

Prepositions & Prepositional Phrases

Prepositions

A preposition is a single word. It sometimes refers to a direction. Some examples are:

- * on
- * in
- * at
- * under
- * across

Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase is a group of words (usually 3 to 5 words) that begins with a preposition. Examples:

- * in a yellow house
- * over the large hill
- * at the small pond

A prepositional phrase must always contain a preposition, but it may also contain one or more of the following:

- * article (a, an, the)
- * noun (some examples are: house, hill, pond)
- * pronoun (some examples are: him, her, them)
- * adjective (some examples are: yellow, large, pretty)

A prepositional phrase can never contain any one of the following elements:

- * subject
- * verb
- * object

Many prepositional phrases will contain an object TO THE PREPOSITION, but not an object of the main clause of the sentence.

Example #1

He was mowing the grass around the house.

Explanation: "Grass" is the object of the main clause of the sentence, but "house" is the object of the prepositional phrase "around the house," and therefore, not part of the main clause.

Example #2

She ran the race with some friends.

Explanation: "Race" is the object of the main clause of the sentence, but "friends" is the object of the prepositional phrase "with some friends," and therefore, not part of the main clause.

HOT GRAMMAR TIP

If you are looking for the subject and/or verb of a main clause in a sentence, cross off the prepositional phrase(s) since neither the subject nor the verb will be contained in a prepositional phrase. This will help you to identify the core parts (subject and verb) of the sentence more easily. When you edit your own writing, mentally crossing off the prepositional phrases will help you to identify whether you have included a subject and a verb; then you will know you have written a complete sentence and not a fragment.

Example #1

She moved quickly on a skateboard toward the house.

Explanation: Prepositional phrases to be crossed off are: on a skateboard and toward the house. This leaves She moved quickly, a group of words that contains the subject (she) and the verb (moved). So if you had written this sentence, you would be sure it was a complete sentence.

Example #2

They went to the movies at the south end of the campus.

Explanation: Prepositional phrases to be crossed off are: to the movies, at the south end, and of the campus. This leaves They went which contains the subject (they) and the verb (went). So if you had written this sentence, you would be sure it was a complete sentence.