

The Preposition

Recognize a *preposition* when you see one.

Prepositions are the words that we use to indicate location. Usually, prepositions show this location in the physical world. Check out the three examples below:



The dolphin is *above* the soup.



The dolphin is *in* the soup.



The dolphin is *behind* the soup.

Above, *in*, and *behind* are all prepositions. They are showing *where* the dolphin is. Prepositions, in addition, can show location in *time*. Read the next three examples:

At midnight, Jill craved mashed potatoes with grape jelly.

In the spring, I always vow to plant tomatoes but end up buying them canned at the supermarket.

During the marathon, Iggy's legs complained with sharp pains shooting up his thighs.

At midnight, *in the spring*, and *during the marathon* all show location in time. Because there are so many possible locations, there are quite a few prepositions. Below is the complete list.

about

concerning

onto

above

despite

on top of

according to

down

out

across

during

out of

after	except	outside
against	except for	over
along	excepting	past
along with	for	regarding
among	from	round
apart from	in	since
around	in addition to	through
as	in back of	throughout
as for	in case of	till
at	in front of	to
because of	in place of	toward
before	inside	under
behind	in spite of	underneath
below	instead of	unlike
beneath	into	until
beside	like	up
between	near	upon
beyond	next	up to
but*	of	with
by	off	within
by means of	on	without

Clauses and Phrases

We have names for different kinds of word-groups composed of different "ingredients." As an example, read the following two groups of words:

1. Birds from the big tree.
2. Birds fly from the big tree.

What is the difference between these two groups of words? In the second group, we can identify a subject/verb unit while in the first we cannot. We call a group of words with a subject/verb unit a CLAUSE; a group of words without a subject/verb unit is a PHRASE.

Also remember that there are two kinds of CLAUSES:

1. Mary likes the clown (INDEPENDENT CLAUSE - can stand alone)
2. Because Mary likes the clown (DEPENDENT CLAUSE - cannot stand alone)

*Be careful of word-groups beginning with: *that, which, who*

People *who* are happy (people needs a verb)

Beliefs *that* most people share (beliefs need a verb)

Habits *which* annoy me (habits need a verb)

A PHRASE is a word group without a subject/verb unit.

The *-ing* form of a word cannot be a verb *all by itself*.

Example: The sweat dripping from his forehead

So, this word-group is not a clause, but a PHRASE. What must you add in front of *dripping* so that you can put this word group in the past tense?_____ The *-ing* form of a verb must have a helping verb to function as a complete verb.

The *to be* form of a word cannot be a verb

Example: To eat chocolate candy all day long

Can you change any of these words into the past or future tense? No, so there is no verb and you have a PHRASE

***But** is very seldom a preposition. When it is used as a preposition, **but** means the same as **except**--*Everyone ate frog legs but Jamie*. **But** usually functions as a **coordinating conjunction**.

Understand how to form a prepositional phrase.

Prepositions generally introduce prepositional phrases. Prepositional phrases look like this:

+ optional modifiers +

Here are some examples:

at school

at = preposition | school = noun

under the stove

under = preposition | the = modifier | stove = noun

in the crumb-filled, rumpled sheets

in = preposition | the, crumb-filled, rumpled = modifiers | sheets = noun

Realize that some prepositions also function as subordinate conjunctions.

Some prepositions also function as **subordinate conjunctions**. These prepositions are **after**, **as**, **before**, **since**, and **until**. A subordinate conjunction will have both a subject and a verb following it, forming a subordinate clause.

Look at these examples:

After Sam and Esmerelda kissed goodnight

After = subordinate conjunction | Sam, Esmerelda = subjects | kissed = verb

As Jerome buckled on the parachute

As = subordinate conjunction | Jerome = subject | buckled = verb

Before I eat these frog legs

Before = subordinate conjunction | I = subject | eat = verb

Since we have enjoyed the squid eyeball stew

Since = subordinate conjunction | we = subject | have enjoyed = verb

Until your hiccups stop

Until = subordinate conjunction | hiccups = subject | stop = verb

If you find a noun [with or without modifiers] following one of these five prepositions, then all you have is a prepositional phrase. Look at these examples:

After the killer calculus test

After = preposition | the, killer, calculus = modifiers | test = noun

As a good parent

As = preposition | a, good = modifiers | parent = noun

Before dinner

Before = preposition | dinner = noun

Since the breakup

Since = preposition | the = modifier | breakup = noun

Until midnight

Until = preposition | midnight = noun

Prepositions

A *preposition* is a word placed before a noun or pronoun to form a phrase modifying another word in the sentence. Since gerunds (the base form of the verb + *ing*) act as nouns, they can also follow prepositions.

The *prepositional phrase* almost always functions as an adjective or as an adverb. There are a limited number of prepositions in English. The most frequently used prepositions in English are: *at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to, and with*.

Example sentences:

The movie starts at 7:00 p.m.

I'll see you in class on February 18th.

The clock is hanging on the wall in the dining room.

Last June, we spent seven rainy days looking at the beach from our hotel room.

We will look forward to seeing you.

We are interested in meeting with you next week.

The most common prepositions in English are included in the following list:

about	beside	from	outside	toward
above	besides	in	over	under
across	between	inside	past	underneath
after	beyond	into	plus	unlike
against	but (when used as the preposition "except")	like	regarding	until
along	by	near	respecting	unto
among	concerning	next	round	up
around	considering	of	since	upon
as	despite	off	than	with
at	down	on	through	within
before	during	onto	throughout	without
behind	except	opposite	till	
below	for	out	to	

Some prepositional phrases are more than one word long:

along with	as well as	in addition to	next to
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(Information adapted from The Bedford Handbook for Writers, 4th Ed., Hacker, Diana)