# Understanding Prepositions

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| ***For the consultant***: Prepositions is a rather challenging topic to teach, especially for academic writing. The key thing here is to ensure that students understand what a preposition *is* and *how* it works. Therefore, it is essential that you work with the basics and use the students writing as the main reference point. When you make corrections to their writing ensure that they understand that prepositions indicate the relationships in writing (as will be better explained below). If they don’t get it immediately, do not panic. Instead, remember that learning about more complicated things, like compound prepositions, will get better as students encounter more academic reading. The more they read academic texts, the easier it will be to teach prepositions. So come back to this lesson and adapt it accordingly as many times as is necessary. |

**By the end of this lesson you should be able to:**

* Identify common and compound prepositions in texts.
* Use common and compound prepositions when writing.

**Introduction**

Prepositions tell us about the relationship between nouns (or pronouns) and others words in the sentence. Often they have to do with the location of things in time and space, but not always. You get common prepositions and compound prepositions that both perform the SAME task. Common prepositions consist of one word while compound prepositions consist of two or more words.

Example 1: *Legislatures occupy a key position in government.*

“In” is the **common** **preposition** in the above example as it links the place “position” with the noun “government”.

Example 2: *Inkatha violence started prior to the negotiations.*

“Prior to” is the **compound preposition** in the above example as it is made up of two words and links the verbs “started” with the noun “negotiations”.

The following are examples of common prepositions:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| about | above | across | after | against | along | among |
| around | as | at | before | behind | below | besides |
| between | beyond | but | by | concerning | despite | down |
| during | except | for | from | inside | into | like |
| near | of | on | out | opposite | over | past |
| since | through | toward | under | until | upon | within |
| with | to | off | outside | onto | underneath | without |

The following are examples of compound prepositions:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| according to | aside from | ahead of | apart from | as of |
| because of | in addition to | in place of | in spite of | instead of |
| in view of | next to | on account of | out of | in front of |

Activity 1

**Circle the preposition in each sentence**

Example: *The lecturer stood before the students.*

1. One of the key features of any political system is the relationship between the legislature and the government.[[1]](#footnote-1)
2. Parliamentary systems are often linked with weak government and political instability.[[2]](#footnote-2)
3. Checks and balances refer to internal tensions within the governmental system.
4. All but five of the students handed their essays in on time.
5. Mosca says the work of Aristotle, Machiavelli and Montesquieu was limited, because of their lack of historical knowledge.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**\*\*\*Note\*\*\***

Prepositions usually show position, but this is not always physical. By position we mean the relationship between two items in a sentence.

*Mosca says the work of Aristotle, Machiavelli and Montesquieu was limited,* ***because of*** *their lack of historical knowledge.*

For example, the preposition ‘because of’ shows the relationship between what Mosca says about Aristotle etc., and why he says it.

When you are connecting/linking different parts of your sentence and showing their relationship to one another, you should use prepositions.

***The clue here should be that prepositions show position!***

If you are in doubt about which preposition to use, grab a dictionary and look up the words above to see if you are using the preposition correctly. If in doubt, you can also ask your consultant. Although it may be tricky in the beginning, as you start to read more academic texts and write more, it will get better!

1. Bill, J and Hardgrave, R. 1981. Comparative Politics: The Quest for Theory. (Washington, DC: University Press of America), pp.150. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Heywood, A. 2007. Politics 3rd Edition (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), pp.339. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Heywood, A. 2007. “Role of Assemblies” in Politics 3rd Edition (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), pp.338. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)