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Grammatical Concepts Paper: Teaching Prepositional Phrases

Too often, educators teach grammar as strict rules to follow in order to fit a prototype. Grammar is not a prototype or a fixed set of rules to follow to be correct in speaking or writing the English language. Grammar is a tool to make writing more effective. Grammatical topics should be taught as a toolbox of resources that can make students’ writing come alive and create images for the reader. One of the most useful tools to make words come to together to form a story is prepositional phrases. In order to understand the importance of prepositional phrases, it is crucial to understand their meaning, their different parts, and what they do for effective writing. As a future educator, I will also describe a process to teach this important tool and why prepositional phrases should be taught to students in that way.

Prepositional phrases are crucial to effective writing. In order to understand why they are so useful it is important to describe what they are. Prepositional phrases are in some of the most popular books from *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss to the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. People use prepositional phrases in their speech every day without even realizing it. They are so helpful in language and communication that we would notice a big difference if they were absent in language. The first part of a prepositional phrase is a preposition. Some of these include in, on, behind, under, across, during, over, or at. It will end with a noun or pronoun, which is the object of the preposition. There are many ways to use these prepositional phrases and they can describe nouns or verbs.

These pieces of a prepositional phrase work together to create a sentence that tells a story. Prepositional phrases can show relationships of time or space, such as when something happened or where it happened. For example, “The three friends had pizza at the Italian restaurant.” The prepositional phrase “at the Italian restaurant” tells the reader where the action is taking place. The reader can then create the image of friends eating pizza at an Italian restaurant. Another example of the usage of prepositional phrases is in the sentence “The three friends ate pizza together on Friday night.” This tells the reader when the action is taking place and helps the reader create an image in their head of it being night time when the friends are eating pizza. Multiple prepositional phrases can be used in on sentence to create a detailed image in a reader’s head. For example, “On Friday night, my friends and I crowded into a booth at the Italian restaurant to share a pizza.” This sentence is full of prepositional phrases, and it creates a detailed image in the reader’s head. This is what effective writing using prepositional phrases can do.

In order to teach this topic to students, I would teach it in steps and spend a considerable amount of time on them because they are crucial to effective writing, so it is important that students understand what they are, how to create them, and how to use them to make their writing better. In the beginning I would start very simple to get students’ minds thinking about prepositions and where they have heard them before. I would start out by doing a scavenger hunt. I would put a collection of items around the room and ask students to get up and look for them. I would tell students that once they find the object, do not pick it up or move it. They would instead write a sentence to describe where the object was and when they found it. Before I allow them to begin, I would give them an example, such as, “The book bin is under the table.” Then, I would set a timer and give them 8-10 minutes to do this activity, depending on the number of objects I placed around the room. I would make sure to walk around and check for understanding or confusion as they are working on this activity. Once all of the students are seated again, I would then ask for volunteers to talk about where and when they found each object and make sure to write their sentences on the bored. After we have all of our sentences and all of our items have been described, I would then tell them that today we are talking about prepositional phrases and the good news is that they have all already used them. I would then underline in each sentence where the students used prepositional phrases and ask them to give each other a round of applause for using creative writing techniques. This activity would get them thinking and also have them moving around so that they are ready to sit down and focus when the time comes for me to give the definition of a prepositional phrase.

The next step would be to give them the concrete example of a prepositional phrase. I would tell them that the first step in building a prepositional phrase is to have a preposition. I would use the sentences they created earlier and underline the preposition used to start each prepositional phrase. At this point, I would probably have them do a cut and paste worksheet to separate types of words in categories of prepositions, nouns, pronouns. Once they are done with that, I would tell them that a prepositional phrase ends with a noun or pronoun, so now they have a worksheet with example to begin and end a prepositional phrase. I would also refer back to the original sentences from the scavenger hunt and underline the noun or pronoun in each sentence. Now that they know the parts and have something to refer to, I would move to the next step: recognition in literature or music.

This next step would begin with me setting out papers with printed passages from literature and different songs. I would most likely not bring a big stack of books or let them research the internet because I would be in a classroom with younger children. I would not want this activity to be too overwhelming for them, but I would still want them to have choices so they could choose two pieces of paper with literature or song examples. I would give them an example by first selecting one of the papers from their options and finding my own example. This could be a selection from *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Suess. The example I could pick out is, “I will not eat them in a house.” The prepositional phrase is “in a house,” so that is what I would highlight. The next step would be to identify prepositional phrases form these examples. I would have them highlight or underline the prepositional phrase. The next step would be to go around and have them talk about what the prepositional phrase does in the sentence. After we discussed their importance, I would then ask my students to rewrite the sentence without the prepositional phrase. Then we would go around and talk about how the sentence has changed and how it changes the meaning. This activity is helpful because it will help the students see how prepositional phrases are used by professionals. It could also give them confidence because they have created their own prepositional phrases and now, they are seeing examples of adults using prepositional phrases. This activity would also help them to see what a prepositional phrase does in a sentence. The last part of teaching my class about prepositional phrases would take a whole class period and take place after we have completed all of these activities.

The last part of the activity would start with a review. I would ask the students to pull out the cut and paste worksheet we did with prepositions and the examples we did in literature and music. While they are reviewing, I would ask them to raise their hands and give me examples of prepositional phrases. Once their brains are warmed up, I would move on to our activity for the day. The first step would be for them to get into groups of no less than 2 and no more than 4. Their task would be to create a scene for a play that includes prepositional phrases. To model this, I would create my own scene and ask them to give me examples. I would start by saying that my scene takes place at the beach and ask the students to help me think of examples. A student may say, “There is a sun in the sky.” Another student may say, “There is a chair on top of the sand.” After they write out their scenes, they would then draw and color a rough sketch of what this scene would look like. We would then go around and ask people to share their scenes. I would ask them how the use of prepositional phrases helped to create their scenes. This would allow them to practice writing prepositional phrases. It would also teach them how prepositional phrases create imagery because they would be actually putting their words into an image. Lastly, this would incorporate theater and drawing into the classroom, and incorporating the arts into the classroom is always a great idea. To wrap up our discussions on prepositional phrases, I would add prepositional phrases to a graphic in the classroom so that the students always have a reminder of a tool they can use in their writing. This graphic could be a toolbox and each grammar concept could be written on a different tool. When we write sentences or paragraphs in the classroom, the students could refer to this toolbox to help them build effective, clear sentences. Activities like these and creating a toolbox for them to use in their writing will make them better writers and help them enjoy writing more.

In conclusion, prepositional phrases are important tools to use in writing. A prepositional phrase is introduced by a preposition and ends with a noun or pronoun. A prepositional phrase can show relationships of time and space in order for students to learn this at an early age and make them more effective writers, teachers must teach the concept, but also guide the students through fun activities to make the idea concrete. Examples of these activities include doing a scavenger hunt and describing when and where students found the object, finding examples of prepositional phrases in literature and music, and creating a scene with prepositional phrases. It is also important to do some sort of paper activity like a cut and paste worksheet or writing prepositional phrase examples in a notebook. This way the students will have something to look back on and review when they would like to use it in their own writing. The goal of teaching grammar concepts is not for students to memorize a prototype. The goal of grammar education is to give students tools to be more effective writers. Activities like these can help enforce this idea and help students learn how to make their writing create images in a reader’s head.

Extra Credit: If I could have one superpower it would be to tell the future and I would use it to help other people. I would not want to know my own future because that would probably make life a little anxious. If I knew the future of everyone else, I could help prevent accidents or I could make the future better by changing things. It reminds me of Raven in *That’s So Raven* and her “visions.”