

3. Prepositions

A preposition shows the relationship between a noun or a pronoun and some other word in the sentence.

Water *under* the bridge
Age *before* beauty

Common prepositions

about	below	for	out	under
above	beneath	from	outside	underneath
across	beside	in	over	unlike
after	between	inside	past	until
against	beyond	into	regarding	up
along	but	like	round	upon
among	by	near	since	with
around	concerning	next	through	within
as	despite	of	throughout	without
at	down	off	till	
before	during	on	to	
behind	except	onto	toward	

Compound prepositions

according to	in addition to	next to
along with	in accordance with	on account of
apart from	in case of	on top of
because of	in favour of	out of
by means of	in front of	regardless of
contrary to	in place of	with regard to
due to	in spite of	with the exception of
except for	instead of	

Ending a sentence with a preposition

You might have come across the so-called ‘grammatical rule’ that you shouldn’t end a sentence with a preposition.

For example, the question “Which subjects did you enrol *in*?” has the preposition *in* at the end of the sentence.

It is the case that the preposition usually precedes the noun or pronoun to which they are attached (it is in the *pre* position).

It was *under* the desk
They drove *to* Melbourne
Enter *through* the Victoria Avenue gates

But, it certainly does not have to be in this position. For example, the question “Which subjects did you enrol *in*?” and “In which subjects did you enrol?” are both perfectly acceptable, although the latter is more formal and is preferable in academic writing.

Consider the following sentence:

Mr Forbes, who entered the presidential race a complete political novice, suddenly emerged as the man *of* whom everybody was afraid.¹

The writer has chosen to embed his preposition in the sentence, thus avoiding ending the sentence with *of*. It is formally correct. It would also be possible to say:

Mr Forbes...suddenly emerged as the man whom everybody was afraid *of*.

However, you must guard against **doubling up** on the prepositions in such a sentence.

Wrong: Mr Forbes.... suddenly emerged as the man *of* whom everybody was afraid *of*.

This faulty doubling-up of the preposition in sentence construction occurs quite frequently in students’ assignments, so you need to be aware of how to avoid it.

Wrong: It was the manager *to* whom he was referring *to*.
Right: It was the manager *to* whom he was referring. (formal)
Right: It was the manager he was referring *to*. (conversational)

¹ *Advertiser*, 22 January, 1996.

Phrasal Verbs

You may also wonder what to do with the preposition in phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs are formed from either a verb + preposition, or an adverb + preposition. In these cases, they *cannot* be separated, so the preposition may well be the last word of the sentence

What is he up *to*?

It isn't worth worrying *about*.

This is the type of behaviour that I will not put up *with*.

A reliable rule is that the preposition should be placed where it sounds most natural.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material in this chapter was compiled from the following sources:

Waldhorn, A & Zeiger, A (1967) *English Made Simple*, W H Allen, London.

Eunson, Baden (1994) *Writing Skills*, The Communication Skills Series, John Wiley & Sons, Milton, Queensland.