A preposition connects a verb, noun, or adjective to another noun or pronoun to describe the relationship of:

- Time (before, after, during class)
- Location in space (in, at, around, by the house)
- Action or descriptive information (with, the green shirt; except, despite the fact)
  - Another way to consider prepositions in yourself in relation to a house. You can be: in, behind, under, above, beside, by, at, the house. You can go to the house; you can come from the house.

Below is a list of the most common prepositions utilized in English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To</th>
<th>Beside</th>
<th>But (as in “all but one”)</th>
<th>Of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From</td>
<td>By</td>
<td>Beyond</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Despite</td>
<td>Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In</td>
<td>Along</td>
<td>Except</td>
<td>Above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around</td>
<td>Anti</td>
<td>Excluding</td>
<td>Below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About</td>
<td>At</td>
<td>Following</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minus</td>
<td>With</td>
<td>During</td>
<td>Near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
<td>Behind</td>
<td>Toward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above list does not encompass every preposition in the English language. However, the prepositions mentioned above do operate as the definition above describes it: in relation to time, space, and action.

Now we can define the various definitions of prepositions and how to use them.

**The Object of a Preposition**

The object of a preposition is the noun or pronoun that follows it.

- We’re going to the club.
  - In this sentence, “to” is the preposition and “club” is the object.
Prepositional Phrases
Now that we know what a preposition and its object are, we can define a Prepositional Phrase.

- A Prepositional Phrase is a phrase comprised of a preposition and its object. The phrase itself can operate as an adjective or adverb.

Common Prepositional Phrases
- According to the weather forecast
- After many tries
- Around the world
- Before we start the meeting
- Between a rock and a hard place
- By the light of the moon
- Off the top
- Out the door
- Through the looking glass
  - This Prepositional Phrase includes an adjective (“looking”) qualifying its object (“glass”). However, the complete phrase, adjective and noun, is the object of the phrase (“looking glass”).

Prepositional Phrases as Adjectives
The following examples are Prepositional Phrases that act as adjectives. In this sense, the phrases themselves describe the nouns.

- You can tell which clothes she wears most often: the jacket with several holes, the shoes with missing laces, and the jeans without pockets.
  - The Prepositional Phrases are italicized, and operate as adjectives to describe the preceding nouns.
- He’s the middle child, one of twelve children.
  - The italicized Prepositional Phrase describes how he is the middle child, or the Prepositional Phrase further qualifies the first clause of the sentence.

Prepositional Phrases as Adverbs
The following examples are Prepositional Phrases that act as adverbs. In this sense, the phrases themselves describe the verbs.

- Strolling along the lake, he felt peaceful even though he had a lot on his mind.
  - The italicized Prepositional Phrase describes the preceding verb, “strolling.”
- I don’t think you did pay me back; I would’ve put the cash into my wallet immediately.
  - The italicized Prepositional Phrase describes where the speaker would have put the cash. The phrase describes the verb “put.”
Preposition Rules
There are three main rules when it comes to prepositions.

1. Prepositions must be followed by nouns (noun, proper nouns, pronouns, noun groups, gerunds), never verbs. There is no exception to this rule.

2. It is commonly stated to not end a sentence with a preposition. However, there are many instances in which it is both permissible and comprehensible to do so.
   - Passive Voice: You can place a preposition at the end of a sentence when using a passive construction of a sentence.
     - Active Voice: They searched for her missing doll.
     - Passive Voice: The missing doll was searched for.
   - Relative Clauses: A relative clause contains a subject and a verb, but does not operate as a complete sentence on its own. Prepositions are used differently in relative clauses, depending on whether the sentence is more akin to “formal” or “informal” English. We can consider “formal” English similar to academic language and “informal” English similar to how we speak every day.
     - Formal: With whom are you going to the party?
       - The preposition is placed before the pronoun, therefore the pronoun needs to be included.
     - Informal: Who are you going to the party with?
       - Since the preposition is at the end of the sentence, the pronoun can be included or not.
   - Infinitive Verbs: Prepositions can be placed at the end of sentences when the infinitive form of a verb is used. The infinitive form is when the verb is not conjugated (ex: “to swim,” instead of “swam,” “swims,” “swim”).
     - This pool is the best to swim in.
       - Even though “to” is a preposition, it is not used as one in this sentence, since it is part of the infinitive form of the verb.
   - “Wh-” Questions and “What-” Clauses
     - Prepositions can be placed at the end of questions that begin with a “wh-” phrase such as: What, Who, Which.
       - What are you looking for?
       - Who are you talking to?
       - Which restaurant will you be at?
     - Prepositions can also be placed at the end of clauses (that are not questions) that either begin with, or contain, “what.”
       - What a mess we’re in.
       - I can help you if you tell me what you’re looking for.
3. A prepositional phrase cannot be the subject of a sentence.
   - Since a prepositional phrase operates to modify the subject in the sentence, the phrase itself cannot be the subject. As mentioned above, the phrase contains an object in itself, but it cannot replace the subject of a sentence.
     - I walked through the park so I could get home sooner.
       - The subject of this sentence is “home,” not “the park” because “home” is the object of the prepositional phrase.
       - I walked through the park so I could get home sooner.
         - Taking out the prepositional phrase allows us to see the subject of the sentence.
     - Over the river and through the woods, to grandmother’s house we go!
       - The subject of this sentence is actually “we.” This becomes more apparent after the prepositional phrases are omitted.
       - Over the river and through the woods, to grandmother’s house we go!
         - Taking out these prepositional phrases shows how this sentence is qualified and portrays the actual subject of the sentence.

Exercise 1: Fill in the following paragraph with the correct prepositions or infinitive forms of the verbs.

I miss being a kid. Now that I’m (1) _______college, I don’t get (2) ______ travel (3)_______summer vacation. Actually, summer isn’t a vacation at all! If I want (4) ___ graduate (5)_______four years, I have (6) ______ take classes (7)_______the summer. Instead of (8 )_________ in my brother’s footsteps and traveling (9)_________ the country, I’ll be stuck (10)_____ campus. I get distracted too easily, I spend too much time (11)_______ my friends. We watch TV (12)_______ their living rooms instead of studying. I could spend time (13)_______ the library, but it’s so boring! (14) _______ my good intentions (15)_______ the beginning of the semester, I always seem to fall (16)_______. Now I have (17)_______ answer (18) _______ my parents. They’re going (19) _____ say, “What are you waiting (20)_______? Your classes aren’t going (21) ____ complete themselves!” I think I’ll use a planner and a calendar next semester so I don’t fall (22) _______. Next summer, I want to travel and not worry about my grades. I guess I’m stuck (23) _________ a rock and a hard place.
Exercise 2: Take out the prepositional phrases in the sentences to find the subjects.

1. After visits to panda exhibits in zoos, many people contribute money to wildlife organizations.

2. If the pandas mate and produce offspring, the zoos get to keep the baby pandas for a year or two.

3. China also lends pairs of pandas to zoos around the world.

4. With no route to new supplies of bamboo, many pandas face the possibility of starvation.

5. During a search of the Internet, I discovered a breed of dog with a very interesting history.

6. The ancestors of the American Indian dog came across the Bering Straits from Asia with their Native American masters.
Exercise 1 Answer Key:

1. Now that I’m in college. (Preposition)
2. I don’t get to travel. (Infinitive Verb)
3. during/for summer vacation. (Preposition)
4. If I want to graduate. (Infinitive Verb)
5. If I want to graduate in four years, (Preposition)
6. I have to take classes… (Infinitive Verb)
7. …take classes over/during the summer. (Preposition)
8. Instead of following in my… (Preposition) **
   ** Even though “following” is a conjugation of the verb “to follow,” the way it is used in this context makes it a preposition. It is used to indicate something coming after something else as a result. In this case, the speaker’s desire to replicate his/her brother’s footsteps is an action that results in the brother having done it first. The word “following” usually operates as a preposition, a noun, or an adjective.
9. …brother’s footsteps and traveling across the country, (Preposition)
10. …I’ll be stuck on/in campus. (Preposition)
11. I get distracted too easily, I spend too much time with my friends. (Preposition)
12. We watch TV in their living rooms instead of studying… (Preposition)
13. I could spend time in the library, but it’s so boring! (Preposition)
14. Despite my good intentions… (Preposition)
15. …at/in the beginning of the semester… (Preposition)
16. …I always seem to fall behind (Preposition)
17. Now I have to answer… (Infinitive Verb)
18. …to my parents. (Preposition)
19. They’re going to say… (Infinitive Verb)
20. “What are you waiting for?” (Preposition)
21. “Your classes aren’t going to complete themselves!” (Infinitive Verb)
22. I think I’ll use a planner and a calendar next semester so I don’t fall behind. (Preposition)
23. I guess I’m stuck between a rock and a hard place. (Preposition)
Campus Academic Resource Program
Prepositions

Exercise 2 Answer Key

Prepositional phrases are bolded and crossed out; verbs and verb phrases are simply crossed out.

1. After visits to panda exhibits in zoos, many people contribute money to wildlife organizations.
   Subject: many people
   Verb: Contribute
   Prepositions: After, to, in, to

2. If the pandas mate and produce offspring, the zoos get to keep the baby pandas for a year or two.
   Subject: the zoos
   Verb: get to keep
   Preposition: for
   Dependent Clause: If the pandas mate and produce offspring

3. China also lends pairs of pandas to zoos around the world.
   Subject: China
   Verb: lends
   Prepositions: of, to

4. With no route to new supplies of bamboo, many pandas face the possibility of starvation.
   Subject: many pandas
   Verb: face
   Prepositions: with, to, of

5. During a search of the Internet, I discovered a breed of dog with a very interesting history.
   Subject: I
   Verb: discovered
   Prepositions: During, with

6. The ancestors of the American Indian dog came across the Bering Straits from Asia with their Native American masters.
   Subject: The ancestors
   Verb: came
   Prepositions: of, across, from, with
Works Cited


