

Prepositions

Prepositions are words that show the relationship between a noun or a pronoun and another word or element in the clause. Example: Robins nest in tall trees. The preposition “in” shows the relationship between the noun “trees” and the subject-verb clause “[r]obins nest”; therefore, “trees” is the **object of the preposition** “in.” A **prepositional phrase** includes the preposition itself, the object of the preposition, and any modifiers (e.g., “tall”).

How can knowing prepositions help in writing effectively?

Recognizing prepositional phrases can help you identify the subject and the verb of a sentence.

- Writers sometimes mistake the object of the preposition for the subject of the sentence and then use the wrong verb tense.

Subject Prep. Phrase Verb
In Freshman English, each of the students write a research paper. (Incorrect)

Subject Prep. Phrase Verb
In Freshman English, each of the students writes a research paper. (Correct)

To determine the correct verb form, you must identify the subject of the sentence. Some writers incorrectly assume the subject of the sentence to be the plural noun “students” and so use the plural verb “write.” However, “students” is actually the object of the preposition “of” and not the subject, which is the singular pronoun “each.” Therefore, the second sentence in the example is the correct one because the singular verb “writes” agrees with the singular subject “each.”

- The subject “one” is a singular noun and requires a singular verb. Look at this example:

Subject Prep. Phrase Verb
Every one of you is getting an A on the homework assignment. (Correct)

Subject Prep. Phrase Verb
Every one of you are getting an A on the homework assignment. (Incorrect)

“You” is not the subject of the sentence—it is the object of the preposition “of.” Thus, the verb phrase “is getting” is the correct form of the verb to agree with the singular subject of the sentence.

- Understanding prepositions can also help you determine which words to capitalize in titles of works. Prepositions are not capitalized if they fall in the middle of a title. Do capitalize them if they are the first or last word in a title or whenever they fall after a colon or semicolon.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

“A Rose for Emily”

“The Truth about Global Warming”

The New Pocket Anthology of American Verse: From Colonial Days to the Present

Special Note: MLA rules for the capitalization of words in titles are different from the rules for other styles such as APA.

