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.
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.
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.
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.
Along

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

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

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


● Ex: He was about to leave for basic training.

● Ex: Each student 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.
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.
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.
**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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
**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.
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.
Works Cited
