



GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Using Prepositions

A preposition may be defined as a connecting word showing the relationship between a noun or a noun substitute to another word or combination of words in a sentence, for example, “The young man **in** the first row is an excellent student.” In this sentence, the preposition “**in**” shows the relationship between a noun (“the young **man**”) and a combination of words that illustrate location (“**the first row**”).

The most commonly used prepositions include the following: **in, with, to, from, at, of, by, for,** and **on.**

Prepositions cause problems for several reasons: sometimes they can be used interchangeably (“He sat **on** the chair.”/“He sat **in** the chair.”); 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 bilingual students, who often seem to find preposition usage one of the most difficult parts of the English language.

USING PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions are used to express a number of relationships, including time, location (place or direction), means or agent, manner, state or condition, quantity or measure, and purpose or reason.

Time

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

Place or Direction

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

Means or Agent

by:	He was hit by a ball. She came by train. It came by special delivery. He got there by swimming.	from:	His success results from careful planning.
		on:	They live on bread and water.
		with:	He chased the mongoose with a stick.

Manner

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

State or Condition

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

Quantity or Measure

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

for:	He bought it for an emergency She went to the city for sightseeing. He loved her for her thoughtfulness.
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USING PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and includes the object of the preposition (a noun, pronoun, or other word group) and its modifiers (**in** the park, **on** the table, **under** the desk, **after** the storm, **with** the group).

The president **of** the company reflected **on** the growth **of** domestic and global assets and the potential **for** continued success **in** the upcoming fiscal year.

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase “of the company” begins with the preposition “**of**” and includes the object of the preposition “company” and the modifier “the”; other prepositional phrases are “**on** the growth,” “**of** domestic and global assets,” “**for** continued success,” and “**in** the upcoming fiscal year.” Prepositions that indicate time and location and usually appear as part of a prepositional phrase are often the most problematic to use correctly, especially the prepositions **on**, **in**, **at**, and **by**, as illustrated below:

Prepositional Phrases that Show Time

on	on a specific day (on Wednesday) or date (on June 20)
in	in a part of a particular day (in the evening), a specific month (in June), a specific year (in 1965), or a specific period of time (in two hours)
at	at a particular time (at 6:30, at midnight)
by	by a particular time (by the end of next week)

Prepositional Phrases that Show Location

on	on a surface (on the desk), a specific street (on Seventh Avenue), or an electronic medium (on the Internet)
in	in a particular space (in the apartment), a geographic location (in New York City), or a print medium (in the newspaper)
at	at a particular place (at the store) or location (at the center)
by	by a familiar place (by the house)

USING ADJECTIVE AND VERB + PREPOSITION COMBINATIONS

Many adjectives and verbs can be combined with prepositions to appear together in idiomatic phrases.

Adjective + Preposition Combination

He was **angry with** his brother-in-law. (the adjective “**angry**” is used with the preposition “**with**”)

Verb + Preposition Combination

He **forgot about** the appointment. (the verb “**forgot**” is used with the preposition “**about**”)

Common Adjective + Preposition Combinations

according to	dependent on / upon	involved in / with
accustomed to	different from / than	known as / for
addicted to	disappointed in	limited to
angry about (something)	due to	made of / from
angry at (someone)	engaged to	married to
angry with (someone)	excited about	opposed to
ashamed of	familiar with	preferable to
aware of	followed by	proud of
based on	fond of	related to
capable of	full of	responsible for
committed to	guilty of	resulting from
composed of	have respect for	satisfied with
concerned about / with	in accordance with	scared of
connected to	independent of / from	similar to
content with	in regard to	tired of
dedicated to	interested in	worried about

Sample Verb + Preposition Combinations

account for	consist of	object to
agree on (something)	convince (someone) of (something)	participate in
agree with (someone)	count on	plan on provide for
apologize to	decide on / upon	provide with
apply for / to	depend on / upon	recover from
approve of	disagree with	remind (someone) of rely on
argue with (someone)	dream about / of	reply to
arrive at / in	feel like	respond to
ask for	forget about	result in
believe in	get rid of	search for
belong to	happen to	see about
blame (someone) for (something)	hear about / from / of	speak to / with
blame (something) on (someone)	hope for	stare at
borrow from	insist on / upon	substitute for
call on / upon	invite (someone) to	succeed at / in
care about / for	laugh at	talk about / of
compare to / with	listen for / to	talk of
compliment (someone) on	look at	think about
come from	look for	think of
concentrate on	look forward to	wait for / on
consent to		