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: | in 1987  |
|          | after lunch                 | on: | in six months (at the end of) |
|          | after three                 |     | in time (early enough) |
| at:      | at five o’clock             |     | 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                 |     |          |

Dr. Murray and Anna C. Rockowitz Writing Center, Hunter College, City University of New York
## Place or Direction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Around:</th>
<th>She walked around the car.</th>
<th>Inside:</th>
<th>Put it inside the house.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At:</td>
<td>They are at home.</td>
<td>Of:</td>
<td>We moved south of Montreal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We were at the restaurant.</td>
<td>On:</td>
<td>We sat on the ocean pier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He smiled at her.</td>
<td></td>
<td>She left on the train.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She looked at the menu.</td>
<td>Through:</td>
<td>They drove through the tunnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down:</td>
<td>They lived down the hall.</td>
<td>To:</td>
<td>He went to Prague.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The cat walked down the stairs.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Give it to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From:</td>
<td>We immigrated from Peru in 1991.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The restaurant is one mile from here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In:</td>
<td>He lives in a trailer.</td>
<td>Up:</td>
<td>He walked up the stairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We waited in the bus.</td>
<td>With:</td>
<td>He went with me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Means or Agent

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

## Manner

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

## State or Condition

| As:     | I see her as a good person.         | For:    | I mistook you for someone else. |
|         | My friend is at work.               | 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. |

## Purpose or Reason

| For:    | He bought it for an emergency      |
|         | She went to the city for sightseeing. |
|         | He loved her for her thoughtfulness. |
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>on a specific day (on Wednesday) or date (on June 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>at a particular time (at 6:30, at midnight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by</td>
<td>by a particular time (by the end of next week)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prepositional Phrases that Show Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>on a surface (on the desk), a specific street (on Seventh Avenue), or an electronic medium (on the Internet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>in a particular space (in the apartment), a geographic location (in New York City), or a print medium (in the newspaper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>at a particular place (at the store) or location (at the center)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by</td>
<td>by a familiar place (by the house)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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”)

Dr. Murray and Anna C. Rockowitz Writing Center, Hunter College, City University of New York
Common Adjective + Preposition Combinations

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

Sample Verb + Preposition Combinations

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