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Quick and Handy Grammar Review: Prepositions

You are probably not surprised to learn that prepositions are considered by many professors 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 about the war. The speech was about causes of cancer. You can now move freely about the cabin.
Above	Meaning: on top of	I placed the painting above the table. The blue sky was above us all afternoon.
Across	Meaning: on the other side	The theater is across the street from the bank. Columbus traveled across the ocean in 1492.
After	Meaning: later in time	After the game, the players went to dinner. After lunch, I studied in the library. The students were very tired after the exam.
Against	Meanings: opposed to, and in contact with	Mr. Jones ran against Ms. Adams for Treasurer. The umbrella is leaning against the wall.
Along	Meaning: on the side of	We strolled along the bank of the river. There are many hotels along the Danube.
Among	Meaning: in the midst of	There is a cat sitting among the flowers. He was found among the dead after the battle.
Around	Meanings: in a circle, and turning a corner	The teacher walked around the room. Ken lives around the block.
At	Meanings: to state time, and to state a place	The game starts at 9:00. Maya studies at the University of Nebraska. Leslie works at Apple Computers.
Before	Meaning: earlier in time	Before breakfast, I took a walk. I would like to finish before noon. The movie ended before 10:00.
Behind	Meaning: in back of	I hid the bag behind the couch. Nestor was standing right behind me.
Below	Meaning: under or underneath	The bag is below the desk. The temperature is 11 degrees below zero.
Beneath	Meaning: under, and lower in status	The dog was sleeping beneath the table. Do you think that working for that company is beneath you?

Common prepositions chart continued...

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

Common prepositions chart continued...

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

Towards 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 2:

Choose the correct preposition for each blank.

- Little Rosita is afraid _____ dogs.
a. in b. at c. on d. of
- Mamma found Sergio hiding _____ the bed.
a. in b. at c. on d. under
- Some little children do not like to go _____ school.
a. to the b. to c. at the d. from
- My two brothers really love to go _____ the mall.
a. for b. to c. at d. from
- Daniel’s father looked him right _____ and knew he was lying.
a. in the eye b. on the eye c. from the eye d. into the eyes
- The thief stole the handbag _____ the woman _____ Fifth Avenue.
a. in / on b. from / in c. from / on d. with / on
- Silvia traveled _____ the world. She went _____ Asia, South America, and Africa.
a. around / on b. around / to c. across / to d. in / to
- The rug _____ the coffee table is _____ Iran.
a. beneath / from b. beneath / to c. under / to d. underneath / to
- Nick sat _____ his wife _____ the party.
a. besides / at b. besides / in c. beside / from d. beside / at
- Mahmoud read a book _____ the Russian revolution.
a. from b. at c. on d. to

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 conclusions: Write a beginning for each sentence.

1. _____ throughout my life.
2. _____ towards 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 p.m.
9. _____ on Thursday afternoon.
10. _____ with dolls.

Exercise 5:

Error correction: Correct the mistakes in the following sentences. Then write each sentence correctly.

1. I didn't stay in 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 p.m.

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 fortuneteller. 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 write each sentence correctly.

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

2. At the summer, my family goes to beach for 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 for to get home quickly.

8. My mother cannot live with her iPod. She listens music all day and night.

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

10. Before to 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. after 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 _____ before you go _____ bed.
a. on / to b. out / to c. off / to the d. off / to
9. _____ the rain, the game was not cancelled.
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 / 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. towards 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. over 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 _____ last July.
a. for b. since c. from d. at

7. John's father says 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. Yesterday the temperature was 11 degrees _____ zero.
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. towards 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 / towards
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 _____ relax before a big exam.
a. on / for to b. in / for to c. in / to d. under / to
7. I will love you _____ I die. I promise.
a. till b. before 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. towards 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.

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 _____ (34). This is how the detective Auguste Dupin found the stolen letter. It was hidden in plain sight, right _____ (35) 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 conclusions: Write a beginning for each sentence

Answers will vary. Examples:

- I have loved music** throughout my life.
- The satisfied concertgoers headed** towards 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 p.m.
- 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 p.m.
- 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 fortuneteller. 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 listens to music all day and night.
- I saw the plane moving towards the airport, but I did not see it land.
- Before breakfast, Sidney jogged in 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 | |