

Prepositions and Verbals: Dictionary of Common Expressions

By the Walden University Writing Center

What is a preposition?

A preposition is a type of word that expresses a relationship of physical space, time, or meaning between words. Common prepositions include *in, from, of, to, for, through, until, before, and after*. Prepositions introduce *prepositional phrases*, which include the preposition and its object. Below are some examples of prepositional phrases in **boldface** with the preposition in **red**:

- The meeting is **on Friday**.
- I asked the director **about the new policy**.
- Five volunteers participated **in the survey**.

What is a verbal?

A verbal is a word that takes the form of a verb but acts as a noun, adjective, or adverb. There are three types of verbals: *participles* (words that look like verbs in the –ed, -en, or –ing forms, but act as adjectives), *gerunds* (words that look like verbs in the –ing form that act like nouns), and *infinitives* (words that look like verbs in the “to + verb” form but act as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs).

- **Studying** for the exam took a full 4 hours.
- The **scared** citizens gathered on the street.
- My brother sold his car **to pay** off his student loans.

Why and how should I use this resource?

Prepositional phrases and verbals can be difficult to master because they are not governed by concrete rules but instead by common usage. For example, there is no clear and easy rule as to why we say “He is married **to** his high school sweetheart” instead of “He is married **with** his high school sweetheart” or “I enjoy **reading** Russian novels” instead of “I enjoy **to read** Russian novels.” Correct use of prepositions and verbals, though, is important for smooth writing.

This resource provides a dictionary of common academic expressions using both prepositions and verbals. Feel free to browse this resource to brush up on your academic expressions, refer to this resource as you are writing, or double check your own writing against this list to make sure that you are using the appropriate prepositions and verbals in your writing.

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Prepositions

Verb and Preposition Combinations

Many verbs are associated with a specific preposition:

verb preposition
└───┘ └─┘
 The student applied to the summer program.
 Egan’s theory differs from James’s theory in three main ways.

For some verbs, different prepositions result in different meanings:

The study group agreed on a time to meet.
 The study group agreed to meet at 5 p.m. on Thursday.

The table below lists common verb and preposition combinations.

care	}	about	benefit	}	from	agree	}	on	agree	}	with				
forget			come			base			associate						
know			derive			comment			begin						
warn			differ			concentrate			compete						
write			emerge			decide			cope						
	exclude	depend	deal												
	recover	elaborate	disagree												
decide	}	against	resign			}			in	insist	}	to	hear	}	of/about
vote			save							experiment			think		
	stem	plan													
classify	}	as	find	work	adapt		}	to		add					
define			include	adjust	agree										
know			invest	apply	attribute										
regard	involve	occur	belong												
arrive	}	at	participate	}	in					contribute			}	to	happen
			persist							lead					object
hope			result							react					refer
pay			specialize			relate			reply						
prepare			succeed			subscribe									
provide	use														
required	}	for	approve			}	of		}	to					
search			consist												
use			cure												
vote			disapprove												
work															

Prepositional Phrases With “Be”

The verb *be*, in its various conjugations, is associated with many prepositional phrases.

verb with “be” preposition
 The student was absent from school.

The nurses worried that other patients had been exposed to the virus.

additional prepositional phrase
 Jackson is known throughout the community for his philanthropy.

The table below lists common prepositional phrases that include the verb *be*.

be anxious be concerned be excited be happy be worried	} about	be afraid be aware be capable be composed be convinced be envious be fond be guilty be innocent be jealous be made be proud be tired	} of	be acquainted be associated be blessed be cluttered be coordinated be connected be crowded be done be equipped be faced be familiar be filled be finished be involved be patient be pleased be provided be satisfied	} with
be discriminated be discouraged	} against } by	be frightened be scared be terrified	} of/by		
be known be famous be prepared be qualified be remembered be responsible be thankful be well known	} for	be accustomed be addicted be committed be dedicated be devoted be engaged be exposed be faithful be friendly be limited be married be opposed be polite be related be relevant	} to	be annoyed be bored be covered be encouraged	} with/by
be absent be discouraged be divorced be exhausted be gone be protected	} from			be angry be annoyed	} with someone } for something
be dressed be disappointed be engaged be interested be involved be located	} in			be grateful	} to someone for something

Prepositional Expressions Followed by Gerunds

Another category of common prepositional phrases involve gerunds, a kind of verbal that looks like a verb in the –ing form but acts like a noun in a sentence.

verb preposition gerund
 She is excited about completing her dissertation
 The jury determined that the suspect was guilty of stealing the car.
 The flood prevented healthcare professional from providing timely care.

The table below lists common prepositional phrases that include gerunds.

be excited be worried	}	about doing something	be interested believe participate succeed	}	in doing something
complain dream talk think		about/of doing something	be accused be capable be guilty instead take advantage take care		of doing something
apologize blame someone forgive someone have an excuse have a reason be responsible thank someone	}	for doing something	be accustomed in addition be committed be devoted look forward object be opposed be used	}	to doing something
keep someone prevent someone prohibit someone stop someone		from doing something			

Verbals

Verbs Followed by Infinitives

As with prepositions, many verbs are associated with specific types of verbals, including infinitives: words that look like verbs in the “to + verb” form but act as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs:

I **hope** **to finish** my dissertation by September.
 The mother **asked to see** her daughter’s grades.
 Next week, we will **prepare to train** the new employees.

The table below lists verbs that are commonly followed by infinitives.

afford	claim	fail	mean	promise	threaten
agree	consent	hesitate	need	refuse	volunteer
appear	decide	hope	offer	seem	wait
arrange	demand	intend	plan	struggle	want
ask	deserve	learn	prepare	swear	wish
care	expect	manage	pretend	talk	

Verbs Followed by Gerunds

Many verbs are also commonly followed by gerunds: words that that look like verbs in the –ing form but act like noun in a sentence:

I **enjoy** **writing** papers.
 He **avoided answering** his phone.
 The client **recalled having** been abused as a child.

The table below lists verbs that are commonly followed by gerunds.

admit	consider	enjoy	miss	recollect	stop
anticipate	delay	finish	postpone	recommend	suggest
appreciate	deny	keep	practice	resent	tolerate
avoid	discuss	mention	quit	resist	understand
complete	dislike	mind	recall	risk	

Verbs Followed by Either Infinitives or Gerunds

Some verbs are commonly followed by either gerunds or infinitives. The meaning of the sentence, though, will sometimes vary depending on whether a gerund or infinitive is used; the two are not necessarily interchangeable.

verb infinitive
I started to work at the store in November.

verb gerund
I started working at the store in November.

} same meaning

He remembered to submit the essay.

He remembered submitting the essay, but the teacher could not find it.

} different meanings

The table below lists verbs that can be followed by either infinitives or gerunds.

advise	continue	hate	love	regret	start
begin	forget	like	prefer	remember	try

Verbs Followed by a Noun or Pronoun + an Infinitive

Some expressions require the addition of a noun or pronoun to complete the idea of the sentence.

verb (pro)noun infinitive
I told my sister to call me when she gets home from work.

The committee advised her to proofread her doctoral study.

The manager challenged the employees to meet the new deadline.

The table below lists verbs that are followed by a noun or pronoun and an infinitive.

advise	challenge	forbid	need	require
allow	convince	force	order	teach
ask	dare	hire	permit	tell
beg	encourage	instruct	persuade	urge
cause	expect	invite	remind	want