



## SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING 101

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### LESSON #3

#### **Angled Lines**

In Lesson 1, we covered the main line of a diagram—the meat of a sentence. In Lesson 2, we added a few side dishes—modifiers.

In this lesson, we introduce items that often distract us from the meat of a sentence. These side dishes are prepositional phrases. As you edit, watch for these phrases. They clutter sentences with unnecessary words and may lead to mistakes in subject/verb or pronoun/antecedent agreement.

We'll also look at indirect objects because some people confuse indirect objects with prepositional phrases.

Finally, we'll introduce objective complements, which appear on the main line after a direct object.

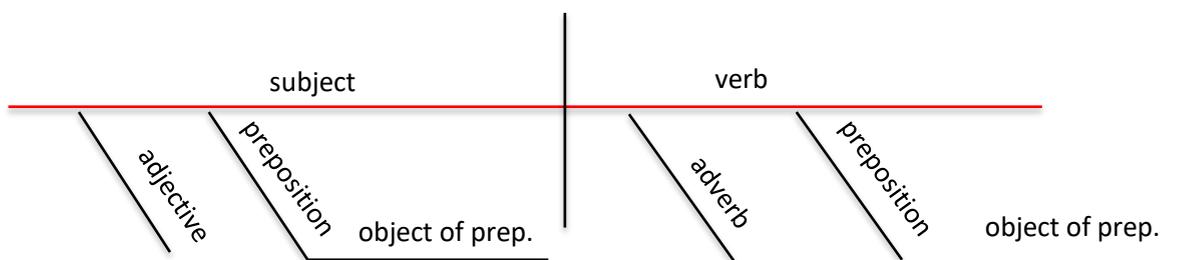
## Prepositional Phrases, Indirect Objects, and Objective Complements

1. A **preposition** is a relational word. It shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and some other word in the sentence:

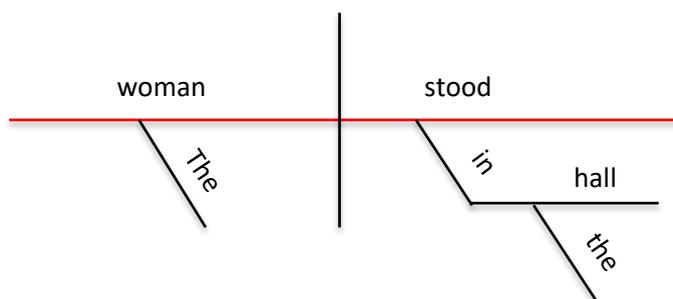
*The woman stood in the hall.* The preposition *in* shows the relationship between *stood* and *hall*. Where did the woman stand? The prepositional phrase is acting as an adverb.

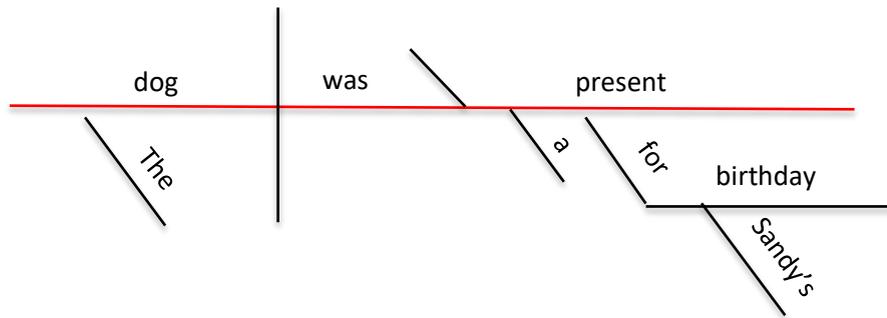
*The dog was a present for Sandy's birthday.* The preposition *for* shows the relationship between *present* and *birthday*. Which present are we talking about? The one Sandy received for her birthday. In this case, the prepositional phrase is acting as an adjective.

A prepositional phrase includes everything between the preposition and its object (the noun or pronoun that completes the phrase's thought). Here's the pattern:



Let's move on to the diagrams for the two example sentences:





If you had a teacher who made you memorize the list of prepositions in your grammar book, be thankful. If possible, send that wise mentor a thank-you note. The ability to quickly discern a prepositional phrase is a valuable skill for editors. Why? It helps you separate the essential from the nonessential in a sentence.

Consider this sentence: Of the women in the group, Joan is the best writer.

In the name of conciseness, what can you delete from that sentence? Right. The prepositional phrases. Leave the subject, verb, and complement alone: Joan is the group's best female writer.

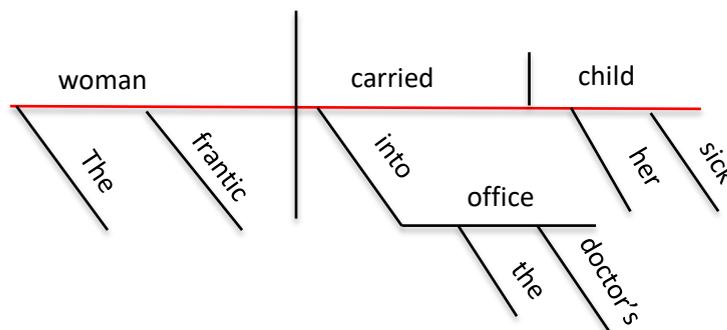
If you have a grammar book, get it out and find the list of prepositions. If you don't have a grammar book, here's an online list: [English Club Preposition List](#).

People who haven't memorized the list of prepositions often use the concept of "any relationship a bug can have to a tree" to determine if a word is a preposition: a bug can go *under, through, around, behind, into, beneath, toward, up, on* a tree. That works for most prepositions, but *since, like, despite* and *with* are also prepositions.

Knowing what word a prepositional phrase modifies is the tricky part of diagramming them. Prepositional phrases can be used as adjectives (modifying nouns or pronouns) or adverbs (modifying verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs). Use the adjective and adverb questions from Lesson 2 to help you determine where to put the prepositional phrase.

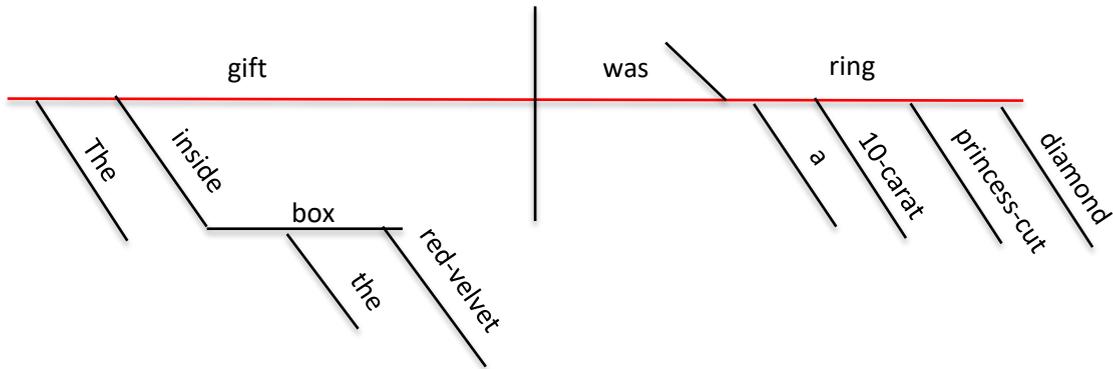
The frantic woman carried her sick child into the doctor's office.

*Into the doctor's office* tells us where the woman carried her sick child. That makes it an adverb, so place it under the verb.

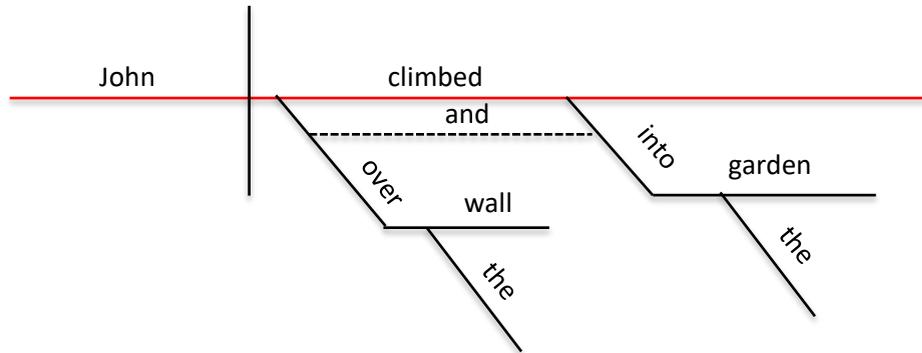


The gift inside the red-velvet box was a 10-carat princess-cut diamond ring.

*Inside the red-velvet box* identifies which gift is meant. That makes it an adjective, so it is placed under the noun it describes.



When you have a compound prepositional phrase, you diagram it like this: John climbed over the wall and into the garden.



Note: To improve the clarity in a sentence, advise clients to keep prepositional phrases close to the word they modify. Sometimes, it's best to break up a string of prepositional phrases to improve a sentence's readability. Notice the difference between the sentences below:

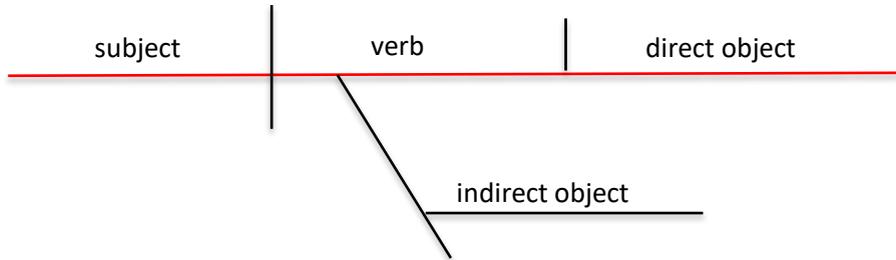
John motioned for the girl to come closer in the red dress.

John motioned for the girl in the red dress to come closer.

In the winter at the pond in her neighborhood, Sue often skated.

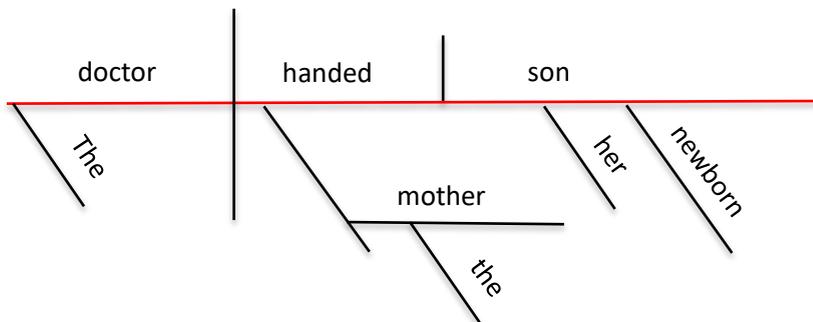
In the winter, Sue often skated at the pond in her neighborhood.

2. An **indirect object** is a noun or pronoun that precedes the direct object (also a noun or pronoun) and usually identifies to whom or for whom the action of the verb is done. Indirect objects are diagrammed on an angled line beneath the verb.

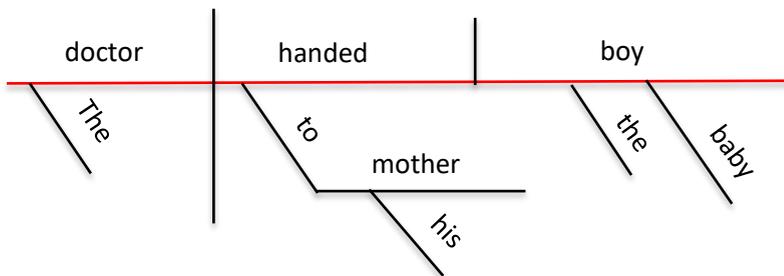


Note: The line connecting the indirect object to the verb extends below the indirect object line, which helps distinguish it from a prepositional phrase.

The doctor handed the mother her newborn son.

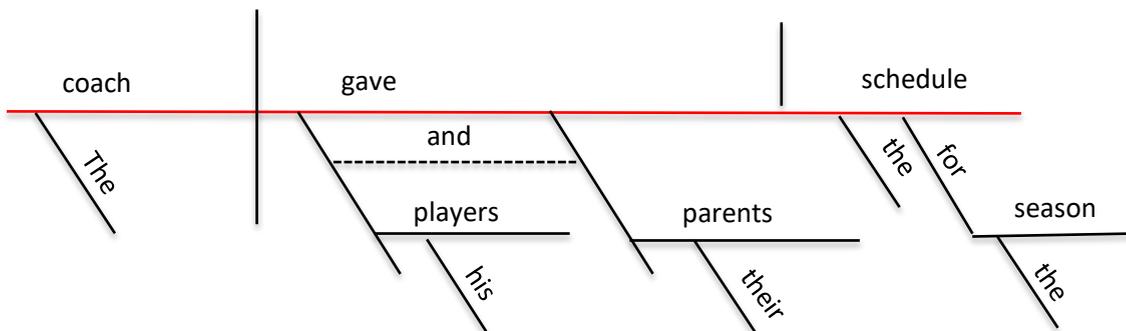


If the word *to* or *for* precedes one of the nouns or pronouns, the group of words is a prepositional phrase, not an indirect object: The doctor handed the baby boy to his mother.

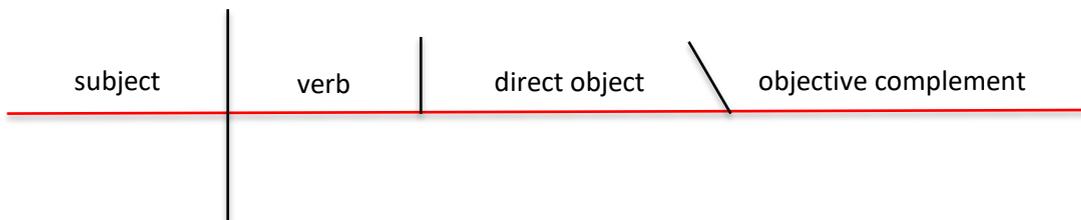


Like any other part of speech, an indirect object can be plural. When you have a compound indirect object, you diagram it like this:

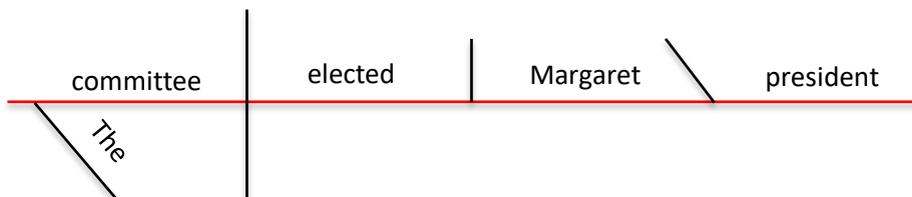
The coach gave his players and their parents the schedule for the season.



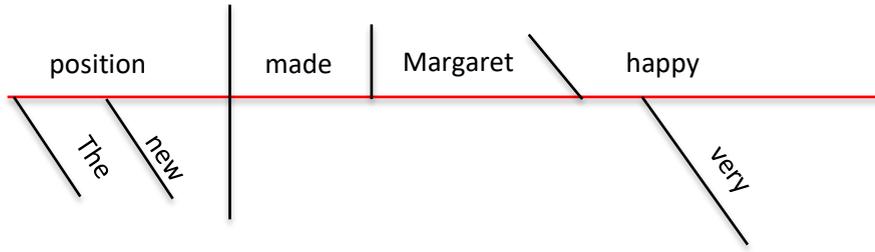
3. An **objective complement** is a noun or adjective used to complete the meaning of some verbs. It is placed in parentheses and diagrammed on the main line after the direct object.



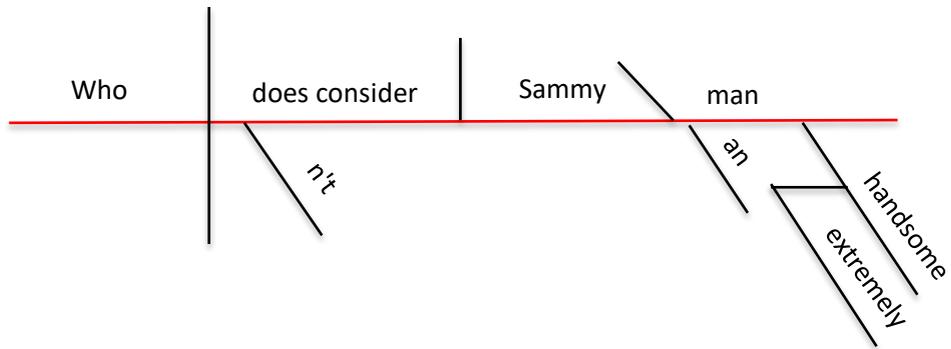
The committee elected Margaret president.



The new position made Margaret very happy.



Who doesn't consider Sammy an extremely handsome man?



Note: Watch for objective complements after the following verbs: *elect, appoint, name, choose, make, consider*. Some verbs, which have meanings similar to *make* or *consider*, also take objective complements:

- The cat licked the bowl clean.
- The stylist cut my hair too short.
- We thought the sermon boring.

### Lesson Review

- Prepositional phrases can be used as adjectives or adverbs. They're placed beneath the word they modify.
- Indirect objects are nouns or pronouns that indicate for whom or to whom the action of the verb is done. They are placed beneath the verb.
- Objective complements are related to the direct object. They're separated from the direct object with a backslash (pointing back to the direct object).

## Lesson #3 Assignments

*To receive a Certificate of Completion you must successfully complete all assignments.*

### Assignment #1

Diagram these sentences.

- A. John considers Mary a happy person.
- B. With little forethought, Jack and Jill climbed the hill and then rolled to the bottom.
- C. Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we go.
- D. Most people in the congregation consider Pastor Joe an excellent preacher.
- E. The biology teacher never offers students extra-credit work.

### Assignment #2

Some sentences are more complex than the ones you diagrammed in number one. Study the sentences below. Diagram as many of the words and phrases as you can.

- A. At my yard sale, Clara first offered me twenty dollars for my bicycle but later changed her mind.
- B. When the police arrived at the crime scene, they found the storeowner unconscious.
- C. John, Mary, and Susan carried the packages that they bought into the house and placed them on the floor.
- D. Who wants buttermilk pancakes and honey bacon for breakfast before we go to the beach?
- E. The grocery store around the corner sells homemade pies, doughnuts, and cakes.

### Assignment #3

Choose one or two sentences from a manuscript you're editing. Try to find at least one that contains an indirect object. Are you able to diagram the entire sentence this week? If so, say "woo-hoo!"

Reminder: The diagrams of the sentences in each lesson's assignments are provided in the Answer Key. Resist the urge to look at the answers before you attempt to diagram the sentences.