

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

Churchill and the Squirrel: Are Prepositions Appropriate at the End of a Sentence?

Definition: A preposition is a word or phrase that anchors, positions, or links a noun (or pronoun) to another word in a sentence. It is memorably described as anything a squirrel can do to a tree (i.e., up, under, around, through, in, out, beside, at, etc.). For example:

The students walked *across* the bridge. (Preposition in bold italics.)

Dispel the myth! It is OK to end a sentence with a preposition. It is certainly common practice to do so in informal language, and it also is appropriate to use in formal writing, especially in short sentences. For example:

The students are easy to work *with*.

We know what that building is used *for*.

Trying too hard to avoid using a preposition at the end of a sentence can make your presentation awkward. Consider the famous example shared by Sir Winston Churchill:

“This is the sort of English up with which I will not put.”

When is it wrong? It is definitely wrong to use a preposition at the end of a sentence when that preposition is dispensable. For example:

We do not know where he is *at*.

For more information on prepositions, see *The Gregg Manual*, 10th edition, page 302.