

9 Prepositions and prepositional phrases

1 Prepositions and adverbs

Prepositions and adverbs are very similar, but a preposition is usually followed by an object. Compare:

*Did you ever travel **before the war**, Dad?*
(preposition + object)

*I have a strange feeling that I've been here **before**.*
(adverb)

We can modify prepositions by putting adverbs before them:

*The bookshop is **almost at** the end of the street, **just before** the traffic lights.*

2 Prepositional phrases

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition and the word(s) that follow it, i.e. a noun, pronoun or noun phrase:

*People are already drawing comparisons **between Obama and Kennedy**.*

*I'll answer the phone ... it's **for you**. You should try to sleep **on a firm mattress**.*

We can also use *-ing* forms or *wh-* clauses after prepositions:

*As **well as helping** us to move into the house, John bought us a great present.*

*Please don't interfere in any way **with what I have written** in the report.*

A prepositional phrase can include nouns, pronouns or determiners before the object:

*The head teacher doesn't approve **of our/these** arrangements with a local band.*

*The director insisted **on Ben and Chris/them/their** staying for the rehearsal.*



We don't use *that-* clauses after prepositions:

~~*X The government managed to pass the bill through Parliament, despite that it had a low majority.*~~

*✓ The government managed to pass the bill through Parliament, **despite** its low majority/
despite having a low majority/**despite** the fact that it had a low majority.*

We can use an infinitive phrase after the prepositions *except*, *but* and *other than*, when they follow a phrase with a negative meaning:

*As you're a captive audience, you have no choice **except to pay** their inflated prices.*

*I'm afraid your action has left us no alternative **but to terminate** your contract.*

3 Stranded prepositions

A stranded preposition comes on its own at the end of a clause or sentence; its object comes earlier in the sentence. We commonly use stranded prepositions in

- questions: *Who are you coming to the party **with**?* (object *who*)
- relative clauses: *I've been offered the job in London **that I applied for**!* (object *the job*)
- infinitive clauses: *That man is impossible to work **with**!* (object *that man*)
- the passive: *What is your coat made **from**?* (object *what*)

FORMALITY CHECK We sometimes keep the preposition and object together in more formal language:

*We are unable to offer you the position **for which** you applied.*

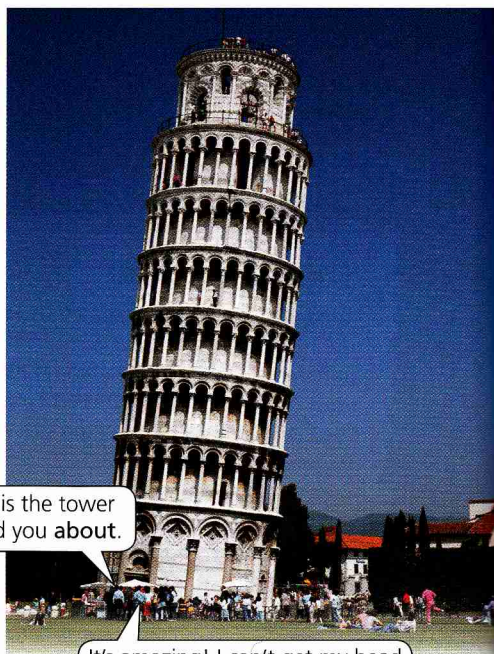


When we use a preposition + relative clause, we use *which* or *whom*, not *that*:

~~*X We are unable to offer you the position for that you applied.*~~

More on stranded prepositions ► Unit 49.5

Common prepositional phrases (advanced level) ► page 365



This is the tower I told you about.

It's amazing! I can't get my head around how much it leans!