

Pondering the Preposition

A Quick Guide



The preposition is an often confusing term. Often (but not always, which is why prepositions can be confusing), a preposition is a location word. Locations can be physical positions, such as "on," "in," and "under," directional terms, such as "to" and "from," or positions related to time, such as "while," "during," and "after." There are a fairly large number of prepositions, and, unfortunately, the only way to really recognize them is through encountering them or memorizing them.

Perhaps the easiest way to define a **preposition** is as a **relational word: a word that is used to indicate some kind of relationship between other words in a sentence** (Capital Community College Foundation, n.d.).

Things to Keep in Mind

- **Any time a preposition is present, it is likely going to be part of a prepositional phrase.** A prepositional phrase consists of the preposition, the noun serving as the object of the preposition (i.e. the word to which the preposition is relating), and any words in between those two (Capital Community College Foundation, n.d.).
 - Example: "in the morning," "on the floor," "after dinner," "when it stops raining," "under the bridge," "while driving to work," "to the store," "over my head," "until the last minute," "against all odds,"....basically, there are many combinations of phrases as indicated by the examples listed.)
 - In general, the only time a preposition will not be part of a phrase is if it is at the very end of a sentence; however, ending a sentence with a preposition is frowned upon in academic writing (just don't do it!).
- **Any number of prepositions may be present but will have nothing to do with whether or not a sentence is actually a complete sentence** or a fragment because as a general rule words included in a prepositional phrase will not be either the main subject or main verb of a sentence.
 - Example: (Complete) "When I woke up, after I had my coffee, as I was getting in my car, I noticed a box of stale fries under my car seat."). (Incomplete) "Around the tree, up the hill, under the bush, over the bridge, down the fence line, across the road."
 - In fact, a good rule of thumb when trying to determine subjects and verbs in sentences is to go through and mark out all the prepositional phrases, then use the words left to determine the subject and verb
 - Example: Using the complete sentence example from above, "~~When I woke up, after I had my coffee, as I was getting in my car,~~ I noticed a box of stale fries ~~under my car seat.~~". The example is basically nothing but prepositional phrases, and marking them out leaves only a few options left for the subject and verb of the sentence.

Preposition Quick List

While there are many prepositions, here is a list of some of the more common ones that may be encountered:

About	By	Outside	Because of
Above	Down	Over	By way of
Across	During	Since	In addition to
After	Except	Through	In front of
Against	For	Throughout	In place of
Around	From	Till	In regard to
At	In	To	In spite of
Before	Inside	Toward	Instead of
Behind	Into	Under	On account of
Below	Like	Until	Out of
Beneath	Near	Up	
Beside	Of	Upon	
Besides	Off	With	
Between	On	Without	
Beyond	Out	According to	

Other Writing Center Resources

- Understanding Commas
- Subjects and Verbs
- Fragments and Run-Ons

Further Reading

- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/594/01/> - Purdue University's Online Writing Lab

Reference

Capital Community College Foundation. (n.d.). Prepositions: Locators in time and place. *The Guide to Grammar and Writing*. Retrieved from <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/prepositions.htm>