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Prepositions

A preposition is one of the eight parts of speech. Specifically, a preposition is a connector: its function is to connect a noun or pronoun (called the object of the preposition) to another word in a sentence. It also shows how that noun or pronoun (its object) is related to the other word. Consequently, a preposition can never stand alone: it must always be contained within a phrase (a group of words) called a prepositional phrase. Most often, prepositions show relationships of direction, location, and time, but they can also express other relationships as well (for example, the prepositions, *but*, *except*, *without*, etc. show a relationship of exclusion).

Commonly used prepositions:

above	behind	for	since
about	below	from	to
across	beneath	in	toward
after	beside	inside	through
against	between	into	under
along	beyond	like	until
among	by	near	up
around	down	of	upon
at	during	off	with
before	except	on	within

Let's look at how prepositions show a relationship to a word in the rest of the sentence.

- Jana likes to play **on the monkey bars**.

"On the monkey bars" is the prepositional phrase. It is a modifier that tells us where Jana likes to play. It is modifying the verb "to play."

Examples of Prepositional Phrases:

1. Jane fell **on the floor**. (**direction**)
2. He retired **after his seventieth birthday**. (**time**)
3. The girl is standing **beside her mother**. (**location**)
4. The students finished the English exam **within an hour**. (**time**)

Sometimes prepositions occur as combinations. The following examples are some of the more common of these **compound prepositions**:



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ahead of	apart from	as a consequence of	because of	on behalf of
in advance of	instead of	in addition to	in the course of	regardless of
in care of	in comparison with	according to	in case of	for fear of
next to	in favor of	with the exception of	up against	at the risk of
along with	in spite of	in connection with	together with	as a result of

Examples of **compound prepositions**.

1. As a result of the flood, we had to move out of our home.
2. Instead of going to Sea World this summer, we are going to Fiesta Texas.

Choosing the Right Preposition: Problem Pairs

Some pairs of prepositions cause problems for even the most careful writers. Often those problems arise from the dialects we speak, and so our ears aren't trained to hear the problems. Fortunately, a little logic can often tell us which one of the pair is the correct choice in any given situation.

1. Off/Of

Do not use the word *of* after the word *off*.

Right: The book fell **off** the table.

Wrong: The book fell off of the table.

2. From/Than

When you are trying to say that something is *unlike* something else, that something is *different from* something, use **from**. **Than** means in comparison to (similarity). It is illogical to use **than** to express difference.

Right: My ideas are different **from** yours.

Right: These blouses are different **from** those.

****Note:** When differ means disagree, the correct preposition to use with it is **with**.

Right: I beg to differ **with** you.

3. Among/Between

Between is the correct preposition to use when there are two people or things involved. **Among** is correct when there are three or more.

Right: We will put this book **between** the other two.

Right: We will put this book **among** all the many others in this group.



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4. Like/As

Both *like* and *as* are prepositions that express similarity. People tend to think of them as interchangeable, but they are not. *As* is a conjunction that shows similarity, but *like* is not. Problems arise when we substitute the preposition *like* for the conjunction *as*. The following sentence is an example of the problem:

Wrong: I will do *like* you advise. (“you advise” is a clause [it has a subject and a verb] and can’t be the object of a preposition; the clause requires a conjunction to introduce it.)

Right: I will do *as* you advise.

5. In/Into

In means inside of, it indicates location-no action. *Into* indicates direction, movement from the outside to the inside of. It merely indicates location; *In* indicates no action.

Right: The cat is *in* the basket.

Right: The cat went *into* the basket.

****Note:** If you need to indicate movement, use *into*.

Choosing the Right Preposition to Say What You Mean

We use *at* when referring to specific times.

The bus will leave *at* 2:30 p.m.

We use *in* when referring to nonspecific times during a day, a month, a season, or a year.

She likes to drink coffee *in* the morning.

It is always so cold *in* February.

The bluebonnets will bloom *in* the spring.

They started dating *in* 1995.

We use *on* when referring to days and dates.

My grandmother will be here *on* Tuesday.

We’re having our family reunion *on* the Fourth of July.

Prepositions of Place: at, on, and in

We use *at* for specific addresses.

The Johnson family lives *at* 509 Lawndale in Victoria.

We use *on* for names of streets, avenues, etc.

The supermarket is *on* Navarro Street.

We use *in* for names of land or areas, such as towns, counties, states, countries, and continents.

Jackie lives *in* Port Lavaca.

Victoria County is *in* Texas.

Cuero is *in* Dewitt County.

Akina lives *in* South America.



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Prepositions of Place: at, on, and in

IN	AT	ON	No Preposition
(the) bed*	Class*	the bed*	downstairs
the bedroom	Home	the ceiling	downtown
the car	the library*	the floor	inside
(the) class*	the office	the horse	outside
the library*	School*	the plane	upstairs
School*	Work	the train	uptown

* other prepositions can sometimes be used.

Prepositions of Movement: to and towards

We use *to* when expressing movement toward a place.

Sue and James are driving *to* the baseball game.

We can also use *toward* and *towards* when expressing movement. These two words can be used according to your preference. They are just simply two different spellings of the same word.

The car was moving *toward* the water.

The children were headed *towards* the concession stand.

Note: We do not use any prepositions with words such as home, downtown, uptown, inside, outside, downstairs, and upstairs.

Examples:

I can hear the baby crying downstairs.

Janie was ready to go home.

Prepositions of Time: for and since

We use *for* to measure time (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years).

He went under water *for* 10 minutes.

Courtney lived in Europe *for* 5 years.

The cruise will last *for* ten days.

We use *since* when referring to a specific date or time.

Jonathan has had that car *since* 1980.

Sally has been a member *since* 5:00 p.m.

Phrasal Prepositions

A phrasal preposition is a simple preposition preceded by a word from another category, such as an adverb, adjective, or conjunction.

Examples:

According to	Aside from	Next to
Ahead of	Because of	Out of
Along with	But for	Prior to
Apart from	Contrary to	Thanks to
As for	Except for	Up to
As to	Instead of	



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Remembering the right preposition combination is sometimes difficult. If you refer to a dictionary, look up the word with which the preposition is used.

For example:

When trying to find the meaning of *bored with*, you would look up the word *bored*.

The following combinations can be troublesome. (see handout on phrasal verbs for a more complete list with examples)

Wrong

apologize about
bored of
capable to
concerned to, on
in search for
independent
interested about
outlook of life
puzzled on
similar with

Revised

apologize *for*
bored *with*
capable *of*
concerned *about, with*
in search *of*
independent *of*
interested *in*
outlook *on* life
puzzled *at, by*
similar *to*

Note

Prepositions can be rather tricky. They especially can create a lot of trouble for those students for whom English is a foreign language. There are thousands of idiomatic expressions where prepositions cause some major difficulties and misunderstandings. It is a good idea to become familiar with some of those that are more commonly used. Of course, the best way to learn these is through practice and close attention to speech and the written word. Another good resource to always keep handy is a good dictionary.

Idiomatic Prepositions

Some prepositions can be combined with certain other words to create phrases whose meaning is something other than their literal meaning. These phrases are called idioms. An idiom is an expression that is either peculiar to itself grammatically or having a meaning that cannot be derived from understanding the individual words it contains.

Example: *To Hang Out With*

Definition: to spend time with, to go somewhere with (often refers to friendship)

** I love *to hang out with* my sister's friends. They like to have fun.

** Cyndi and Jimmy enjoy *hanging out with* each other on the weekends.

Unfortunately, idioms need to be learned by rote.
There are no tricks or shortcuts.



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Here are some idiomatic uses of prepositions.

Agree *on* a procedure

Agree *to* a proposal

Agree *with* a person

Argue *about* or *for* a proposal

Argue *with* a person

Compare *to* (when you are showing the likes of two things or putting them in same category)

Compare *with* (when you are examining the similarities or differences of things)

Contrast *with* (only when you are showing differences)

Correspond *to* or *with* a thing (similar to)

Correspond *with* a person (communicate with)

Interfere *in* someone's business

Interfere *with* an activity

Stand *by* or *with* a friend

Stand *for* a cause

Stand *on* an issue

Wait *at* a place

Wait *by* the hour

Wait *for* a person

Wait *in* the rain

Wait *on* a customer

Tips to writing with prepositions

- Underline all the prepositions you are unsure about.
- Ask a native speaker.
- Keep a list to memorize the correct prepositions and their uses.



Now it is your turn to put your knowledge to work.

See exercised 1, 2, 3, and 4 that relate to using prepositions.

Exercise 1: Choosing the Correct Preposition

Exercise 2: Understanding Prepositions

Exercise 3: Working with Problem Pairs

Exercise 4: Writing with Prepositions

For more information and exercises on prepositions, visit the following websites:

<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/9704/cn-prepos.html>

<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/prepositions.htm>

<http://a4esl.org/a/f/z/zz98bck.htm>

<http://www.ruthvilmi.net/hut/LangHelp/Grammar/prepositions.html>

<http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/200/grammar/prepo.htm>