

## PREPOSITIONS – BASIC USES

Prepositions may cause misunderstandings, but do not cause big grammatical problems. Very often a good translation will give you the preposition you are looking for.

However, languages sometimes see things differently. In English, you are *in* the shower in the morning, you may live *on* a farm, or be lying *in* the sun, although you are in fact under it. Americans live *on* a certain street but the British live *in* it.

There are situations where we use a preposition and a noun, but no article, such as 'at school' or 'in hospital'. It's also important to know when English does not use a preposition. For example, we discuss something, we do not discuss 'about' it.

## PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

### ABOVE

*We were flying high above the clouds.*

### AROUND

*They sat around the table, talking.*

### AT

*She lives at number 65.*

*She's at home, work, school ... (without 'the')*

*The answer's at the bottom of the page.*

### BELOW

*I could see the rocks below the surface of the water.*

### IN

*He lives in Sydney, in Australia ...*

*He's in hospital, prison ... (without 'the')*

*Put it in the corner, in the middle ...*

### ON

*It's the first house on the left.*

*The café is on the corner of the street.*

*They live on a farm.*

### OVER

*There's an old bridge over the river.*

### UNDER

*I'll leave the key under the doormat.*

## PREPOSITIONS OF DIRECTION

### ACROSS

*They drove across the bridge.*

### ALONG

*I walked along the avenue from one end to the other.*

### INTO

*She poured the mixture into the pot.*

### OUT OF

*He took the file out of his drawer.*

### OVER

*The ball went over the wall into the neighbour's garden.*

### ROUND / AROUND

*They walked round / around the garden.*

## THROUGH

We went through the tunnel and came out into the sunlight.

## TO

Have you been to the USA?

## TOWARDS

He was walking towards the door.

## TIME PREPOSITIONS

I'll see you **after** 3 o'clock.

Wash your hands **before** dinner.

I want to finish this work **by** the end of the month.

We worked hard **during** the morning session.

I haven't had a weekend away **since** Christmas.

The kids have been on a trip to London **for** a few days.

We'll be decorating the house **over** the summer.

He was asleep **throughout** the film.

If you don't hurry up, we'll be here **until** midnight.

Payment has to be made **within** 30 days.

'By' means: before, or not later than.

'Over' is similar to 'during', but we say 'over', not 'during', a period of years or a number of weeks.

Throughout' means: for the entire time, from the beginning to the end.

'Within' is similar to 'in', but has an additional idea of completion before a time-limit.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER AND ERRORS TO AVOID

- 'at' 11pm / midday / night / Christmas / the beginning of June
- 'on' Monday / January 21
- 'in' the morning / September / 2005
- 'for' is used with periods: 30 minutes / two days / a little while
- 'since' is used with points, dates, seasons and events: 7am / 1995 / the winter
- 'during' is *not* use with time units: ~~during three days / eight months~~

'Before' and 'after' can be followed by a clause with a verb, a noun, or an 'ing' verb form:

Can you put out the cat before **coming** to bed? (Not ~~'before to come'~~)

We say 'at', not 'in' the / this moment.

On time' means: at the correct time.

She's very punctual; she's always **on time**.

'In time' means: not too late.

You're just **in time**. We were going to start without you.

## Exercise 1

Match the beginning of each sentence with the correct conclusion.

1. She lives at	a) Paris.
2. I'm going	b) 87, King Street.
3. Come to	c) a small island.
4. They live on	d) home.
5. We drove through	e) sea-level.
6. In 20 minutes, I drove across	f) the upstairs bedroom, impatiently.
7. Mary walked around	g) Texas.
8. We went down	h) the Alps.
9. The cat's under	i) the River Thames by boat.
10. Admiring the mountains, Jim flew over	j) the coffee table.
11. The city is below	k) the box.
12. The key's inside	l) a snowstorm.

## Exercise 2

Complete each sentence with 'in', 'on' or 'at'.

1. Times Square ..... New York is a major tourist attraction.
2. I'm taking my vacation ..... September.
3. Our forecast is based ..... the available information.
4. For now, ..... least, there is no need to raise prices.
5. We will be reviewing safety procedures ..... the coming weeks.
6. When you arrive, you will see my office ..... the left.
7. We will be able to pay for the new equipment ..... part by making savings elsewhere.
8. It was decided ..... the end to cancel the meeting.
9. We get most of our supplies ..... the local store.
10. Put the boxes down there ..... the corner.

### Exercise 3

For each sentence, choose the word or expression which does not complete it correctly.

1. It was so hot that the ice cream melted ..... a few seconds.

- a) in
- b) within
- c) before
- d) after

2. I'll be in Manchester ..... the summer.

- a) over
- b) within
- c) during
- d) until

3. I think we should go and see them ..... , don't you?

- a) in a few minutes
- b) before Christmas
- c) for a little while
- d) since Monday

4. She was completely silent ..... dinner.

- a) after
- b) throughout
- c) while
- d) during

5. Everything was completely silent ..... nightfall.

- a) at
- b) after
- c) throughout
- d) before

6. We should finish the job before ..... .

- a) eating
- b) eight o'clock
- c) to go home
- d) we have a break

7. I was awake ..... five o' clock.

- a) at
- b) until
- c) during
- d) by

8. The plan should be realized ..... September.

- a) before
- b) by
- c) towards
- d) until

9. We can promise delivery ..... the week.

- a) in
- b) during
- c) within
- d) since

10. Residents whose homes had been destroyed were relocated ..... a few weeks.

- a) over
- b) after
- c) during
- d) in

## NOUNS, VERBS AND ADJECTIVES WITH PREPOSITIONS

In addition to the basic uses of prepositions for space, direction and time, English contains a large number of preposition expressions formed with nouns, verbs and adjectives.

As we are dealing with expressions, the language is more abstract, and it is less easy to sense what the correct preposition is in any given situation. It is easier, for example, to draw a picture to remind yourself of the difference between 'in' and 'at' than it is to draw one for the difference between 'in business' and 'out of business' or similar expressions.

Concentrate on learning the most common expressions, the ones that you are likely to meet again and again.

### ADJECTIVES AND PREPOSITIONS

Many adjectives can be followed by different prepositions, according to the meaning. For example, you can be tired *of* the same old routine, or tired *from* walking so much. Here are some typical combinations:

happy / bored / fed up / annoyed	with
tired	of
good / amazed	at
interested	in
ready / prepared / fit / suitable	for
surprised / fascinated / amazed / worried	by
different*	from
concerned / worried / crazy / mad	about

\* also different *than* (US English), and different *to*

### NOUNS AND PREPOSITIONS

There are many fixed combinations. Here are a few common ones:

on account of / on the point of / on the phone / in time for / in connection with / in relation to / in the hands of / in need of / with respect to / by luck / by accident / explanation for / reason for

### VERBS AND PREPOSITIONS

Note the following combinations:

change / transform / translate *into*

participate / take part / involve *in*

associate / equip *with*

depend / rely / count / concentrate / focus / impose *on*

rise / fall / increase / decrease *by* (a specific amount)

## POINTS TO REMEMBER AND ERRORS TO AVOID

Often, related adjectives, verbs, and nouns are followed by the same prepositions:

*We're interested **in** what you have to say.*

*He is known for his keen interest **in** the occult.*

*She got married **to** someone much older.*

*His marriage **to** his childhood sweetheart didn't last very long.*

However, note the following:

*We had a discussion **about** the project.*

*We discussed **about** the project.*

*There is no easy answer **to** the question.*

*I answered **to** the letter the next day.*

Note also these common verbs which **are** followed by prepositions:

listen **to** music / pay **for** something / operate **on** a patient

### AS AND LIKE

Note the difference between the prepositions 'as' and 'like'. Compare:

*It functions **as** a safety-valve. (This means it **is** a safety valve; it has that job.)*

*It functions **like** a safety-valve. (The way it works is being compared to the way a safety-valve does.)*

## Exercise 1

**Which preposition is correct? There may sometimes be no preposition (Ø).**

1. Are you interested ..... history?

- a) by
- b) in

2. I don't have any explanation ..... his behaviour.

- a) for
- b) of

3. I used to be good ..... science at school.

- a) in
- b) at

4. The book has been translated ..... fifteen languages.

- a) in
- b) into

5. There has been a fall ..... the number of road deaths.

- a) of
- b) in

6. The surgeon decided to operate ..... her immediately after the accident.

- a) Ø
- b) on

7. Throw the newspaper ..... me, and I'll read you what it says.

- a) to
- b) at

8. They didn't let me pay ..... the meal or the drinks.  
a) Ø  
b) for
9. There is not much demand ..... that sort of product these days.  
a) of  
b) for
10. We discussed ..... our plans for the summer.  
a) Ø  
b) about

## Exercise 2

Complete the preposition expressions in the sentences below.

1. Many people are *allergic* ..... peanuts.  
a) to  
b) at  
c) of
2. I am writing ..... *response* ..... your recent job offer.  
a) as / at  
b) for / on  
c) in / to
3. We are trying to determine what caused the machine to malfunction ..... *the first place*.  
a) at  
b) in  
c) of
4. Their *proximity* ..... transport facilities makes the Belleview apartments highly desirable.  
a) to  
b) of  
c) from
5. The staff have learned to adapt to the new management ..... *a period of time*.  
a) over  
b) in  
c) during
6. Every available space in the building has been efficiently *put* ..... *use*.  
a) for  
b) to  
c) at
7. If we discontinue this service we *run the risk* ..... upsetting some of our customers.  
a) in  
b) by  
c) of



8. Late night trading *accounts* ..... a large part of our sales.

- a) to
- b) for
- c) of

9. Our customers, especially those ..... *a budget*, will appreciate that we are not raising prices.

- a) with
- b) on
- c) at

10. We are *passionate* ..... designing beautiful websites.

- a) for
- b) about
- c) in

### Exercise 3

**Complete the sentences below with the correct words.**

1. Professor Morton was awarded the prize in ..... of her contribution to medical research.

- a) appraisal
- b) recognition
- c) esteem
- d) merit

2. Prices ..... from as little as \$10 to more than £200.

- a) expand
- b) increase
- c) range
- d) raise

3. We would like to ..... your attention to the fact that your bill is still outstanding.

- a) attract
- b) draw
- c) divert
- d) pay

4. The mountain lies on the ..... of the town.

- a) frontier
- b) gateway
- c) outskirts
- d) border

5. The error is not, ..... its own, too serious.

- a) at
- b) by
- c) of
- d) on

6. We need to be clear ..... how we are going to proceed.

- a) about
- b) over

- c) in
- d) to

7. With ..... to the quality of the food, there is little to choose between the two restaurants.

- a) concern
- b) respect
- c) relation
- d) connection

8. By ..... of an introduction, I would like to tell you a little story.

- a) way
- b) a way
- c) the way
- d) ways

9. The building is old, and consequently is in ..... of renovation.

- a) lack
- b) demand
- c) need
- d) requirement

10. On ..... of the severe snowstorm, people were asked to only travel if necessary.

- a) consequence
- b) account
- c) reason
- d) regard

**to malfunction – to not work or function correctly**  
**an outstanding bill – a bill which has not been paid**