

Writing Mechanics

Wordiness: Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional Phrases

A modifying phrase consisting of a preposition and an object [of the preposition].

A phrase that begins with a preposition and ends with a noun, pronoun, gerund, or a clause (all of which are objects of the prepositions)

- “In time”
- “At home”
- “With me”
- “By singing”
- “About what we need”
- “Without worrying”

Prepositions

aboard	aside from	by means of	in spite of
about	as of	concerning	instead of
above	at	considering	into
according to	atop	despite	in view of
across from	barring	down	like
across	because of	during	near
after	before	except	nearby
against	behind	for	next to
ahead of	below	from	of
along	beneath	in	off
alongside	beside	in addition to	on
along with	besides	in back of	on account of
amid	between	in front of	onto
among	beyond	in place of	on top of
apart from	but	in regard to	opposite
around	by	inside	out
out of	regarding	to	unto
outside	round	together with	up
over	since	toward	upon
owing to	through	under	with
past	throughout	underneath	within
prior to	till	until	without

Source: Forlmi, G., et al. (2010). Prentice Hall Grammar and Composition 4.

Sometimes, however, you don't need them...

Examine This Clause

After the fall of the Roman Empire...

After the Roman Empire's fall...

After Rome's fall...

After Rome fell...

Two writer's choices

(1) Take the object of the preposition and make it possessive.

(2) Take the object of the preposition and see if you can make it do an action.

Examine This Sentence

The Black Death devastated Europe during the Middle Ages.

The Black Death devastated medieval Europe.

OR

The Black Death devastated Europe.

Two writer's choices

(1) Take the prepositional phrase and make it an adjective *before* the direct object.

(2) Eliminate the prepositional phrase entirely.

An Example of Eliminating Unnecessary Prepositional Phrases

Charlemagne's reign started the Carolingian Renaissance and his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor marked the peak of the Renaissance.

By coronating Charlemagne Holy Roman Emperor, Pope Leo jumpstarted his renaissance.

Charlemagne presided over this renaissance.

Historians mark the Carolingian Renaissance's peak with Charlemagne.

Examine This Sentence

Most historians acknowledge that the Middle Ages spanned from the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 until the start of the Italian Renaissance in the 14th century.

Most historians situate the Middle Ages between Rome's fall to the Italian Renaissance.

Some More Crappy Writing

Advancements in agricultural technology assisted farming in the Medieval Period.

Charlemagne's coronation strengthened the bond between the papacy and Charlemagne...

Here's a doozy!

How many prepositional phrases?

So in this period rife with organization and decentralization, the feudal and manorial systems both stood as the stabilizers of a chaotic time period, and as the self-sufficiency of the peasants combined with their need for land along with the lords need for labor, the people of the middle ages finally had the order and organizations previously non-existent in their lives.

I'm vomiting...

How Many Prepositional Phrases?

The independence from a common authority enjoyed by feudal lords diminished territories' ability to benefit from the strength of a united continent under a handful of selected rulers.

Someone save me...

Key Takeaways

Prepositional phrases *aren't* bad.

Over-usage *is* bad – they *can* lend to wordiness

Unnecessary prepositional phrases *are* bad.

Recommendations

Ask yourself, “Do I need this phrase?”

“Would the sentence still make sense if the phrase didn't exist?”

Think about rephrasing sentences without prepositional phrases