



# WRITING CENTER

Library and Academic Resource Center (LARC 229)

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Figure 1 Logos for the Academic Resource Center and The Writing Center

## PREPOSITIONS & THEIR PHRASES

Prepositions act as locators in time, space, and manner. A preposition describes the relationship between other words in a sentence. They are used to locate something in time and space, to modify a noun or a predicate, and to tell *where* or *when* or under *what conditions* something happened. They are almost always combined with other words in structures called “**prepositional phrases**.” These phrases can act like adjectives or adverbs to modify a noun or verb phrase. This handout will help you recognize, understand, and practice using prepositions and prepositional phrases.

### **PART 1:**

Look at some examples of prepositions. Remember, prepositions clarify and/or describe time, place, location, and movement.

#### **Time: at, on, in, for, and since**

We use *at* to designate specific times.

The train is due *at* 12:50 p.m.

We use *on* to designate days and dates.

My brother is coming *on* Monday.

We’re having our party *on* the Fourth of July.

We use *in* for nonspecific times during a day, a month, a season, or a year.

She likes to jog *in* the morning.

It’s too cold *in* winter to run outside.

He started the job *in* 1971.

He’s going to quit *in* August.

We use *for* when we measure time (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years).

He held his breath *for* seven minutes.

She’s lived there *for* seven years.

The British and Irish have been quarreling *for* seven centuries.

We use *since* with a specific date or time.

He’s worked here *since* 1970.

She’s been sitting in the waiting room *since* two-thirty.

**Place: at, on, and in**

We use *at* for specific addresses.

Jane Smith lives *at* 55 Boretz Rd in Durham.

We use *on* to designate names of streets, avenues, etc.

Her house is *on* Boretz Rd.

We use *in* for the names of land-areas (towns, counties, states, countries, and continents).

She lives *in* Durham.

Durham is *in* Windham County.

Windham County is *in* Connecticut.

**Location: in, at, and on and no preposition**

We typically use the preposition *in* for these words:

(the) bed*	the bedroom	school*
the library*	the car	(the) class*

We typically use the preposition *at* for these words:

class*	home	school*
the library*	the office	work

We typically use the preposition *on* for these words:

the bed*	the ceiling	the plane
the floor	the horse	the train

We do not use prepositions with the following words:

downstairs	downtown	upstairs
inside	outside	uptown

*\* These words can be used with various prepositions.*

**Movement: to and no preposition**

We use *to* in order to express movement toward a place.

They were driving *to* work together.

She is going *to* the dentist's office this morning.

Toward and towards are also helpful prepositions to express movement. These are simply variant spellings of the same word; use whichever sounds better to you.

We're moving *toward* the light.

This is a big step *towards* the project's completion.

We use no preposition with the words home, downtown, uptown, inside, outside, downstairs, or upstairs.

Grandma went upstairs.

Grandpa went home.

They both went outside.

**Exercise: Highlight ONLY the prepositions in the following paragraph about the qualities of a desk.**

You can sit before the desk (or in front of the desk). The professor can sit on the desk (when he's being informal) or behind the desk, and then his feet are under the desk or beneath the desk. He can stand beside the desk (meaning next to the desk), before the desk, between the desk and you, or even on the desk (if he's really strange). If he's clumsy, he can bump into the desk or

try to walk through the desk (and stuff would fall off the desk). Passing his hands over the desk or resting his elbows upon the desk, he often looks across the desk and speaks of the desk or concerning the desk as if there were nothing else like the desk. Because he thinks of nothing except the desk, sometimes you wonder about the desk, what's in the desk, what he paid for the desk, and if he could live without the desk. You can walk toward the desk, to the desk, around the desk, by the desk, and even past the desk while he sits at the desk or leans against the desk. All of this happens, of course, in time: during the class, before the class, until the class, throughout the class, or after the class.

## **PART 2:**

Prepositional Phrases consist of a preposition followed by a determiner and an adjective, and then followed by a pronoun or a noun (the object of the preposition). Remember, there are 2 kinds of prepositional phrases: **adverbial** & **adjectival**. Look at some examples of *prepositional phrases*.

### **1. Adverbial**

I went to the car.

I (subject) *went* (verb) **to the car** (preposition).

What does this preposition describe, the subject or the verb?

-The preposition describes the verb (went).

Therefore: the preposition is adverbial.

### **2. Adjectival**

I am the loud neighbor

I (subject) *am* (verb) **the loud neighbor** (prepositional phrase).

What does this preposition describe, the subject or the verb?

The preposition describes the subject; therefore: the preposition is adjectival.

### **Exercise: Create 3 complete sentences by using prepositional phrases**

QUICK NOTE: Sometimes, prepositions are so commonly used with other words that, together, convey one meaning. *In these cases*, you will always use the two words together. This occurs in three categories: nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

#### **Nouns and Prepositions**

approval of	fondness for	need for
awareness of	grasp of	participation in
belief in	hatred of	reason for
love of	hope for	respect for
concern for	interest in	success in
confusion about	desire for	understanding of

### Adjectives and Prepositions

afraid of	fond of	proud of
angry at	happy about	similar to
aware of	interested in	sorry for
capable of	jealous of	sure of
careless about	made of	tired of
familiar with	married to	worried about

A combination of verb and preposition is called a phrasal verb. The word that is joined to the verb is then called a particle.

### Verbs and Prepositions

apologize for	give up	prepare for
ask about	grow up	study for
ask for	look for	talk about
belong to	look forward to	think about
bring up	look up	trust in
care for	make up	work for
find out	pay for	worry about

**This handout is based on the following texts:**

Capital Community College. "Guide to Grammar and Writing." Charles Darling. Hartford, Connecticut. 22 Sep 99. 17 Nov 03. **For further reference, see the following books:**

Beason, Larry and Mark Lester. A Commonsense Guide to Grammar and Usage. Boston: Bedford, 2000. Langan, John. English Skills. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 1997.

*All of the above texts are available in The Writing Center. Last Revised: 06/20/18*