

preposition. 1 A preposition is a word such as *after*, *in*, *to*, and *with*, which usually stands before a noun or pronoun and establishes its relation to what goes before (*the man on the platform | came after dinner | What did you do it for?*). The superstition that a preposition should always precede the word it governs and should not end a sentence (as in the last example given) seems to have developed from an observation of the 17c poet John Dryden, although Dryden himself did not always follow the rule in his own prose. It is not based on a real ap-

preciation of the structure of English, which regularly separates words that are grammatically related.

2 There are cases when it is either impossible or not natural to organize the sentence in a way that avoids a final preposition:

►**a** In relative clauses and questions featuring phrasal verbs: *What did Marion think she was up to?*—Julian Barnes, 1980 | *Budget cuts themselves are not damaging: the damage depends on where the cuts are coming from*—*Spectator*, 1993 | *The right to fail is one of the holy tenets of student drama, and it's a right that's taken full advantage of*—*Times* 2003.

►**b** In passive constructions: *Even the dentist was paid for*—*New Yorker*, 1987.

►**c** In short sentences with a *to*-infinitive or verbal noun: *There are a couple of things I want to talk to you about*—F. Knebel, 1972 | *Hand-turned treen are a joy to look at*—*Daily Telegraph*, 1980.

3 CONCLUSION. In many cases, especially in more formal writing, it is preferable to avoid placing a preposition at the end of a sentence where it might look stranded. In many other cases, and in conversational English generally, it is impossible to contrive the sentence in such a way as to avoid a final preposition without producing awkwardness or unnaturalness, and it is inadvisable to try.