Preposition Rules

Two major rules regarding the use of prepositions:

1. Preposition choice: Certain prepositions must follow certain words, and the correct preposition must be used to make relationships between words in the sentences clear.
2. Prepositions placement: Prepositions must be followed by nouns, and prepositions can only ever go on the end of the sentence in certain situations.

1. Preposition Choice

Determining what preposition to use is not simple. This can be especially difficult when dealing with idioms (expressions in the English language that require the use of a certain word, simply because that is the word we have chosen to use). Idiomatic expressions are expressions you just have to memorize, and when errors are made, they are almost always preposition errors.

Here are some examples of idioms, together with the correct prepositions:

1. Able to
2. Concerned by
3. Prohibited from
4. Capable of
5. Preoccupied with

Each of the italicized words are the only acceptable prepositions to follow these words. It would not be grammatically correct to say "able from" or "preoccupied for"

2. Preposition placement

Prepositions must always be followed by a noun or pronoun. That noun is called the object of the preposition. A verb can't be the object of a preposition.

- The antenna was for the car. This is correct- the preposition for is followed by the noun "car."
- The antenna was for drive. This is not correct. The preposition for is followed by a verb "drive." Drive can't be the object of a preposition.

This rule may seem confusing at first, because you may have seen words that look like verbs following the preposition to in sentences; for example:

- I like to dance or This rope is for jumping.

However, in these examples, the dance and jumping are not actually acting as verbs.

- In the first example, to dance is part of the infinitive. An infinitive is NOT a verb. An infinitive occurs when a verb is used as a noun, adjective, or adverb. Here, "to dance" is a THING that the person likes doing, not an action that they are doing. It is a verbal noun.
**Preposition Rules**

- In the second example, “jumping” is a gerund. Like an infinitive, a gerund is NOT a verb, but is instead a noun, adjective or adverb. Here, “jumping” is a thing that the rope is for. No one in this sentence is doing the action of jumping.

**Prepositions at the End of Sentences**

Because prepositions must be followed by a noun and have an object, they usually can't be used at the end of a sentence. For example, it is not correct to say:

- The table is where I put my books on.

However, there are certain circumstances where it is acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition. These exceptions exist when the preposition needs to be there, and if it wasn't, the meaning of the sentence would change.

In the above example, "The table is where I put my books on." the use of the preposition "on" isn't necessary. We could take the "on" out of the sentence and the meaning would be the same. So, the use of the preposition was unnecessary and we don't need it.

However, here is an example where it is perfectly acceptable to use a preposition to end a sentence:

- "I turned the TV on."

If you removed the "on" from the end of this sentence, it would change the meaning. Instead of switching on the set, you would be saying that you turned the TV itself.