

The Prepositional Phrase

Recognize a *prepositional phrase* when you see one.

At the minimum, a prepositional phrase will begin with a preposition and end with a noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause, the "object" of the preposition.

The object of the preposition will often have one or more modifiers to describe it. These are the patterns for a prepositional phrase:

PREPOSITION + **NOUN, PRONOUN, GERUND, OR CLAUSE**

PREPOSITION + **MODIFIER(S)** + **NOUN, PRONOUN, GERUND,
OR CLAUSE**

Here are some examples of the most basic prepositional phrase:

At home

At = preposition; **home** = noun.

In time

In = preposition; **time** = noun.

From Richie

From = preposition; **Richie** = noun.

With me

With = preposition; **me** = pronoun.

By singing

By = preposition; **singing** = gerund.

About what we need

About = preposition; **what we need** = noun clause.

Most prepositional phrases are longer, like these:

From my grandmother

From = preposition; **my** = modifier; **grandmother** = noun.

Under the warm blanket

Under = preposition; **the, warm** = modifiers; **blanket** = noun.

In the weedy, overgrown garden

In = preposition; **the, weedy, overgrown** = modifiers; **garden** = noun.

Along the busy, six-lane highway

Along = preposition; **the, busy, six-lane** = modifiers; **highway** = noun.

Without excessively worrying

Without = preposition; **excessively** = modifier; **worrying** = gerund.

Understand what prepositional phrases *do* in a sentence.

A prepositional phrase will function as an adjective or adverb. As an adjective, the prepositional phrase will answer the question *Which one?*

Read these examples:

The book **on the bathroom floor** is swollen from shower steam.

Which book? The one **on the bathroom floor!**

The sweet potatoes **in the vegetable bin** are green with mold.

Which sweet potatoes? The ones forgotten **in the vegetable bin!**

The note **from Beverly** confessed that she had eaten the leftover pizza.

Which note? The one **from Beverly!**

As an adverb, a prepositional phrase will answer questions such as *How? When?* or *Where?*

Freddy is stiff **from yesterday's long football practice**.

How did Freddy get stiff? **From yesterday's long football practice!**

Before class, Josh begged his friends for a pencil.

When did Josh do his begging? **Before class!**

Feeling brave, we tried the Dragon Breath Burritos **at Tito's Taco Palace**.

Where did we eat the spicy food? **At Tito's Taco Palace!**

Remember that a prepositional phrase will *never* contain the subject of a sentence.

Sometimes a noun within the prepositional phrase seems the logical subject of a verb. Don't fall for that trick! You will *never* find a subject in a prepositional phrase. Look at this example:

Neither *of these cookbooks* contains the recipe for Manhattan-style squid eyeball stew.

Cookbooks do indeed contain recipes. In this sentence, however, **cookbooks** is part of the prepositional phrase **of these cookbooks**. **Neither**—whatever a neither is—is the subject for the verb **contains**.

Neither is singular, so you need the singular form of the verb, **contains**. If you *incorrectly* identified **cookbooks** as the subject, you might write **contain**, the plural form, and thus commit a subject-verb agreement error.

Some prepositions—such as **along with** and **in addition to**—indicate "more to come." They will make you think that you have a plural subject when in fact you don't. Don't fall for that trick either!

Read this example:

Tommy, *along with the other students*, breathed a sigh of relief when Mrs. Markham announced that she was postponing the due date for the research essay.

Logically, more than one student is happy with the news. But Tommy is the only subject of the verb **breathed**. His classmates count in the real world, but in the sentence, they don't matter, locked as they are in the prepositional phrase.



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