

Parts of Speech: Prepositions

Description of the Lecture This lecture is about prepositions. It provides the conceptual as well as technical frameworks of prepositions to identify their classification, kinds and uses in English sentences. The lecture counts on the definitions, kinds, uses, examples and exercises. Objectives of the Lecture

When students have successfully completed this unit, they should be able, among other things, to;

1. Define the part of speech known as preposition.
2. List the main kinds and common prepositions.
3. Show the relationship of prepositions with other related words in a sentence.
5. Compose correct, meaningful and functional sentences through prepositions.

1. Definition of Preposition

Prepositions are little words that are used to join nouns, gerund, and pronouns to other words in a sentence. As the word itself suggests ("pre" is a prefix means "before" while position refers to a place), a preposition is a word in a position before its object "a noun or pronoun". Prepositions are used in sentences to show a relationship between the object of the preposition and another word in a sentence. It is worth to mention that prepositions may tell us about the position, time, ownership or movement. It should be noted that the nouns or pronouns that follows the preposition is called the object of the preposition. In the following sentence notice how the word preposition changes the meaning of the sentence between the subject and object. So prepositions are important words because they add more detail to a sentence. The word around is a preposition which tells the relationship between the boy moved and the school. Other prepositions show different relationships between the boy moved and the school. Examples:

☐ The boy moved at the school. ☐ The boy moved through the school. ☐ The boy moved into the school. ☐ The boy moved down the school. ☐ The boy moved behind the school. ☐ The boy moved to the school. ☐ The boy moved besides the school. ☐ The boy moved near the school.

☐ A preposition is a word usually placed before a noun or pronoun to show place, time, cause, purpose, or means. ☐ Propositions or Ad-position = pre + position "connectives" = "they precede a phrase that act as a modifier or a noun by indicating a position in time, location or manner".

2. English Preposition Rule

There is one very simple rule about prepositions. And, unlike most rules, this rule has no exceptions. This rule is as follows: A preposition is followed by a "noun". It is never followed by a verb. By "noun" we include: ☐ noun (dog, money, love) ☐ proper noun (name) (Bangkok, Mary) ☐ pronoun (you, him, us) ☐ noun group (my first job) ☐ gerund (swimming) A preposition cannot be followed by a verb. If we want to follow a preposition by a verb, we must use the "-ing" form which is really a

gerund or verb in noun form. In the following sentences, why is "to" followed by a verb? That should be impossible, according to the above rule: ☐ I would like to leave now. ☐ He used to take cigarette. Here in these two sentences, "to" is not a preposition. It is part of the infinitive of the verbs ("to leave", "to take").

3. Prepositional Phrase

Prepositions and the nouns/pronouns that follow them are always grouped together and treated as a single grammatical unit, called Prepositional Phrases. A prepositional phrase is comprised minimally of a preposition and its object to add more detail to a sentence. In other words, a prepositional phrase is a group of words that begins with a preposition and ends with a noun, noun phrase, pronoun or a gerund subordinate clause. It should be noted that the object of a preposition is typically a noun or a pronoun. Consider this expression: Preposition (in) + Object (the water) = Prepositional Phrase (in the water). Example: ☐ Stephan, the researcher from Algeria, wrote an excellent research paper on the computer. Here (on the computer) is a prepositional phrase.

3. Difference between Prepositions and Adverbs

The difference between a preposition and an adverb is that an adverb answers the questions, Where? When? How? To what extent? by itself. It should be noted that adverbs are content words in the sense that they can fulfill their role and meaning only through one word while prepositions are functional words in the sense that they cannot full their meaning ad role alone so they need to be embedded with other words in a sentence to function properly unlike adverbs. Examples: ☐ Ann moved up. (Up is an adverb because it takes only one word to tell where Ann moved.) ☐ Ann moved up the stairs. (Up is a preposition because it takes more than a single word to tell where Ann moved.)

☐ John walked aboard. (Aboard is an adverb because it takes only one word needed to tell where John walked.) ☐ John walked aboard the plane. (Aboard is a preposition because it takes more than one word to tell where John walked.)

Positions of Prepositions Positions Examples
1 Preposition + Noun or Pronoun at home, about him,
on the table
2 Question-word + verb + subject + preposition + question mark What is this bag for?
Which room did you sleep in?
3 before a relative pronoun The room in which I live is big.
4 In exclamations What a society we live in!
5 in the passive construction The situation is being looked into

4. Kinds of Prepositions

4. 1. Simple or Common Prepositions

Simple prepositions consist of only one single word. They are the most used prepositions. Simple prepositions are important words. Speakers use individual prepositions more frequently than other individual words. In fact, the prepositions "of", "to" and "in" are among the ten most frequent words in English. Here is a short list of around 70 of the more common one word prepositions. Many of these prepositions have more than one meaning. Please refer to the table below for meanings of prepositions and a dictionary for precise meaning and usage. The table below represents the most common simple prepositions. Examples: ☐ We are waiting at the station. ☐ The dog is under the table. ☐ My copybook is in my bag. ☐ A captain is below a general. ☐ The supermarket is between a mosque and the bank.

The most used simple prepositions

across beside through after besides of throughout including

at from with within atop in round without

aboard behind like unlike save about below

over under underneath amongst down past up around

opposite to amidst by out outside toward(s) among despite

excluding against between on times along until till of

before inside worth bar barring concerning considering upon

minus since above beneath near than off

during per versus as for plus via

except excepting following pending beyond on/up amid but

4. 2. Complex or Common Prepositions

They do the same as common prepositions. Complex or compound prepositions consist of more than one word which are all altogether treated as one single unit in the sentence. The table below represents the most common compound prepositions.

☐ My car is parked in front of the Hotel. ☐ The prime minister is out of the service.

The most used compound prepositions

as to onto as for out of into up in addition to in lieu of instead of but for

according to along with away from because of by means of by reason of with an eye to with a view to with respect to in accordance with

by way of by virtue of in the light of with regard to in course of in order to on behalf of together with due to owing to

in front of for the sake of in favor of in light of in spite of in search of in quest of in the event of in view of with reference to

5. Meanings of Prepositions

The best way to learn the correct use of prepositions is by reading, listening, speaking and writing as much as possible. The use of prepositions is not determined by their kinds but by their relations in a sentence. Keep in mind that same prepositions can be used for different relations. See the table and figure below.

Meaning Prepositions Examples

Location "In, on, at, inside, within" Trust no one within this room.

Mode of Transport "By, in, on" I prefer travelling by road. Cause "Because of, on account of, from, out of, for ... of, of" Out of curiosity the little boy opened the bag.

Subject Matter "About, on, regarding....." a talk on linguistics

Summary

☐ Prepositions are present in every sentence people use when communicating an oral or written message to another person. For this reason, prepositions have an important role when learning English language. When using prepositions, their meaning may be literal or figurative; this imposes some challenge to students. ☐ Prepositions are high frequency items belonging to one of the eight word classes into which English lexicon can be divided. They can be defined as a relatively closed class that is not prone to quick changes. ☐ From a morphological viewpoint, prepositions can be defined as invariable word forms which, throughout the history of English, almost never took any inflections. ☐ Prepositions and their relation to semantics have always been problematic. They are

often considered to have too little semantic content or, vice versa. Most linguists consent that nouns, adjectives and main verbs are items with a full lexical

meaning. When it comes to prepositions, question might arise, whether they should also be regarded as lexical elements with their own lexical meaning or rather as semantically empty grammatical elements.