

Prepositions

Introduction

Consider these two sentences:

- “I put the book.”
- “I put the book **on** the shelf.”

The first sentence leaves you hanging, doesn't it? It's like a puzzle with missing pieces. Where did I put the book?

The second sentence, however, paints a complete picture. The book has a place—it's on the shelf. This magic is the work of a single word: “**on**”. This word is a preposition, and it's one of the most powerful tools in our language toolbox.

Prepositions are tiny words that serve as powerful connectors, linking nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words within a sentence. They provide essential context, indicating time, place, direction, and more, thereby adding depth and clarity to our expressions.

Understanding prepositions is not just about memorizing a list of words; it's about grasping the nuances of their usage, the subtle differences in meaning they can convey, and the idiosyncrasies of their placement in sentences.

Definition of prepositions

Prepositions are words that link nouns, pronouns, or phrases to other words within a sentence. They act to connect the people, objects, time, and

locations of a sentence. Prepositions are usually short words, and they are normally placed directly in front of nouns.

let's consider these examples:

- “I will meet you **at** 5 o'clock”

In the sentence, the preposition “**at**” is used to specify the exact time of the meeting. It connects the action of "meeting" to the time (5 o'clock) when this action will take place.

- “The cat is **on** the mat”

In the sentence, the preposition “**on**” is used to specify the location of the cat in relation to the mat. It connects the noun (the cat) to another noun (the mat) and shows where the cat is located.

- “She is going **to** the market”

In the sentence, the preposition “**to**” is used to specify the direction in which “she” is going. It connects the action of going with its destination (the market).

- “He reacted **with** surprise”

In the sentence, the preposition “**with**” is used to specify the manner in which “he” reacted. It connects the action of "reacting" with the manner of the reaction (surprise).

Types of Prepositions

Prepositions of time

Prepositions of time are words that allow you to discuss a specific time or period. They help us talk about when or for how long something happens

in the present, the future, or the past. They show the relationship between a noun or pronoun and a specific time or period.

Here are some examples:

- We stayed at a student hostel **during** the conference.
- I'm just going to bed **for** two hours or so.
- We'll wait **till/until** half past six for you.
- The factory has been here **since** the 1970s.
- He left the house over an hour **ago**.

These prepositions help create clarity when discussing events related to time frames such as days, weeks, months, years, and seasons.

Prepositions of Place

Prepositions of place are words that provide information about the location of an object, person, or thing in relation to another object or place. They help answer questions like "**Where is it?**" or "**Where are they?**".

Here are some examples:

- He lives **in** America
- He was **on** a plane.
- She was waiting **at** the bus stop.
- Our friends in the apartment **above** us are really noisy.

These prepositions add clarity and specificity to our descriptions of physical positions.

Prepositions of direction

Prepositions of direction are words that indicate the direction or movement of something in relation to another thing. They often accompany verbs of motion and are used to give a more detailed description of whether someone is moving towards or away from something.

Here are some examples:

- The man started walking **toward** the exit.
- The red ball is bouncing **onto** the blue box.
- The red ball is bouncing **out of** the blue box.
- The boy is walking **down** the hill.
- The red ball is bouncing **into** the blue box.

Prepositions of manner

Prepositions of manner are words that describe how something is done or the way in which an action takes place. They often answer the question "**how?**".

Here are some examples:

- "He cut the paper **with** scissors".
- "She lost 2 pounds **by** going vegan".
- "He acted **like** there was no other option".
- "I have worked **as** a teacher and counselor".

Rules Governing the Use of Prepositions

Having explored the various types of prepositions, it's crucial to understand how to use them correctly. Let's transition now to the rules of usage of prepositions, which will guide us in constructing grammatically sound and meaningful sentences.

Prepositions with Special Words and Phrases

Certain words and phrases require specific prepositions in order to create a connection to the rest of the sentence. Here are a few examples:

- She **depends on** her parents for financial support.
- He always **complains about** the weather.
- She is **afraid of** spiders.
- He is **interested in** learning Spanish.
- She is **good at** playing the piano.

Preposition + Noun

Prepositions must always be followed by a noun or a pronoun. This noun or pronoun is referred to as the “**object of the preposition**”.

Here are some examples:

- “The book is **on** the table.”
- “My car is **in** the garage.”
- “She brought a gift **for** her husband.”

In each of these sentences, the preposition introduces the object that follows it and shows the relationship of the object to the rest of the sentence.

Prepositions + Infinitive

It can be confusing when you encounter sentences where the preposition “**to**” is followed by words that look like verbs.

Here are some examples:

- “You need **to see** a doctor.”

- “She wanted **to travel** with them.”

In these examples, “**to see**” and “**to travel**” are not verbs. They are **infinitives**. An infinitive occurs when the verb is used as a noun, adjective, or adverb. In this case, “**to see**” and “**to travel**” are things to do, not actions being done.

Preposition + Gerund

A gerund is the “-**ing**” form of a verb when it functions as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb in a sentence.

For example:

- “These pencils are **for drawing**.”

In this example, “**drawing**” is a **gerund**. Like the infinitive, the gerund is not a verb, but a noun, adjective, or adverb. Here, “**drawing**” is a thing, not an action. The preposition “**for**” is used to indicate the purpose of the pencils, which is “drawing”. So, in this case, the gerund “drawing” is the **object of the preposition** “for”.

Adjective + Preposition

Some adjectives require a preposition to introduce their objects. This is not a rule, but something that needs to be learned through practice and exposure.

Here are some examples:

- “Russia is **famous for** its cold weather.”
- “I am **proud of** you.”
- “Nobody is **interested in** the offer.”
- “He is **bad at** soccer.”
- “He is **good at** tennis.”

- “She is **married to** her cousin.”
- “We are **excited about** the game.”
- “The new version is **different from** the old one.”
- “She is **afraid of** failure.”

Adjective + Preposition + Gerund

In English, it's common to use the structure “**Adjective + Preposition + Gerund**” in sentences. Here, a gerund is a verb that ends in “-ing” and functions as a noun.

When an adjective is followed by a preposition and a verb, the verb is in the gerund form. This structure is often used to describe feelings or states.

Examples::

- **Excited about going**
- **Tired of working**
- **Interested in learning**
- **Worried about failing**
- **Capable of winning**
- **Committed to improving**

Remember, the gerund (**-ing form**) is used when a verb acts as a noun in the sentence.

Verb + Preposition

Certain verbs are typically followed by specific prepositions. This is known as the “**Verb + Preposition**” structure. The preposition that follows a verb often gives us more information about the relationship between the verb and the rest of the sentence.

Examples:

- We **listen to** music,
- I **depend on** my alarm to wake up on time
- **Look at** that beautiful sunset
- We **believe in** equality for all.
- She **cares for** her elderly parents.
- I need to **focus on** my studies.
- We are **waiting for** the bus.
- They are **talking about** the movie.

Verb + Preposition + Gerund

Certain verbs are often followed by prepositions. When another verb follows the preposition, that verb is typically in the **gerund** form, which is the “-ing” form of the verb. This structure is known as “**Verb + Preposition + Gerund**”.

Here are some examples:

- He **insists on paying** for dinner
- I **believe in doing** what’s right.
- Our success **depends on having** a good team.
- He **succeeded in learning** a new language.
- I **dream of traveling** the world.

Prepositions Interrogative Sentences

In English, it’s common to end questions and interrogative sentences with prepositions. This often happens when the preposition is part of a phrasal verb or when the question word (who, what, where, when, why, how) is the object of the preposition.

Here some examples:

- **Who** are you going **with**?
- **What** are you looking **for**?
- **What** are you interested **in**?

- **Where** are you **from**?
- **Who** are you talking **to**?
- **What** are you thinking **about**?

It's important to note that while this is a common structure in informal and spoken English, some people consider it less formal or less correct than other structures.

In more formal English, the preposition often comes before the question word, such as “**With** whom are you going?” or “**For** what are you looking?” However, these more formal structures can sound quite stiff and are less common in everyday conversation.

Double & complex prepositions

With the rules of usage of prepositions under our belt, we are now equipped to tackle more complex structures. Let's move on to discuss double and complex prepositions, which will allow us to express more nuanced relationships between words in our sentences.

Double prepositions

Double prepositions, also known as compound prepositions, are **two prepositions used together** to form a more specific meaning in a sentence.

Here are some examples with detailed explanations:

- She walked **out of** the room.
- We drove across the bridge and **into** the city.
- He climbed **up to** the top of the mountain.

Complex Prepositions

Complex prepositions are prepositional phrases that function as a single preposition. They consist of two or more words, **usually a simple preposition and another word**, such as a noun, pronoun, or adverb.

It's important to remember that they function as a single unit. This means that you cannot insert other words into the middle of the preposition.

Here are some examples:

- **In spite of** the rain, we decided to go for a walk.
- **Because of** the traffic, I was late for work.
- **According to** the weather forecast, it will rain tomorrow.
- I am speaking **on behalf of** my team.
- **In addition to** playing the guitar, he also sings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, prepositions are tiny words that serve as powerful connectors, linking nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words within a sentence. They provide essential context, indicating time, place, direction, and more, thereby adding depth and clarity to our expressions.

Understanding prepositions is not just about memorizing a list of words; it's about grasping the nuances of their usage, the subtle differences in meaning they can convey, and the idiosyncrasies of their placement in sentences.