(last updated 5/17/16)

Definition: A **prepositional phrase** is a group of words including a preposition and a noun or its equivalent: *under the steep stairs, with my kind sister, in his left hand*. (Of course, the nouns in the prepositional phrases might appear with articles like *a, an*, or *the* AND/OR with descriptive adjectives like *steep, kind,* or *left*.) There are two kinds of prepositional phrases: adjective and adverb.

Adjective Phrases

Adjectives modify a noun or a pronoun.	The highest score was a B+. *Highest is an adjective modifying the noun, score.*
Prepositional phrases used as adjectives do exactly the same thing, but as an entire phrase, not merely as one word.	Joe is the student *with the highest grade.* *With the highest grade is a prepositional phrase. With is the preposition; the highest grade is the noun (and its descriptors) following it. The entire phrase modifies student.*

Adverb Phrases

Adverbs modify a verb, adjective, or another adverb. They answer the questions *when?, where?, how?,* or *to what extent?* about the word they modify.	My math test was *extremely* difficult. *Extremely is the adverb, explaining to what extent the math test was difficult. (By the way, difficult is an adjective modifying the noun test.)*
Adverb phrases do exactly the same thing, but as an entire phrase, not merely as one word.	Megan put the bird *in its cage.* *In its cage answers where the bird was put. Put is the verb; therefore, the whole phrase in its cage is acting as an adverb. (You can tell the phrase isn't acting as an adjective because it doesn't answer the questions what kind of bird? or which bird?)*

Two or More Phrases

When two or more prepositional phrases follow each other, they may modify the same word, or one phrase may modify the noun in the preceding phrase.	**Modifying the same word:** They arrived *at the airport on time.* * Both phrases modify *arrived*; *at the airport* and *on time* answer the questions when and where they arrived. **Modify the object in the preceding phrase:** Chicago is located *on the northeast tip of Illinois.* * *On the northeast tip* modifies *is*; *of Illinois* modifies *tip*.