

PREPOSITIONS

COMMON PREPOSITIONS (*NOTE: Some prepositions contain several words working as a unit.)

aboard	beyond	of
about	but (except)	off
above	by	on
according to	by means of	on account of
across	despite	on board
after	down	out
against	due to	out of
ahead of	during	over
along	except	past
alongside	for	since
amid	from	subsequent to
amidst	in	through
among	in addition to	throughout
apart from	in back of	to
apropos	in front of	together with
around	in lieu of	toward
as far as	in light of	towards
as to	in place of	under
at	in regard to	underneath
because of	in spite of	until
before	inside	unto
behind	in spite of	up
below	instead of	upon
beneath	into	with
beside	in view of	within
besides	like	without
between	near	

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

A preposition begins a prepositional phrase.

prepositional phrase = preposition + modifiers + object
(optional) (noun/pronoun)

EXAMPLES:

for me: for = preposition; me = object (pronoun) Note that because the pronoun is an object, you must use the objective case of the pronoun.

in light industry: in = preposition; light = modifier (adjective); industry = object (noun)

toward a democratic bipartisan government: toward = preposition; a democratic bipartisan = modifiers (adjectives); government = object (noun)

Prepositional phrases are fragments, not complete sentences, if written alone.

EXAMPLES:

sentence: He felt under the weather.

fragment: Under the weather?

A prepositional phrase is never the subject of a sentence.

EXAMPLES:

subject **verb**

One (of the basketball players) was recognized.

Since “**players**” is part of the prepositional phrase “of the basketball players,” it cannot be the subject. “One” is the subject; the prepositional phrase works as an adjective to describe “one.” Mistaking the object of the preposition for the subject of a sentence can lead to faulty subject-verb agreement.

Prepositional phrases function as adjectives or adverbs.

EXAMPLES:

The girl (in the yellow shorts) played (on the beach.)

"in the yellow shorts" tells us **which** girl—works as an adjective describing the noun "girl"

"on the beach" tells us **where** she played—works as an adverb describing the verb "played"

Some prepositions can function as other parts of speech.

EXAMPLES:

adverb: She fell down.

preposition: She fell down the stairs.

adjective: Do you believe there is an after life?

adverb: Susan came after.

conjunction: After I find the right major, I'll be able to really study.

preposition: The penguins slid down the hill after each other.

Watch out for the infinitive form of a verb (to + verb root) and the preposition "to."

EXAMPLES:

preposition: I am going (to town.)

infinitive: My goal is to succeed.

preposition: Please give the message (to all the committee members).

infinitive: The crowd felt his desire to jump higher as the record-breaking leap seemed apparent.

Special usage difficulties:

beside/besides

beside—"by the side of." We stood beside the old Civil War cannon.

besides—"in addition to, moreover, except." Besides playing tennis, James was an outstanding student.

between/among

between—refers to two persons or things. The ambassador strove to bring accord between the two nations.

among—refers to three or more persons or things. The awards were divided among the contest participants.

different from

Use from after the adjective different. Different than is considered incorrect in standard English.

except/accept

except—a preposition meaning "excluding." Everyone came except Susie and me.

accept—a verb, never a preposition. Susie will accept the award.

Prepositions sometimes are used in an interlocking series and are not separated by commas.

In the woods near the stream by the mossy rock under the fallen log crept the cottontail.
[In the woods][near the stream][by the mossy rock][under the fallen log] crept the cottontail.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE EXERCISES

I. DIRECTIONS: Place parentheses around the prepositional phrases in each sentence.

1. One of the boys is looking for his dog.
2. The abandoned barn in the mountains was made of hand-hewn timbers.
3. The child in red chased pink balloons across the lawn.
4. Under the bed near you is the package for Jean.
5. If you go to the inn on the creek, take me with you.
6. On the mantel above the fireplace is the letter with the state seal on it.
7. Many of the soldiers tramping through the village had never been in this part of the world.

8. According to the press, after a bitter fight against inequities in the law, the old man ceased his efforts because of the infirmities of age.
9. All of the men by Jim ran ahead of the buggy past the dun mare standing quietly in the traces despite the sound of gunfire in the distance.
10. By noon the wagons had left in a cloud of dust, heading toward the setting sun.
11. Before them lay endless miles of prairie; beyond the horizon were unseen peaks covered with snow.
12. In the forest near the abandoned mine shaft by the pile of rotting timbers under a clump of mullein behind an old cask huddled the lost child, whimpering with fear like a frightened puppy.

ANSWERS:

1. One (of the boys) is looking (for his dog.)
2. The abandoned barn (in the mountains) was made (of hand-hewn timbers.)
3. The child (in red) chased pink balloons (across the lawn.)
4. (Under the bed) (near you) is the package (for Jean.)
5. If you go (to the inn) (on the creek,) take me (with you.)
6. (On the mantel) (above the fireplace) is the letter (with the state seal) (on it.)
7. Many (of the soldiers) tramping (through the village) had never been (in this part) (of the world.)
8. (According to the press,) (after a bitter fight) (against inequities) (in the law,) the old man ceased his efforts (because of the infirmities) (of age.)
9. All (of the men) (by Jim) ran (ahead of the buggy) (past the dun mare) standing quietly (in the traces) (despite the sound) (of gunfire) (in the distance.)
10. (By noon) the wagons had left (in a cloud) (of dust,) heading (toward the setting sun.)
11. (Before them) lay endless miles (of prairie); (beyond the horizon) were unseen peaks covered (with snow.)
12. (In the forest) (near the abandoned mine shaft) (by the pile) (of rotting timbers) (under a clump) (of mullein) (behind an old cask) huddled the lost child, whimpering (with fear) (like a frightened puppy).

SOURCE: Austin Community College, Riverside

II. DIRECTIONS: In the following excerpt from Eudora Welty's "A Visit of Charity," place parentheses around twenty-five prepositional phrases. (There are more twenty-five.)

It was midmorning—a very cold, bright day. Holding a potted plant before her, a girl of fourteen jumped off the bus in front of the Old Ladies' Home, on the outskirts of town. She wore a red coat, and her straight yellow hair was hanging down loose from the pointed white cap all the little girls were wearing that year. She stopped for a moment beside one of the prickly dark shrubs with which the city had beautified the Home, and then proceeded slowly toward the building, which was of whitewashed brick and reflected the winter sunlight like a block of ice. As she walked vaguely up the steps, she shifted the small pot from hand to hand; then she had to set it down and remove her mittens before she could open the heavy door.

"I'm a Campfire Girl. . . I have to pay a visit to some old lady," she told the nurse at the desk. This was a woman in a white uniform who looked as if she were cold; she had close-cut hair which stood up on the very top of her head exactly like a sea wave. Marian, the little girl, did not tell her that this visit would give her a minimum of only three points in her score.

"Acquainted with any of our residents?" asked the nurse. She lifted one eyebrow and spoke like a man.

"With any old ladies?" No—but—that is, any of them will do," Marian stammered. With her free hand she pushed her hair behind her ears, as she did when it was time to study Science.

ANSWERS:

It was midmorning—a very cold, bright day. Holding a potted plant (before her), a girl (of fourteen) jumped (off the bus) (in front) (of the Old Ladies' Home), (on the outskirts) (of town). She wore a red coat, and her straight yellow hair was hanging down

loose (from the pointed white cap) all the little girls were wearing that year. She stopped (for a moment) (beside one) (of the prickly dark shrubs) (with which) the city had beautified the Home, and then proceeded slowly (toward the building), which was (of whitewashed brick) and reflected the winter sunlight (like a block) (of ice). As she walked vaguely (up the steps), she shifted the small pot (from hand) (to hand); then she had to set it down and remove her mittens before she could open the heavy door.

"I'm a Campfire Girl. . . .I have to pay a visit (to some old lady)," she told the nurse (at the desk). This was a woman (in a white uniform) who looked as if she were cold; she had close-cut hair which stood up (on the very top) (of her head) exactly (like a sea wave). Marian, the little girl, did not tell her that this visit would give her a minimum (of only three points) (in her score).

"Acquainted with any (of our residents)?" asked the nurse. She lifted one eyebrow and spoke (like a man).

"(With any old ladies)?" No—but—that is, any (of them) will do," Marian stammered. (With her free hand) she pushed her hair (behind her ears), as she did when it was time to study Science.

SOURCE: Winterowd, W. Ross and Patricia Y. Murray. *English: Writing and Skills*. Coronado Publishers, 1985.

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