

[See this page in the course material.](#)



Prepositions are relation words; they can indicate location, time, or other more abstract relationships. Prepositions are noted in bold in these examples:

- The woods **behind** my house are super creepy **at** night.
- She sang **until** three in the morning.
- He was happy **for** them.

A preposition combines with another word (usually a noun or pronoun) called the complement. Prepositions are still in bold, and their complements are in italics:

- The woods **behind** *my house* are super creepy **at** *night*.
- She sang **until** *three in the morning*.
- He was happy **for** *them*.

Prepositions generally come before their complements (e.g., **in** England, **under** the table, **of** Jane). However, there are a small handful of exceptions, including **notwithstanding** and **ago**:

- *Financial limitations* **notwithstanding**, Phil paid back his debts.
- He was released *three days* **ago**.

Prepositions of location are pretty easily defined (*near*, *far*, *over*, *under*, etc.), and prepositions about time are as well (*before*, *after*, *at*, *during*, etc.). Prepositions of “more abstract relationships,” however, are a little more nebulous in their definition. The video below gives a good overview of this category of prepositions:



[Video Link](#)

Note: The video said that prepositions are a closed group, but it never actually explained what a closed group is. Perhaps the easiest way to define a closed group is to define its opposite: an open group. An open group is a part of speech allows new words to be added. For example, nouns are an open group; new nouns, like *selfie* and *blog*, enter the language all the time (verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are open groups as well).

Thus a closed group simply refers to a part of speech that doesn't allow in new words. All of the word types in this section—prepositions, articles, and conjunctions—are closed groups.

Practice

Identify the prepositions in the following sentences:

1. The cow jumped over the moon.
2. My favorite painting is *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*.
3. Beatriz wanted to know if she would see Alexandre before lunch.
4. All he does is talk about his band.

Click to Show Answer

The prepositions have been bolded in the sentences below:

1. The cow jumped **over** the moon.
2. My favorite painting is *The Girl **with** the Pearl Earring*
3. Beatriz wanted to know if she would see Alexandre **before** lunch.
4. All he does is talk **about** his band.

So far, all of the prepositions we've looked at have been one word (and most of them have been one syllable). The most common prepositions are one-syllable words. According to one ranking, the most common English prepositions are *on, in, to, by, for, with, at, of, from, as*.

There are also some prepositions that have more than one word:

- in spite of (She made it to work in spite of the terrible traffic.)
- by means of (He traveled by means of boat.)
- except for (Joan invited everyone to her party except for Ben.)
- next to (Go ahead and sit down next to Jean-Claude.)

Prepositions in Sentences

You'll often hear about **prepositional phrases**. A prepositional phrase includes a preposition and its complement (e.g., "**behind the house**" or "*a long time ago*").

Ending a Sentence with a Preposition



[Video Link](#)

As we just learned, it is totally okay to end a sentence with a preposition. And, as we saw, it can often make your writing smoother and more concise to do so.

However, it's still best to avoid doing it unnecessarily. If your sentence ends with a preposition and would still mean the same thing without the preposition, take it out. For example:

Where are you at?

That's not what it's used for.

If you remove *at*, the sentence becomes "Where are you?" This means the same thing, so removing *at* is a good idea. However, if you remove *for*, the sentence becomes "That's not what

it's used," which doesn't make sense.

Licenses and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Revision and Adaptation. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Preposition and postposition. **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preposition_and_postposition. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)
- Prepositions of neither space nor time. **Authored by:** David Rheinstrom. **Provided by:** Khan Academy. **Located at:** <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/partsofspeech/the-preposition/v/prepositions-of-neither-space-nor-time>. **License:** [CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](#)
- Terminal prepositions. **Authored by:** David Rheinstrom. **Provided by:** Khan Academy. **Located at:** <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/partsofspeech/the-preposition/v/terminal-prepositions-prepositions-the-parts-of-speech-grammar>. **License:** [CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](#)
- Image of box. **Authored by:** Lek Potharam. **Provided by:** The Noun Project. **Located at:** <https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=put&i=17426>. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)

</div