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 or how long an activity lasts. For example, you might have class on certain days, and those classes might happen for a whole semester:

Ex. I have a meeting **with** Dr. Smith **in** Morton Hall **during** lunch.

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.

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 or **with** the television. Likewise, you’ll need to wait for somebody. You can’t wait at them, but you can look at them while you wait. If you wait with somebody, then it means you are waiting for a third person to show up.

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.