

Prepositions



How do prepositions function in a sentence?

Prepositions are linking words used in sentences, usually to indicate different types of relationships in sentences. Rather than being like nouns that mean one definite thing—a table will always be a table—prepositions help us understand *how* we should consider objects such as tables, for example.

How and when do writers use them?

You can use prepositions in order to understand relationships with time.

This way, your reader will understand when something happens—on a particular day or a time of day—or how long an activity lasts.

For example, you might have class **on** certain days, or **during** the day. Those classes might happen **for** a whole semester. You might have a meeting with a professor **in** the afternoon.

Many prepositions help to indicate an object's location spatially.

Ask yourself: *Where* was the book? Was it **on**, **under**, **above**, **over**, **beside**, **beneath**, **against** the table? Each of these words can show a different spatial relationship between the book and the table. If you just said "the book was the table," the reader might think that the book has turned into a table, and feel confused by this sudden transformation.

Similarly, look at the sentence "the cat hides **beneath** the sofa." Where is the cat? Is the cat sitting **on** the sofa? Is it **in** the sofa cushions?

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Some verbs always need prepositions in order to make their meaning clear.

For example, "I'm looking **at** the television." If you don't put *at* after *look*, the reader might wonder if you are looking *for* the television (maybe you lost it and you're searching for it) or *with* the television (maybe you and the television are looking at something together). Likewise, you'll need to wait **for** somebody. You can't wait *at* them (but you can look *at* them while you wait) and if you wait *with* somebody, then it means you are waiting for a third person to show up. If you use a verb that needs a preposition

What are some common prepositions?

Some common prepositions are *at, on, in, for, to, of*, as well as words related to directions (across, behind, above, over, beneath, beside, against, etc.) and words related to time (during, within, since).

How can writers edit their work to improve their use of prepositions?

When you're revising, think about the relationship between the objects and verbs in the sentence. Is it clear which direction you are moving in? Is it clear when this action took place?

We went **to** the movies.

She brought the book **for** her friend.

We haven't met **since** last month.

If you have a phrase like "she brought the book her friend," the relationship between *the book* and *her friend* is not clear. If you find any phrases like this in your writing, then you will need to use a prepositional phrase.

Prepositions rarely ever happen alone, so watch for them in sentences and use them to clarify your meaning!