Chapter 2 — The Prepositional Phrase

**Prepositional Phrases** add detail, description and vividness to writing. The preposition works in conjunction with its object to form the prepositional phrase, as seen below:

**EXAMPLE:** We sat **around** the blazing **campfire**.

- **preposition**
- **object of the preposition**

Prepositional phrases follow an easy formula:
**PREPOSITION + MODIFIERS + NOUN**

**EXAMPLES:**
- in your ear
- by the river
- about the test
- with my cat
- from the window
- under the sink
- like a monkey
- during the meeting
- according to Jack

This is how we use prepositional phrases:

- to make a comparison — *like, as, than …*
- to indicate direction or place — *by, to, behind, over, under, near …*
- to establish time relationships — *at, by, between, before, after …*
- to provide descriptive details — with, without …

**PUNCTUATION OF PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES**

**_initial Position**
Prepositional phrases in the *initial position* are set off from the base clause or other free modifiers by a comma:

*In October, the Yankees will again win the World Series.*
*In the middle of the night, Josh woke up screaming.*

**Medial Position**
Like all medial positioned free modifiers, prepositional phrases in the medial position should interrupt the subject from its verb:

*Josh, in the middle of the night, woke up screaming.*
*The Yankees, in October, will win the World Series.*

**Final Position**
Prepositional phrases are not usually found in the final position. Usually, they are embedded into the base clause, as in these examples below:

*The Yankees will win the World Series in October.*
*Josh woke up screaming in the middle of the night.*
Single-Word Prepositions

aboard  about  above  across  after  against  along  amid  among  around  as  at  before  behind  below  beneath  beside  besides  between  beyond  but  by  concerning  considering  despite  down  during  except  excluding  following  for  from  in  inside  into  like  minus  near  of  off  on  onto  opposite  outside  over  past  per  plus  regarding  round  save  since  than  through  to  toward  towards  under  underneath  unlike  until  up  upon  versus  via  with  within  with

Multi-Word Prepositions

because of  on account of  by means of  in spite of  apart from  in place of  instead of  according to  out of  as to  save for
IDENTIFYING PREPOSITIONS — EXERCISE A

Circle the prepositions in the next two passages.

"At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and Agatha entered. Who can describe the horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted and Safie, unable to attend to her fiend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung. In a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sank within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained. I saw him on the point of repeating his blow, when, overcome by pain and anguish, I quitted the cottage and in the general tumult escaped unperceived to my hovel."

The other day, I'm walkin down the street an this man was out workin in his yard. He'd got hissef a bunch of shrubs to plant an he say to me, "Forrest, you wanna earn some money?" an I says, "Uh-huh," an so he sets me to movin dirt. Darn near ten or twelve wheelbarrows of dirt, in the heat of the day, truckin it all over creation. When I'm thru he reach in his pocket for a dollar. What I shoulda done was raised Cain about the low wages, but instead, I took the dollar an all I could say was "thanks" or somethin dumbsoundin like that, an I went on down the street, waddin an unwaddin that dollar in my hand, feelin like a idiot.
"Turn off the light," she says as she walks away, creating a small whoosh that smells sweet and chemical. It makes me sad because it’s the smell she makes when she’s leaving.

“Okay,” I say. The orange light ___1___ the dehumidifier that sits ___2___ the wicker laundry hamper is looking ___3___ me, and I look back ___4___ it. Normally it would terrify me, but because my mother is here, it is okay. Except she is walking fast, is almost ___5___ the fireplace, will be turning ___6___ the corner and heading ___7___ the stairs and then I will be alone ___8___ the dark bathroom ___9___ the dehumidifier eye, so I run. I run ___10___ her, certain that something is following me, chasing me, just about to catch me. I run ___11___ my mother, running ___12___ the stairs, using my legs and my hands, charging ahead ___13___ all fours. I make it ___14___ the top and look down ___15___ her.

She climbs the stairs slowly, deliberately, reminding me ___16___ an actress ___17___ the way ___18___ the stage to accept her Academy Award. Her eyes are trained ___19___ me, her smile all mine. “You run ___20___ those stairs just ___21___ Cream” (the dog).

— From Running with Scissors by Augusten Burroughs

Identifying Prepositional Phrases Formula

PREPOSITION + _______________ = OBJECT OF THE PREPOSITION

Example: Like what? _______________ _______________
Identifying Prepositional Phrases

Exercise C

Directions: In the following passages, identify the prepositional phrases by circling the prepositions and underlining the objects.

Remember: Preposition + What? = Object of the Preposition

"I am speaking to the person inside of Regan," the psychiatrist said firmly. "If you are there, you too are hypnotized and must answer all of my questions." For a moment, he paused to allow the suggestion to enter her bloodstream. Then he repeated it: "If you are there, then you are hypnotized and must answer all of my questions. Come forward and answer, now: Are you there?"

Silence.

Then something curious happened: Regan's breath turned suddenly foul. It was thick, like a current. He smelled it from two feet away. He shone the penlight on Regan's face.

Chris stilled a gasp. Her daughter's features were contorting into a malevolent mask: lips pulling tautly into opposite directions, tumefied tongue lolling wolfish from her mouth.

Quickly reining back his revulsion, he closed the door. Then his eyes looked, stunned, on the thing that was Regan, on the creature that was lying on its back in the bed, head propped against a pillow, while eyes bulging wide in their hollow sockets shone with mad cunning and burning intelligence, with interest and with spite as they fixed upon his, as they watched him intently, seething in a face shaped into a skeleton, hideous mask of mind-bending malevolence. Karras shifted his gaze to the tangled, thickly matted hair; to the wasted arms and legs; to the distended stomach jutting up so grotesquely; then back to the eyes: they were watching him . . . pinning him . . . shifting now to follow as he moved to a desk and chair near the window.

"Hello, Regan," said the priest in a warm, friendly tone. He picked up the chair and took it over by the bed.

"I'm a friend of your mother's. She tells me that you haven't been feeling too well." He sat down. "Do you think you'd like to tell me what's wrong? I'd like to help you."

The eyes gleamed fiercely, unblinking, and a yellowish saliva dribbled down from a corner of her mouth to her chin. Then her lips stretched taut into a feral grin, into bow-mouthed mockery.
**Fill-in the Blank Phrase Fun — Exercise D**

**Directions:** Fill in the following blanks with appropriate **prepositional phrases**. Use the list of prepositions in this workbook if you need to.

**Remember:** This exercise asks you to fill in the blank with an entire prepositional phrase, such as *at times* and *to Doodle*.

*At times* I was mean *to Doodle*. One day I took him ___3___ and showed him his casket, telling him how we all believed he would die. It was covered ___4___ ___5___, which was sprinkled to kill the rats. Screech owls had built a nest ___6___.

Doodle studied the mahogany box ___7___, and then said, “It’s not mine.”

“It is,” I said. “And before I’ll help you down ___8___, you’re going to have to touch it.”

“I won’t touch it,” he said sullenly.

“Then I’ll leave you here ___9___,” I threatened, and made as if I were going down.

Doodle was frightened ___10___. “Don’t leave me, Brother,” he cried, and he leaned ___11___. His hand, trembling, reached out, and when he touched the casket he screamed. A screech owl flapped out ___12___ ___13___, scaring us and covering us ___14___. Doodle was paralyzed, so I put him ___15___ and carried him ___16___, and even when we were outside ___17___, he clung ___18___ crying, “Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me.”

— From James Hurst’s “The Scarlet Ibis”
Writing Your Own — Exercise E

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the sentences below and fill in the blanks with prepositional phrases.

(1) 1 The clerk, / , walked in the room on the right.
    2/ a small man with huge hands

(2) 2 ________ ________,
    1 the children, / , ran ________,
    2/ ________

(3) 1 The apartment house, / , rose ________.
    2/ a huge building ________

(4) 2 ________,
    1 we left ________ ________.

(5) 2 ________ ________,
    1 They played ________.

(6) 1 The cast members had been working ________ ________.

(7) 1 The woman ________, / , opened the door ________.
    2/ dressed ________ ________

(8) 2 ________,
    1 he, / , answered questions ________.
    2 ________

(9) 1 The children, / , played happily ________.
    2/ ________

(10) 2 ________ ________
     1 the crowd scattered ________ ________.
Prepositional Phrase Punctuation
Exercise F

COMMA RULES FOR PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES
• INITIAL ✓
• MEDIAL ✓
• FINAL ✓
(usually embedded)

Directions: Analyze the use of prepositional phrases in the following sentences, and then on a separate slice of paper,

1. Indicate whether the sentence is correct or incorrect, according to the rules of punctuation for prepositional phrases.
2. Then explain your answer in one sentence, underlining all prepositional phrases you use.

Here is how your work should be set up:
With a new pencil in his hands James decided that it was time to get down to business.

Incorrect. This sentence requires a comma after the prepositional phrases in the initial position.

(1) James with a kickball in his hand ran to the dodge ball line and drilled Kathy in the knee.

(2) Under the night stars, the couple watched the movement of the universe: the gradual motion of the moon, the twinkling of the stars, and the scanning motion of the nearly transparent clouds.

(3) With a metal thermos in his hand, Adam with his orange hunting hat blazing in the early morning darkness waited for the perfect buck to stroll by his tree stand.

(4) Jen walked to the convenience store at the end of the block on Friday in the biggest snowstorm of the 21st century.

(5) During the annual company meeting, Jessica discussed the need for improved transportation of packages to the West coast.

(6) What is there to do with a five-foot inflatable palm tree at the end of the college school year?
Prepositional Phrase Punctuation — Exercise F continued

(7) For the benefit of all we hope that students take the time to become more acquainted with what is and what is not acceptable at Newark Valley High School.

(8) On the first day of freshman orientation, the event is open to the general public.

(9) At the end of practice we had the soccer team picture taken.

(10) After three days of watching her from his bedroom window, Jeff decided that the new girl from across the street was definitely a cutie.

(11) The red-haired student, behind the fake plastic tree in the cafeteria, is an undercover police officer.

(12) The telephone, in my pocket, rang loudly during the morning assembly, startling even the principal, who was sitting three rows away from me.

(13) In English class, I learned that the dictionary is a useful tool for checking a word’s spelling, definition and even part of speech.

(14) I burned a music CD on my computer, but I forgot to close the session, and now the disc won’t play, on the stereo in my room.

(15) The Binghamton Bearcats, during the winter basketball season, turned in impressive performances, beating several top-ranked teams from across the conference.

(16) Save for a few days at the end of June I spent summer vacation wrapped up in a full-body cast.

(17) My printer, in the middle of an important assignment, ran out of black ink, which, surprisingly, was more expensive to buy than color.

(18) The cat sprang off the couch like a tiger after its prey.

(19) Like a tiger after its prey the cat sprang off the back of the couch.

(20) The cat, like a tiger after its prey sprang off the back of the couch.