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## Quick and Handy Grammar Review: Prepositions

You are probably not surprised to learn that many professors consider prepositions to be the most difficult part of speech to use. Why? Because they are always abstract. You can't see, feel, taste, smell, or hear prepositions. That is because they express relationships between or among things, but they do not express or describe things themselves.

The following is a list of common prepositions, some notes on their use, and examples.

Preposition	Notes	Examples
About	Meanings: on (the subject of) and around (a place)	I read a book <b>about</b> the war. The speech was <b>about</b> causes of cancer. You can now move freely <b>about</b> the cabin.
Above	Meaning: on top of	I placed the painting <b>above</b> the table. The blue sky was <b>above</b> us all afternoon.
Across	Meaning: on the other side	The theater is <b>across</b> the street from the bank. Columbus traveled <b>across</b> the ocean in 1492.
After	Meaning: later in time	<b>After</b> the game, the players went to dinner. <b>After</b> lunch, I studied in the library. The students were very tired <b>after</b> the exam.
Against	Meanings: opposed to and in contact with	Mr. Jones ran <b>against</b> Ms. Adams for treasurer. The umbrella is leaning <b>against</b> the wall.
Along	Meaning: on the side of	We strolled <b>along</b> the bank of the river. There are many hotels <b>along</b> the Danube.
Among	Meaning: in the midst of	There is a cat sitting <b>among</b> the flowers. He was found <b>among</b> the dead after the battle.
Around	Meanings: in a circle and turning a corner	The teacher walked <b>around</b> the room. Ken lives <b>around</b> the block.
At	Meanings: to state time and to state a place	The game starts <b>at</b> 9:00. Maya studies <b>at</b> the University of Nebraska. Leslie works <b>at</b> Apple Computers.
Before	Meaning: earlier in time	<b>Before</b> breakfast, I took a walk. I would like to finish <b>before</b> noon. The movie ended <b>before</b> 10:00.
Behind	Meaning: in back of	I hid the bag <b>behind</b> the couch. Nestor was standing right <b>behind</b> me.
Below	Meaning: under or underneath	The bag is <b>below</b> the desk. The temperature is 11 degrees <b>below</b> zero.
Beneath	Meaning: under and lower in status	The dog was sleeping <b>beneath</b> the table. Do you think that working for that company is <b>beneath</b> you?

**Common prepositions chart continued...**

Preposition	Notes	Examples
Beside	Meaning: next to	I stood <b>beside</b> Mr. Johnson. The chair is <b>beside</b> the table.
Besides	Meaning: in addition to	<b>Besides</b> John, Jane and Alicia are going.
Between	Meaning: in the middle of (two things or people)	The blue car is <b>between</b> the red and the white ones. I was sitting <b>between</b> Toshiko and Nabuko.
Beyond	Meanings: more than and farther than	Ines became rich <b>beyond</b> her wildest dreams. Xavier looked <b>beyond</b> the blue horizon.
By	Meanings: near, ownership, and how something was done	Patrick lives <b>by</b> the sea. That book was written <b>by</b> Harlan Cobin. I sent the letter <b>by</b> mail.
Despite	Meaning: contrast	<b>Despite</b> the rain, we still had a picnic.
Down	Meaning: opposite of “up”	She ran <b>down</b> the hill. The cat went <b>down</b> the stairs.
During	Meaning: something is in progress	There was a terrible storm <b>during</b> the night. <b>During</b> the movie, Carl ate two bags of popcorn.
For	Meanings: to show the intended recipient and purpose	This gift is <b>for</b> Helga. I’m taking this course <b>for</b> my degree.
From	Meanings: to show the origin and to show the start time or place	This package is <b>from</b> my brother. This shop is open <b>from</b> 9:00 to 5:00.
In	Meaning: inside	The check is <b>in</b> my pocket.
Into	Meaning: put inside	I put the change <b>into</b> my wallet.
Like	Meaning: similarity	Vicki looks just <b>like</b> her mother.
Near	Meaning: close to	Paul lives <b>near</b> his school.
Of	Meaning: possession and materials	The wines <b>of</b> France are excellent. Diana’s shirt is made <b>of</b> silk.
Off	Meaning: opposite of “on”	Keep your books <b>off</b> the table. Iris fell <b>off</b> her bicycle.

**Common prepositions chart continued...**

Preposition	Notes	Examples
On	Meanings: on top of and about	The bag is <b>on</b> the table. I read a book <b>on</b> the election of 2008.
Out	Meanings: to go outside and opposite of "in"	Kris went <b>out</b> the door at six o'clock. Victor jumped <b>out</b> the window and ran away.
Over	Meaning: above	The airplane is flying <b>over</b> the house.
Since	Meaning: a start time	Wes has worked for Target <b>since</b> 1999.
Through	Meaning: to go from one side to the other	I walked <b>through</b> the park.
Throughout	Meaning: for the term of	<b>Throughout</b> his life, he was always kind and gentle.
Till	Meaning: up to the time	I worked <b>till</b> 10:00 last night.
To	Meaning: direction	Ashley is going <b>to</b> Colombia next fall. Lon gave a ring <b>to</b> his girlfriend.
Toward(s)	Meaning: in the direction of	The truck was coming directly <b>toward(s)</b> us.
Under	Meaning: below	The cat hid <b>under</b> the couch.
Until	Meaning: up to the time	Ziggy will work <b>until</b> 2018. Walter will stay in China <b>until</b> July.
Up	Meaning: above	Kristin hiked <b>up</b> the mountain. The bathroom is <b>up</b> the stairs to your right.
Upon	Meaning: when (poetic use)	Once <b>upon</b> a time, there was a noble queen.
With	Meaning: together	I had dinner <b>with</b> Arnold yesterday. Are you <b>with</b> me or against me?
Within	Meaning: inside	Hal tried to live <b>within</b> his income. <b>Within</b> these walls are many treasures.
Without	Meaning: lacking	People cannot live <b>without</b> water. I cannot live <b>without</b> you.

## Prepositional Phrases

One of the most common constructions in the English language is the prepositional phrase. You can find prepositional phrases in almost every sentence. Sometimes there are even two or three prepositional phrases used in the same sentence.

The basic prepositional phrase has three words: preposition, article, noun. This is the most common construction. Other words, such as adjectives, may be added. The article is not used in some phrases, and the noun may be replaced by a pronoun. Analyze the following examples:

In the closet (preposition, article, noun)

Over the chair (preposition, article, noun)

To the woman (preposition, article, noun)

From the mall (preposition, article, noun)

To India (preposition, noun)

Near Syria (preposition, noun)

After lunch (preposition, noun)

Toward me (preposition, pronoun)

With them (preposition, pronoun)

## Phrasal Verbs

Many verbs are followed by prepositions. These prepositions often change the meaning of the verb. Analyze the differences among the following phrasal verbs:

John **threw away** his old notebook. (*meaning*: to get rid of)

Harold **threw up** after he drank too much beer. (*meaning*: to vomit)

Patricia **looked up** the word in the dictionary. (*meaning*: to check)

George **looked into** becoming a nurse. (*meaning*: to research)

David **looked up to** his boss. (*meaning*: to admire)

Sally **looks out** for her little brother. (*meaning*: to take care of)

Cindy wanted to **try on** the new dress. (*meaning*: to put on for the first time)

Sam is going to **try out** the new high speed internet service for one month. (*meaning*: to try for the first time)

**Exercise 1:**

*Choose the correct preposition for each blank.*

1. Henrietta met her boyfriend \_\_\_\_\_ the bus from Washington to Miami.  
a. in                      b. at                      c. on                      d. between
2. I have never seen such a gigantic nose \_\_\_\_\_ my whole life.  
a. in                      b. at                      c. on                      d. between
3. Chita Rodriguez comes \_\_\_\_\_ Cuba.  
a. in                      b. from                      c. on                      d. until
4. We will go dancing \_\_\_\_\_ midnight.  
a. in                      b. at                      c. on                      d. from
5. Anesha usually goes \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. in the summer India                      b. to India in the summer  
c. to India on the summer                      d. over the summer to India
6. Hank made many mistakes \_\_\_\_\_ the past.  
a. in                      b. at                      c. on                      d. from
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Joseph, Won Min and Adytya are also going.  
a. beside                      b. besides                      c. addition to                      d. in addition
8. \_\_\_\_\_ love, life is very difficult.  
a. with                      b. without                      c. within                      d. in
9. The whole family goes out to breakfast \_\_\_\_\_ Sunday mornings.  
a. in                      b. at                      c. on                      d. from
10. I think that Horace's father was arrested \_\_\_\_\_ the fall.  
a. in                      b. at                      c. on                      d. from



**Exercise 3:**

*Sentence stems: Complete each sentence.*

1. After the storm, \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Down by the river, \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Among the survivors, \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Near the town of Roxbury, \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Before breakfast, \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. In my heart, \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Around the corner, \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Between you and me, \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. For the past three years, \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Besides Charlie and Mohammed, \_\_\_\_\_

**Exercise 4:**

*Sentence Stems: Complete each sentence.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ throughout my life.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ toward the exit.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ in my dreams.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ across the ocean.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ under the bed.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ in the winter.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ far from the one she loves.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ at 7:30 pm.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ on Thursday afternoon.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ with dolls.

**Exercise 5:**

*Error Correction: Correct the mistakes in the following sentences. Then rewrite each sentence correctly.*

1. I didn't stay up late. I was asleep on midnight.

---

2. She met her best friend on September, 1999 at Seoul.

---

3. Anita moved of Rome at 2006.

---

4. The plane finally arrived on 5:46 pm.

---

5. Bob met his future wife in a bus, not on a taxi.

---

6. In this moment, Ushbek is studying from Bunker Hill Community College.

---

7. Don't pay attention at that fortune-teller. She has no idea about events on the future.

---

8. My mother and father don't drive on the dark, so they stay home at the night.

---

9. I think that Tom is in a date with Sally. I think she is separated to her husband.

---

10. That woman is staring to the man on the other table. He is looking off the window.

---

**Exercise 6:**

*Error Correction: Correct the mistakes in the following sentences. Then rewrite each sentence correctly.*

1. On Sunday, Jong goes to the church for to pray.

---

2. At the summer, my family goes to beach to swim.

---

3. On her living room, there is an end table next the couch.

---

4. Barbara found her purse under chair on the family room.

---

5. Bobby read a book across the Second World War.

---

6. The bakery is next the diner.

---

7. The children walked for the park to get home quickly.

---

8. My mother cannot live with her iPod. She always listens music.

---

9. I saw the plane moving to the airport, but I did not see it land.

---

10. Before breakfast, Sidney jogged on the park.

---

**Exercise 7:**

*Choose the correct preposition for each blank.*

1. Can you tell me a little bit \_\_\_\_\_ your experience?  
a. in                                      b. about                                      c. on                                      d. of
2. I think I left my laptop \_\_\_\_\_ the couch.  
a. in                                      b. at                                      c. on                                      d. down
3. Some little children are afraid \_\_\_\_\_ animals.  
a. to the                                      b. to                                      c. of                                      d. of the
4. We had a picnic \_\_\_\_\_ the tall elm tree.  
a. beneath                                      b. on                                      c. on top of                                      d. next
5. The crowd cheered continuously \_\_\_\_\_ the game.  
a. beside                                      b. near                                      c. during                                      d. by
6. I am not completely \_\_\_\_\_ you. I just don't share all your opinions.  
a. for                                      b. against                                      c. near                                      d. beside
7. John's father was standing right \_\_\_\_\_ him at the concert.  
a. in front                                      b. next                                      c. behind                                      d. on
8. Don't forget to turn the television off before you go \_\_\_\_\_ bed.  
a. to                                      b. to                                      c. to the                                      d. to
9. \_\_\_\_\_ the rain, the game was not canceled.  
a. despite                                      b. in spite                                      c. despite from                                      d. because of
10. \_\_\_\_\_ the class, the students walked slowly \_\_\_\_\_ the room.  
a. before / out to                                      b. after / out of                                      c. during / in of                                      d. after from / out

**Exercise 8:**

*Choose the correct preposition for each blank.*

1. Can you tell me how to get \_\_\_\_\_ library?  
a. to                      b. to the                      c. toward the                      d. from the
  
2. I think you left your book \_\_\_\_\_ the table over there.  
a. in                      b. at                      c. on                      d. down
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ the walls of the ancient city, there are many secrets.  
a. Without                      b. Within                      c. Above                      d. Through
  
4. John had a discussion \_\_\_\_\_ his advisor yesterday.  
a. from                      b. on                      c. with                      d. to
  
5. I took a walk \_\_\_\_\_ the river. It was so peaceful.  
a. after                      b. along                      c. during                      d. through
  
6. Quentin has lived in Texas \_\_\_\_\_ July.  
a. for                      b. since                      c. from                      d. at
  
7. John's father said that he will work \_\_\_\_\_ 9:00 tonight.  
a. until                      b. without                      c. over                      d. for
  
8. I found your old love letter \_\_\_\_\_ some papers that I had left in my desk drawer.  
a. around                      b. against                      c. after                      d. among
  
9. My best friend lives right \_\_\_\_\_ the street \_\_\_\_\_ me.  
a. across / to                      b. across / from                      c. across / for                      d. across / on
  
10. The temperature was 11 degrees \_\_\_\_\_ zero yesterday.  
a. below                      b. from                      c. to                      d. above

**Exercise 9:**

Choose the correct preposition for each blank.

1. The Rodriguez family goes \_\_\_\_\_ church every Sunday.  
a. to                                      b. to the                                      c. toward the                                      d. from the
2. I will always stand \_\_\_\_\_ you, \_\_\_\_\_ thick and thin.  
a. besides / in                                      b. beside / through                                      c. besides / through                                      d. on / through
3. \_\_\_\_\_ the blue skies \_\_\_\_\_ me, I felt like a new man.  
a. with / below                                      b. with / above                                      c. without / above                                      d. with / toward
4. Joshua lives \_\_\_\_\_ a bakery and a bagel shop.  
a. from                                      b. on                                      c. with                                      d. between
5. Calculus III is way \_\_\_\_\_ me. I don't understand anything in the class.  
a. after                                      b. along                                      c. beyond                                      d. through
6. Omar always stays \_\_\_\_\_ his room to relax before a big exam.  
a. on                                      b. for                                      c. in                                      d. under
7. I will love you \_\_\_\_\_ I die. I promise.  
a. till                                      b. during                                      c. when                                      d. without
8. Once \_\_\_\_\_ a time, an old man was living \_\_\_\_\_ a bridge.  
a. upon / under                                      b. upon / next                                      c. upon / through                                      d. on / below
9. When I saw the ball coming \_\_\_\_\_ me, I didn't know what to do.  
a. across                                      b. about                                      c. toward                                      d. from
10. I have always tried to be honest and sincere \_\_\_\_\_ my life.  
a. until                                      b. across                                      c. to                                      d. throughout

**Exercise 10:**

Write an appropriate preposition in each blank. Note: You will also need to write “to” for all infinitive verbs.

### Hidden in Plain Sight

They say that when you want \_\_\_\_\_ (1) hide something, one \_\_\_\_\_ (2) the best places \_\_\_\_\_ (3) hide it is \_\_\_\_\_ (4) plain sight. \_\_\_\_\_ (5) a story written \_\_\_\_\_ (6) Edgar Allan Poe called “The Purloined Letter”, a cunning man, known as Mr. X, stole a secret letter \_\_\_\_\_ (7) an important woman. He threatened to show the letter to everyone if she did not pay him a great deal \_\_\_\_\_ (8) money. She went \_\_\_\_\_ (9) the police, and they secretly searched Mr. X’s apartment. They started by looking \_\_\_\_\_ (10) the rugs and \_\_\_\_\_ (11) the books \_\_\_\_\_ (12) the bookshelves. Nothing. Then they looked \_\_\_\_\_ (13) the bed and \_\_\_\_\_ (14) all the closets, but they could not find it. They thought that Mr. X was carrying the letter \_\_\_\_\_ (15) his pocket or \_\_\_\_\_ (16) his wallet, so they followed him \_\_\_\_\_ (17) a park, but they were unsuccessful in finding the letter.

The police called the famous detective Auguste Dupin, and asked him \_\_\_\_\_ (18) investigate the case. Dupin wore dark sunglasses and went \_\_\_\_\_ (19) Mr. X’s house. While he was sitting \_\_\_\_\_ (20) the table drinking a cup \_\_\_\_\_ (21) tea, he looked \_\_\_\_\_ (22) the whole room. He looked at the paintings \_\_\_\_\_ (23) the wall, the books \_\_\_\_\_ (24) the desk, and even the cat sleeping \_\_\_\_\_ (25) the rug. Finally, he looked \_\_\_\_\_ (26) a bowl \_\_\_\_\_ (27) some letters in it. He noticed that one \_\_\_\_\_ (28) the letters looked familiar. Dupin knew that this one was the stolen letter. When Mr. X heard a shout from \_\_\_\_\_ (29) the front window, he ran \_\_\_\_\_ (30) see what was happening. In the meantime, Dupin took the stolen letter and replaced it \_\_\_\_\_ (31) a similar one that he had \_\_\_\_\_ (32) his pocket. He thanked Mr. X \_\_\_\_\_ (33) the coffee and hurried out. This is how the detective found the stolen letter. It was hidden in plain sight, right \_\_\_\_\_ (34) the table.

**Answer Key**
*Exercise 1: Choose the correct preposition.*

- |      |       |      |      |
|------|-------|------|------|
| 1. c | 2. a  | 3. b | 4. b |
| 5. b | 6. a  | 7. b | 8. b |
| 9. c | 10. a |      |      |

*Exercise 2: Choose the correct preposition.*

- |      |       |      |      |
|------|-------|------|------|
| 1. d | 2. d  | 3. b | 4. b |
| 5. a | 6. c  | 7. b | 8. a |
| 9. d | 10. c |      |      |

*Exercise 3: Sentence Stems: Complete each sentence.*

Answers will vary. Examples:

- After the storm, **the sun came out**.
- Down by the river, **six fishermen were having their lunch**.
- Among the survivors, **there were two children and one woman**.
- Near the town of Roxbury, **there is a large mall**.
- Before breakfast, **I took a walk around the block**.
- In my heart, **I know that I am right**.
- Around the corner, **there is a large green house**.
- Between you and me, **I don't trust Larry**.
- For the past three years, **my sister has lived in Winnipeg**.
- Besides Charlie and Mohammed, **Aisha and Hee Jung are also coming to the party**.

*Exercise 4: Sentence Stems: Complete each sentence.*

Answers will vary. Examples:

- I have loved music** throughout my life.
- The satisfied concertgoers headed** toward the exit.
- I am the best soccer player in the league** in my dreams.
- Hal's brother lives** across the ocean.
- The dog was hiding** under the bed.
- We go skiing** in the winter.
- Thelma lives** far from the one she loves.
- The movie will start** at 7:30 pm.
- Teresa has Spanish class** on Thursday afternoon.
- My little sister loves to play** with dolls.

*Exercise 5: Error Correction.*

- I didn't stay up late. I was asleep **at** midnight.
- She met her best friend **in** September, 1999 **in** Seoul.
- Anita moved **to** Rome **in** 2006.
- The plane finally arrived **at** 5:46 pm.
- Bob met his future wife **on** a bus, not **in** a taxi.
- At** this moment, Ushbek is studying **at** Bunker Hill Community College.
- Don't pay attention **to** that fortune-teller. She has no idea about events **in** the future.
- My mother and father don't drive **in** the dark so they stay home **at** night.
- I think that Tom is **on** a date with Sally. I think she is separated **from** her husband.
- That woman is staring **at** the man **at** the other table. He is looking **out** the window.

*Exercise 6: Error Correction.*

- On Sunday, Jong goes **to** church **to** pray.
- In** (the) summer, my family goes **to** the beach to swim.
- In** her living room, there is an end table **next to** the couch.
- Barbara found her purse under **the** chair **in** the family room.
- Bobby read a book **about** (on) the Second World War.
- The bakery is **next to** the diner.
- The children walked **through** the park to get home quickly.
- My mother cannot live **without** her iPod. She always listens **to** music.
- I saw the plane moving **toward** the airport, but I did not see it land.
- Before breakfast, Sidney jogged **in** (around) (through) the park.

*Exercise 7: Choose the correct preposition.*

- |      |       |      |
|------|-------|------|
| 1. b | 2. c  | 3. c |
| 4. a | 5. c  | 6. b |
| 7. c | 8. d  |      |
| 9. a | 10. b |      |

*Exercise 8: Choose the correct preposition.*

- |      |       |      |
|------|-------|------|
| 1. b | 2. c  | 3. b |
| 4. c | 5. b  | 6. b |
| 7. a | 8. d  |      |
| 9. b | 10. a |      |

*Exercise 9: Choose the correct preposition.*

- |      |       |      |
|------|-------|------|
| 1. a | 2. b  | 3. b |
| 4. d | 5. c  | 6. c |
| 7. a | 8. a  |      |
| 9. c | 10. d |      |

*Exercise 10: Write an appropriate preposition in each blank. (Answers may vary.)*

- |            |            |             |
|------------|------------|-------------|
| 1. to      | 13. under  | 25. on      |
| 2. of      | 14. in     | 26. in      |
| 3. to      | 15. in     | 27. with    |
| 4. in      | 16. in     | 28. of      |
| 5. In      | 17. into   | 29. outside |
| 6. by      | 18. to     | 30. to      |
| 7. from    | 19. to     | 31. with    |
| 8. of      | 20. at     | 32. in      |
| 9. to      | 21. of     | 33. for     |
| 10. under  | 22. around | 34. out     |
| 11. behind | 23. on     | 35. on      |
| 12. on     | 24. on     |             |

**Spelling Note:** This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Theater* (p. 2), *Traveled* (p. 2 & 7), and *Canceled* (p. 12). Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Theatre*, *Travelled*, and *Cancelled*. Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the text and see if they know the alternate spellings.

**Editor's Note: Preposition or Adverb?** Some words in English such as *up*, *down*, *on*, *off*, etc. can function as prepositions or adverbs depending on sentence position and function. Check out our blog post on this topic, refresh your memory on the rules, and decide if it's worth mentioning to your students. <http://www.esl-library.com/blog/2013/05/09/preposition-or-adverb/>