PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE
A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, a noun or pronoun that serves as the object of the preposition, and, more often than not, an adjective or two that modifies the object. Ernest Hemingway apparently fell in love with the rhythms of his prepositional phrases at the beginning of his short story "Hills Like White Elephants":

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid.

Prepositional phrases usually tell when or where: "in forty minutes," "in the sun, against the side, etc." Prepositional phrases can perform other functions, however: Except Jo, the children were remarkably like their father.

A prepositional phrase at the beginning of a sentence constitutes an introductory modifier, which is usually a signal for a comma. However, unless an introductory prepositional phrase is unusually long, we seldom need to follow it with a comma.

You may have learned that ending a sentence with a preposition is a serious breach of grammatical etiquette. It doesn't take a grammarian to spot a sentence-ending preposition, so this is an easy rule to get caught up on (!). Although it is often easy to remedy the offending preposition, sometimes it isn't, and repair efforts sometimes result in a clumsy sentence. Based on shaky historical precedent, the rule itself is a latecomer to the rules of writing. Those who dislike the rule are fond of recalling Churchill's rejoinder: "That is nonsense up with which I shall not put." We should also remember the child's complaint (attributed to E.B.
White): "What did you bring that book that I don't like to be read to out of up for?"

**APPOSITIVE PHRASE**

An appositive is a re-naming or amplification of a word that immediately precedes it. (An appositive, then is the opposite of an opppositive.) Frequently another kind of phrase will serve in apposition.

- My favorite teacher, a fine chess player in her own right, has won several state-level tournaments. [Noun phrase as appositive]

- The best exercise, walking briskly, is also the least expensive. [Gerund phrase as appositive]

- Tashonda's goal in life, to become an occupational therapist, is within her grasp this year, at last. [Infinitive phrase as appositive]

**ABSOLUTE PHRASE**

Usually (but not always, as we shall see), an absolute phrase (also called a nominative absolute) is a group of words consisting of a noun or pronoun and a participle as well as any related modifiers. Absolute phrases do not directly connect to or modify any specific word in the rest of the sentence; instead, they modify the entire sentence, adding information. They are always treated as parenthetical elements and are set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma or a pair of commas (sometimes by a dash or pair of dashes). Notice that absolute phrases contain a subject (which is often modified by a participle), but not a true finite verb.

- Their reputation as winners secured by victory, the New York Liberty charged into the semifinals.

- The season nearly finished, Rebecca Lobo and Sophie Witherspoon emerged as true leaders.

- The two superstars signed autographs into the night, their faces beaming happily.

When the participle of an absolute phrase is a form of to be, such as being or having been, the participle is often left out but
understood.
• The season [being] over, they were mobbed by fans in Times Square.
• [Having been] Stars all their adult lives, they seemed used to the attention.

Another kind of absolute phrase is found after a modified noun; it adds a focusing detail or point of focus to the idea of the main clause. This kind of absolute phrase can take the form of a prepositional phrase, an adjective phrase, or a noun phrase.
• The old firefighter stood over the smoking ruins, his senses alert to any sign of another flare-up.
• His subordinates, their faces sweat-streaked and smudged with ash, leaned heavily against the firetruck.
• They knew all too well how all their hard work could be undone — in an instant.

It is not unusual for the information supplied in the absolute phrase to be the most important element in the sentence. In fact, in descriptive prose, the telling details will often be wrapped into a sentence in the form of an absolute phrase:
• Coach Nykesha strolled onto the court, her arms akimbo and a large silver whistle clenched between her teeth.
• The new recruits stood in one corner of the gym, their uniforms stiff and ill fitting, their faces betraying their anxiety.

INFINITIVE PHRASE
An infinitive phrase consists of an infinitive — the root of the verb preceded by to — and any modifiers or complements associated with it. Infinitive phrases can act as adjectives, adverbs, and nouns.
• Her plan to subsidize child care won wide acceptance among urban politicians. [modifies plan, functions as an adjective]
• She wanted to raise taxes. [noun-object of the sentence]
• To watch Uncle Billy tell this story is an eye-opening experience. [noun-subject of the sentence]
• To know her is to love her. [noun, predicate nominative]
• Juan went to college to study veterinary medicine. [tells us why he went, so it's an adverb]
GERUND PHRASE
Gerunds, verbals that end in -ing and that act as nouns, frequently are associated with modifiers and complements in a gerund phrase. These phrases function as units and can do anything that a noun can do. Notice that other phrases, especially prepositional phrases, are frequently part of the gerund phrase.
• Cramming for tests is not a good study strategy. [gerund phrase as subject]
• John enjoyed swimming in the lake after dark. [gerund phrase as object]
• I'm really not interested in studying biochemistry for the rest of my life. [gerund phrase as object of the preposition in]

Reviewing the general uses of gerunds and infinitives might not be a bad idea. Click HERE.

PARTICIPIAL PHRASE
Present participles, verbals ending in -ing, and past participles, verbals that end in -ed (for regular verbs) or other forms (for irregular verbs), are combined with complements and modifiers and become part of important phrasal structures. Participial phrases always act as adjectives. When they begin a sentence, they are often set off by a comma (as an introductory modifier); otherwise, participial phrases will be set off by commas if they are parenthetical elements.
• The stone steps, having been worn down by generations of students, needed to be replaced. [modifies "steps"]
• Working around the clock, the firefighters finally put out the last of the California brush fires. [modifies "firefighters"]
  • The pond, frozen over since early December, is now safe for ice-skating. [modifies "pond"]