

Prepositions: “Of,” “At,” and “For”

Prepositions are words that come before a noun to create a prepositional phrase; they can be used to express time, location, or direction. However, the prepositions “of,” “at,” and “for” can be used in contexts other than time or space; they can also connect nouns with their objects.

Using these Prepositions Appropriately

Prepositions like “of,” “at,” and “for” are typically placed at the start of a *prepositional phrase*, and these phrases can modify either the preceding noun or the preceding verb. These phrases help specify the “who,” “what,” “where,” “why,” or “how” of your sentence (i.e., the object of your sentence).

Examples of Prepositions

There are hundreds *of* books to choose from.

It was hard not to stare *at* the car crash.

He was searching *for* his keys.

Using the Preposition “of”

The preposition “of” can be used in many different contexts. It can be used to help quantify a time or measurement (e.g., “the fifth **of** September” or “three pounds **of** potatoes”) and even identify a location (e.g., “south **of** California”), but it can also create more general relationships between objects and their nouns.

To Show Connection or Belonging

“Of” is most frequently used to correlate an object with its noun. This can occasionally show possession or belonging.

Examples Using “of”

I approve *of* this message.

The name *of* our college is San José State University.

In the first example, the prepositional phrase “**of** this message” tells the reader what it is that you approve of. In the second example, the prepositional phrase “**of** our college” specifies what the name belongs to.

To Identify What Something Is about

Prepositional phrases that begin with “of” can also tell the reader what something is about. These next two examples explain what someone was thinking or dreaming *about*.

Examples Using “of” to Say “about”

She was thinking **of** *what to eat next*.

They were dreaming **of** *their next trip to Disneyland*.

Using the Preposition “at”

The preposition “at” can be used in multiple contexts, such as telling time or location (e.g., telling someone to meet “**at** midnight” or “**at** the coffee shop”). However, “at” can also be used to introduce prepositional phrases that identify the object of a sentence.

Examples Using “at”

He was looking **at** *all the different options*.

The teacher pointed **at** *the textbook*.

As we see in these examples, “at” provides more context for the reader to know what it is that was being “looked **at**” or “pointed **at**.”

Using the Preposition “for”

“For” has multiple uses; it can function as a coordinating conjunction (one of the F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.) to connect words or groups of words together, but it can also function as a preposition. It can serve as another means of disclosing distance, quantity, or a duration of time (e.g., “**for** several miles,” “**for** five dollars,” or “**for** ten minutes”). One of the most common uses of “for” is simply to identify the object in a sentence.

Examples Using “for”

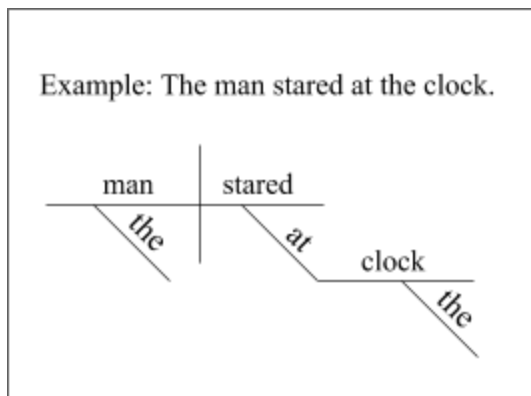
My brother arrived early, so he had to wait **for** *his friend*.

The couple was hoping **for** *a baby girl*.

Adding these prepositional phrases tells the reader *whom* your brother was waiting for and *what* kind of hopes the couple had.

Activity 1

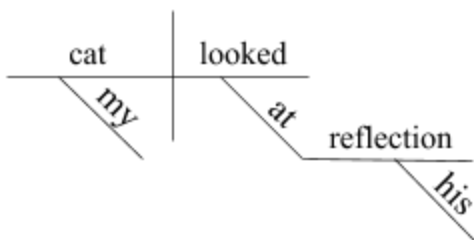
Directions: Sentence diagrams can be useful in visually showing the relationships among words within a sentence. On the first horizontal line, list the main subject and main verb with a vertical line between them. Use the first diagonal line to list any modifying words for the subject; these can include articles, adjectives, etc. For the verb, one of the prepositions, “of,” “at,” or “for,” will function as the modifier. On the second horizontal line, list the object of the preposition. Now use the following diagonal lines for any words that modify that object. This will help you understand how prepositions introduce prepositional phrases that modify a verb.



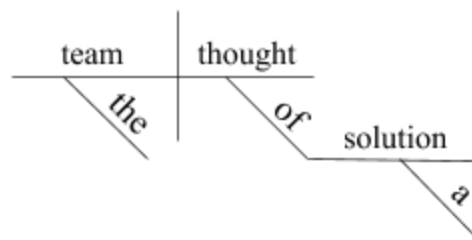
1. My cat looked at his reflection.
2. The team thought of a solution.
3. Some textbooks are for the students.
4. My mom waved at her friend.
5. Our club asked for extra funding.
6. Many professors think of their retirement.

Activity 1 Answer Key

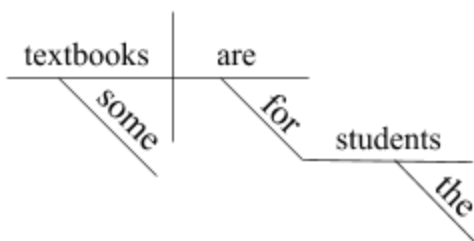
1. My cat looked at his reflection.



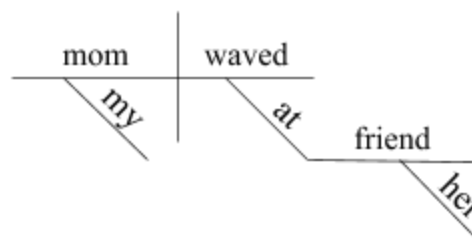
2. The team thought of a solution.



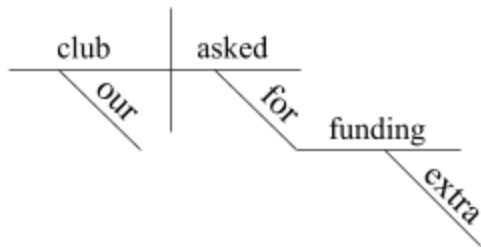
3. Some textbooks are for the students.



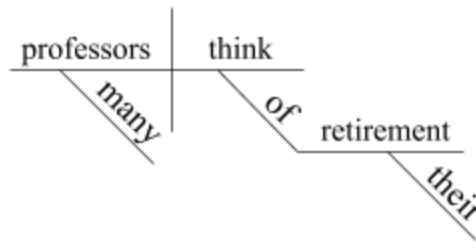
4. My mom waved at her friend.



5. Our club asked for extra funding.



6. Many professors think of their retirement.



References

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