A preposition is a word that serves to relate a noun or pronoun to another part of the clause. Prepositions fall into different categories: time, place, movement, or agent/device/instrument. The same word can serve as more than one type of preposition depending on how it functions in a sentence.

Prepositions serve as the first word in prepositional phrases. The suffix “pre” indicates before and therefore, prepositions come before the object of the prepositional phrase. Prepositional phrases serve as adjective phrases if they describe a noun, pronoun, or gerund. Prepositional phrases serve as adverb phrases if they describe a verb, adjective, or adverb.

Prepositions of Time
Prepositions of time offer information about when something occurs. Common prepositions of time include: in, on, by, until, and at. These prepositional phrases serve as adverb phrases.

- I went out with my friends on Saturday night.
- The meeting is at 2:30 pm this afternoon.
- Summer vacation starts in May.
- The essay is due by 5 p.m.

Prepositions of Place
Prepositions of place provide information about where something is located. Common prepositions of place include: in, on, behind, above, across, below, under, between, opposite, near, and far. These prepositions can serve as the beginning of adverb or adjective phrases.

Adverb Phrases

- I live in Texas.
- The book that you are looking for is on the third shelf.
- The cups are located above the oven.
- The library is across the courtyard.

Adjective Phrases

- The house by the river is more than a century old.
- The dog behind the fence is friendly to those passing by.
- The chandelier in the dining room is an heirloom.
Prepositions of Movement
These prepositions offer information about the movement of a noun or pronoun. Common prepositions of movement include: to*, off, through, across, over, down, up, and towards. These prepositions serve as the beginning of adverb phrases.

We walked **around** the park yesterday.
My friends climbed **up** the mountain while the trailhead was still open.
I moved **to** Texas at the end of 2015.
The family decided to drive their RV **across** the country.
There is a hiking trail in Colorado that travels **across** the continental divide.

Prepositions of Agent/Device/Instrument
Prepositions of agent/device/instrument express a causal relationship between two parts of a clause. Common prepositions in this category include: by, with, and without. These prepositions serve as the beginning of adverb phrases.

The helpful handouts were created **by** the writing consultants.
Her head was filled **with** deadlines, due dates, and project details.
You cannot write a strong essay **without** a strong thesis statement.

Note: A sentence can have more than one prepositional phrase
You must take the road that winds **through** the mountains to get to Colorado **by** midday.
We are going to run **through** the park **on** Sunday morning.
The friends are going to meet **at** the restaurant **on** Main Street **at** 5 p.m.

*The word “to” can start a prepositional phrase or an infinitive phrase. To determine which type of phrase follows “to” look at the word that follows. An infinitive phrase will include a verb after “to” while a prepositional phrase will not include this verb.

Ex.) Infinitive Phrase: *I want to travel to Spain this summer.*
Ex.) Prepositional Phrase: *We will travel to Spain in June.*