

List of Prepositions

Usage of some commonly confused prepositions

In and Within

In refers to the end of a period usually in the future, e.g., He will return in a month. (at the end of one month)

Within means before the end of a period. (at any time before the specified period)

E.g., He will return within a month. (Before the month is out)

In and Into

“In” indicates rest or motion inside anything.

She is in the garden. (Rest inside)

“Into” means motion towards the inside of anything.

She walked into the garden.

On and Upon

On is used

In speaking of things at rest.

He sat on a big stone.

Before the names of dates and days.

He is coming on Friday. On 26th August, etc.

To denote support and concern.

He lives on his uncle's wealth.

I wrote books on politics.

Upon is used

In speaking of things in motion.

The tiger sprang upon the goat.

Beside and Besides

Beside means “by the side of.”

My house is beside the library.

Besides means “in addition to.”

Besides English we teach communication skills.

Between and Among

Between is used for two persons or things.

Distribute the money between the two children.

There is a good understanding between him and her.

Among is used for more than two persons or things.

The boys were fighting among themselves.

By

Used for

According to, from the evidence of

By my watch, it is 1:30 a.m.

To denote the doer of the action is passive voice

The thief was beaten by the policeman.

Preposition Usage

Given below are the most usual meanings of English prepositions. Each meaning is illustrated by an example.

About

1. On the subject of: This is a story about elephants.
2. Approximately: He is about ten years old.

Above

1. Higher than; over: The plane flew above the clouds.
2. Earlier on a page: There is a heading above each diagram.

Across

1. From one side to the other: We walked across the field.
2. On the other side of: There is a store across the street.

After

1. Later in time: after ten o'clock; after lunch
2. Later in a series: Q comes after P in the alphabet.
3. In pursuit of: The dog ran after the cat.

Along

1. Following the length of: We walked along the road.

Among

1. Within a group: The money was shared among three people.

Note: In formal English, among is usually used only when referring to more than two persons or things. In contrast, between is used when referring to two persons or things.

Around

1. Circling something: We walked around the block.
2. Surrounding: There is a fence around the garden.
3. In different parts of: I looked around the house for the keys.

4. In the other direction: We turned around and went back home.
5. Approximately: He is around six feet tall.

At

1. A specific location: at 23 Chestnut Street; at the park
2. A point in time: at 5 o'clock; at Christmas
3. A condition: at peace; at war; at rest
4. An activity: at work; at school; at play
5. Towards: Look at someone; wave at someone

Note: When referring to a specific location or to a point in time, at is usually used. When referring to a certain street or a certain day, on is usually used. When referring to a location as an area, or when referring to a unit of time longer than a day, in is usually used.

E.g. at Christmas; on Christmas day; in the Christmas holidays

Before

1. Earlier in time: before two o'clock; before Christmas
2. Earlier in a series: S comes before T in the alphabet.

Behind

1. At the back of: The little girl hid behind her mother.
2. Late: I am behind in my work.
3. Cause; origin: Who was behind that idea?

Below

1. Lower than; under: below freezing; below sea level
2. Later on a page: Footnotes are provided below the text.

Beneath

1. Lower than; below: beneath the earth

Beside

1. Next to; at the side of: I sit beside her in class.

Besides

1. Also; as well as: We study other languages besides English.

Note: The differing meanings of beside and besides. Beside is usually used with reference to a physical location.

Between

1. An intermediate location: Toronto lies between Montreal and Vancouver.
2. An intermediate time: between Christmas and New Year's Day

3. Intermediate in a series: B comes between A and C in the alphabet.
4. An intermediate amount: between five and ten people
5. Within a group of two: The money was shared between two people.

Beyond

1. Farther than: The mountains lie beyond the horizon.
2. Further than; exceeding: That was beyond my expectations.

But

1. Except: I have read all but the last chapter.

Note: But is used more often as a conjunction than as a preposition.

By

1. Near: a house by the sea
2. Past: He waved as he drove by the house.
3. Not later than: Try to finish the work by next week.
4. In units of: cheaper by the dozen; sold by weight
5. Through the means of: travel by plane; written by him

Note: By is often used in combination with verbs in the Passive Voice.

Down

1. To a lower position: The ball rolled down the hill.
2. Further along: He lives down the street.

During

1. Throughout a period: She works during the day.
2. Sometime within a period: An accident occurred during the night.

For

1. Duration of time: We walked for two hours.
2. Distance: I walked for five kilometers.
3. Purpose: I bought this jacket for you.
4. In the direction of: She left for New York.
5. In favour of: We are for the proposal.
6. Considering: The boy is clever for his age.

From

1. Place of origin: We left from Boston; he comes from Mexico
2. Start of a period: from now on; from yesterday until today
3. Start of a range: pages from 20 to 30 are missing from this book.
4. Cause: He suffers from nervousness.

5. Source: I first heard the story from you.

In

1. Place thought of as an area: in London; in Europe
2. Within a location: in the room; in the building
3. Large units of time: That happened in March, in 1992.
4. Within a certain time: I will return in an hour.
5. By means of: write in pencil; speak in English
6. Condition: in doubt; in a hurry; in secret
7. A member of: He is in the orchestra; in the navy
8. Wearing: the boy in the blue shirt
9. With reference to: lacking in ideas; rich in oil

Inside

1. Within: They are inside the house.

Into

1. To the inside of: We stepped into the room.
2. Change of condition: The boy changed into a man

Of

1. Location: east of here; the middle of the road
2. Possession: a friend of mine; the sound of music
3. Part of a group: one of us; a member of the team
4. Measurement: a cup of milk; two meters of snow

Off

1. Not on; away from: Please keep off the grass.
2. At some distance from: There are islands off the coast.

On

1. Touching the surface of: on the table; on the wall
2. A certain day: That happened on Sunday, on the 6th of June.
3. A certain street: on South Street
4. About: a book on engineering
5. A state or condition: on strike; on fire; on holiday
6. By means of: live on a pension; shown on television

Onto

1. To a position on: The child climbed onto the table

Out of

1. To the outside of: She went out of the room.
2. From among: We won two games out of three.
3. Motive: We spoke to them out of politeness.
4. Material: The bridge is made out of steel.
5. Beyond: out of control; out of danger

Outside

1. On the outer side of: outside the house
2. Beyond the limits of: outside my experience

Over

1. Above; higher than: There are cupboards over the sink.
2. Covering: We spread an extra blanket over the bed.
3. Across: I jumped over a puddle.
4. More than: It cost over ten dollars; it took over an hour
5. During: I saw him several times over the past week.
6. By means of: We made plans over the telephone.

Past

1. Up to and beyond: I walked past the house.
2. After (in time): It was past 2 o'clock; half past two
3. Beyond: past belief

Since

1. From a specific time in the past: I had been waiting since two o'clock.
2. From a past time until now: I have been waiting here since noon.

Note: Because of its meaning, the preposition since is usually used in combination with a perfect tense. It should be noted that the preposition for can also be used with a perfect tense. However, when used with reference to time, for is usually followed by a phrase referring to a period; whereas since is usually followed by a phrase referring to a specific time.

E.g., I have known him for six months.

I have known him since January.

In the first example, for is followed by six months, which refers to a period. In the second example, since is followed by January, which refers to a specific time.

Through

1. Across; from end to end of: the main road through town
2. For the whole of a period: I slept through the night.
3. By means of: Skill improves through practice.

Throughout

1. In every part of: throughout the world
2. For the whole of a period: throughout the winter

Till

Note: Till can be used instead of until. However, at the beginning of a sentence, until is usually used.

To

1. In the direction of: Turn to the right.
2. Destination: I am going to Rome.
3. Until: from Monday to Friday; five minutes to ten
4. Compared with: They prefer hockey to soccer.
5. With indirect object: Please give it to me.
6. As part of infinitive: I like to ski; he wants to help.
7. In order to: We went to the store to buy soap.

Toward (or Towards)

1. In the direction of: We walked toward the centre of the town.
2. Near; just before (time): It rained towards the evening.

Under

1. Beneath: under the desk; under the trees
2. Less than: Under 100 people were present.
3. In circumstances of: under repair; under way; under discussion

Underneath

1. Below, under: underneath the carpet

Until

1. Up to a certain time: She will stay until Friday; until 5 p.m.

Upon

Note: On and upon have similar meanings. Upon may be used in certain expressions, as in once upon a time, and following certain verbs, as in to rely upon someone.

Up

1. To a higher place: We went up the stairs.
2. In a higher place: She lives up the hill.

Up to

1. As far as: up to now; I have read up to page 100.
2. Depending on: The decision is up to you.
3. As good as; ready for: His work is up to standard.

Versus

1. Against (sports, legal): The next game is England versus Australia.

Via

1. By way of: He went to Los Angeles via San Francisco.

With

1. Accompanying: He came with her; I have my keys with me.
2. Having; containing: Here is a book with a map of the island.
3. By means of; using: I repaired the shoes with glue.
4. Manner: with pleasure; with ease; with difficulty
5. Because of: We were paralysed with fear.

Within

1. Inside of: within twenty minutes; within one kilometer.