

Preposition Use in Academic Writing

Understanding How
Prepositions Fit Your
Sentences and Ideas

What is a Preposition?

- A preposition goes before a noun phrase or pronoun **in** a sentence.
- It shows a positional/spatial relationship **between** two nouns/pronouns.
- These relationships are grounded in location, direction, position, and time.
- We have highlighted examples of prepositions in use and will provide more in the list as we go

Above

is used to show the position of one object higher than another.

- Ex: The sun rose **above** the mountains.
 - Ex: **After** the flood, Jenny preferred to live **above** sea level.
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Across

is used when one needs to show intersecting position or direction **between** two objects.

- Ex (direction): She sat **across** from him **in** their biology lab.
 - Ex (position): Becca's cat, Ramona, sat **across** her lap.
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After

is used to show the time **between** two situations where one precedes the other.

- Ex: They went **to** Waffle House **after** the concert.
 - Ex: **After** the election, many people watched and waited **for** the results to be counted.
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Against

is used when objects oppose or contrast each other. It can be used as a position or direction.

- Ex (position): She was leaning **against** the backdrop when it fell over.
 - Ex (direction): They turned the boat **against** the wind and set sail.
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Along

is used to show objects moving in the same constant direct.

- Ex: She moved **along** the walkway **to** her next class.
 - Ex: The paintings hung **along** the main hallway **in** the music building.
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Among

is used when one object surrounds another

- Ex: The imposter is **among** us.
 - Ex: The choir stood **among** the church pews **to** sing their last song.
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Around

can be used when discussing direction or position and shows when an object is surrounded.

- Ex (position): They posted GSA pamphlets **around** campus in order to expand the campus community.
 - Ex: (direction): Alice carefully drove **around** the wreck on Caraway.
-

At

is used to show where an object is or when something begins. It works with both position and time.

- Ex (time): Her Psychology final started **at** 10:00am.
 - Ex (position): We don't currently have that program **at** our university.
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Away From

is used to show an object moving in the opposing direction.

- Ex: They ran **away from** the food truck, because it had taken too much of their lunch money.
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Before

like after, is used to show time between two situations. The difference is the shift in focus **to** the preceded event.

- Ex: He got there an hour **before** class started.
 - Ex: We were able to complete our lab **before** the storm started.
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Behind

is used to show the position of objects when one is further back than another.

- Ex: She printed her exam essay at the printer **behind** her professor's desk.
 - Ex: The band walked **behind** the fifty yard line **at** the homecoming game.
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Below

is used to show one object positioned lower than another.

- Ex: He found everything he needed **in** a rare book collection **below** the library.
 - Ex: She looked **below** her prompt to see the format requirement **for** that assignment.
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Beneath

is used to describe the position of one object that is right under another.

- Ex: She sat **beneath** the cherry blossom tree to watch the petals fall.
 - Ex: They did a quick change **beneath** the stage **before** the next number.
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Beside

is used to show the position of one object next to another. It is also used to differentiate objects apart from each other.

- Ex: She set the beaker **beside** her and worked diligently to complete the rest of her project.
 - Ex: What else did you want to major in **besides** Nursing?
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Between

is used to separate the time and space of different objects.

- Ex: There was one day that stood **between** her and college graduation.
 - Ex: They sat **between** a large family and a small couple **at** the ceremony.
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By

Is used to describe the position and time that surrounds an object.

- Ex (time): **By** the end of the test, no one had finished.
 - Ex (position): The Kum & Go **by** the school has the best hot food.
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Down

is used to show an object moving in a lower direction.

- Ex: They lived **down** the street **from** each other but never knew it.
 - Ex: The art professor went **down** the line **for** critiques.
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During

is used to show an object's interaction with another throughout a period of time.

- Ex: The class is only offered **during** the fall semester.
 - Ex: Our research got skewed **during** the experiment.
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For

is used to show an object going towards another or used to indicate someone receiving something.

“For.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/for>.

- Ex: He was about to leave **for** basic training.
- Ex: Each students needs at least five sources **for** the research project.

From

is used to identify the beginning of a time or beginning **at** a certain location.

- Ex (time): Because she avoided that 8:00 am class, her classes last **from** 11:00 am-5:00 pm.
 - Ex (direction): We have driven **from** Colorado to Oklahoma **for** this concert.
-

In

Is used to describe the position, location, or time of an object that happens within another.

- Ex (time): The exam starts **in** an hour.
 - Ex (position): The instrument is **in** her locker **at** the music building.
 - Ex (location): We at lunch **in** the Caf today.
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In Front Of

is used to show the position of one object before another.

- Ex: She sat **in front of** the professor's lectern.
 - Alex felt bad because they cut **in front of** multiple people **during** the early release of the new game.
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Inside

just like in, is used to show the position of one object within another.

- Ex: He placed the dog **inside** the kennel.
 - Ex: The students waited **inside** the Student Union because it was raining.
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Into

is used to show direction when an object collides or surrounds itself with another object.

- Ex: Nick collided **into** Malachi's car yesterday.
 - She went **into** the office to get her graduation packet.
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Near

describes an event coming up soon or an object that is close by.

- Ex (time): With graduation **around** the corner, the end to her college career is **near**.
 - Ex (position): We are finally **near** our hotel.
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Next to

is used to show close proximity
between two objects.

- Ex: The humanities building is **next to** the fine arts building.
 - Ex: She sat **next to** her crush **in**
Advanced Calculus.
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Off (of)

Is used to show the direction of one object moving away from another object.

- Ex: The beaker fell **off of** the table and shattered.
 - Ex: She jumped **off** the diving board.
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On

can be used to describe the location, position, or time of an object that contacts or supports another object.

- Ex (time): All classes begin **on** August 19th.
 - Ex (position): That novel is **on** my shelf.
 - Ex (location): The mall is **on** Red Wolf Boulevard.
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Onto

describes placement of an object
on the surface of another.

- Ex: He leapt **onto** the subway platform.
 - Ex: The toddler climbed **onto** the playground.
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Out of

shows the direction an object left from.

Ex: Jake just got **out of** his midterm.

Ex: She left **out of** the side door and headed **to** her dorm.

Outside

is used to show an object moving beyond the confines of another.

- Ex: Her drawing class met **outside** the art annex today.
 - Ex: He stood **outside** the International building waiting **for** his ride.
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Over

can be used to show position or direction of something far **above** another object.

- Ex (position): The was a helicopter flying **over** campus today.
 - Ex (direction): He went **over** the speed bump too fast.
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Through

Shows the position or direction of an object going into another or communicating a movement with time.

- Ex (position): There is a hallway **through** the parking garage **to** the student union.
 - Ex (direction): We drove **through** Kansas **on** our way to Colorado.
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To

is used to describe an object reaching a certain position or span of time.

- Ex (direction): She went **to** the clinic and got tested for Covid.
 - Ex (time): Her office hours lasted **from** 3:00 pm **to** 6:00 pm.
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Towards

shows an object's movement in the direction of another.

- Ex: He walked **towards** the post office **on** campus.
 - Ex: She switched majors **towards** the end **of** her degree plan.
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Under

is used to position an object below another.

- Ex (position): She sat **under** the stars all night.
 - Ex (direction): They walked **under** an umbrella to stay out **of** the rain.
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Underneath

like under, is used to place an object below another. However, with this preposition, the object is situated directly below the other.

- Ex: She placed her returned assignment **underneath** her textbook to hide the bad grade.
 - Ex: Their car broke down **underneath** the overpass.
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Until

is used to show the moment **up** to a point of time.

- Ex: The test is being administered **until** 1:00 pm.
 - Ex: He **worked** until his hands were blistered and bleeding.
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Up

shows the direction of an object moving **above** another object.

- Ex: They ran **up** to the food truck.
 - Ex: We took the documents **up** to the DMV clerk.
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Works Cited

Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

“Prepositions”. *GrammarBook*, GrammarBook, <https://www.grammarbook.com/grammar/probPrep.asp>.