

Unit 15

PREPOSITIONS



Think about some of your favorite foods. What is one food item that you particularly like? What are the ingredients and how is it prepared? How and when is it usually eaten?

GOALS

- Learn why mastering prepositions is important in writing
- Understand three problems writers commonly encounter when using prepositions
- Use prepositions correctly in exercises and writing assignments

LEARN WHAT THE ERROR IS

Errors with Prepositions

An error with a preposition occurs when a preposition has been incorrectly used or not used when needed. **Prepositions** (for example, *in*, *at*, *towards*, or *in spite of*) link nouns, pronouns, and adjectives to other words in a sentence. Prepositions can be used in a phrase (*during the daytime*), as a particle with a two- or three-word verb (*turn in*, *check up on*), or after an adjective or noun (*be happy about*, *take credit for*). The editing symbol for a preposition error is *prep*.

Knowing how to use prepositions correctly is very important in formal writing. Although an error with a preposition is a local (less serious) error and thus affects only part of a sentence, many errors with prepositions in a piece of writing make it difficult for the reader to concentrate on the content while he or she is trying to mentally correct the prepositions.

In academic and professional writing, the reader expects to see correct use of prepositions. Preposition use is generally idiomatic (unpredictable) rather than rule-based, so which preposition to use must often be memorized. While mastering prepositions is challenging, each small improvement in preposition use makes a text easier to read.

Suggestions for Reducing Errors

- Remember that there are few rules for prepositions, so preposition use is learned mainly through listening and reading.
- Memorize **phrasal verbs** (two- and three-word verbs) so that you can use them correctly and automatically. Use a learner's dictionary to look up phrasal verbs that you are unsure of.
- Improve your control of prepositions by paying attention to them when you read and listening for them when people speak.
- Ask an instructor or a fluent speaker for help when you are unsure about a preposition.

Check Your Understanding

Write answers to the following questions. Share your answers with another student.

1. What happens when a reader encounters too many errors with prepositions in a piece of writing?
2. Why is it necessary to learn preposition use through usage and memorization?

GRAMMAR JOURNAL ENTRY 15 PREPOSITIONS

Respond to the following in your grammar journal.

1. What are three things that you usually do in the morning, at noon, and at night? List what these activities are and at what time you do them. Then, write a paragraph about whether or not you would like to change any of these activities to another time. Underline five prepositions in your paragraph.
2. Look in a magazine or a newspaper for an article that interests you. Then, underline five two- or three-word verbs that you find. Write sentences with each of those verbs.

UNDERSTAND COMMON PROBLEMS

This section presents three problems that writers commonly encounter with prepositions. First, take the pre-test to see what you already know about prepositions. When you finish, check your answers on page 354. Then, carefully study each problem and the examples that illustrate it. Pay particular attention to those problems that correspond to the pre-test questions you had difficulty with. Remember that becoming aware of the types of errors you most often make with prepositions will increase your chances of avoiding these errors in your writing.

Pre-test

What Do You Already Know?

Test your ability to recognize and correct errors with prepositions.

- A** Correct the marked errors. These are examples of the three common problems that are presented in this unit.

Problem 1 Erik is taking summer school classes ^{prep} in Harvard University.

Problem 2 The dentist said that there are three reasons ^{prep} of my new cavities: too much candy, too little flossing, and too soft a toothbrush.

Problem 3 Jack is seeking ^{prep} for information about snakes on the Internet.

- B** Underline and correct the one error in each of the following sentences. (The errors are not in any particular order.)

1. Registration of next semester's classes starts next week.
2. Linh wanted to study the grammar rules with herself to get ready for the test.
3. When I arrived, the class was already discussing about the Civil War.

Problem 1

The wrong preposition has been used in a prepositional phrase or in an idiomatic expression using a preposition.

Three Common Problems

Incorrect: My brother lives ^{prep} in Anderson Street.

Correct: My brother lives on Anderson Street.

Incorrect: Tran always gives the correct answers ^{prep} of the math homework questions.

Correct: Tran always gives the correct answers to the math homework questions.

Incorrect: Jaime gets frustrated if he makes the same error time ^{prep} by time.

Correct: Jaime gets frustrated if he makes the same error time after time.

Incorrect: Marjan will often meet us for coffee ^{prep} in the night.

Correct: Marjan will often meet us for coffee at night (or in the evening).

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Be aware that because the rules for preposition use are very limited, you may want to ask an instructor or a fluent speaker for help, as he or she knows intuitively whether the preposition "sounds right" in that particular case. However, since some rules do exist, it is a good idea not only to learn the rules below but also to read about preposition use in a comprehensive ESL grammar textbook.

Problem 2

The incorrect preposition has been used following an adjective or a noun.

Incorrect: My mother worked, so the ^{prep} responsibility of the housework was mine.

Correct: My mother worked, so the responsibility for the housework was mine.

Incorrect: I sometimes feel ^{prep} uncomfortable in speaking up in class.

Correct: I sometimes feel uncomfortable about speaking up in class.

Correct: I sometimes feel uncomfortable speaking up in class.
(no preposition needed)

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Remember that you can look up the adjective or noun in a learner's dictionary to see which preposition(s) it can be used with. Remember that some nouns or adjectives can take more than one preposition depending on meaning.

EXAMPLES:

I am happy about getting a part-time job. (A learner's dictionary will show various prepositions that can be used with *happy*.)

I am happy to help you.

Problem 3

A verb + preposition problem has occurred.

1. The preposition that should be used with a given verb is missing.

Incorrect: I will have to study more tonight to compensate^{prep} the time I lost yesterday.

Correct: I will have to study more tonight to compensate for the time I lost yesterday.

Incorrect: The two teams will compete^{prep} each other next week.

Correct: The two teams will compete with each other next week.
(or compete against)

2. A preposition is used when it is not needed after a given verb.

Incorrect: In my paper, I emphasized about^{prep} the need for smaller classes.

Correct: In my paper, I emphasized the need for smaller classes.

Incorrect: The reporter got her information by interviewing with^{prep} three people.

Correct: The reporter got her information by interviewing three people.

3. The wrong preposition has been used after a given verb.

Incorrect: The professor often refers on^{prep} the textbook.

Correct: The professor often refers to the textbook.

Incorrect: In the spring, Mike often suffers of^{prep} allergies.

Correct: In the spring, Mike often suffers from allergies.

4. A preposition that is part of a phrasal verb (two- or three-word verb) is incorrect or missing.

Incorrect: He just hung off the phone.

Correct: He just hung up the phone.

Incorrect: We will have to call over the birthday party.

Correct: We will have to call off the birthday party.

Incorrect: After being sick, I had to catch up my assignments.

Correct: After being sick, I had to catch up on my assignments.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Many errors with verbs and prepositions can be avoided by checking the verbs in a learner's dictionary.

REVIEW GRAMMAR SOLUTIONS

In this section, you will learn selected rules and be given guidelines that will help you use prepositions correctly.

Prepositions of Direction, Place, Position, and Time

1. Prepositions of Direction

PREPOSITION	MOVEMENT	EXAMPLE
around	in a circular fashion	<i>around the block</i>
into	to an interior location	<i>into the room; into the box</i>
onto	to a surface	<i>onto the desk</i>
to	in the direction of	<i>to work</i>
toward(s)	in the direction of	<i>toward the school</i>

2. Prepositions of Place

PREPOSITION	PLACE	EXAMPLE
at	an address	at 1123 Harvard Drive
at	a specific place	at school; at home; at the airport; at the store; at the movies
in	a city, country	in Dallas; in Canada
in	inside of a place	in the language lab; in the library
on	a street	on First Street

3. Prepositions of Position

PREPOSITION	POSITION	EXAMPLE
above; over	higher than	(an airplane) above us; (hit the ball) over the net; above the line
behind	in back of	behind the building
below; under	lower than	under the magazine; below the window
between	somewhere in the middle of	between San Diego and Los Angeles
in	inside of	in my room; in the car
in front of	ahead of something or someone	in front of the building
near	close to	near Chicago
next to; beside	adjacent to	the house next to Jim's; beside the sofa
on	on top of; on a surface	on the desk; on the wall

4. Prepositions of Time

PREPOSITION	TIME	EXAMPLE
at	specific time of day	at 8:00 AM; at 3:30 PM sharp
in	month, year	in February; in 2012
in	time of day	in the morning; in the afternoon; in the evening (but at night)
on	day of the week, date	on Monday; on June 1

Phrasal verbs and their synonyms are also treated in Unit 13, "Word Choice."

Using Prepositions with Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb + a preposition. In a phrasal verb, the preposition is sometimes called a **particle**. Together, the verb and its preposition or prepositions create the meaning of the verb. Although phrasal verbs are used more frequently in speaking than in formal writing, they are also used in written English.

1. Phrasal verbs frequently have a more formal one-word synonym that can be used in written English.

Examples:

We had to call off the party. (*call off* has the same meaning as *cancel*)

Could you turn down the volume? (*turn down* has the same meaning as *decrease* or *lower*)

I am trying to get hold of my friend. (*get hold of* has the same meaning as *contact* or *reach*)

2. Phrasal verbs are highly complex in that a preposition can completely change the meaning of the verb. Read the following examples and note how the meaning changes.

Examples:

Please turn on the light. (meaning = start the operation of)

Please turn in the assignment on Friday. (meaning = submit)

I usually turn over a lot when I sleep. (meaning = roll from one side to the other)

3. Another complexity is that some phrasal verbs have more than one meaning depending on the context.

Examples:

Please turn down the volume. (meaning = decrease or lower)

I hope you will not turn down the job because of the pay. (meaning = refuse)

Five thousand people turned out to hear the concert. (meaning = came)

Please turn out the light. (meaning = extinguish)

The best way to learn these two- and three-word verbs is to listen for them in conversations and to look for them in written material. They are also listed in dictionaries.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE

THE NINE MOST COMMON PREPOSITIONS

Improve your ability to use prepositions by becoming aware of the most commonly used prepositions. The nine most common prepositions are at, in, on, by, from, to, for, of, and with.

Examples:

I met my professor at a conference in Illinois.

At present, I am a fourth-year Ph.D. student in economics.

I plan to take a biochemistry course in the spring.

In this laboratory course, I developed skills in recording data.

On Friday, the president visited an elementary school in Washington, D.C. The children loved his visit. On the other hand, critics questioned it as political.

We obtained our information by performing studies in five states.

One study was conducted by a marketing company in Texas.

We obtained our blood samples from patients who volunteered.

Phase II of our research will take place from May to July of this year.

After class, I need to go to the bookstore and to the library.

According to some studies, second-hand smoke is dangerous to children.

The manager was absent, so her assistant chaired the meeting for her.

The committee identified numerous reasons for the problem.

The price of gasoline seems to go up every year.

Fifty percent of the survey respondents said they were trying to drive less.

Jacob is writing a report with two other graduate students.

They have not finished with their research yet.

AVOIDING WORDINESS

Overuse of prepositional phrases can make a piece of writing very wordy as well as difficult to read. Below are some suggestions to edit out wordiness with prepositional phrases.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE (CONT.)

You can replace the prepositional phrase with a verb.

Example:

What are the effects of large chains and superstores on smaller, family-owned businesses?

How do large chains and superstores affect smaller, family-owned businesses?

You can replace the prepositional phrase with a possessive.

Example:

The illness of her mother left the family in turmoil.

Her mother's illness left the family in turmoil.

You can replace the prepositional phrase with an adjective.

Examples:

A country needs a president with intelligence and with good people skills.

A country needs an intelligent president with good people skills.

That school district requires students to wear shirts or blouses with navy and white stripes.

That school district requires students to wear navy and white striped shirts or blouses.

PRACTICE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Underline and correct the preposition errors. Each sentence has one error. The first one has been done for you.

1. They had to be nice ^{to} with their neighbors.
2. I am a student in the music department in the University of Michigan.
3. The revised schedule gives students a choice with dates.

4. All the graduate classes in this department are held at the early afternoon and evening.
5. It is easy to clean the kitchen when all you have to do is load the dishes to the dishwasher.
6. My lab partner lives in 1003 Rosemont Avenue.
7. Living in an apartment is difficult if you are not happy of your roommates.
8. If you are looking for your car keys, I saw them lying in the table.
9. If my trip goes as planned, I will see you at Monday.
10. My uncle, who owns a successful business, has had a big influence in me.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: Fill in each blank with the correct preposition to accompany a verb, noun, or adjective. You may want to refer to a dictionary.

Example: My sister is very proud of her swimming award.

1. My neighbors make so much noise that I have trouble concentrating _____ my work.
2. I dreamed _____ you last night.
3. I do not know if I can ever forgive you _____ misleading me.
4. Are you interested _____ going camping with us next weekend?
5. My advisor insisted _____ my submitting a research proposal by January.
6. I will have to think _____ what you have said before I give you an answer.

7. I am hopeful that I will succeed _____ finishing my bachelor's degree by next year.
8. My parents do not object _____ my borrowing their car on weekends.
9. We want to take advantage _____ the nice weather and go on a picnic.
10. My brother's carelessness about food safety resulted _____ his getting food poisoning.

EXERCISE 3

Directions: Check your knowledge of prepositions in two- and three-word verbs by filling in each blank with the correct preposition.

Example: When her fever got worse, she was sorry she had put off going to the doctor.

1. The school has not yet found _____ who gave that generous gift of \$500.
2. If you have not finished your homework before class, you had better come up _____ a good excuse for the teacher.
3. He was so angry about being overcharged that he tore _____ the bill.
4. If you are not going to use that equipment, please get rid _____ it.
5. My cousin is very sociable; he likes to interact _____ people.

EXERCISE 4

Directions: Fill in each blank in the following e-mail message with the correct preposition.

Dear World Bank Internship Coordinator:

I am very pleased to apply _____⁽¹⁾ an internship with the World Bank for next summer. I am a second-year graduate student _____⁽²⁾ the Economics Department _____⁽³⁾ the University of California, Davis. My research focuses _____⁽⁴⁾ International Economics.

I am certain that your internship program will provide me with valuable hands-on experience that I will be able to use _____⁽⁵⁾ my future career.

Before becoming a graduate student, I worked _____⁽⁶⁾ the Bank of Korea from 2009 _____⁽⁷⁾ 2011, mainly _____⁽⁸⁾ the Foreign Exchange department.

I would be honored to work _____⁽⁹⁾ your organization _____⁽¹⁰⁾ my summer vacation. I have attached my résumé and would also be happy to participate _____⁽¹¹⁾ a phone or face-to-face interview. Please feel free to contact me _____⁽¹²⁾ the following phone number or e-mail address: 550-327-6655; jsmithstone@somewhere.net

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward _____⁽¹³⁾ hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jason Smithstone

Graduate Student in Economics

University of California, Davis

Post-test**What Do You Know Now?**

A Fill in the blanks with the correct commonly used prepositions.

1. I live _____ Chicago.
2. I am a student _____ Northwestern University.
3. A botanical garden can be found _____ the college campus.
4. Chelsea is a student _____ the Environmental Science Department. Cindy is _____ the field of computer science.
5. Lin is doing research _____ the effects of vitamins on the immune system. Sandra is doing research _____ wireless networks.
6. The lecture for the entrance exam was _____ the topic of homelessness in small towns.
7. Frank's work focuses _____ human memory processes.
8. My calculus class meets _____ the afternoon _____ Tuesdays and Thursdays _____ 2:10 PM.
9. Rashid was admitted _____ Ohio State University to study maternal and child nutrition.
10. Moe is interested _____ a career in advertising.
11. I have enrolled _____ three classes this quarter.
12. This semester, classes began _____ Thursday, September 15.

B Fill in the blank in each sentence with the correct preposition to follow a noun or adjective.

1. Sharif was very nervous _____ taking the driving test for the first time.
2. Some stores are happy to give refunds while others are hesitant _____ giving refunds and would rather give credit instead.
3. The reason _____ the delay in the flight's arrival was not explained.

4. During the summer months, there is an abundance _____ produce in the farmers' markets.
5. Many students say that the preparation _____ taking an entrance exam is often harder than the exam itself.

C Fill in the blank in each sentence with the correct preposition or prepositions to complete the verb.

1. In mid-April, we need to register _____ summer school to get the classes we want.
2. When Jacques looked up _____ the clock, he saw he had only ten minutes left to complete the exam.
3. Before I give you a definite answer, I feel I need to think _____ the situation further.
4. Mark was asked to write an article _____ the conference that he attended.
5. The professor has referred _____ Shakespeare's works numerous times.

D Correct the marked errors in each paragraph in the short biographical statements by writing the correct preposition, adding a preposition, or deleting a preposition. The first one has been done for you.

1. Gail Wong is a senior ⁱⁿ of chemistry and expects to graduate at June of this year. After she graduates, she hopes to do graduate work on the area of organic chemistry. She just completed one year as a study-abroad student for Beijing University, where she learned to speak Chinese. Besides her academic studies, Gail serves student body vice president, and she is interested swimming. Her hobbies include listening to classical music and reading.

2. Michael Miyagi is a first-year graduate student working in a master's degree for civil engineering. He has a bachelor's degree civil engineering from Hokkaido University at Japan. Before coming to the United States, he worked a Japanese company that plans, designs, and constructs urban freeway systems on the Tokyo metropolitan area. While in Japan, he was involved designing new freeways. Currently, his research focuses in ways to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution. In his free time, he likes to play baseball and spend time for his family.

APPLY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED TO WRITING

Select a writing topic and follow the steps in Appendix A on page 337.

Topic 1:

Think about your favorite restaurants. Choose one of them and describe what it is like in terms of food, atmosphere, service, and any other aspects you would like to focus on. Then, say why you would recommend this restaurant to your friends.



Topic 2:

Advise someone on how to be a successful student. What should a student do to be successful? If you are working, you may want to give advice on how to be successful in your line of work.



Topic 3:

Compare and contrast the person you are today with the person you were two or more years ago. What are the major changes in yourself? What has stayed the same?

