

Prepositions: some problems areas

A preposition is word used to describe the relationship between other words in a sentence.

Prepositions are almost always combined with other words. In grammars, these structures are called prepositional phrases.

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition followed by an article or another determiner and an adjective or two, followed by a pronoun or noun. Here the adjective modifies the noun or pronoun which acts as the object of the preposition.

A prepositional phrase acts as an adjective or an adverb.

Ending a sentence with a preposition

You may have heard that ending a sentence with a preposition is a serious breach of grammatical rules. Well, not really. Of course, you are not supposed to end every one of your sentences with a preposition, but sometimes ending a sentence with a preposition is better than moving it to another location in the sentence.

Consider the two examples given below.

- 1) The professor asked the students to indicate the reference book they are quoting from. (This sentence ends in a preposition.)
- 2) The professor asked the students to indicate from which reference book they are quoting.

As you can see, sentence 2 isn't much better than sentence 1 although it doesn't end in a preposition.

The prepositions in, at and on can all indicate position. Here is a list of common word combinations with these prepositions.

In the bed / in the bedroom / in the car / in the class / in the library / in school

At class / at home / at the library / at the office / at school / work

On the bed / on the ceiling / on the floor / on the horse/ on the plane / on the train

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As you can see, with some of these locations, different prepositions are possible.

No prepositions are used with the following expressions: *downtown, downstairs, outside, inside, upstairs, uptown* etc.