

Set II, 1

Basic Uses of Prepositions

A preposition shows a relationship between its object and other words in a sentence. The preposition may be in the form of one word (at, by, in, on, etc.) or in the form of a phrase that functions as a unit (in front of, by way of, etc.)

Some of the relationships that prepositions express are place or position, time, manner, direction, and agent.

The book is on the desk.	(place or position)
The boy ran toward the house.	(direction)
The man arrived at ten o'clock.	(time)
He travels by train.	(manner)
The book was written by him.	(agent)

A preposition + an object forms a phrase. This kind of phrase usually functions as a modifier (adjective or adverb).

The report of the meeting was read.	(adjective)
We go to class at ten o'clock.	(adverb)

PREPOSITIONS of PLACE or POSITION

The following sentences show some of the relationship of place or position expressed by various prepositions:

	on	
	in	
	by	
The paper is	beside	the desk.
	near	
	against	
	under	

	behind	
	in back of	
	in front of	
He is sitting	beside	her.
	near	
	by	

	in	
	inside	

		outside	
		in front of	
Jack is		in back of	the car.
		behind	
		underneath	
		on top of	

		across the park.	
		around the park.	
		under the bridge.	
		down the street.	
They walked		up the street.	
		over the hill.	
		through the park.	
		on the sidewalk.	

Below is a list of some prepositions that indicate relationships of place or position:

1. at Elizabeth is at the store.
Is Mary at home?
2. to Elizabeth went to the store.
Mr. MacDonald is from Scotland.
3. in Mr. Brown is sitting in the leather chair in the lobby.
Put a stamp on the envelope.
Please sit on the sofa.
4. by The matches are over there by the cigarettes.
The napkin is placed beside the plate.
near They are sitting near the window.
against Don't lean against the stove.
5. over Our apartment is directly over yours.
A plane flew over our house at noon.
under The box is under the table.
beneath The closet is beneath the stairs.
underneath Put a pad underneath the rug.
on top of The carpenter is on top of the house.
6. behind The chair is behind the desk.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| in back of | John is standing <u>in back of</u> Harry. |
| in front of | There is a car parked <u>in front of</u> the house. |
| 7. up | I saw Mr. Jones walking <u>up</u> the street. |
| down | There is a service station about two miles <u>down</u> the road. |
| 8. across | They live <u>across</u> the street from us. |
| around | Let's take a walk <u>around</u> the block. |
| through | I took a walk <u>through</u> the park yesterday. |
| 9. between | Martha is sitting <u>between</u> George and Jim. |
| among | The letter is somewhere <u>among</u> these papers. |
| 10. inside | These plants should be kept <u>inside</u> the house. |
| outside | The chairs were left <u>outside</u> the house all night. |
| 11. after | Put a question mark <u>after</u> each question. |
| before | In giving dates, we usually place the month <u>before</u> the day. |
| 12. above | This city is three thousand feet <u>above</u> sea level. |
| below | This land is <u>below</u> sea level.
Your grade is <u>below</u> average. |
| 13. at the top of | Your name is <u>at the top of</u> the waiting list. |
| at the bottom of | His mane is <u>at the bottom of</u> the list. |
| at the head of | He is now <u>at the head of</u> his class. |

Compare in--on, on--at, at--in in the situations described below:

1. IN--ON
In general, in means beneath the surface; on means touching the surface.
 - o There is a grease spot on my coat and a moth hole in my sweater.
 - o We had to drive a large nail in the ceiling in order to hang the picture on this wall.

2. ON--AT
In an address, on is used with the name of the street; at with the house number and the name

of the street.

- He lives on Green Street.
- He lives at 1236 Green Street.

3. AT--IN

In referring to location, at ordinarily indicates a specified location, in, a location within a house, building, city, and so forth.

- I'll meet you at the library.
- I'll meet you at the information desk in the lobby of the hotel.
- She is in the kitchen preparing dinner.

In is also used in referring to a location within a country.

- They own a house in Sweden.
- He is in Peru, South America, now.

In is ordinarily used in referring to cities.

- He lives in Hartford, Connecticut.
- They will arrive in Bangkok next month.

At is sometimes used in referring to the arrival of a train, and so forth.

- The train will arrive at Philadelphia at 8:10 p.m.

PREPOSITIONS of DIRECTION

The prepositions listed in this section are those usually thought of as indicating direction. However, there is some overlapping of place and direction in such prepositions as from, to, through, up, down, over, under, etc.

The following sentence shows some of the relationships of direction expressed by various prepositions:

		into		
The dog ran		out of		the building.
		toward		

Below is a list of some prepositions that indicate relationships of direction:

1. into I walked into the room and sat down by the fireplace.
2. out of They ran out of the burning building.
3. toward He walked toward the City Hall.
4. by way of You can go by way of the Panama Canal.

Compare in--into in the following situations:

In ordinarily refers to place or position.

- He is in his office now.

Into ordinarily refers to motion or action, although in is often used interchangeably with into in situations of this kind.

PREPOSITIONS

- I saw him go into (in) the director's office a few minutes ago.
- They went into (in) the building an hour ago.

PREPOSITIONS of TIME

The following sentence shows some of the relationships of time expressed by various prepositions:

		at	
		by	
Please arrive		before	10 o'clock.
		after	

Below is a list of some prepositions that indicate relationships of time:

Note: At 2.30 p.m. = at exactly or precisely 2.30 p.m.

By 2 o'clock = not later than 2 o'clock.

The definite article is used as the expression in the morning, (afternoon, evening, but not in at noon,

(night, midnight).(Also see Section 75b.)

1. at The baseball game will start at 2.30 p.m.
This gate opens at noon and closes at midnight.
Try to be there by 2 o'clock.
2. in The train will arrive in an hour.
I must leave in a few minutes.
He goes to work early in the morning.
Ray's birthday is on November 18.
3. for They stayed for three weeks.
We saw them often during the summer.
We have been here since 1955.
4. after Call me again after 10 o'clock.
He always gets home before 6 o'clock
5. until Why don't you stay until (till) Sunday?
I'll be here till (until) 5 o'clock.
6. at the beginning
of I'll call you at the beginning of the week.
at the end of You will receive your check at the end of the month.
in the middle of Let's have lunch sometime in the middle of the week.

Compare **on--in** and **for--during--since** in the situations described below.

1. ON--IN

In giving dates, **on** is used before days of the week or before months and day of the month; **in**, before months not followed by the day and before numbers indicating the year.

- On Saturday they left for Europe. They took a trip in June.
- The store opened on May 23, 1950. They moved to Boston in July, 1955.
- On May 10th they left for Europe. They took a trip to Japan in 1954.

2. FOR--DURING--SINCE

In expressions of time, **for** refers to a period of time, frequently stated in terms of the number of hours, days, weeks, and so forth, and in such expressions as **for a long (short) time**, **for several (a few) minutes**, **for a little while**, and so forth.

	fifteen minutes.
	two hours.
We waited for	several hours.
	a long time.

BASIC USES OF PREPOSITIONS

During also refers to a period of time, frequently stated as a block of time (during the summer, during the year, during the semester, during my vacation, etc.).

	the winter.
	the year.
It rained a great deal	the spring semester.
	April.
	1955.

In many cases **for** refers to something more or less continuous: **during**, to something intermittent. **For** is followed by the indefinite article: **during**, by the definite article. Compare:

It rained for a day or so.

(It rained almost continuously for a day or so.)

It rained during the day.

(It rained sometime during the day or perhaps off and on during the day.)

Since refers to a period of time that extends from a point of time in the past to the present or to another point of time in the past. The verb tense is usually the present perfect or past perfect.

BASIC USES OF PREPOSITIONS

	five o'clock.
I have been here since	May 10th.
	June, 1952.
We have been here since	noon.

Compare: We haven't seen him for two or three years.

We saw him several times during our trip South.

We haven't seen him since 1954.

They have lived in London for two years.

They have met many people during the two years
(two year period) they have been in London.

They have lived in London since 1950.

In addition, note the following expressions:

1. ON TIME--IN TIME

On time means "on schedule"; in time usually means before an appointed time (often with time left over to do something).

◦ Were you late for your appointment?

▪ No, I was there on time. (I was there at the appointed time.)

▪ No, I reached the office in time to have a cup of coffee before my appointment.

2. FROM . . . TO--FROM . . . UNTIL

These expressions have approximately the same meanings and are usually interchangeable in expression of time. However, only from ... to is used in referring to place or position.

◦ He works from 8:00 to 5:00. He works from 8:00 until 5:00.

◦ We drove from Boston to New York in four hours.

3. AROUND--ABOUT

Around and about (sometimes preceded with by and are used to indicate approximate time.)

◦ I'll pick you up around 7 o'clock.

◦ It is now about 5 o'clock.

PREPOSITIONS of MANNER

1. by You can go by bus (car, train, ship, plane, foot).

2. on He went on foot (horseback).

I like to travel on train (ship, plane).

3. in We came here in a car (taxi).

Please write in ink (pencil).

He speaks in a low voice.

He left in a hurry.

4. with I accept your invitation with pleasure.

She greeted him with a smile.

The car started with a jerk.

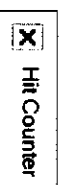
5. like He walks like an old man.

You speak like an authority on the subject.

SOME OTHER TYPES of PREPOSITIONS

1. AGENT (or INSTRUMENT)--by and with

- This poem was written by Walt Whitman.
 - The door is opened by a mechanical device.
 - Try opening the door with this key.
 - I can write better with my own pen.
2. ACCOMPANIMENT--with
- He went with her to the store. II, 1--9
 - Try some of this sauce with your meat.
3. PURPOSE--for
- This door is for emergency exits only.
 - I need to go to the store for a loaf of bread.
4. ASSOCIATION--of
- The new wing of the building is almost completed.
 - We heard the news of your promotion from Bill.
5. MEASURE--of and by
- I want three quarts of milk and a pound of cheese.
 - One-third of the students are from South America.
 - Coffee is sold by the pound, but ribbon is sold by the yard.
6. SIMILARITY--like
- You look like your brother.
 - This material feels like silk.
 - It looks like rain.
7. IN THE CAPACITY OF--as
- He got a job as an elevator operator.
 - Mr. Kingsley will serve as chairman of the committee.
 - She appeared as Desdemona in Othello.



Prepositions: Definition and Usage

A **preposition** may be defined as connecting word showing the relation of a noun or a noun substitute to some other word in the sentence (the squirrel in the tree; the preposition in shows the relationship between the squirrel and the tree.).
Over ninety percent of preposition usage involves these nine prepositions:

with	at	by
to	in	for
from	of	on

Prepositions cause problems because sometimes they can be used interchangeably (He sat on the chair: He sat in the chair), because prepositions are often combined with verbs to create phrasal verbs (to look after someone; to look down on someone), and because a single preposition can be used to express several different ideas (He is tall for his age; I swam for an hour).

The most efficient method of study is to familiarize yourself with prepositions and prepositional phrases through practice and memorization. This is particularly helpful for the bilingual student, who often seems to find preposition usage one of the most difficult parts of the English language.

Uses of Common Prepositions

Prepositions are used to express a number of relationships, including time, location, manner, means, quantity, purpose, and state or condition. The following outline demonstrates the uses of common prepositions.

A. TIME

about:	about noon (approximately)	after:	after the game
at:	at five o'clock		after lunch
by:	at last (finally)		after three
from:	by midnight (no later than)	for:	for an hour (duration)
of:	from Monday to Friday	in:	in the morning
	a quarter of three (15		in the fall
	minutes before)		in April
on:	on Tuesday (day of the week)		in 1987
	on May 8 (date)		in six months (at the end
	of)		
	on time (punctual)		in time (early enough)
past:	a quarter past three (15	to:	a quarter to three (15
minutes	minutes after)		before)

B. PLACE OR DIRECTION

around:	She walked around the car.	at:	They are at home.
down:	They lived down the hall.		We were at the restaurant.
from:	We immigrated from Peru in 1991.	in:	He smiled at her.
	The restaurant is one mile from here.		He lives in a trailer.
of:	We moved south of Montreal	inside:	We waited in the bus.
through:	They drove through the tunnel.	on:	Put it inside the house.
to:	He went to Prague.		We sat on the ocean pier.
	Give it to me.	up:	She left on the train.
		with:	He walked up the stairs.
			He went with me.

C. MEANS OR AGENT

by:	He was hit by a ball.	from:	His success results from careful planning.
	She came by train.	in:	He takes pleasure in it.
	He did it by hard work.	on:	They live on bread and water.
	It came by special delivery.		
		with:	He chased the mongoose with a stick.

D. MANNER

by:	By doing it yourself, you save time.	in:	He left in confusion.
like:	He looks like a hero.		The room was in a turmoil.
on:	I swear it on my word of honor.		You can do it in a day.
with:	He ate it with a fork.		

E. STATE OR CONDITION

at:	My friend is at work.	by:	They are by themselves (alone).
in:	She is at home.	on:	He is on duty (scheduled to work).
for:	He is in a state of confusion.		
	I mistook you for someone else.	as:	I see her as a good person.

F. QUANTITY OR MEASURE

for:	We drove for twenty miles.	by:	We bought them by the kilo.
	We bought it for ten cents.		

G. PURPOSE

for:

He bought it for an emergency.

She went to the city for sightseeing.

He loved her for her thoughtfulness.

Uses of Prepositions after Certain Verbs

account for	listen for
agree on (something)	listen to
agree with (someone)	look at
apologize to	look for
apply for	look forward to
approve of	object to
argue with (someone)	plan on
ask for	provide for
believe in	provide with
belong to	recover from
blame (someone) for (something)	remind (someone) of
blame (something) on (someone)	search for
borrow from	see about
call on (upon)	substitute for
care for	talk about
compliment (someone) on	talk of
come from	telephone to
consent to	think about
consist of	think of
convince (someone) of (something)	wait for
decide on (upon)	wait on (meaning serve)
depend on (upon)	
get rid of	
hear about	
hear from	
hear of	
insist on (upon)	
invite (someone) to	
laugh at	

Uses of Prepositions with Certain Adjectives and in Idiomatic Expressions

according to	angry at (someone)
accustomed to	angry with (someone)
angry about (something)	based on
capable of	independent of
composed of	in regard to
content with	interested in
dependent on (upon)	limited to
different from (than)	married to

disappointed in
due to
followed by
fond of
have respect for
in accordance with

proud of
related to
resulting from
similar to
tired of