

# PREPOSITIONS

## THE ULTIMATE BOOK



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**For International Students**

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THE KEY TO FLUENCY IN ENGLISH CONVERSATION

REVISED EDITION



# **Prepositions: The Ultimate Book - Mastering English Prepositions**

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**For International Students**  
THE KEY TO FLUENCY IN ENGLISH CONVERSATION  
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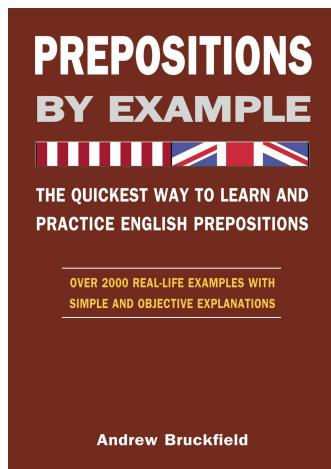
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## Also by Andrew Bruckfield



## Introduction

PREPOSITIONS are perhaps the most important connectors of words and ideas in the English language, certainly one of the most important parts of speech of the English grammar--especially for students who are not native speakers of English.

However, some of the best books on English grammar were not written for the international student and do not deal with prepositions in a comprehensive and structured manner, but rather leave important gaps that are inconsistently explored in a variety of ways, both by teachers and students of English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL).

Non-native English students and teachers have been struggling for years to find suitable English grammar textbooks that include cross-cultural references and language equivalences, in addition to an efficient methodology to learn and teach prepositions in a reliable and definitive way in different societies. This has terrified students and teachers altogether in both the national and the international English language classrooms. If you want to learn or teach English, prepositions shall be taken into serious consideration--make them your priority.

This revised edition of *Prepositions: The Ultimate Book* is intended for speakers of ESL/EFL, for the general public, as a reference for regular communication and business purposes, and for everyone who needs to use English as a *lingua franca*.

This book proposes a pedagogical--not a linguistic--approach to the prepositions of the English language. You can use it in class or for self-study. However, learning and teaching English prepositions need focus and practice. You cannot simply translate them--they have to be known and explored in order for their meanings to be understood and so that they can be easily applied in everyday life. Prepositions deserve special attention in order to function properly within the English language environment.

*Prepositions: The Ultimate Book* was not written for primary or secondary school education. The purpose of this book is to discuss a comprehensive, but nevertheless often unorthodox approach to English prepositions--and not the grammatical structures of the language. Simply put, this book is oriented toward users--people who are seeking methods to improve their prepositional skills--rather than for linguists interested in describing the function of

prepositions. This practical, yet powerful guide to "thinking prepositions," covering comprehensively different aspects of our daily lives, was designed having in mind ESL/EFL students' immediate needs to apply prepositions in their frequent communication challenges.

Spatial prepositions are the most common form, although they may fall into many different classes and categories, not always dealing with space proper. However, one practical way of understanding them is by picturing a bridge where on one side we see a word that needs to be connected to another word in order to produce meaning (that is, to represent your ideas in an appropriate and organized manner). What goes on that bridge will depend on the context. For example:

The teacher is talking \_\_\_\_ her students \_\_\_\_ the classroom.

Two prepositions need to cross their respective bridges in order for the sentence above to make sense, and the correct ones will have to be decided by the speaker on the basis of the context in which he or she is inserted at the moment of speech. As an example using the sentence above, we could choose the prepositions ABOUT and IN. We could also use TO and IN or even TO and ABOUT. However, context would allow us to use other combinations of prepositions, such as FOR and IN, or AT and INSIDE, just to mention a couple of additional examples.

Though we shall not focus our efforts on learning and analyzing English grammar, in this book we briefly study the relationship of prepositions with other classes of words such as nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives, as a way to contrast them and practice with prepositions.

## Conventions Used in This Book

In this book, prepositions are always shown in capital letters when independent of context. For example, UP, DOWN and BECAUSE OF are prepositions. Adverbial particles and conjunctions are shown in italics to distinguish them from prepositions. For example, *up* and *down* may also be adverbial particles, whereas *because* is a conjunction. When tied to a context in the middle of a paragraph, the preposition and the prepositional particle will always appear in bold letters, and the example will be italicized in order to avoid confusion with the conventional paragraph, as in *He went **up** the mountain*, while the adverbial particle will not appear in bold letters, as in *He*

*went up*. However, in the indented examples, unless a specific word should be marked in italics, only the adverbial particle will appear italicized--and the preposition will be in bold letters, as in:

He went *up* **in** the lift.

In the example above, *up* is an adverbial particle, and IN is a preposition.

Words, phrases or clauses that are emphasized may also appear in italics or inside quotation marks, and a few are underlined. For example, the notion of "volume" is very important if you want to learn or teach English prepositions; the word *process* describes one of the attributes of the preposition ON; in one of my examples, the noun clause *what will change the company* is the object of the preposition.

Unless I need to emphasize a particular word, multi-word prepositions, as well as idioms using prepositions, appear in **bold** when they are part of an example and in **bold italics** when inside a paragraph. For example:

He was named John Doe **for lack of** a better name.

This is true **all along the line**.

In the first example, **for lack of** is a complex preposition, and **all along the line** is an idiom using the preposition ALONG (see more descriptions and distinctions ahead in *The Function of English Prepositions*).

Some prepositions are considered "modern," while others are "archaic." Dictionaries list prepositions under a variety of labels such as "archaic," "dialect," "literary," "old," "Scottish" or "chiefly Scottish," "chiefly British," "chiefly American," etc., according to their usage. In this book, for the sake of simplicity--except in a few specific cases--all the prepositions that are not used in current American English, as it is used all over the world, are simply labeled as "archaic or regional."

I use the following rationale to describe a prepositional scene:

speaker	designates the person who is describing or narrating a prepositional scene.
agent	designates someone or something that is responsible for the prepositional scene.
entity	designates someone or something that is part of a prepositional scene.
referent	designates someone or something that is the target affected by a preposition.

For instance, in the classic example below, the preposition ON is used to

designate the relation between *book* and *table*:

The book is **on** the table.

In the example above, the word *book* is an entity representing something related to the word *table*, which represents the referent (or the grammatical "object of the preposition"). Likewise, in the sentence below, the word *woman* is an entity representing someone related to the referent *table*:

The woman is **at** the table.

Thus, in this book, the words *agent*, *entity* and *referent* can represent the same thing. For instance, in the following example, the woman is the agent, and the book is an entity related to the man; the man is the referent:

The woman threw the book **at** the man.

Compare the two examples below. In (a), *table* is the entity, while *carpet* is the referent; in (b), *carpet* is the entity, and *table* is the referent:

- a) The table is **on** the carpet.
- b) The carpet is **on** the table.

Sometimes I use the term "abstract world" or "abstract sense" to designate abstract nouns (as opposed to concrete nouns) preceded by a preposition (e.g., when the example is referring to a metaphorical container or surface). However, this does not mean that the *entire sentence* necessarily conveys an abstract sense.

I use the symbol  $\circledast$  for ungrammatical or odd sentences, or for sentence structures that I do not recommend. For instance, the sentence in (a) is ungrammatical, and the sentence in (b) might not be recommended (however, it is not ungrammatical):

- a) She gave the book **toward** him.  $\circledast$
- b) He works **as** a horse.  $\circledast$

## Types of Prepositions

There is some confusion among English learners about the existing types of prepositions. Generally, though, this confusion starts when one tries to define

what exactly "type of preposition" means, as the words *type*, *category* and *class* are sometimes used interchangeably to explain the *semantics* of English prepositions, in terms of their basic linguistic and grammatical characterization, and their *practical function*, therefore the "meaning." In this book I use the term "class" to explain the prepositional groups of situations explored in the next six chapters.

## The Meaning of Prepositions

Some prepositions may or may not contribute semantic content to its phrase or sentence. For instance, in the phrasal verb *blow up* in the example below, the particle *up* does not have an independent meaning (the same occurring to the verb *blow* in this specific case):

The balloon *blew up* in the atmosphere.

This does not happen to the preposition UP in the following example:

The boy went **up** the stairs.

In this book, all the examples are referred to as *sentences* (or simply as *examples*), and the meaning of a preposition is discussed according to the role of its sentence; that is to say, in terms of its context. For instance, in the following two grammatically correct sentences, only one offers a plausible context:

The book is **on** the table.

The table is **under** the book. ⊗

Therefore, if you need to learn or teach English prepositions, you will also need to focus on context. For example, if there is no illustration showing a book on the table, then the blank space to be filled in the sentence below,

The book is \_\_ the table.

could well be represented by NEAR or UNDER--but never by IN, for instance, due to the contextual features of the noun *table* (normally it is not possible to place a book "inside" a table); or AMONG (to start with, there is only one table!); or by TO, due to its lack of directional attributes when followed by the verb *to be*. Additionally, a single preposition may

communicate more than one meaning, depending on the situation being described. For example, in the sentence:

Mary is **on** vacation, she is **on** the beach.

each preposition **ON** has a different function; that is, their meanings are different according to the context to which they belong in each clause. Without having to resort to the realm of applied linguistics, in this book we discuss how to identify and group the prepositions used in different examples of real-life contexts by associating them to independent meanings. This means that, for us, the two prepositions **ON** above could have the following meanings:

<b>ON</b>	used for intervals of time ( <b>on</b> vacation).
<b>ON</b>	used for location or "geographic intervals" ( <b>on</b> the beach).

These concepts become very important when we discuss different meanings in apparently similar contexts, as in the sentence below:

Mary is **on** vacation, she is **at** the beach.

## Classes of Prepositions in This Book

Space and spatial relations are the key to non-native speaker's reasoning of prepositions. These basic prepositions have some kind of "logical" attributes that are naturally perceived by native speakers. However, just as emotion terms are often difficult to translate if one is not culturally and historically connected to one's foreign language, these logical attributes are not always automatically "translated" by the native speakers in the English classroom, since they do not need an external resource, or an additional incentive, in order to correctly apply them. Understanding these logical concepts may ultimately lead students to expand their knowledge of English prepositions and their applications in the realms of physical, temporal and abstract space. Regardless of the type of utterance, phrase or sentence, the use of a spatial preposition will always represent one of these relations.

In the recent years, linguists have come up with excellent published works on cognitive grammar, having prepositions in the center stage. Concepts such as landmark, path, trajector, figure, ground, actor, patient, topology, target, goal, thematic role, verticality, horizontality, projection; dynamic, stative and

dimensional prepositions, and grammatical and lexical prepositions, among others, have changed the prepositional world--for the better. Using a simple, practical approach, *Prepositions: The Ultimate Book* tries to "translate" these concepts to the real world, to speakers and students of English as a Second or Foreign Language.

Before writing this book, I spent some time trying to figure out the best way to communicate all the possible prepositional spatial (as well as non-spatial) usages to readers, in an easy, error-proof and logical manner. The result was a set of prepositional classes, with a selection of pictures and charts spread throughout the next five chapters, giving you the opportunity to deal with and compare different prepositional contexts. I hope I have accomplished my goal.

In this book, we discuss the following six classes of prepositions:

- \* Prepositions of Direction
- \* Prepositions of Orientation
- \* Prepositions of Location
- \* Prepositions of Transportation
- \* Prepositions of Time
- \* Non-spatial Prepositions

**Prepositions of direction** (also directional prepositions) specify the direction of an entity relative to a referent. For instance, in the sentences:

Hillary is driving **to** Washington.

Hillary drove **along** the river.

both prepositions belong to the directional class. However, TO indicates "direction with movement and/or with a change of position or place" of an entity from one reference point to another, which means that Hillary was originally in another place before going to Washington. The use of TO also implies a *reception*; that is, Hillary will eventually arrive in Washington. The preposition ALONG does not indicate a change of referent but rather an *interaction* with the same referent; in other words, Hillary did not move from one river to another and, consequently, there was no necessary reception. I explore the prepositions of direction in Chapter 1.

**Prepositions of orientation** (also orientational prepositions) specify a vertical or horizontal position of an entity relative to a referent. For example:

The Helicopter is **over** the mountain.

The bear is **behind** the tree.

In the two sentences above, the sense of "verticality" is represented by the preposition OVER (the helicopter is "vertically above" the mountain), and the sense of "horizontality" is represented by the preposition BEHIND. I explore the prepositions of orientation in Chapter 2.

**Prepositions of location** (also locational prepositions) specify a position or a location of an entity relative to a referent using the general notion of place. The sentences below demonstrate the use of two different locational prepositions:

The man is **in** the house.

The woman is sitting **between** the trees.

In the first example above, the preposition IN specifies the location of the man as *inside* the house. The house may be a mansion, with gardens, courts and a swimming pool, but the use of IN implies that the man is *not* outside the house. In this example, the preposition IN expresses *something contained*. The preposition BETWEEN used in the second sentence specifies the current location of the woman as *in the space separating at least two trees*. Prepositions of location also include the prepositions of proximity. I explore the prepositions of location in Chapter 3.

**Prepositions of Transportation** specify the position of an entity relative to a means of transportation. For example:

The man is **on** the bus.

The woman is **in** the taxi.

The preposition ON used here specifies the location of the man as *inside* the bus *as a passenger*. However, he could also be *on top of* the bus--it all depends on the context in which the man is seen by the speaker-observer. In this example, the preposition ON indicates the *position and the status of the man relative to the bus*. However, in the second example, the woman could

not possibly be *on top of* the taxi, as the preposition IN indicates a position *inside* the vehicle. The prepositions of transportation are explored in Chapter 4.

**Prepositions of time** (also temporal prepositions) specify a relation between an entity and its time referent, or the duration of an event or action. For example:

I always take my vacation **in** December.

**Since** school started, I have been waking up **at** 7:00 every morning.

We could also say that these prepositions deal with *positions in time*. The same way that we don't know exactly where *in the house* the man is--but we know that he is somewhere *inside* the house--you don't know exactly *when* I take my vacation in December; it could start in the first week or in any other week. The prepositions of time are discussed in Chapter 5.

**Non-spatial prepositions** specify events and situations that are not related to space or time. More than 200 simple and complex non-spatial prepositions are introduced in this chapter, including participial and -*ing* prepositions. For instance, we often use the participial preposition below to introduce a sense of disadvantage or depreciation in a sentence:

He did an excellent job, **considering** his lack of experience.

We use the following complex preposition to indicate compliance with something:

The team shall play **according to** the rules.

In addition to these classes of prepositions, a range of examples of figurative uses of spatial prepositions are spread throughout the first five chapters--including their use to introduce abstract nouns in expressions that are not necessarily idiomatic. For instance, consider the two identical sentences below:

- a) She did something **with** him.
- b) She did something **with** him.

Grammatically, they are the very same sentence with the same prepositions

WITH. However, in the first sentence I meant that *she somehow transformed him*, whereas in the second example I wanted to imply that *they did something together!* The use of the preposition WITH in (a) is figurative and involves a metaphorical extension of the "togetherness" meaning of "with" (the meaning changes to TO), while the preposition WITH used in (b) is a regular locational preposition of proximity.

In the example below, OVER introduces the abstract noun *creativity*, but the sentence does not have a very strong idiomatic reading:

Her teachers were excited **over** her creativity.

Classes of prepositions can be mixed and therefore confusing for the non-native speaker. For instance, the sentence below,

John walked **through** the mist, **over** the field **along** the river **to** the barn.

shows that John followed some path or trajectory in the direction of the barn, and the prepositions THROUGH, OVER, ALONG and TO could all demonstrate a directional concept. However, depending on the context, they could also be allocated to other classes of prepositions. Consider the next examples. There is a clear directional sense in the two sentences below, but only one demonstrates a locational (static) sense as generally understood by non-native speakers of English, whereas the other leaves us with a clear dynamic sense:

The horse jumped **over** the fence.

The cat jumped **over** the table.

Unless the horse is an artistic gymnast mare performing on a balance beam, chances are that it jumped-passed the fence ending up on the ground on the other side, while the cat graciously stopped on top of the table. Here, context plays a very important role (the cat could also have jumped over to the other side of the table). Nevertheless, the preposition OVER used in these examples is better classified as an *orientational* preposition with a "vertical" attribute; that is, the horse was *over* the fence only for the fraction of a second that it was *vertically above* the fence during his jump. You can see the difference between the orientational preposition OVER and the locational preposition OVER in Chapter 2.

Verbs also play an important role in defining the status of some prepositions, suggesting *static* versus *dynamic* relationships (or, what I like to term, "attributes") of prepositions. They are easy to explore in any English course because they suggest a *perception*. Take, for instance, the two prepositions BY used in the sentence below:

In the winter, I like to sit **by** the fire and watch the train pass **by** the station.

In the example above, the verbs *sit* and *pass* lend their attributes to their following prepositions, quickly helping the formation of each context. By changing the prepositions, you can dramatically change the meaning of the sentence:

In the winter, I like to sit **in** the fire and watch the train pass **under** the station. ☺

## A Word on Phrasal & Prepositional Verbs

In order to make a more relevant point in the discussions ahead, I would like to briefly explore the concepts of phrasal verbs, phrasal-prepositional verbs and prepositional verbs. We will deal with a few examples of prepositions and adverbial particles that resemble prepositions, which will help us move forward to the next chapters.

A phrasal verb, also known as "multi-word verb," is a combination of a verb and a preposition or adverb; it is also called "phrasal-prepositional verb" when comprising of a verb with both an adverb and a preposition. Phrasal verbs create a meaning different from the original verb, forming a new single semantic unit; that is, a new verb is created. Another important verb-preposition combination is the prepositional verb, which basically consists of a verb followed by a specific preposition. Prepositional verbs are also known as multi-word verbs, each consisting of a verb which is inseparable from its preposition, and which is always followed by its object, forming a prepositional phrase.

Prepositional verbs (a.k.a. preposition-dependent verbs) often preserve the meaning of the original verb, but they can also create new lexical and semantic units, when combining verbs which bond with their prepositions. For example:

He *believes in* God.

## Distinction

Basically, you can distinguish between a phrasal verb and a prepositional verb by their different stress and intonation patterns. In a phrasal verb, the adverbial particle is closely tied to the verb and is always stressed, whereas in the prepositional verb, the prepositional particle is always tied to the pronoun or the noun of the prepositional phrase, and therefore is unstressed, or the stress can go to the verb--or sometimes to other parts of the prepositional phrase, according to the particular emphasis given at the moment of speech (in some cases the intonation will depend on the speaker's emotional attitude and not on the action being described).

In the following examples with the verb *look*, the adverbial particle *up* and the preposition *AFTER* help modify the original verb (i.e., they form a single unit). The particle is stressed in the examples of the phrasal verbs, while the preposition used in the prepositional verb is unstressed and tied to the noun phrase *the children*.

She <i>looked up</i> the word in the dictionary.	Transitive Phrasal Verb
She said that things are <i>looking up!</i>	Intransitive Phrasal Verb
She <i>looked up to</i> her parents.	Phrasal Prepositional Verb
She <i>looked after</i> her children.	Prepositional Verb

Prepositional verbs are transitive and always inseparable (i.e., the prepositions are attached to the verb), while phrasal verbs can be separable (when transitive) or inseparable (when intransitive). For example, we could not say:

She *looked* her children **after**. ⊗

but we could use:

She *looked* the word *up* in the dictionary.

In a prepositional verb, sometimes it is possible to include an adverb or adverb phrase between the verb and its preposition:

She looked *carefully after* her children.

The examples below help distinguish between the two types of verb:

She <i>turned on</i> her computer.	Phrasal verb = To activate or cause to operate.
She turned <b>on</b> her attacker.	Prepositional verb = To attack/counterattack.

Prepositional verbs, such as the ones in the two following examples, normally have the primary stress on the verb:

They rely **on** her.

She called **on** the police to investigate the case.

or there can be no specific intonation, as in the free verb-preposition combination:

She walked **up** the stairs.

In prepositional verbs, the prepositional particle does not necessarily come before the object, as in the example below,

What are you talking **about**?

where the verb is followed by the preposition ABOUT at the end of the clause.

In the following sentence, the verb *look* is bonding with the preposition AFTER forming the prepositional verb *look like* to create a new meaning which differs from the original verb:

Sometimes a phrasal verb *looks like* a prepositional verb.

The example above tells us that a phrasal verb *resembles* a prepositional verb. Most phrasal verbs allow the adverbial particle to be separated from the verb so that, for instance, both *figure out something* and *figure something out* are possible. Nevertheless, whenever the direct object of a phrasal verb is a pronoun, we normally use the separated form: *I can't figure it out*. In contrast, prepositional verbs have a strong bond between the verb and the preposition (as in *look after*, for example), and they do not allow the preposition to be separated from the verb.

Grammarians generally differentiate between phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs rather than assume them to be part of the same construction. Some authors, for the sake of simplicity, prefer to use the term "phrasal verb" to explain all the multi-word verb combinations.

One of the reasons I am bringing this subject to your attention is that, for most ESL/EFL learners who are not focusing on grammar as a tool for

learning English--rather relying on more conversational and practical aspects of their English course--the complementary adverbial particle that helps form the phrasal verb will be immediately identified as a preposition, whereas, in fact, this word *resembles* a preposition but is functioning as an adverbial particle; that is, the same word may be used as a preposition or an adverb, according to its function in the sentence, which, ultimately, creates confusion among international students.

The idea here is to isolate the prepositions and study their intrinsic meanings and the reason why they can be understood independently and in terms of the contextual roles with which they are associated. For instance, we know that UP, as in *John went up the mountain*, means that he did not go **down** the mountain; therefore, if one had the following choice to fill in the blank space below,

John went \_\_ the mountain.

the verb *go* plus the noun *mountain* would help convey the meaning of the sentence, by suggesting the choice of the preposition UP (or DOWN) rather than the choice of TO or of another appropriate preposition. Here, the context exists more at sentence level.

Now, if we came upon the following option,

John went \_\_the building.

the verb and the noun would not be sufficient to suggest which preposition should be applied in the sentence; in other words, we would need a more ample context than that of the verb and the noun. Here, context exists more at spoken discourse level and must be experienced by the narrator. Context is explored at greater length in the next chapters.

There are several possible choices of prepositions that could complete the example above, such as *John went to the building*, *John went up the building*, *John went down the building*, *John went inside the building*, among others. However, prepositional contexts can be tricky for the non-native speaker, and the sentence could actually be using a phrasal or prepositional verb (underlined in the following examples) to fill in the blank space. For instance, we could have:

John went **to** the building.

as a literal free verb-preposition construction, or:

John went for the building.

as a prepositional verb, as in the hypothesis that "there was an auction of an office building and a rare painting, and John decided to *try to guarantee the possession* of the building for himself" (and he did not even need to actually go TO the building in order to participate in the auction!).

Following is an example of a phrasal-prepositional verb. In the sentence:

The more I went on at them, the more difficult they became!

the unit *went on at* represents the phrasal-prepositional verb *go on at*, meaning that, "as I *pestered* them, they became more difficult." Here, *went on* is the combination of the verb *go* plus the adverbial particle *on* (also known as adverbial preposition), while *AT* is a preposition, meaning "the direction of my intent."

Many prepositions and adverbial particles are actually "twins" in meanings:

She threw the letter **in** the wastebasket.

He opened the door and stepped in.

The word *in* is acting as a preposition in the first sentence and as an adverbial particle in the second, but in both cases they help convey the same meaning: *inside* (inside the wastebasket and inside the house).<sup>1</sup>

In this vein, there are many possibilities to be explored with verbs, prepositions and adverbs in the English language, but we cannot say the same with other languages, such as Portuguese and Spanish, for example. Speakers of these Latin-based languages account for a great number of ESL/EFL learners throughout the world. These differences may be responsible for the misapplication of prepositions by many ESL/EFL students, and, to a certain extent, cause confusion:

Portuguese

- a) Ela jogou a carta **na** lata de lixo.
- b) Ele abriu a porta e **entrou**.

Spanish

c) Ella tiro la carta **en** el basurero.

d) Elle abrio la puerta y **entro**.

In (a) (*she threw the letter in the wastebasket*), the equivalent to the preposition IN is the Portuguese word *na*--which cannot act as an adverb; in (b) (*he opened the door and stepped in*), there is no equivalent to the adverbial particle *in*, and the Portuguese word representing the action of *stepping in* is the verb *entrou* in the simple past tense--which cannot play the role of an adverb.

In (c), the equivalent to the preposition IN is the Spanish word *en*--which is also only a preposition and not an adverb; the same occurs with (d), where the verb *entro* in the simple past tense is the equivalent to the action of *stepping in*--which does not play the role of an adverb.

## A Word on Adjectives + Prepositions

Another part of speech which deals closely with prepositions is the adjective. Some ESL/EFL students often confuse the combination **adjective + preposition** with a prepositional verb, despite the presence of the preceding verb *to be* before the adjective. For instance, the sentences:

Mary is *related to* John.

John is *delighted with* her.

She is *good at* swimming.

are not prepositional verbs but are commonly confused with **verbs + prepositions** by the unaware ESL/EFL learner; therefore, an occasional distinction between these two combinations in the classroom, associated with phrasal verbs, will certainly appease a baffled student.

## A Word on Prepositions and Adverbs

Students of English do not need a phrasal verb in order to confuse an adverbial particle with a preposition. Some simple adverbs will do the trick and make learners believe that they are dealing with a preposition. For instance, in the sentence below the words OUT and ABOUT are playing the role of adverbs, not prepositions:

See you *out and about*.

In the following example, *out* is an adverb preceding the preposition IN:

He went *out in* the woods.

Sometimes the meaning of a prepositional sentence is very similar to the meaning of an adverbial sentence. Consider the following two examples:

John went **up** *the stairs*.

John went *up (using the stairs)*.

The two examples above show that prepositions always have complements (the object *the stairs* of the preposition UP); without the complement (e.g., a noun or a noun phrase, a pronoun, etc.), the word *up* is an adverbial particle.

The examples below have different meanings. The sentence in (a) is using the adverb *up*, and the sentence in (b) is using the preposition UP:

a) John went *up in* the elevator.

b) John went **up** the elevator.

In the examples above, in (a), *the elevator* is the object of the preposition IN (and not of the adverbial particle *up*), while in (b) *the elevator* is the object of the preposition UP (i.e., *up* in the first example is an adverb; UP in (b) is a preposition).

## A Word on Prepositions and Conjunctions

Sometimes the same word used as a preposition can actually function as a conjunction. For instance, in the following examples of conjunction, I am using the words *and*, *because* and *but*:

Will *and* Kate got married last year.

They are going to the beach *because* it is sunny.

I wanted to go to the beach with them, *but* I didn't have time.

The table below shows the structural difference between prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs, using the word *before*:

I read it <b>before</b> Mary.	Preposition
I read it <i>before</i> Mary arrived.	Conjunction
I've read the paper <i>before</i> .	Adverb

Conjunctions that are similar to prepositions are always followed by a verb or clause:

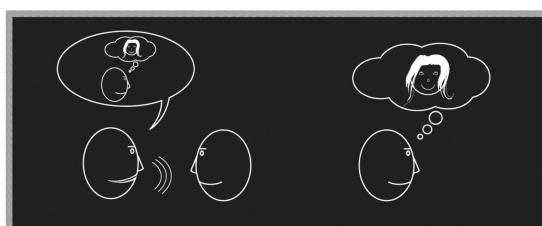
After dinner, I slept on the couch.	Preposition followed by the noun <i>dinner</i> .
After I swam ten miles, I slept on the couch.	Conjunction followed by the verb <i>swim</i> .
I studied prepositions until midnight.	Preposition followed by the noun <i>midnight</i> .
I studied prepositions until I felt tired.	Conjunction followed by the verb <i>feel</i> .

Sometimes conjunctions and prepositions can be very similar--but it is very easy to identify the difference between them (see also *Prepositions and the That-Clauses* in Chapter 6. For instance, in the following examples, the sentence in (a) uses the complex preposition BECAUSE OF, and the sentence in (b) uses the conjunction *because*:

- a) The game was cancelled **because of** the bad weather.
- b) The game was cancelled *because* the weather was bad.

## Illustrate and Explain

If you are teaching prepositions, the blackboard, a notebook, a notepad, etc. are all great resources to illustrate prepositional meanings--besides being fun. You don't need to be an expert cartoonist or designer, all you need is your imagination, a piece of chalk or a pencil to express prepositional images. Compare this amateur drawing below to its counterpart in Chapter 1. They are not really different. Pedagogically speaking, these visual resources help improve your English lessons.



Drawing of John and George talking **to** each other; they are talking **at** Jeff.

## Reading the Story

Each of the six chapters ahead brings a story that explores a number of prepositions introduced in the chapter. **Reading the Story** is a unique opportunity for you to practice the prepositional skills you have just acquired in the chapter. You may also find some additional, unmarked prepositions as

an extra bonus to test your skills. At the end of each chapter, ***Practicing the Best Scenario*** is a practical 10-question test prepared to evaluate your knowledge of the prepositions introduced in the chapter. The answers to the tests are at the end of the book.

## The Function of English Prepositions

Simply put, prepositions are used to express positions in time and space, direction, motion, or non-spatial/temporal relation, according to specific contexts.

Learning English prepositions helps students develop English proficiency in a stimulating way--despite the fact that prepositions have been considered by many as the most difficult part of speech in the English language. Fortunately, we can distinguish them by their function and organize them into specific groups of situations and contexts.

## Etymological Distinctions of the English Prepositions

English prepositions can be simple (one-word prepositions) or complex (made up of two or more words), but every preposition must be treated as a single preposition, despite its number of constituents.

### Simple Prepositions

- \* Simple: IN, ON, AT, etc.
- \* Compound: INTO (IN+TO), ONTO (ON+TO), BELOW (BE+LOW), etc.
- \* Derived from present participles: INCLUDING, CONSIDERING, FOLLOWING, etc.
- \* Derived from past participles: COME, GIVEN, GRANTED, etc.

### Complex Prepositions

- \* Complex: ACCORDING TO, IN SPITE OF, FROM UNDER, etc.
- \* Idiomatic: IN THE FACE OF, IN THE TEETH OF, WITH AN EYE TO, etc.

Note that not all the idiomatic complex prepositions are idiomatic to the same extent; some may have more or less idiomatic meaning than others. Note also that simple prepositions do not have constituents to form an idiomatic

structure of their own, but they are frequently used with other words to form idiomatic phrases. See *Prepositional Idioms & Idiomatic Prepositions* in this Introduction.

Some grammarians distinguish between *grammatical* and *lexical* uses of simple prepositions. In this vein, IN, ON, AT, etc. are considered grammatical rather than lexical because they do not carry a specific conceptual meaning, while ABOVE, BELOW, BENEATH, etc. do (Yule, 2004: 158). It is not the purpose of this book to address this distinction at a linguistic level. However, the idea of pointing out the meaning of simple prepositions is particularly interesting for beginning and intermediate non-native speakers, for whom all prepositions (should) have some kind of implicit meaning--a strategy that would facilitate comprehension and learning. For example, although AT has a somewhat vague meaning, it does show some kind of connection or proximity, especially when compared to IN and ON; in a spatial context, ON always suggests contact with some kind of surface, while BELOW expresses the idea of lower than. On the other hand, a minimum context is required in order for this strategy to be successful. As a practical example, if we use the noun *table* with these two simple prepositions, they will yield the same strength of meaning:

**on** table

**below** table

Once learners have practiced with "minimum contexts," they will acquire "degrees of suggestion" in the interpretation of isolated prepositions, which means that they will be able to allocate possible multiple meanings to these prepositions. For instance, you can "measure" your own degree of suggestion by expressing what comes to your mind when you hear or read these isolated words:

- \* UP
- \* IN
- \* ON
- \* ABOVE

However, if we do not have a context on which to rely, ON and BELOW, for example, will yield different strengths of meaning; that is, ON without a

complement will not be as expressive as BELOW without a complement. In addition, when part of a sentence, non-lexical prepositions are able to be replaced by other prepositions without causing a significant change in meaning, while lexical prepositions cannot be replaced without a shift in meaning (and harm to the sentence!).

## A Word on Compound Prepositions

Compound prepositions are simple prepositions that are formed in several ways; by prefixing *a* (Old English meaning AT, ON, IN) or *be* (Old English meaning BY) to another preposition, a noun, an adjective, or an adverb; for example:

- |           |            |
|-----------|------------|
| • around  | a+round    |
| • across  | a+cross    |
| • along   | a+long     |
| • afore   | a+fore     |
| • beneath | be+beneath |
| • beside  | be+side    |
| • below   | be+low     |
| • before  | be+fore    |

or by uniting two prepositions, a preposition and an adverb or adverbial suffix:

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| • upon       | up+on       |
| • within     | with+in     |
| • without    | with+out    |
| • toward     | to+ward     |
| • underneath | under+neath |
| • throughout | through+out |

A few have more than two compounds in their original meanings. For example:

- |                   |                  |                     |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| • alongside       | along+side       | a+long+side.        |
| • notwithstanding | not+withstanding | not+with+stand+ing. |

## A Word on Complex Prepositions

Some writers avoid using complex prepositions, explaining that they are wordy, and most of the time unnecessary. A number of grammarians even dispute their status as indivisible syntactic units. For most of them, however, complex prepositions play an indispensable role in communication, because they play the role of a single preposition in terms of meaning in a sentence. For instance, in the examples below, we could either choose the complex

prepositions BY MEANS OF and IN FRONT OF, or the simple prepositions VIA and BEFORE:

There is access **by means of** public transport.

(*There is access via public transport.*)

He was finally **in front of** the judge.

(*He was finally before the judge.*)

Complex prepositions are also known as "phrasal prepositions," as opposed to "simple" prepositions, although some linguists disagree with the term, stating that they do not behave exactly as a unit (i.e., as a single preposition), but rather as part of one or more prepositional phrases. For example:

a) **in the heat of the moment**

b) **in the heat + of the moment**

In (a), the idiomatic IN THE HEAT OF is functioning as a complex preposition (i.e., a prepositional unit), heading the prepositional phrase **in the heat of the moment**; however, in (b), grammarians and critics--who base their views on purely linguistic considerations--would say that the preposition IN is heading the prepositional phrase **in the heat**, while the preposition OF is heading the prepositional phrase **of the moment**, and a few authors would say that **in the heat of** is by itself a prepositional phrase.

English is evolving in its system and its use--with over one billion non-native speakers and speakers of English as a *lingua franca*, plus over one billion new learners since the last decade--and the introduction of new complex prepositions into the language runs parallel to this evolution. In this book, these word combinations are explored in a wide range of contexts.

## Complex Prepositions vs. Prepositional Phrases

As seen above, some writers use the terms "phrasal preposition" (i.e., "complex preposition") and "prepositional phrase" interchangeably. But they are not really interchangeable. A prepositional phrase (shown in bold in the following examples) is a phrase that is introduced by a preposition. The phrase itself does not behave like a preposition. For example:

The book is **on the table**.

In the sentence above, ***on the table*** is the prepositional phrase, which is introduced by the preposition ON and complemented with the noun phrase *the table*.

A prepositional phrase can also function as an adjective, an adverb or a noun. The prepositional phrase in the sentence below is functioning as an adjective:

Spectators were distracted by the noise **of the waterfall**.

In the example above, the prepositional phrase ***of the waterfall*** is acting as an adjective phrase, modifying the noun *noise*.

The prepositional phrase in the sentence below is functioning as an adverb:

She was happy **with her husband**.

In the example above, the prepositional phrase ***with her husband*** is acting as an adverb phrase modifying the adjective *happy*.

In the following sentence, the prepositional phrase is acting as a noun:

**Under the bridge** is the birds' nest.

In the example above, the prepositional phrase ***Under the bridge*** is acting as a noun phrase subject of the verb *is*.

A complex preposition is a preposition that consists of a group of two or more words that act as a single preposition. For example:

We went to the beach **in spite of** the rain.

In the sentence above, ***in spite of*** is the preposition.

Thus, in this book I adopt the following criterion: A complex preposition (i.e., a phrasal preposition) is a single preposition that consists of more than one word, like INSTEAD OF, IN FRONT OF, etc. A prepositional phrase is composed of a simple or a complex preposition generally followed by a noun or noun phrase; for example, ***on the table, in front of the house***.

Complex prepositions are often used in the interest of higher expressiveness, to enrich sentences, and for the purpose of variation. They are also used when designating more than one relationship between the entity and the referent. For example:

After the tornado, they came out **from under** the house.

Complex prepositions may be structured in a two-word combination of adverb or preposition plus a preposition (APART FROM, INSTEAD OF, ALONG WITH, etc.), or a participle plus a preposition (PERTAINING TO, DEPENDING ON, RELATING TO, etc.), or an adjective plus a preposition (DUE TO, CONTRARY TO, FOREIGN TO, etc.), or a few combinations of a conjunction plus a preposition (BUT FOR, EXCEPT FOR, BECAUSE OF, etc.), or a noun plus a preposition (THANKS TO, NORTH OF, BACK OF, etc.).

Multi-word complex prepositions (i.e., single prepositions made up of more than two words) always begin and end with a simple preposition, normally followed by a noun (BY COURTESY OF, IN SPITE OF, BY DINT OF, etc.). Sometimes these complex prepositions take a definite or indefinite article (IN THE CASE OF, IN THE LIGHT OF, WITH A VIEW TO, etc.).

Normally, you cannot change or reduce a commonly accepted complex preposition:

- \* instead *for* <sup>®</sup>
- \* by means *at* <sup>®</sup>
- \* *at* means of <sup>®</sup>
- \* according *on* <sup>®</sup>

## Double Prepositions

In the sense described in this book, double prepositions are a type of complex preposition that is used when a single simple preposition cannot adequately convey the intended meaning of the speaker. A double preposition often designates more than one relationship between the entity and the referent. For example:

The noise coming **from within** the vehicle.

Sometimes the first preposition of a double preposition plays the role of an adverb:

The bird flew **out among** the trees.

The hikers are coming **down from** the mountains.

In the two examples above, OUT and DOWN are used as adverbs.

## Compound Complex Prepositions

Some writers term the complex prepositions written as three words "compound complex prepositions." Consider the following examples:

a) according **to**

b) **in** reference **to**

In the examples above, only the complex preposition in (b) would be a compound complex preposition (**in** + *reference to*). However, this book treats both cases synonymously, as complex prepositions.

## Prepositional Idioms & Idiomatic Prepositions

An "idiom" is a commonly used phrase or expression that has a meaning other than the literal representation of its individual words. Idioms are not exclusive to the prepositional world. For instance, there is no preposition in the idiomatic expressions below:

The old man *kicked the bucket*.

(*i.e., the old man died*)

It's *raining cats and dogs*.

(*i.e., it is raining heavily*)

However, the prepositional world is also rich in idiomatic expressions and word combinations known as "prepositional idioms," "idiomatic prepositional phrases," or "idiomatic complex prepositions." These combinations of words--often treated as *phrases*--are sometimes generically referred to as "idiomatic prepositions"; however, it is not rare to find literature describing practically *all* idiomatic uses of prepositions as "prepositional idioms." In this book, for the sake of methodology, I try to distinguish them from each other.

For some writers, prepositional idioms are simply another definition for complex prepositions; others say that they always begin with a simple preposition followed by a noun or noun phrase (e.g., **under discussion**, **on duty**, etc.); for example, in the sentence:

Right now the topic is **under discussion**.

the noun *discussion* is preceded by the preposition UNDER in a relation of dependence, and the two words would form the prepositional idiom ***under discussion***, which, in fact, is an "idiomatic prepositional phrase."

Some grammars state that prepositional idioms can begin with a *verb*, including a *participle* (ABIDE BY, TAKE OFF, CONCERNED WITH), with an *adjective* (ANXIOUS ABOUT), or with a *noun* (APPROVAL OF). There are certain expressions (not always yielding a real or strong idiomatic sense) which are formed with the help of prepositions after these classes of words--without these combinations, they would be meaningless. Many of these combinations are prepositional verbs, phrasal verbs, complex prepositions, or simply part of a larger idiomatic expression--but they do not function as heads of a prepositional idiom or phrase; these idiomatic uses of prepositions are quite popular in the English language. For example:

She is *angry at* her car.

The preposition AT in *She is angry at her car* has an idiomatic relation to the adjective *angry*. Without the adjective we would have:

She is **at** her car.

and with another preposition, the sentence would have a completely different meaning. For example:

She is angry **in** her car.

Without any preposition, the adjective would not make sense, and the sentence would be ungrammatical:

She is angry **her** car. ⊗

In the example above, the combination of *angry* + AT would form the idiomatic (adjective) phrase ***angry at her car***. However, *angry at* is not really yielding an idiomatic expression in the sense that, without the combination of the two words, the meaning of the adjective would remain the same:

She is angry.

Moreover, here the preposition is introducing the noun phrase *her car* and not the adjective *angry*, which is combining with the preposition AT to form the

prepositional phrase (i.e., the prepositional phrase here is *at her car* and not *angry at*). The same rationale goes for a great number of combinations, such as *envious of*, *free from*, *capable of*, *frighten by*, etc., as opposed to the example below, where the preposition FROM introduces the noun *scratch* forming the idiomatic prepositional phrase ***from scratch***:

He built his boat **from scratch**.

An "idiomatic complex preposition," as the term implies, is a complex preposition that yields a strong idiomatic sense. For example, the complex preposition IN THE TEETH OF has a sense of "against" or "despite the difficulty of" and has nothing to do with the meaning of the noun *teeth*, as in:

The country is **in the teeth of** recession.

whereas the complex preposition WITH THE EXCEPTION OF suggests a strong literal reading. For example, the sentence:

All the officers, **with the exception of** the generals, went to the battle field.

tells us that the generals did not go to the battle field with the other officers.

Many complex prepositions are idiomatic--some of them are not or are less idiomatic. For instance, the following example in (a) is non-idiomatic, or less idiomatic than the example in (b), because its meaning is close to--if not very--literal, while the example in (b) shows an idiomatic complex preposition:

- a) I am writing **in reference to** your request.
- b) Gulf beach resorts persist **in the face of** the oil spill.

Sometimes non-idiomatic complex prepositions are used in figurative sentences:

The police are **on top of** the situation.

In the example above, ***on top of the situation*** has a figurative sense.

Some writers analyze the aspects of "fossilization"<sup>2</sup> of some complex prepositions; that is, the fact that we cannot normally change or reduce a complex preposition also makes them idiomatic in the sense that they have a

fixed word order. For instance, we could not change the preposition OF or remove the preposition ON and still preserve the meaning of ON TOP OF in the examples below:

The police are **on top to** the situation. ☺

The police are **top of** the situation. ☺

These complex preposition structures are often described as "prepositional idioms." For instance, using examples with IN THE TEETH OF, we could say:

The country is **in the teeth of** recession.

but it would not make sense to say one of the following:

The country is **in** the recession's teeth. ☺

The country is **in the teeth** recession. ☺

The country is **the teeth of** recession. ☺

Simple prepositions can also be used idiomatically *and* in a figurative sense:

The president insisted **on** a solution.

In the example above, the preposition ON has an idiomatic relation to the verb *insist* (e.g., *insisted a solution* or *insisted in* would not make sense), and the prepositional phrase **on a solution** has a figurative meaning because "a solution" (meaning "the act of solving a problem") cannot act as a physical surface.

Thus, a "prepositional idiom," as understood by some writers, is an idiom that begins with a simple preposition, whose word order is analyzed from the point of view of the relation of its fixed constituents (such as **in front of**, **by virtue of**, etc.) and not as a complex preposition--a syntactic unit related to the (external) object of the preposition; in other words, the noun, pronoun, noun phrase, gerund, gerund phrase or noun clause that comes *after* the phrase. An "idiomatic complex preposition" is a preposition formed by a phrase (such as **by virtue of**, or **due to**) which has an idiomatic interpretation. When the head of the phrase is a preposition (e.g., **by virtue of**), it is often also called a prepositional idiom. An "idiomatic prepositional phrase" always

begins with a preposition. Some phrases, however, present a more figurative meaning; for example, **at work**, **at war**, **on foot**, etc., are more literal than **under discussion**, **from scratch**, **on the other hand**, etc. Often called "idiomatic prepositions" or "prepositional idioms" in the specialized literature, the combination of a verb, a participle, a noun or an adjective with a preposition (such as **agree with**, **addicted to**, **approval of**, **capable of**, etc.) help build idioms whose meanings are not predictable from the meaning of their individual components.

Regardless of the methodology used in this book, there are many writers who prefer to use the generic term "prepositional idioms" to identify these phrases. Therefore, since this book is not about idioms, if you are preparing for an accredited English exam, consider all available information relevant to your particular needs.

## The Object of the Preposition

A prepositional phrase always has a complement, known as the object of the preposition, in the form of a noun, pronoun, noun phrase, gerund, gerund phrase or noun clause. For instance, in the sentence below:

**According to** reports, the man was rich.

the two-word combination ACCORDING TO is a complex preposition, and the noun *reports* is the object of the preposition. In the following example, the preposition is preceding a pronoun:

There is little space **between us**.

In the example below,

The cat is **under** the bed.

the preposition UNDER is followed by the noun phrase *the bed*.

In the following sentence,

The horse jumped **over** the fence **of** the farm.

the preposition OVER is followed by the noun phrase *the fence*, and the preposition OF is followed by the noun phrase *the farm*.

Sometimes a preposition is followed by an adjective modifier before the

noun:

She is sitting **at** *the glass table*.

where AT is the preposition and *glass* is the modifier of the object *the table*.

In the sentence below, the object of the preposition is a gerund:

I spent the summer **without** *swimming*.

In the following examples, in (a) a simple preposition is followed by a gerund phrase; in (b), a gerund phrase is preceded by a complex preposition:

a) I am looking forward **to** *swimming this summer*.

b) **On top of** *running a business*, she tries to be a perfect mom and wife.

The object of a preposition can also be an entire noun clause:

My boss and I had a discussion **regarding** *what will change the company*.

Many complex prepositions include a prepositional object:

The two Koreas were **on the brink of** *war*.

In the example above, ON THE BRINK OF is a complex preposition and the noun *war* is the prepositional object; however, analyzing the structure of the complex preposition (like in IN THE HEAT OF), some grammars would say that *the brink* is also the object of the preposition ON and *war* is the object of the preposition OF.

Sometimes a pronoun can play the role of the object of a preposition placed at the end of the sentence (see *Ending a Sentence or Clause with a Preposition*):

a) I found the preposition book *that* everybody is talking **about**.

b) I found the preposition book everybody is talking **about**.

Note that the pronoun *that* is repeated in an elliptical form (i.e., it is missing in (b)), but it is still the object of the preposition ABOUT. In the example below,

*What else could you ask for?*

the interrogative clause *What else* is the object of the preposition FOR.

## Participial Prepositions

As seen earlier, participial prepositions are participles that lost their verb-nature functioning as a preposition; that is, in some cases, a preposition must be distinguished from its gerund-participial verb-form. For example, the word **counting**, as used in (a), is a preposition; *Counting* used in (b) is a present participle verb:

- a) There are five people in the car, **counting** the driver.
- b) *Counting* his chickens before selling them, he realized that ten chickens were missing.

The problem with these participles is that (1) they can be misread as a simple participle; and (2) you have to watch for "dangling modifiers." For more details and examples, see SPEAKING OF, BASED ON, ON THE BASIS OF, and BARRING.

Do not mistake a gerund (noun in the *-ing* form) for a participle phrase. In *he loves counting his chickens*, the word *counting* is a gerund.

Sometimes we use a verb in the *-ing* form as a preposition to distinguish a continuous or temporary action from a spatial or a temporal domain. For example, in the sentences below, the word *following* is a verb in the present participle form, while the word **Following** is acting as a participial preposition.

Somebody is *following* me.

**Following** the meeting, we will be going out for dinner.

The following sentences show the word **given** as an example of a participial preposition and *given* as a past participle verb:

I have decided to accept the job offer, **given** the economic downturn.

All sorts of job offers were *given* to me after I graduated!

## Using Prepositions

Frequently--especially when we deal with non-spatial issues--personal choice based on rhythm and emphasis of the phrase plays an important role in deciding which preposition to apply in a sentence. For example, we could

chose between two or more simple prepositions:

decide **on** this matter

decide **upon** this matter

Or we could choose between two or more complex prepositions:

I am writing **with regard to** your request.

I am writing **in reference to** your request.

However, when dealing with spatial contexts in the physical world, visual objects have a substantial impact on our basic perception, and the choice of preposition must respond to this perception. For example:

The book is **on** the floor.

The book is **upon** the floor. ☺

The same rationale can be extended to temporal relations. For instance, in the first example below, I mean that I can start and finish the work "during the period of time of one day" and not on a specific day of the week:

I can do all the work **in** a day.

I can do all the work **on** a day. ☺

## Ending a Sentence or Clause with a Preposition

Some teachers suggest that, whenever possible, especially in formal settings, we should avoid ending a sentence with a preposition. However, as we have seen earlier in an example of a prepositional verb, this is **really** not a problem--as long as you know what you are doing. For instance, there are certain situations in which ending a sentence with a preposition is simply impossible. For example, it would be grammatically impossible to end the sentence below with the preposition FOR:

Thank you **for** listening.

Thank you listening **for**. ☺

Nevertheless, ending a sentence with a preposition is perfectly acceptable--in fact, even recommended in some cases. The general rule is that, if the verb in

the relative clause (generally introduced by the relative pronoun *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *that*, or *which*) needs a preposition, we can put it at the end of the clause. For example, both sentences below are correct:

This is the book we are going to talk **about**.

This is the book **about** which we are going to talk.

Prepositions are often placed at the end of *wh*-questions:

Where did you come **from**?

What are you waiting **for**?

in passive-voice constructions:

She doesn't like to be stared **at**.

Your meal has already been paid **for**.

and in infinitive structures:

We have nothing to hide **from**.

The children had lots of toys to play **with**.

The examples in (a) and (b) are using the compound relative pronouns *whichever* and *whomever*; the sentence in (c) is using *whoever* with a phrasal verb:

a) You can choose whichever sport you are interested **in**.

b) Whomever you work **for** will have to pay you,

c) He was thankful to whoever *backed him up*.

## How the Prepositions Are Described in This Book

In most cases, the preposition entries are explained with the help of one or more simple or complex prepositions. For example:

### IN TERMS OF: with regard to; in relation to; considering

Some entries are explained by one or more phrases that have a prepositional sense:

## **IN IMITATION OF: as a copy of**

Sometimes the entry is explained with the help of a clause:

## **THROUGHOUT: everywhere in a place, region or object**

In some cases, the prepositions that can operate in more than one domain are introduced in the chapter covering its primary sense, including examples of its secondary senses. For example, AROUND, which is primarily a directional preposition, is also active in the locational and temporal domains; however, it is only introduced in Chapters 1 and 5--with the locational examples presented in Chapter 1 due to the similarities between the two classes of prepositions.

## **A Word on Spatial and Non-Spatial Prepositions**

Generally speaking, prepositions can be spatial (IN, ON, TO, BELOW, IN FRONT OF, etc.) or non-spatial (GIVEN, CONSIDERING, REGARDING, IN TERMS OF, EXCEPT, etc.). More specifically, all prepositions of direction, orientation, location, transportation and time are related, one way or another, to space. For instance, if you use the preposition TO to say that someone went from *A to B*, you are implying that someone moved through or across space from *A* to *B*. We use the preposition IN to say that *C* is *in D* because *D* is an object, a place or a location that contains *C*. On the other hand, when we say that we have to think *in terms of logic*, we do not convey any idea related to space. In addition, spatial prepositions can also be used figuratively or to designate metaphorical space. For instance, we may say that someone is *in your heart* or that someone is *in love*. The figurative senses of spatial prepositions are exemplified throughout the first five chapters of this book.

## Chapter 1 : Prepositions of Direction

In the first part of this chapter, the directional prepositions are used to describe a *change in position, motion, direction*, or they may convey an *intention*. Most importantly, by knowing how to identify the correct directional preposition, you will be able to set them apart from the other spatial prepositions in order to formulate grammatically correct sentences and utterances.

Here, we will carefully examine truly directional prepositions, distinguishing them from the prepositions used in other situations.

### Direction and Goal

#### TO: direction, movement, and reception

Directional prepositions may or may not have a motion component. For instance, if you talk TO your teacher in the classroom and he or she responds, then you have established a complete communication channel, where your intention to talk to the teacher was present (the direction), your voice reached the teacher's ears (the motion of the sound waves--not to be confused with the action verb *talk*), and he or she corresponded to your intention by talking back to you (the reception). It is the same phenomenon that happens when you give a book TO someone or throw a ball TO your friend. The following examples have the components **direction + motion + reception**, forming what I term "the three connection phases" of the preposition TO:

- a) John is talking **to** Mary.
- b) The teacher is talking **to** the class.
- c) The pope spoke **to** thousands of people.
- d) Carlos is throwing the ball **to** Alicia.
- e) Chang is giving the book **to** May-Ling.
- f) Henry flew from New York **to** London.

In (a), John is directing his attention to Mary (the direction), emitting sound waves (the motion), and Mary is acknowledging the communication (the reception). However, Mary does not necessarily need to respond by speaking,

as long as she is participating in the event; that is, as long as she is voluntarily paying attention to John. The examples in (b) and (c) also show direction and movement, but different degrees of reception (i.e., although the class must be paying attention to the teacher, the students are not required to respond by speaking; the thousands of people who were listening to the pope could not possibly speak back to him). In (d), Carlos is directing the ball to Alicia (the direction), the ball is flying towards her (the motion), and she will or is ready to get the ball (the reception). In (e), Chang is showing his clear intention to give the book to May-Ling (the direction), in fact giving her the book (the motion), while she acknowledges it (the reception). In (f), Henry took off from New York to London (the direction), the airplane flew all the way to England (the motion) and then landed in London (the reception). See also WITH in Chapter 3.

Now consider the two sentences below:

- a) I am tired. I am going home now.
- b) I am tired. I am going **to** my house now.

Note that in sentence (a) the preposition TO was not necessary. In (b), the preposition TO is there, indicating the intention/direction of the speaker. What is the difference?

The word *home* used in (a) is an adverb of place, which is self-indicative of its function. Here, *home* is the same as *homeward* (equivalent to *toward home*, i.e., in the direction of my house). Other equivalent words are: *backward*, *forward*, *southward*, *onward*, *outward*, *rightward*, *eastward*, *downward*, *upward*, *westward*, *inward*, *sideward*, *northward*, and *leftward*. These words function with the suffix *-ward* denoting spatial or temporal direction. For example, the word TO plus the suffix *-ward* makes the new preposition TOWARD. Compare the following sentences to see the use of the suffix *-ward* without the preposition TO and the same idea expressed with TO:

- a) To reach the island we will have to sail southward.
- b) To reach the island we will have to sail **to** the south.
- c) If you want to reach the bank, you should go left.

In (a), the adverb *southward* (the word *south* plus the suffix *-ward*) expresses

its complete sense of direction. The suffix *-ward* replaces the need for the preposition TO. In (b), TO is used to indicate a direction and *the south* is the object of the preposition. The sentence in (c) has the same "shortcut" as the example of *home* (the word *left* meaning *leftward*--i.e., in the direction of the left). In the sentence:

What did Mary do **to** John?

we presuppose that Mary did "something" to John, but we do not need to explain exactly what she has done in order to be grammatically competent at sentence level. The sentence above apparently does not show the *three connection phases* introduced in this chapter because there is no apparent reception, physical movement or direction--but we know that there were *intention, action* and a *reception* in the form of a *consequence*. Thus, the example above could well fall into the concept of the three connection phases described earlier if we realized that, in fact, *she did something to John* that somehow *affected* him. However, there are other "locational" implications regarding some possible answers to this question, which are discussed in Chapter 3. (See TO also used as a temporal preposition in Chapter 5.)

TO is used to designate a variety of physical, figurative, and abstract connections--including response or reaction (a) and (d), *restriction* (b), *achievement* or *goal* (c), *comparison* (e), *relationship* (f) and (g), and *direction* (h):

- a) She sang **to** the tune of the pianist.
- b) Entrance is forbidden **to** strangers.
- c) Her wedding was planned **to** perfection.
- d) They danced **to** the rhythm of the tango.
- e) The board of directors voted 5 **to** 0 against the merger.
- f) He is a special advisor **to** the president on foreign trade.
- g) She was born **to** a Native American family.
- h) The stress of their career drove them **to** divorce.

TO is often used in idiomatic prepositional phrases:

His lessons are clear, **to the point**, and easy to understand.

Business relations can be influenced **to a certain extent** by economic factors.

The idiomatic phrase **to the point** means that his lessons are also *relevant*; **to a certain extent** means that the business relations can be *partly* influenced.

The preposition TO is also used to introduce abstract nouns in expressions that are not necessarily figurative or idiomatic:

Disposition of mind is necessary **to** happiness.

See also UP and DOWN in Chapter 2 for additional directional meanings.

## **FROM: the origin of a direction**

Also FRAE. Archaic or regional.

FROM is basically a preposition of source (i.e., related to a location). It is also a directional preposition in the sense that when an entity starts its movement towards a referent it does so FROM a starting point. It would be impossible to go TO a place without departing FROM an initial point, as shown in the sentence below:

She went **from** New York **to** London.

However, FROM cannot always be used as the converse of TO in non-spatial situations. For instance, FROM would not fit into the following sentence:

She did something **to** John.

Conversely, TO cannot always be used as a pair with FROM. For instance, we would not be able to use the preposition TO in the examples below:

How can I remove mold **from** my house?

She is arriving **from** London this morning.

The trout was taken **frae** the waters of Ayrshire.

The flight **from** London departed last night and will arrive at 7 a.m.

FROM used in the figurative and abstract world:

**From** my point of view the situation is different.

In essence, Fred is quite different **from** his father.

I am trying to understand the world **from** his perspective.

**From** food to books, they carry everything in their backpacks.

Please, refrain **from** smoking in the building.

See Chapter 3 for more details on the preposition FROM used to indicate an original location or source; see FROM also as a preposition of time in Chapter 5.

## **UNTO: TO**

Archaic or regional.

The two examples below show UNTO used in the physical and abstract worlds. The sentences would also be correct with the preposition TO:

They rolled the stone **unto** the door.

Disposition of mind is necessary **unto** happiness.

UNTO is also used as a temporal preposition. See Chapter 5.

## **AT: only direction and intention is guaranteed!**

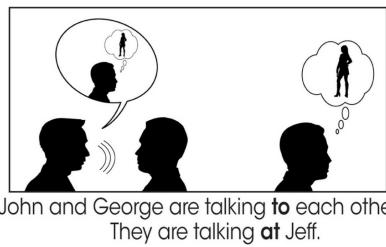
The preposition AT in the context of directional prepositions (AT is also applied in locational, temporal and non-spatial situations) lacks at least one of the components that otherwise would help form the three connection phases discussed earlier: motion and/or reception. For instance, in the sentences:

- a) John is talking **at** Mary.
- b) John is smiling **at** Mary.
- c) John is throwing the ball **at** Mary.

the use of the preposition AT denotes John's intention (the direction) toward Mary. However, in (a), John is talking without letting Mary speak, or Mary is not engaging in a conversation with John (no reception), who is actually talking ABOUT her (and not TO her). In (b), the use of the prepositional verb **smile at** tells us that Mary may or may not have noticed John's smile, but there is no motion transporting John's smile from his mouth to Mary's eye (like there is with the sound waves when we speak and someone hears and processes the sound before responding). In (c), Mary is not aware or not

expecting the ball being thrown in her direction by John. Here, again, there is no reception.

The following figure depicts two men talking TO each other AT a third one, who is thinking ABOUT a girl. Note that you can *talk to* someone when you carry on a conversation, or *talk at* or *about* someone who is not aware or participating in the conversation, but you cannot use the mental verb *think* to "think at" something or someone, because this verb class normally does not allow directional attributes (on the other hand, you could use "think of," for example).



John and George are talking **to** each other.  
They are talking **at** Jeff.

AT conveys a sense of "detachment" (when compared to TO, which carries a sense of cooperation between an entity and its referent), linking ideas as a directional preposition with an *imprecise* relation to its referent; sometimes this relation tends to be hostile. The notion of "imprecision" is also observed in the examples of the preposition AT of location. Consider these examples of AT and its detachment attribute:

- a) Cindy is shouting **at** Joe.
- b) Marcus is shooting **at** the target.
- c) The child is looking **at** the toy.
- d) She took no offense **at** his manner.
- e) a glimpse **at** happiness

In the five examples above, the referents *Joe*, *the target*, *the toy*, *his manners* and *happiness* are not necessarily "receiving" any action from Cindy, Marcus, the child, the woman, or from a glimpse. In (a), Joe is not *participating* in a conversation with Cindy (and he may not even want to hear her aggressive shouts). Similarly, in (b) and (c), both the target and the toy cannot obviously *expect* anything from Marcus and the child. The results here could be no specific communication between Cindy and Joe; Marcus may or may not hit

the target, and nothing is going to happen to the toy just because the child is appreciating it. In (d), his manners are a part of his behavior that was *perceived* by the woman. In (e), AT is introducing the abstract noun *happiness* using the same rationale of (c).

In the sentence below, there is a connection between the actress and the crowd:

The actress waved **to** the crowd.

In the example above, the actress *responded to* a stimulus created by her popularity among her fans, who *expected* to see her; that is, to *connect* with her in a certain way--in this case by visual contact. It is not relevant who initiates the event--in this particular case, the *gesture*; the action will always be a response TO a stimulus; in other words, if the actress sees the crowd first, she will still be *responding to* a stimulus from the crowd. On the other hand, the two examples below may not be conveying any connection at all with the actress:

The crowd is clapping **at** the famous actress.

The crowd is waving **at** the famous actress.

In both examples above, the fans may have been outside of the theater when the actress arrived, but we cannot be sure that she actually saw (connected with) them.

Now, compare the following and pay attention to their referents; in this case, the words *myself* and *everyone*. Note that I am using TO and AT with the same verb:

I was so happy, I was smiling **to** myself.

I was so happy, I was smiling **at** everyone.

The combination of the verb *smile* and the referent *myself* makes clear that I have to use the preposition TO, because there is obviously a complete connection between my own smile and me; that is, we can identify *the three connection phases* of the action: direction, movement and reception represented by my own intention, thought and fulfillment. The combination of the verb *smile* with the preposition AT and the referent *everyone* suggests that "I am not sure that everyone noticed my smile."

AT is often used in idiomatic prepositional phrases:

There is a lot **at stake**, and there is no room for error.

Some wrong decisions may put lives **at risk**.

## **INTO & OUT OF: direction toward or away from a container**

INTO implies movement in the direction of a container and the entry in the container. OUT OF is a preposition of source that functions as the converse of INTO. For instance, if you are IN your office it is because first you came INTO the office, and if you are not in your office anymore it is because you went OUT OF it.<sup>3</sup> For example:

The bears came **out of** the forest.

She squeezed **into** the crowded elevator.

We noticed a smell of smoke coming **out of** the house.

Get the shrimp **out of** the water and **into** the freezer!

She went **out of** the country to teach English.

We also use INTO to indicate a place of arrival, or where a road, route, etc. leads:

The trail led **into** the river.

Figuratively, or in the abstract world, we could also say:

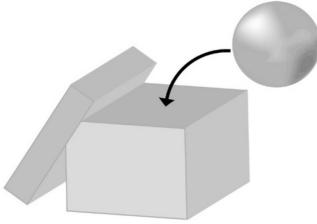
He won a prize for his research **into** economics.

This software transforms your computer **into** a piano.

They were born **into** a poor family.

She went **into** a depression.

He went **into** surgery.



The ball is going **into** the box.

See INTO also in Chapter 5. See OUT in Chapter 3 and OUT OF in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

### **ONTO & OFF: direction toward or away from a surface**

ONTO implies movement in the direction of a surface, regardless of its shape or position. For instance, when I arrive in my office every morning, the first thing I do is to toss my keys ONTO the desk. Usually, the keys do not fall OFF the desk. However, sometimes the result is not so precise, and the keys fall ON the floor! Wait a minute! Why did I use *keys onto the desk* and *fall on the floor*? I chose these prepositions according to the *result* of the action.

### **The Result Is Important**

Actually, I could have said *fall onto the floor*, but I preferred to imagine the keys already on the floor when I said it (with ONTO you can also imagine the keys flying in the direction of the desk before they actually reach the top of the desk). It all depends on the result of the action. Take, for instance, the three sentences below:

- a) The plane flew **onto** the runway smoothly.
- b) The airplane just landed **on** the runway.
- c) The plane drifted **off** the runway **onto** the grass.

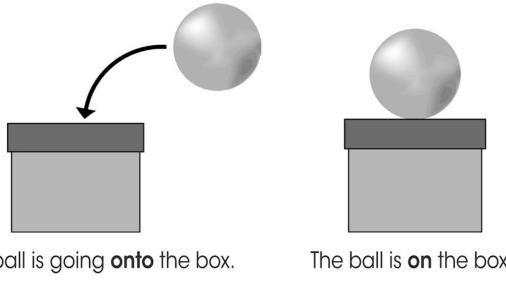
In (a), I used ONTO with the help of the verb *fly*, which does not show a completed action (although the plane flew in the direction of a surface, it was still flying toward that surface before actually landing on it). In (b), you simply cannot use ONTO because the verb *land* shows that the action of landing the airplane was completed. In (c), the plane drifted away from the runway before stopping on the grass verge.

In the example below, we could use either ON or ONTO with different results:

a) The father lifted the child **onto** his shoulders.

b) The father lifted the child **on** his shoulders.

In (a), the father lifted his child from a lower position, say, from the floor or from the baby pram, and sat her on his shoulders; in (b), the father lifted her to a higher position using his shoulders as support (the child was already on his shoulders).



ONTO is often used in the sense of attachment, pressure or awareness:

Only one news channel was **onto** the case.

The boss was **onto** me because my work was behind schedule.

Using spatial prepositions in non-spatial, figurative or abstract senses poses some additional challenges. For instance, consider the following two examples of ONTO used in a non-physical sense:

I've stumbled **onto** a problem.

He spent the last minutes putting the finishing touches **onto** his plan.

Now, compare the sentences above with the examples below using INTO:

Many times, new insights **into** a problem occur at an unconscious level.

It is essential to organize your thoughts **into** a plan.

Defining the abstract nouns *problem* and *plan* as having a sense of surface (therefore used with ONTO), and a sense of container (therefore used with INTO), will depend on the speaker's personal view of the specific context. For instance, we may stumble ONTO a problem when we *encounter* a problem (which is not the same as *solving* the problem by getting INTO it). See OFF in Chapters 3 and 4; see more of ONTO in Chapter 5.

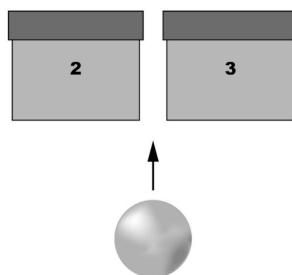
## TOWARD: in the direction of

Also TOWARDS.

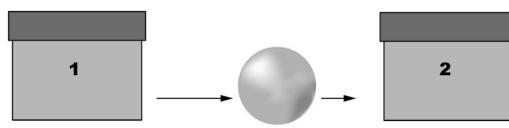
TOWARD differs from the preposition TO because it always has a two-connection phase. TOWARD is also "less precise" than TO. For instance, while TO shows direction, movement and reception, TOWARD suggests only direction or direction *and* movement (in the direction of a goal). Compare the following sentences:

- a) Ahmed flew from New York **to** London.
- b) Wang Lee flew **towards** London but landed in Crawley.

In (a), the speaker wants to mean that Ahmed's final destiny was London, while in (b) the speaker was not really worried about Wang Lee's final destination (which could be Crawley or London). Now compare the two following figures. Note that, in the figure below, the ball is going TOWARD the boxes, but we don't know exactly which box will be its final destination; the next figure shows that the ball is going from box number 1 TO box number 2 (i.e., the speaker must know that there will be a reception):



The ball is going **toward** boxes 2 and 3.



The ball is going **from** box 1 **to** box 2.

The *movement* I describe in the three connection phases is always implicit in the sentence--it does not necessarily need to have been accomplished to meet the definition of the three (or two) phases. For instance, you may say:

Ahmed *flew* from New York **to** London.

Ahmed *will fly* from New York **to** London.

and the meaning of TO will still be the same. However, with TOWARD things are a little different because it does not require the reception (the accomplishment) phase of TO or the motion of AT. Compare these three examples:

- a) He looked **toward** his wife.
- b) He flew **toward** London.
- c) He flew **to** London.

In (a), he simply looked in her direction. In (b), he flew in the direction of London (but nothing guarantees that he actually landed in London), while in (c) there is a sense of accomplishment. Now consider the two following sentences:

Martina gave the book **to** Dimitri.

Martina gave the book **toward** Dimitri. ☺

Note that the verb *give* helps the meaning of the sentence because it requires completion, which is possible with TO but impossible with TOWARD.

TOWARDS is often used in the figurative and abstract senses:

I am working hard **towards** a good result.

Parents are always protective **towards** their children.

We shall direct our attention **towards** the future.

See also Chapter 5 for examples of TOWARD as a temporal preposition.

## Other Directional Situations

In this section, we deal with a different set of directional prepositions. The reason I separated them from the first set is that they never expect a reception "on the other side" of the referent; in other words, you only need one entity and one referent. For instance, if you say that **X** went from **Y to Z**, you mean that **X** is an entity and that **Y** and **Z** are the referents. But if you say that **X** went **across Z**, then **X** is the entity and **Z** is its only referent. Spatial and geometric thinking are essential if you want to learn and ultimately acquire English prepositions.

For example, let us compare TO and ALONG. We know that if you travel from New York TO London, there will be a change of position of someone (you) from one place (New York) to another (London). However, if I say:

I strolled on Park Lane, which runs **along** Hyde Park.

I mean that I walked on a street named Park Lane, which runs *parallel* to Hyde Park. Here, I am not worried about a particular change in position but about the *direction* of the street relative to another referent (in this case, the park). I did not change streets (I remained on Park Lane all the time). In this example, I am the agent, Park Lane is playing the role of an entity (as in the question "*Where is Park Lane?*"), and Hyde Park is playing the role of a referent (in the answer "*It runs along Hyde Park!*"). It is important, in this case, that the entity and the referent (the street and the park) co-exist parallel *in length*. For instance, if you find a ball lying on the street, although grammatically correct, you should not say:

There is a ball **along** Hyde Park. ☺

## ALONG: direction of a length

However, following the discussion above, we do not need two parallel referents (i.e., an entity parallel to its referent) in order to use the preposition ALONG. For example:

- a) I strolled **along** Ocean Front Walk last night.
- b) This morning I walked **along** the beach.

In (a), I walked a *certain extension* of the Venice Beach promenade last night. In (b), this morning I walked a certain extension ON the beach itself. In both cases I walked in the *direction of the length* of the two referents, regardless of their orientation. The following figure shows a view from above of eight balls ALONG a line.

Although more akin to a dynamic interpretation, the figure shows ALONG as a preposition of direction *and* place used in the sense of the locational BESIDE, but on or following an imaginary path that runs parallel to something with a linear extent.

There are 8 balls **along** the line.



The locational extension of ALONG allows for the use of different static referents:

He lives **along** the river with his wife and a dog.

The houses are scattered **along** the road.

ALONG used outside the physical world (often used in the temporal sense):

He took us through a journey **along** his career.

There are several challenges faced by an enterprise **along** its growth trajectory.

See ALONG also in Chapter 5.

### **ALONG OF: along**

Also LONG OF. Archaic or regional.

ALONG OF is seldom used in spoken discourse nowadays:

The trail is located **along of** the Santa Ana River.

We drove at the foot of the cliffs **along of** the winding road.

ALONG OF can also be used as a preposition of location or in the sense of BECAUSE OF or THROUGH (see more examples in Chapter 3).

### **IN THE PATH OF: on the same route of**

The complex preposition IN THE PATH OF can be used in literal or figurative contexts:

The city is putting bicycles **in the path of** motorists.

These areas lie directly **in the path of** expansion of the city.

### **AROUND & ROUND: on all sides of; a contour; a detour**

AROUND (American English) and ROUND (chiefly British English) mean "encircling," a direction that *contours* or *surrounds* a referent on all sides or just in part. AROUND has a sense similar to ALONG for circular or curved trajectories--including different angle turns--and may be used regardless of the shape, orientation and volume of the referent. For example:

Walk **around** the lake.

Circle **around** the cube.

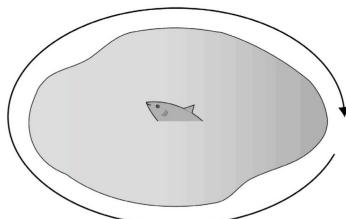
The newsstand is **around** the corner.

I swam 40 loops **around** the Olympic pool.

Also used as a preposition of location to indicate one or more static entities surrounding, near or in the vicinity of a referent:

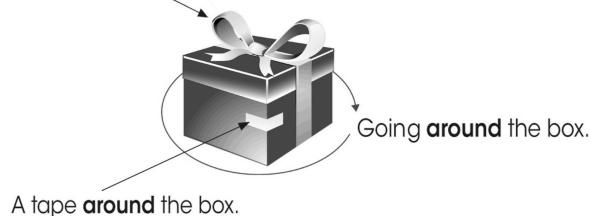
The bike trail is **around** the lake.

You can find hotels **around** the lake.



Going **around** the lake.

A ribbon **around** the box.



For some speakers, however, ROUND does not always mean "around," despite their frequent interchangeability. For instance, you can use ROUND to distinguish partial contour movements from complete encircling movements. For example:

a) The thief ran **round** the corner.

b) He had to drive **round** the lake to go to the park.

In (a), ROUND and AROUND are pretty much interchangeable. However, there are those who prefer to use ROUND for the same reason explained in (b). In (b), the speaker used ROUND to distinguish the trajectory to go to the park from the complete 360-degree trajectory designated by AROUND. Using this criterion, the choice of ROUND and AROUND would not cause confusion:

Going round the lake - A detour--the trajectory continues away from the lake.

Going around the lake - A 360-degree path. The trajectory ends near or where it began.

In this vein--and, again, despite the fact that these two prepositions are normally interchangeable--the additional examples below explore this rationale:

They sailed **round** Cape Horn to the Pacific.

He poked his head **round** the door to see what was going on in the room.

Everyone sat **round** the only TV in the house to watch the movie.

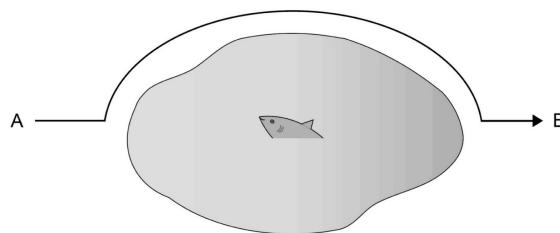
We are in the south. If you want to go north you must go **round** that mountain.

The road is closed. You will have to go **round** this stretch on the parallel road.

Consider a campfire and a home fireplace. In order to distinguish AROUND from ROUND, the choice of prepositions for these two examples could be:

We all sat **around** the fire to sing.

We sat **round** the fireplace to watch TV.



Driving **round** the lake from A to B.

ROUND is more often used than ROUND in vaguer contexts in the sense of ABOUT, meaning "on all or several sides of a place," "somewhere in or

near," "from place to place or in various points of a place," or "approximately," as in:

There was a series of framed photographs **around** the wall.

I am usually **around** the office from 8 to 5 every day.

The children are playing **around** the house.

The band is traveling **around** the country.

This will cost you **around** \$50 per month.

## AROUND and ROUND outside the physical world:

He likes to remember the adventures that revolved **around** his life.

You need to go **round** the problem and get the job done!

Many people love to navigate **around** the internet.

See more uses of AROUND and ROUND in Chapter 5.

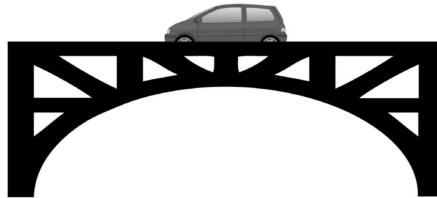
## ACROSS: from one side to the other

The preposition ACROSS means, literally, "from one side to the other of something (generally in a two-dimensional space)." In a sense, this preposition may require movement. However, it differs from the directional preposition TO in a very basic aspect: TO specifies movement from point A to point B (from one referent to another), while ACROSS requires movement *over* or *in relation to* the same referent. For instance, compare the two examples below:

She flew **from** New York **to** London.

He drove **across** the bridge.

TO requires the determination of a source, an action and a destination, while ACROSS only requires an action.



Driving **across** the bridge.

The same way you can drive ACROSS the bridge, you can drive ACROSS the river that runs under the bridge, and the bridge itself is located (static) ACROSS the river. For example, if you ever visit Thailand you will be able to see the real bridge over the Khwae Yai River, then whistle the famous tune and say:

The bridge **across** the river Kwai has twelve arches.

We use ACROSS to say that something is located in many or every part of a large area (as in "from one point to another in different directions"), or that sometimes spreads or occupies part of an area or crosses some kind of surface. For example:

Voters **across** the nation will elect a new president.

My company has more than 100 offices **across** the U.S.

They were sitting at the wooden dining table **across** the room.

The president was wearing the presidential sash **across** his chest.

As a personal example, I used the preposition IN to write the following sentence, which was quickly edited to ACROSS. Compare the two sentences:

These types of dance were spread **in** the entire continent.

These types of dance were spread **across** the entire continent.

**ACROSS** in the figurative and abstract senses:

She looked me in the eye with a huge smile **across** her face.

Using cloud computing, my files are updated **across** all my devices.

Communication **across** cultures is complex but vital for business relations.

ACROSS can be considered both a preposition of direction and orientation.

## **ASLANT: across in an oblique or diagonal direction**

ASLANT describes an oblique or diagonal position of an entity relative to a referent:

The child lay **aslant** the bed.

We saw the golden rays of the sun **aslant** the tall trees.

ASLANT used outside the physical world:

Suddenly, the light shot **aslant** the darkness.

ASLANT can be considered both a preposition of direction and orientation.

## **ATHWART: extending across or from one side to the other of**

ATHWART is different from ASLANT in that it describes an oblique or diagonal position of an entity that is often *extended* from one side to another of a referent, or that is in opposition to that referent. For instance, when we say that the truck is ATHWART the road, we mean that the truck is actually occupying a substantial part of the road, from one side to the other. Compare the following examples:

The lorry stopped in a dangerous position **athwart** the road.

The long dining table stretched **athwart** the house, from window to window.

The log was lying **athwart** the creek.

ATHWART used in the sense of "in opposition to" or "against":

The sailors were tired of rowing **athwart** the tide.

Like ASLANT, ATHWART can be used outside the physical world:

A new idea shot **athwart** her mind.

ATHWART can be considered both a preposition of direction and orientation.

## **THROUGH: crossing a volume**

THROUGH has some similarities with ACROSS but is essentially a three-dimensional preposition. For instance, you can go from one side of the river

to the other ACROSS a bridge. You can also go from one side to another of a mountain THROUGH a tunnel.<sup>4</sup>



Driving **through** the tunnel.

THROUGH is used in the sense of movement and direction "from one side to the other of something," "across an area, region or place," or "within groups of people or things." THROUGH is also used in a static sense to show a route. For example:

To reach the museum I had to walk **through** the park.

The teacher walked **through** the desks to correct the exercises.

The fireman had to go **through** the fire to save the child.

He was looking at the moon **through** the binoculars.

The car came running **through** the gate.

The sauna is **through** the bathroom.

THROUGH used in the figurative and abstract world:

You can learn about his life **through** his diaries.

I like to build relationships **through** trust and understanding.

I never saw their story **through** their eyes. I had my own interpretation.

The preposition THROUGH is also explained in Chapter 5.

### **THROUGHOUT: everywhere in a place, region or object**

The difference here is very subtle, and the choice of ACROSS, THROUGH or THROUGHOUT will depend on your point of view. For instance, when we say *across* we are thinking in a more organized and geometric manner, as in "from one side to the other of an area or region" (for example, from east to west or from north to south, etc.), whereas when we say *throughout*, we are

thinking of "every part of the place or region," but not necessarily in an organized fashion. Like **THROUGH**, the preposition **THROUGHOUT** also implies a sense of volume:

I searched **throughout** the house but did not find my keys.

My company has more than 100 offices **throughout** the U.S.

Abbreviations were found extensively **throughout** the text.

However, the same way that my company has more than 100 offices **THROUGHOUT** the U.S., I could also say that my company has more than 100 offices **ACROSS** the U.S.; my exact choice of preposition will depend on how I picture the region or the landscape at the moment of speech. See other examples of **THROUGHOUT** in Chapter 5.

**THROUGHOUT** in the abstract and figurative senses:

His talent is reflected **throughout** his magnificent work.

Modern vice presidential candidates also travel **throughout** the campaign.

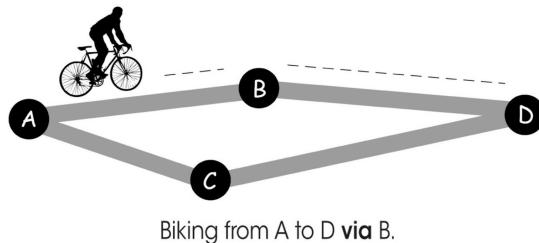
### **VIA: a route through or by way of a particular referent**

The preposition **VIA** has some similarities with **THROUGH** and **ACROSS**, without specifically having to preserve the attribute of "volume" or "surface" of its referent; that is, **VIA** functions as a zero-dimensional preposition. For instance, when I say:

There is a direct train to Covent Garden **via** the Piccadilly line.

I am not really worried about the type of terrain I am going through or across, but rather about the *route* that is going to take me to my destination *by way of* (or *going through*) a particular place or point of reference.

The following figure shows that the biker could have chosen another route to D, but he preferred to reach D **via** B. Now stop to think for a minute. Imagine if this figure represented a forest with a bike trail in the middle. Then we could say that the biker could have chosen the trail that goes to D **through** the forest.



VIA can also function as a two- or three-dimensional preposition, indicating the route **across** or **through** a particular referent:

The beach is accessible **via** the parking lot.

I went to the living room **via** the front door.

Sometimes VIA will simply indicate the route being used:

We went from Miami to New York **via** Interstate 95.

VIA in the abstract and figurative senses:

Customers can pay **via** alternative methods.

You have to login **via** password.

See the extended meaning of VIA in Chapter 4.

### **BY WAY OF: via; through**

He traveled to the Pacific **by way of** the Strait of Magellan.

She drove from London to Birmingham **by way of** Leek.

BY WAY OF in the figurative and abstract senses:

He was elected **by way of** false promises.

See BY WAY OF also in Chapter 4.

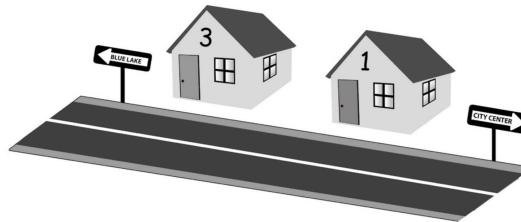
### **PAST: further than; in a direction that passes**

PAST indicates movement in a direction that passes, or the position of an entity further than, the specified referent:

She walked **past** me on the way to the bus stop.

His jeans were rolled up **past** his knees.

House number 1 is **past** house number 3.



I am at Blue Lake. House 1 is located **past** house 3.

PAST used outside the physical world:

What you are asking is **past** my pay grade.

He was determined to move **past** his mistakes.

The true leaders always push themselves **past** their comfort zone.

See also Chapter 5 for examples of PAST as a temporal preposition.

## BY: past; via; through

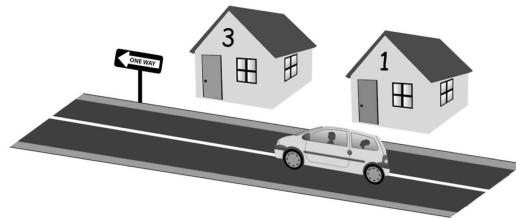
The directional preposition BY is normally used with verbs of motion indicating proximity or route. For example:

The woman is driving **by** the house.

The dog ran **by** me chasing the bear.

The golf ball flew past **by** the window.

The bear entered **by** the open door.



The woman is driving **by** house number 1.

Sometimes its sense of direction seems interchangeable with its sense of location:

He went **by** the door and glanced in.

Note that, in its directional sense, the preposition BY often means "in a direction other than toward its referent." For instance, comparing the sentences below, in (a), the bird flew past *near* the window; in (b), the bird flew in the direction of the window (but landed on the porch in front of the window); in (c), the bird flew straight into the house from the outside:

- a) The bird flew **by** the window.
- b) The bird flew **toward** the window.
- c) The bird flew **through** the window.



The bird is flying **by** the window. The couple is kissing **by** the window.

The figure of the window above is showing both the directional and locational attributes of the preposition BY.

When functioning as a directional preposition, sometimes BY is not interchangeable with the prepositions of location and proximity. For example, the following two sentences have a different meaning:

- a) He drove **by** the house.
- b) She drove **near** the house.

In (a), he drove past the house; a few moments later we could not see his car anymore. In (b), we could see her car while she was driving because she was never far from the house (she was probably having driving lessons). Now compare:

- a) The Hollywood tour bus passed slowly **by** the house.
- b) A Hollywood tour bus passes slowly **by** the house.
- c) The river runs **beside** the house.
- d) UFO passes **next to** a plane!

In (a), even though the bus was moving slowly, it *passed by* the house as,

what I term, a "temporary motion entity." If the bus was stationary, we could say: *The bus is next to the house*. In (b), I used the verb in the present tense (like I did with the example of the river in (c)), but I still used the preposition BY instead of NEXT TO or BESIDE. Why? Is this an exception? The answer is no. The Hollywood tour bus is not a river! It is not expected to pass by the house *forever*. In fact, the event in (b) could be a *past event* that is being *narrated in the present*, while in *The river runs beside the house*, the noun and the verb are indicating a *permanent event*. In (d), a UFO is not a river, but I used the verb in the present tense and the preposition NEXT TO. Why? Because, as a narrative (e.g., the headlines and photos of a newspaper), we can also consider the situation in (c) as a stationary event (the UFO will never move past the plane in a photo). Sometimes BY is used with a sense of temporality. Compare the two sentences below:

I am going **to** your office today.

I am going **by** your office today.

If you say that you are going TO a place, you do not specify how much time you intend to spend at that place, whereas if you say that you are going BY a place, you are implying that you are not going to stay for too long.

See more examples of the prepositions AT and BY in Chapter 3, where we discuss the prepositions of location and proximity, as well as the "instrumental" use of the preposition BY. See also Chapters 4, 5 and 6 for other examples of BY.

BY used outside the physical world:

Many thoughts passed **by** his mind.

The train platform flew **by** her field of vision.

I read your articles every day. **By the way**, I love your pictures!

Note that **by the way** is an idiomatic prepositional phrase.

## **ABOUT: near or around; somewhere in a place or area**

ABOUT implies different or uncertain directionalities. It somewhat resembles AROUND, or the preposition THROUGHTOUT without its "scatter" and "volume" attributes:

He is walking **about** the lake.

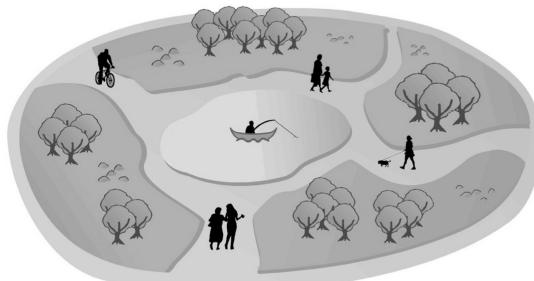
Her dog was walking **about** her, liking her hands.

The lake described above does not suggest a landscape with significant volume. In the second example, the dog was probably walking around her or back and forth (but the dog was always near her). Now, compare the two sentences below:

The children are running **about** the house playing with their walkie-talkies.

The mother searched **throughout** the house but did not find her keys.

The first example describes a sense of area (e.g., the floor spaces of the bedroom, the living room, the backyard, etc.), while the second sentence describes a sense of volume (all the rooms and also the drawers, closets, etc.). **ABOUT** does not require any specific directionality, which means that one can run about the house by simply accessing *some* of its rooms.



There are people walking **about** the lake.

Because of its lack of specific directionality, the preposition **ABOUT** cannot always be understood as **AROUND**; for example, a spaceship flying **about** the planet is not necessarily the same thing as a spaceship flying **around** the planet.

As a non-spatial preposition, **ABOUT** has the sense of "on the subject of," "in connection with," "relating to," "with reference to," etc. For example:

He was always dreaming **about** her.

There is something strange **about** him.

As we go **about** our lives, we don't realize the impact we have on others.

See also IN RELATION TO, REGARDING & CONCERNING, IN

REFERENCE TO and WITH REGARD TO in Chapter 6. See more examples of ABOUT in Chapter 5.

## **AGAINST: force in the opposite direction; in opposition to**

Also AGIN. Archaic or regional.

Have you ever ridden a motorcycle or a roller coaster? Have you ever taken off on an airplane? Have you ever put your hand outside the window of a car at highway speed? Have you ever played any kind of ball game? If you have done any of these things, you have implicitly used the preposition AGAINST. When you play a game in opposition to another player, you play AGAINST that player. When you ride a motorcycle, you create wind resistance, which means that you travel AGAINST the wind. The same thing happens when we ride a roller coaster! Airplanes, for instance, are only supposed to take off and land when AGAINST the wind, to help generate lift force. You can feel this force when you put your hand outside the car window at fast speeds! (Don't do that! Safety always comes first, please). But you do not need to run in order to generate this opposite force. Consider the examples below:

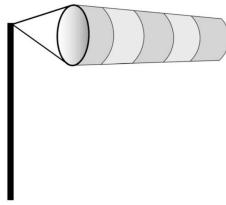
Please, put the ladder **against** the wall.

The pilot applied pressure **against** the rudder pedal.

Windsocks work at best when **against** the wind.

Two cars raced **against** each other in a heat.

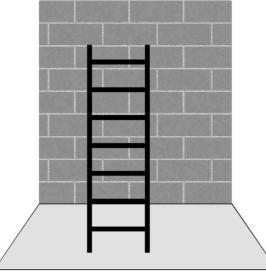
Avoid photographing **against** the sun.



The windsock is **against** the wind, pointing in its direction.

The first three examples above show force in an opposite direction. In the first case, force is generated by gravity; that is, you do not need to generate an external force in order to be against something--gravity can do the trick! In the second example, the force is generated by the wind itself; windsocks always point in the direction of the wind (when there is wind!), and when this happens, the wind must be AGAINST the windsock in order for it to do its

job. In the third example the force is applied by the pilot's foot. Only the fourth and fifth examples show opposition without "force in the opposite direction."



The ladder is leaning **against** the wall.

### AGAINST used in figurative and abstract senses:

Are you **for** or **against** this idea?

The people reacted **against** the changes.

The coupon is redeemable **against** future purchases.

I never discriminate **against** anyone because of religion.

Currencies used to be measured **against** gold.

We need insurance **against** climate changes.

### Also UP AGAINST:

She pushed the pillows **up against** the wall and lay upon the mattress.

He leaned his head **up against** the window and prayed.

### **FOR: exchange or intent of destination or dedication**

Most authors classify FOR as a perfect directional preposition, as in *she left for London*. I prefer to term these cases under the "exchange" or "intent of destination" category because FOR is not a *true* preposition of direction (like TO or TOWARD) even though sometimes it is preceded by a verb of motion.

Nevertheless, native speakers of English have no problem in using FOR as a true directional preposition, as in the example below:

Miguel headed **for** the airport.

However, for non-native speakers, especially speakers of the Romance

languages, FOR does not imply a perfect sense of direction and may be better understood as a preposition of "exchange," "substitution," or "intent of destination." Thus, *headed for the airport* might tell us that Miguel decided to go to the airport and, consequently, he probably started to go toward the airport (but it is uncertain if he did reach the airport or not). In the sentence:

The plane leaves New York **for** London at 11 p.m.

the motion verb *leave* does not want to designate a direction in the same sense of TO or TOWARD but to propose an action that has an objective (to reach London). Here, I am not discussing "direction," as in *the plane will fly to London*; all I am saying is that the plane intends to reach its destination. We could include the preposition FOR used in this example in the "exchange" category, as the plane will in fact temporarily change countries. In the example below,

Katsumi left **for** Japan last week.

we know that Katsumi arrived because he has been there since last week, but there is no directional attribute associated with the preposition FOR, although the "sense" of direction remains unchanged due to the travel context. Therefore, all that the idea of "leaving FOR Japan" tells us is that Japan *replaced* Katsumi's current country for an unknown period of time.

### Purpose, Comparison, Cause, Representation, Behalf, Substitution

We also use FOR to show the "object or the direction of an emotion" when we want to express wishes, attitudes or feelings toward something or someone, but this does not mean that these emotions will necessarily be perceived:

She has a passion **for** fashion.

When used outside the spatial and temporal contexts, FOR has a great many significations. Practically all its applications will fall in these (not literally directional) categories described above. For example:

- a) This house is **for** sale.
- b) The dress is too small **for** her.
- c) She was praised **for** her good work.

- d) Everything I did was **for** love, not **for** money.
- e) He speaks **for** the minorities and the oppressed.
- f) "DUI" stands **for** Driving Under the Influence.
- g) I bought this magazine **for** just \$1.
- h) I need to change my car **for** a newer model.

The sentence in (a) indicates the owner's "purpose," which is to sell the house. In (b), by "comparing" the dress to her body size we can see that she needs a larger number. In (c), the "reason" she was praised was her good work. In (d), what I did was "because of" love, not "because of" money. In (e), he speaks "on behalf of" them. In (f), we have the "meaning" of the acronym "DUI." In (g), I gave the vendor \$1, and, "in exchange," he gave me the magazine. We find the same sense of substitution in (h).

You could consider the "purpose" category of the preposition FOR in the sentence below in two ways:

I use the lawn mower **for** cutting the grass.

I use the lawn mower for a purpose, which is to mow the lawn. However, this is "my" purpose; or we could also say that the "purpose of the machine" is to cut the grass (the purpose of the object), just as the purpose of a glass is to hold liquid.

We can see the dramatic difference between the attribute of direction of TO and the "substitution" attribute of the preposition FOR in the following two examples:

- a) I will send this letter **for** Mary.
- b) I will send this letter **to** Mary.

In (a), Mary will not receive any letter from me because I am posting the letter "in her place" (I am helping Mary to send the letter because she is busy and cannot go to the post office now); here I am using the "substitution" attribute of FOR. In (b), Mary is the destination of my letter; here, I am using the "directional" attribute of the preposition TO.

The preposition FOR used below can have three different interpretations:

I will sing **for** Mary.

Given the example above, I could be meaning that: I will "substitute" Mary and sing in her place; I will sing "with the purpose of pleasing" Mary; I will sing "with the purpose of paying homage" to Mary. However, the attribute of substitution would not apply in the following sentence (I cannot substitute her with my vote, but I could find a reason--or a purpose--to vote in order to elect her):

I will vote **for** Mary.

The preposition FOR often has a "benefactive" meaning (i.e., it is used to indicate someone's benefit), as in:

Please, give the book **to** Jane. The book is not **for** you, it's **for** Jane!

This "benefactive" directional sense seems to derive from the core meaning of "substitution" of the preposition FOR; nevertheless, it has an authority of its own as in *I am doing this for you*, which could be interpreted as "I am substituting you" or "this is dedicated to you."

Compare the following examples of TO and FOR:

- a) She is beautiful **to** me.
- b) She is beautiful **for** me.
- c) Being strong is important **to** me.
- d) Being strong is important **for** me.

There are subtle, yet important differences between the examples of TO and FOR above. In (a), "*I believe she is beautiful*"; in (b), "*she is acting beautifully--she wants to impress me*"; in (c), "*I believe it is nice to be strong and have a beautiful body*"; in (d), "*I am a stevedore and I need to be strong for my own daily tasks*." In both uses of the preposition TO, the speaker is expressing a personal *opinion*; both prepositions FOR are indicating a personal *benefit*.

The example below illustrates the conjunction *for*--not the preposition FOR:

Sorry, I cannot go fishing with you, *for* I will have to work this weekend.

To find out if FOR is a conjunction or a preposition, try changing FOR into another conjunction, such as *because*:

Sorry, I cannot go fishing with you, *because* I will have to work this weekend.

If this exchange of words works, it is because FOR is a "conjunction." Now, if you try this with the preposition FOR, the conjunction will not work and the sentence will not be intelligible. For instance, (a) is a preposition and (b) is not correct with the conjunction *because*:

This gift is **for** me.

This gift is *because* me. ☺

Sometimes FOR is followed by a pronoun with an infinitive. For example:

Maria was anxious **for** him to come.

In the example above, Maria was anxious *because* she was expecting him to come.

FOR used before abstract nouns and as part of idiomatic phrases:

I did it **for** love.

**for instance; for example**

**for the sake of** humanity

The preposition FOR is further explored in Chapter 5.

## A Word on IN and ON

Although IN and ON have a distant directional attribute, I prefer to consider them as basically locational and temporal prepositions, to avoid misinterpretation. The reason for this particular choice is that, even when *directional*, these prepositions are actually static and locational. For example, when we say:

Dimitri jumped **in** the lake.

there is a weak directional component to the preposition IN, but the real fact is that Dimitri is already in the lake, or that we are just describing the place where Dimitri was after he jumped (INTO would be a better choice here). It is the same thing as saying that one flies TO or IN a place. Compare the two sentences below:

a) Mathilda flew **to** London.

b) Mathilda flew **in** London.

In (a), we find the truly directional preposition TO (Mathilda flew from one place **to** another). In (b), Mathilda was already in London when she flew around the city (but we do not know her route or destination).

The same goes for the preposition ON. For instance, when we say:

The plane landed **on** the runway.

we mean that the plane in fact has already touched the surface of the runway, which ultimately means, that "the plane *is already* on the runway." These directional components of IN and ON are exclusively suggested by their preceding verbs, being these two prepositions really more suitable to indicate positions in time and space.

## Reading the Story

### A Trip to London

Last Monday I took a plane from New York **to** London to spend a week at my company's headquarters, where I was expected to be a keynote speaker **for** our annual technology conference. It was a very busy week. As soon as I arrived in London, I threw my jacket **onto** the coat hanger, handed the disk with the new IT project **to** my British colleague and we immediately started working **on** our forthcoming presentation, which was going to happen on Wednesday, in the morning, right after breakfast, in our beautiful conference room.

On the day of the presentation, as I was talking **to** the audience during the lunch break, I noticed that some people were talking **at** me--and laughing. I didn't know what was going on until I realized that I was pouring coffee **into** a cup of pens that was on my table, instead of pouring it **into** my coffee cup!

On Saturday, some friends and I strolled on Park Lane, which runs **along** Hyde Park. It was a nice walk. Later, we drove up Park Lane **toward** Marble Arch. Then, we decided to go **to** Trafalgar Square. We drove down **toward** Piccadilly Arcade and the Buckingham Palace, **past** Mayfair, **via** Admiralty Arch, **by** Spring Gardens and **to** Trafalgar Square; all a must-see in London.

London is the largest city in the European Union and has a rich cultural life.

There are over 240 museums **throughout** the city, including the British Museum, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain, Tate Modern and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

After lunch, we drove **by** the Big Ben and **across** the Westminster Bridge to visit the City Hall and the Tower Bridge. We still had time to drive **through** the Blackwall Tunnel after visiting the Tower of London, before going back **to** the hotel.

My hotel was right across the street from the park, on Green Street, between Dunraven Street and Park Street, in a nice neighborhood, located among London's famed shopping and entertainment attractions. At night, I remember that I walked **about** the room in great excitement, thinking of the next day. Exhausted, I leaned **against** the couch and fell asleep.

On Sunday, before heading **to** the airport in the evening, I still had time to go all the way **through** Hyde Park **toward** Kensington Palace, over Serpentine Bridge, but I decided to stay in Kensington Gardens walking **around** its attractions. I left **for** New York Sunday night.

### Practicing the Best Scenario

This is not supposed to be a comprehensive test but a *comprehension* test. In some questions, you can actually use more than one preposition, but be sure to choose the most appropriate one for each example. However, do pay attention, as this is a *directional* preposition quiz aimed at making sure that you feel safe with the prepositions introduced in this chapter (of which only fourteen are included in the following test). Hint: only one preposition is repeated in the test. The preferred answers to this and all the other tests are in the Appendix at the end of the book.

- 1) The plane flew from New York \_\_\_\_ Madrid. It landed \_\_\_\_ Runway 18R/36L.
- 2) There are many trees \_\_\_\_ the river and \_\_\_\_ the lake.
- 3) Hillary drove \_\_\_\_ the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge to the other side.
- 4) His company has offices spread \_\_\_\_Europe.
- 5) She was distant, but she noticed they were talking \_\_\_\_ her.
- 6) The coffee went right \_\_\_\_ the cup and did not spill.
- 7) David threw the keys \_\_\_\_ the table, but they fell \_\_\_\_ the floor!

8) As there was no direct flight from New York to London, he had to go \_\_\_ Paris.

9) Ahmed drove \_\_\_ the museum and \_\_\_ the tunnel to the other side.

10) Francelle is worried. She keeps walking \_\_\_ her room, thinking.

## Chapter 2 : Prepositions of Orientation

The basic prepositions of orientation--or orientational prepositions--are a specific class of prepositions of location used to designate a *region* in a *vertical* or *horizontal* position *projected* (and often, but not always, *away*) *from* its referent. I have also included in this chapter those simple and complex prepositions whose spatial region is *extended along* its referent (i.e., the referent is *partitioned* for orientation purposes). As a first example, compare:

- a) My helicopter is **on** the table.
- b) My helicopter is **over** the table.

In (a), I placed my remote control toy helicopter *on top of* the table. The preposition ON in this example is used to specify a location or place. In (b), I am playing with the helicopter, making it fly *vertically above* the table. The helicopter is not in contact with the table and I did not need to specify its altitude, just the *region* it was flying *relative to the table*. The preposition OVER in this example is used to denote an orientation relative to a location or place.

In this chapter, all you need to know to learn the prepositions of orientation is the notion of "vertical" and "horizontal" axis. For example, if you see a helicopter hovering away from a mountain, you may say:

The helicopter is hovering **above** the mountain.

However, if the helicopter is *vertically above* the mountain, then you could say:

The helicopter is hovering **over** the mountain.

This notion of "verticality" also holds for the "horizontality" attributes of some prepositions. For example, if you know that someone is at the back of the house, you could say:

Someone is **behind** the house.

However, the preposition BEHIND suggests a sense of "volume" (the back, or the other side of something or of a place, where we can hide or hide an

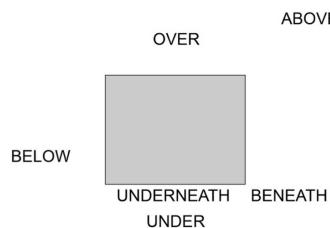
object). For instance, I would normally say the sentence in (a) below, but I would prefer (c) to (b) because the lake does not have enough volume to hide a tree on a horizontal plane (this rationale is particularly relevant if you are not a native speaker):

- a) She is **behind** the tree.
- b) The tree is **behind** the lake. ⊗
- c) The tree is **on the other side of** the lake.

## Vertical Projections

### ABOVE, BELOW, OVER, UNDER: vertical opposites

We discuss the horizontal sense of prepositions later in this chapter. Here, we deal with the *vertical* prepositions ABOVE, BELOW, OVER and UNDER; in the next section we discuss UNDERNEATH and BENEATH. The figure below shows a loose schematic representation of these six prepositions; look at the figure and think vertically in relation to the rectangular object.



A loose schematic representation of the vertical prepositions.

Looking at the reference above, one quick conclusion is that OVER and UNDER are vertically opposed, which means that, when using these two prepositions, the entity and its referent must occupy the same vertical space.

The prepositions ABOVE and BELOW are also vertically opposed to each other, but they do not necessarily designate the same vertical space. The best way to deal with these prepositions from an observer's point of view is to contrast them, as in the following examples:

- a) The airplane is flying **above** the mountains.
- b) The helicopter is hovering **below** the Golden Gate Bridge.
- c) The submarine is traveling **under** the mountain. ⊗

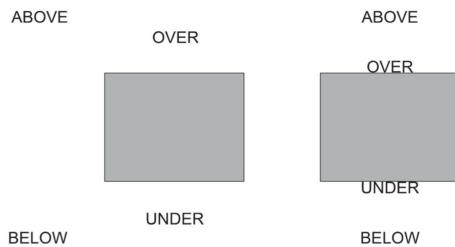
To fly ABOVE the mountains means to fly "higher than" the mountains, but *not necessarily* "over" (vertically above) them, whereas to hover BELOW the Golden Gate bridge means "to be suspended in the air above the water surface, but lower than the elevation of the bridge" (and possibly, but *not necessarily*, "under" the bridge--depending on the exact position of the helicopter and on the point of view of the speaker). The sentence in (c) is grammatically correct but semantically anomalous, as it violates the semantic constraints because a submarine cannot possibly navigate under a mountain. Here, you would have to choose a more appropriate noun, such as *sea* or *water*, in order to be able to use UNDER. Consider the three sentences below:

- d) The airplane is flying **over** the mountain.
- e) The helicopter is hovering **over** the mountain.
- f) The submarine is traveling **under** the sea.

When comparing the examples above with the examples in (a), (b) and (c), we observe a more precise and "geometric" distinction: In (d), to fly OVER the mountain means to fly "vertically" or "directly above" the mountain. Semantically, it also means that the plane is moving past the mountain, while in (e) the helicopter is suspended in the air also vertically or directly above the mountain (without necessarily moving past the mountain). The semantically perfect example of the submarine in (f) tells us that the submarine is vertically or directly below the surface of the water.

Do you want an example of BELOW the water surface without actually being in the water, to match the figure above? Think of the Netherlands! Approximately 20% of its area is located BELOW sea level (but the country is not UNDER the sea!).

The following illustration shows another schematic possibility for the two pairs ABOVE & BELOW and OVER & UNDER. Now think of the two schematic representations: In the figure above, BELOW is *not lower* than UNDER, but ABOVE is *higher* than OVER. The problem here is that ABOVE has a sense of "absolute height" (an airplane can be ABOVE the tallest mountain in the world), but there is no sense of "absolute depth" with BELOW, which means that if a plane is BELOW the mountain it cannot possibly be UNDER the mountain, let alone lower than under the mountain.



Two other possible schemas for the pairs OVER & UNDER, ABOVE & BELOW.

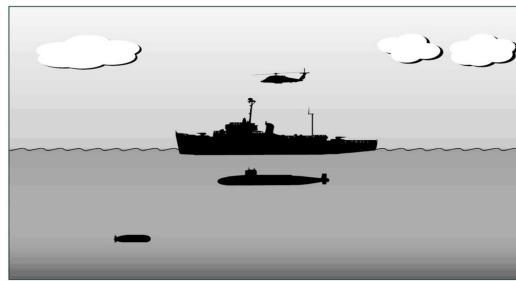
Translating the above left schema into the figure below, we could say:

The clouds are **above** the ship and the helicopter is **over** the ship.

The torpedo is **below** the ship and the submarine is **under** the ship.

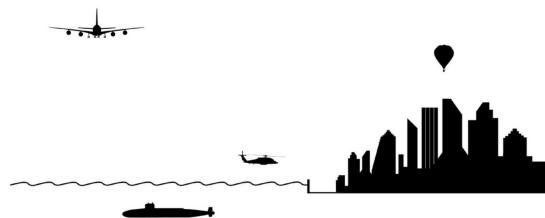
However, ABOVE and UNDER can also function as an opposite pair:

Only part of an iceberg is **above** the water; most of it is hidden **under** the water.



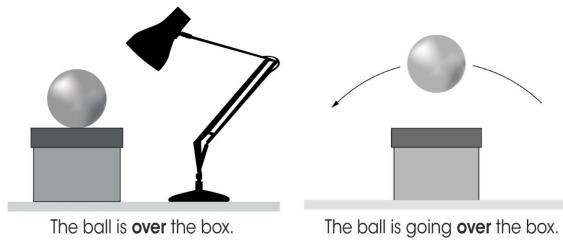
Compare this figure with the schema above.

In the following figure, an airplane is flying ABOVE the city and OVER the sea; a helicopter is hovering OVER the water, but BELOW the tall buildings; a submarine is UNDER the sea; the city is BELOW sea level; and there is a balloon ABOVE the city and also ABOVE the helicopter and the sea, but BELOW the airplane; the helicopter is also BELOW the airplane and ABOVE the submarine.

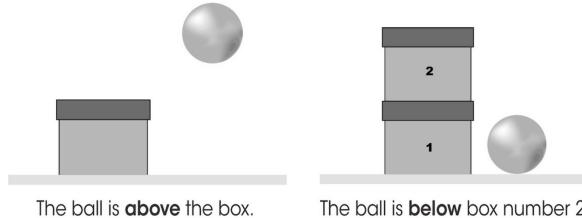


Following the example of our third schematic representation of ABOVE,

BELOW, OVER and UNDER, the figure below, on the left, shows a ball OVER a box. There is a table lamp, whose metal shade is placed above the box (which means that the box is below the metal shade). The floor under the box is gray. The figure on the right shows a ball moving OVER the box (from one side to the other, *passing* vertically ABOVE the box at a certain moment).



The figures below show the balls ABOVE and BELOW a box (hence the conclusion that if an object is OVER a reference point, "it is necessarily above that point," but when the object is ABOVE that point, "it is not necessarily over it."

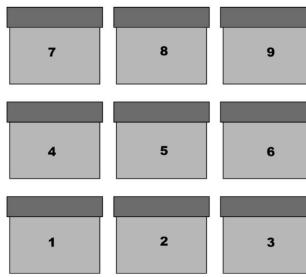


ABOVE and BELOW always imply separation from their referents. In the examples below, both the scar and the tattoo are on their bodies--but are not exactly on his knee or on her belly button:

He has a big scar **above** his knee.

She has a tattoo **below** her belly button.

OVER and UNDER (plus UNDERNEATH and BENEATH), on the other hand, do not always imply separation from their referents, as you can see from reading their respective sections. Now consider the following figure containing nine separated boxes.



Views of ABOVE, BELOW, OVER and UNDER.

Boxes normally do not fly, but I want to explore another angle of ABOVE, BELOW, OVER and UNDER. The boxes figure shows that box number 9 is ABOVE box number 5 and OVER box number 6. On the other hand, box number 6 is BELOW box number 8 and UNDER box number 9. Boxes number 1, 2 and 3 are all UNDER boxes 4, 5 and 6.

ABOVE and BELOW can also function in the sense of north, south, up, or down:

Massachusetts is located **above** Maryland.

*(north of Maryland)*

Maryland is located **below** Massachusetts.

*(south of Massachusetts)*

There is a house on the street **above** the river.

*(beyond the head of the river)*

They live on a small road **below** the river.

*(downstream the river)*

An old church stands **above** the street.

*(uphill from a point)*

The square is **below** the main road.

*(downhill from a point)*

They live **above** the river.

*(upstream the river)*

ABOVE and BELOW used in figurative and abstract senses:

The general is **above** the captain.

Judges are not **above** the law.

The captain is **below** the general.

This year the profits were **below** average.

The temperature was extremely hot, **above** 90degF.

The company's net income was **below** the budget.

OVER often lends its attribute of vertical orientation to the locational senses of "covering," "overcoming an obstacle" and ON TOP OF. For instance, compare the following examples with ON and OVER, which are often used interchangeably:

The blanket is **on** the bed.

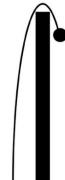
The blanket is **over** the bed.

Sometimes OVER is used in the same sense of surface of ON with verbs of motion. However, these meanings can be slightly different. For example:

- a) The coffee spilled **on** the floor.
- b) The coffee spilled **over** the floor.
- c) People climbed **on** the wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate.
- d) People climbed **over** the wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate.

In (a), the consequence of spilling coffee ON the floor can be meaningless, with perhaps a localized pool of coffee on the floor (the sense of "contact" with a surface). In (b), the consequences could be more dramatic, with coffee spread OVER a large area (the sense of "covering" a surface, as in the opposite of UNDER). Climbing ON the wall, as exemplified in (c), can mean the action of *crawling up* the wall, or the position ON TOP OF the wall after reaching the top (again, the sense of surface). In (d), **over** the wall may mean that the people reached the top and went to the other side (the sense of "overcoming an obstacle").

Climbing **over** the wall (to the other side).



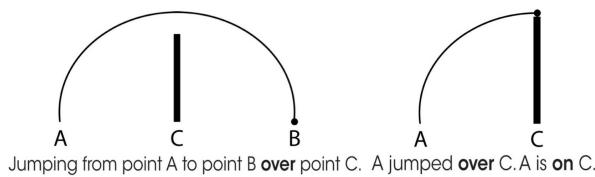
In the next three examples, the horse jumped from point A to point B **over** point C, which means that the speaker considered three reference points to use the preposition OVER. We could also say that the hunter lives in point B if observed from our point of view (point A); in this case, the river would be point C, which means that, if we wanted to visit the hunter, at a certain point (point C) we would have to pass vertically above the river to reach the other side. One way to do this would be to walk OVER the bridge (from one side to the other of the bridge/river). The examples in (a) and (b) have a sense of orientation; the example in (c) has a more locational function (the hunter walked **on** the bridge):

- a) The horse jumped **over** the fence.
- b) The hunter lives **over** the river.
- c) The hunter walked **over** the bridge to his house.

Now consider the sentence below:

The cat jumped **over** the table and sat **on** the table.

The different trajectories considered in the last four examples, at a certain point (point C), show a vertical relation between the entities (horse, hunter and cat) and their referents (fence, river, bridge and table). For instance, the horse was *vertically above* the fence at the moment it passed point C; we place the hunter after an imaginary path that also passes vertically above the river (point C) before reaching his home; or he may reach his house by crossing the bridge (point C); the cat, on the other hand, did not reach the other side but was also vertically above point C a moment before it landed on the table (point C). The rationale here is that the path produced by the use of the preposition OVER always uses a vertical referent at some point of its trajectory.



The notions of "verticality," "covering something" and "overcoming an obstacle," here represented by *point C*, are the core meaning of the

preposition **OVER** and can be applied to a variety of spatial contexts. Now compare:

- a) The cat fell **over** the roof.
- b) There is a bridge **over** the river.
- c) Pour the sauce **over** the meatballs.

In (a), the cat skidded across the edge of the roof and fell to the ground. In (b), the bridge is vertically above the river, and in (c), the sauce is to be poured on top of the meatballs.

An *obstacle* can be any physical or abstract *object* or *area* such as a bed, a floor, a continent, the weekend, ice cream, or your problems--here represented by the black rectangle in the following figure. Now, look at the figure below and try to imagine the curved line as the entity, the action or the trajectory of the entity relative to (i.e., **over**) the referent. For example, the curved line represents *There is a blanket, From my window I have a view, I prefer fruit and Parents should have control*; the black rectangle represents the referents *the bed, the entire bay, ice cream and their kids*:



There is a blanket **over** the bed. From my window I have a view **over** the entire bay.  
I prefer fruit **over** ice cream. Parents should have control **over** their kids.

The notion of "obstacle" explored here is simple: in the physical or abstract world, this is something you need to overcome *from one side to another of the referent* (i.e., completely); or it may mean the trajectory relative to the referent in its entirety; in other words, one cannot *cover* the bed with *half* a blanket and say that the blanket is **over the bed**, or have a partial view of the bay and say that they have a view of the *entire* bay; I cannot *prefer* ice cream and fruit if only these two options are being offered; and parents cannot have control of *half* a kid.

Consider these two idiomatic expressions with **OVER**:

- a) He is **over head and ears** in love.
- b) The owner sold the house **over my head**.

In (a), he is *profoundly* in love; in (b), the owner sold the house *without*

*consulting me* (I am his tenant!). The examples in (a) and (b) are using idiomatic prepositional phrases; the example below is using an idiomatic expression that contains a preposition:

His older brother **hauled him over the coals**.

To **haul someone over the coals** means to reprimand someone.

We can also use the phrase OVER AND ABOVE in the sense of IN ADDITION TO:

She receives wages **over and above** expenses of living.

**Over and above** his love for acting, he aspires fame and glory.

**UNDER** used in the figurative sense:

Orders **under** five dollars will not have shipping charges.

There are thousands of ships sailing **under** the Liberian flag.

Sometimes, we find ourselves **under** the clouds of adversity.

I agree, **under** the condition that you come with me.

**UNDER** used with idiomatic prepositional phrases:

The elected official is **under scrutiny** for fraud.

The forest fires have been brought **under control**.

The writer learned how to write fast **under pressure**.

She cannot enter the casino because she is **under age**.

The police placed the man **under arrest** for driving **under the influence**.

## **ALL OVER: Over the Entire Area or In Many Different Parts**

By extension, the phrase **all over** adds the sense of "throughout" to the core meaning of OVER and is used as an intensifier in a sentence that otherwise would only need the preposition OVER.

It's raining **all over** the country!

The toys were **all over** the house.

He spilled coffee **all over** the floor.

The police were **all over** the place.

**All over** does not need to follow a concrete noun:

Rumors that the celebrity is coming are **all over** the city.

**All over** is often used figuratively, in the sense of criticism or pursuit of something or someone, or in a sense of (an often unauthorized) intimacy:

The press was **all over** the president after he proposed new cuts in the economy.

The fans were **all over** the band once word leaked that they were filming a new clip.

The fans were **all over** the singer, grabbing his butt, asking for autographs, hugs, etc.

## **UNDERNEATH and BENEATH: dealing with bottom issues**

Throughout the years, the use of some prepositions became more interchangeable and arbitrary, which is especially true with the prepositions BELOW, BENEATH, UNDER and UNDERNEATH. This does not represent a problem for native speakers, but for non-native speakers, who need to rely on a precise method for combining prepositions with context and acquire a common rationale, it is an extra burden.

As the distinctions in the use of these prepositions can be very subtle, I tried to elaborate on them, presenting them in different perspectives and contexts, contrasting them when possible--sometimes setting them apart from each other by means of their imagery. For instance, while UNDER expresses a constant or temporary vertical relation between an entity and its referent, UNDERNEATH expresses an additional relation of "proximity" or "contact with a larger referent," as you can picture from these two examples below:

He swam **under** the bridge from east to west.

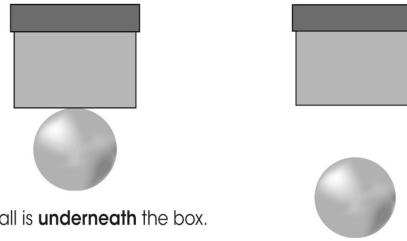
The child was hiding **underneath** the blanket.

The first example depicts the vertical and dynamic sense of UNDER, while UNDERNEATH expresses the sense of contact between the child and a larger referent (the blanket was covering the child); for instance, a pen can be underneath a notepad, but a notepad cannot be underneath a pen; that is, if you are underneath a referent, you are also under this referent; however, the fact that you are under a referent, does not mean that you are underneath the referent!

Many people who travel by car in the U.S. describe bird nests built under bridges all over the country. However, the last time I did a road trip I said:

I saw a nest of swallows **underneath** the bridge.

Compare the two figures below:



The ball is **underneath** the box.

The ball is **under** the box.

What exactly is the difference between UNDER and UNDERNEATH?

The word *neath* comes from Old English meaning "lower" or "bottom." The compound UNDER comes from *on+neder*. Since *neder* (or *nether*) and *neath* are the same word, UNDERNEATH, which is a double compound, would be a redundant composition had it not become a "specialized UNDER." For instance, the sentence:

The woman is walking **under** the bridge.

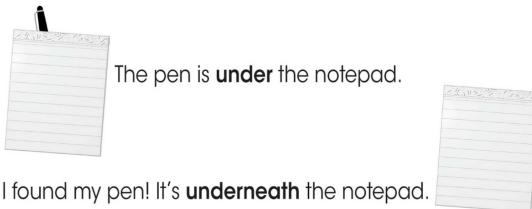
means that the woman is vertically below the bridge *at the moment she passes from one side to the other of the bridge*. She is not *necessarily* completely covered or protected by the bridge (against the rain, for example), and the bridge is not touching her (like a blanket, for example). UNDER, in the previous example, is used dynamically (with a verb of motion); UNDER, in the sentence below, is used statically:

The pen is **under** the notepad.

Now compare the three figures below and find out what they have in common.



The woman is walking **under** the bridge.



The pen is **under** the notepad.

I found my pen! It's **underneath** the notepad.

Where is the pen in the above right figure? As I explained earlier, you cannot see it because the pen is **UNDERNEATH** the notepad!

To be **UNDER** means to be vertically or directly below, but not necessarily touching or covered by the referent, as in the opposite of **OVER** (like the example of the woman walking under the bridge), or vertically or directly below, touching the referent when only *partially* covered (when not underneath, like the example of the pen under the notepad in the above left figure). Consider this sentence:

There is a carpet **under** the table.

Normally, we would not say that the carpet is underneath the table because **UNDERNEATH**, would literally mean "under or on the bottom side of a surface," or "vertically below and covered by a surface," as in the example below:

Every time I get home my daughter hides **underneath** the blanket.

The preposition **UNDERNEATH** offers a more pictorial sense than **UNDER**. For instance, when someone is hidden underneath the blanket, the image of the blanket covering the person comes immediately to our minds. For example, by looking at the image of the figure below we may say:

The man is walking to work **underneath** his umbrella.

because we lend a specific imagery to the meaning of the sentence. Here, the speaker is determining the relation between the man and the umbrella by

saying that "the man is covered and protected by the umbrella while he walks." There is no apparent relation of physical contact, such as with the blanket (except for the fact that he is holding the umbrella); yet there is a sense of shelter proposed by the umbrella. Even though the man is moving, **UNDERNEATH**, here, is not as dynamic as **UNDER** because the relation between the man and the umbrella is pretty static (he is not *passing* under the umbrella but walking *with* it).



The man is walking to work **underneath** his umbrella.

**UNDER** is used to express more literal meanings than **UNDERNEATH**, which is also more metaphorical. The following two examples demonstrate the choice of the speaker to use either **UNDER** or **UNDERNEATH** with the same referent (the sun):

The soldiers marched **under** the sun.

The soldiers marched **underneath** a scorching sun.

Here, we have two "images" of almost imperceptible difference. The relation noted by the speaker in the first sentence is a more literal, simple and vertical one, where he or she is emphasizing the fact that the soldiers marched during a sunny day. In the second sentence, though, the speaker is stressing the heat of the sun as something that affected the soldiers, as in a specific relation of direct contact. In similar situations, you can choose whether to apply **UNDER** or **UNDERNEATH** according to your own interpretation of the context.

In the example below, the speaker wants to transmit a more poetic picture by using **UNDERNEATH** to describe a scene that would otherwise be described with the more literal preposition **UNDER**:

The best thing about camping is sleeping **underneath** the sky.

By using **underneath the sky**, the speaker is focusing on the celestial vault, imagining the sky as a blanket of stars, and so on.

The preposition **BENEATH**, generally used in literary contexts in place of **UNDER** or **UNDERNEATH**, would also do the trick in the example sentence above:

The best thing about camping is sleeping **beneath** the sky.

Many times **BENEATH** can be used in the same ways as **UNDER**, **UNDERNEATH** or **BELOW**, but **BENEATH** is more efficient when depicting something "extending from below" that is generally longer or larger than its referent, or that has no restriction in relation to the size of its referent. For instance, in (a), **BENEATH** is functioning as **UNDERNEATH**; the sentence in (b) may mean that only the part of the floor which is covered by her feet is wet, whereas in the example in (c), she may be standing on a larger wet area than what is covered by her feet:

- a) She was **beneath** the sheet.
- b) The floor **under** her feet is wet.
- c) The ground **beneath** her feet is wet.

The same rationale is used in the next example, except that now **BENEATH** is showing "extension from underneath":

The soil **beneath** the roots is wet.

Another way to picture **BENEATH** and compare it with **UNDERNEATH** is to look at a city located in a mountain valley, like Davos, in Switzerland, for example--where the World Economic Forum is held every year. If you see a city in a mountain valley, such as the one in the example of the figure below, please do not say:

The city lies **underneath** the mountains. ☺

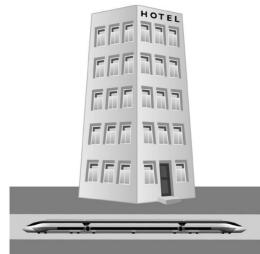
This would be grammatically correct but completely illogical!



A city **beneath** the mountains.

A city cannot be under or underneath a mountain, whereas when we say that a city is below a mountain we do not necessarily emphasize its proximity to the mountain, or the fact that the city is at the foot of the mountain, for example. Nevertheless, there are cases in which UNDER, UNDERNEATH or BELOW simply will not work--and that is when we need BENEATH. To mention a real example, "this morning I noticed a mark on my window that looks like a bird strike. Fortunately, no dead bird was **beneath** the window, so I assume the bird survived the crash." Using **below** the window wouldn't give you an accurate picture of this particular experience.

This sense of extension of BENEATH also works for positions "directly underneath" or "covered by something," as in *the catacombs beneath the cathedral* or *the animal life beneath the surface of the sea*, or to indicate close proximity "at the foot of or below something," as in *the village beneath the mountain* or *a rabbit beneath the window*:



The subway line **beneath** the building.



There is a rabbit **beneath** my window.

BELLOW is preferred to BENEATH for comparing different heights or lengths, or when we need to locate something directly under a referent on a

vertical or flat plane:

The clouds were **below** the mountain tops.

The ball struck a few inches **below** the window.

You can use the scroll bars **below** the window.

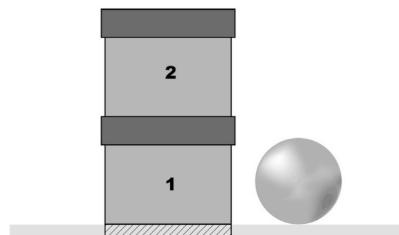
**Below** the headline is a picture of the president.

BENEATH seems to be the preference for locating something next to the lower part of--and extended from or perpendicular to--the specified referent:

There's a small desk **beneath** the window.

The flower box **beneath** the window was empty.

Some speakers would alternate between *ball beneath the box* and *ball below the box*, and *floor under the box* and *floor beneath the box* when describing the figure below; however, most would agree that *only the striped area is underneath box 1*.



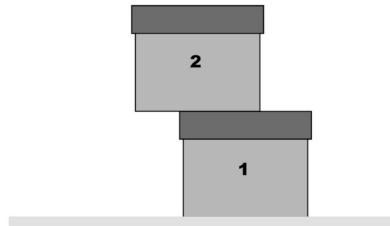
Only the striped area is **underneath** box 1.

UNDERNEATH, as represented by the striped floor in the figure, shows a more complex vertical relation between the entity and its referent: Box number 1 has the same width of the demarcated floor and is in contact with it. That is to say, speakers often prefer UNDERNEATH when the entity is of "equal or smaller size than its referent," otherwise they choose UNDER. We can also see, from the striped area underneath box number 1, that BENEATH is some kind of "extension" of UNDERNEATH. Therefore, besides *a beautiful valley beneath the mountain*, one could also say:

**Beneath** the church, there was a large cemetery.

Below we see two BENEATH relations. We could say that box number 1 is BENEATH box number 2 (and we could also say that it is UNDER box

number 2); and the gray strip representing the floor is also **BENEATH** the two boxes (or **UNDER** box 1).



Box 1 is **beneath** box 2. The floor **beneath** the two boxes is gray.

**BENEATH** has a looser sense of "lower than" and "bottom" than **UNDER** and **UNDERNEATH**, and can express contact or distance between the entity and its referent. For example, compare the following sentences:

- a) The skier is wearing warm underwear **underneath** her skiing clothes.
- b) In the autumn, she likes to wear black stockings **beneath** her short dress.
- c) I always see her at the kebab kiosk **beneath** my office window.

Analyzing the three examples above, we can conclude the following: in (a), in the winter, the skier's underwear is completely covered by her skiing clothes, whereas in (b), in the autumn, people can see her black stockings, which are only partially covered by her short dress; in (c), I like her very much, I love to see her from my office window every time she is at the kiosk.

When indicating separation, both **BENEATH** and **UNDER** can be used to help describe something covered by, but not necessarily larger than, the referent--though **UNDER** generally gets the preference:

I found mushrooms **beneath** the leaves.

I found mushrooms **under** the leaves.

However, when indicating the lower surface or the bottom side of something, **UNDERNEATH** is the natural choice:

The bug was crawling **underneath** the leaf.

Do you enjoy walking at night with your loved one? If you do, both **BENEATH** and **UNDER** would tell the story:

We walked **beneath** the moon.

We walked **under** the moon.

UNDER, in this context--however poetical it may be--could suggest a more literal interpretation, whereas BENEATH, for being more literary, would be a better choice if you want to impress your audience.

Compare the two examples below. You could say,

We love to walk **under** the moonlight.

We love to walk **underneath** the moonlight.

to express that the light reflected by the moon is shining on you in two slightly different ways: *under the moonlight* would have a more direct, vertical sense, while *underneath the moonlight* would be more poetic, as if the moonlight was everywhere and not only over one specific spot.

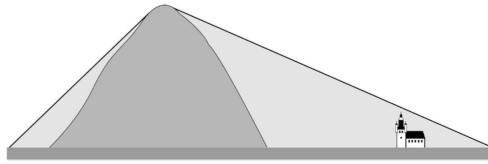


Riding a horse **beneath** the moon or **underneath** the moonlight.

Now I am expanding a little: the concept of BENEATH taken from the figure above suggests a *relation* between the speaker and the moon, whereas the concept of UNDERNEATH suggests an *integration* between the speaker and the moonlight.

One other way to visualize and compare the use of the prepositions BENEATH and UNDERNEATH is thinking in terms of a simple spatial projection. The following figures show the two relations.

When acting in the sense of "at the foot of," BENEATH can indicate either a rather imprecise distance (the entity beneath the referent will be beneath to its end or to the limit of the observer's eye; therefore, it will be "within" the entire projected area), as in *The panoramic sight of the ocean **beneath** the cliffs is a breathtaking experience*, or close proximity to the referent, within a limited field of vision, as in the example of the rabbit beneath the window.



A mountain with its "beneath" projection.



The black floor **underneath** a house with a "beneath" projection.

## BENEATH and UNDERNEATH used in figurative and abstract senses:

**Underneath** his appearance he was a good guy.

I helped him explore the emotion **underneath** the anger.

She glared at me from **beneath** her eyelashes.

The green grass lies **beneath** his sight.

BENEATH used in the figurative sense is often interchangeable with UNDERNEATH:

**Beneath** her looks lie intelligence and virtue.

**Underneath** her looks lie intelligence and virtue.

## NEATH: beneath

Also ANEATH. Archaic or regional.

Not often used nowadays, NEATH is interchangeable with BENEATH:

The herd sleeps **neath** the mountains.

## UP & DOWN: not necessarily perpendicular to the plane

The prepositions UP and DOWN are not only used to show a truly vertical attribute. Actually they are commonly used in a horizontal sense, as well as to indicate various slopes. Consider the following examples:

I work on the 50th floor and I have to go **up** the stairs to my office now.

I had to walk **up** the hills in San Francisco. Then I walked **down** the hills.

The Post Office is just **up** the street.

The bank is just **down** the street.

There is a bridge **up** the river.

The bear was **up** the tree.

The imaginary lines produced by the notion of UP and DOWN in the examples above have variable vertical orientations. For example, I may go up the stairs on a moderate slope, but when I arrive on the 50<sup>th</sup> floor I will be in my office, which is UP in a vertical direction from the street immediately below, likely at a 90-degree angle. On the other hand, when I had to walk UP and DOWN the hills of San Francisco, I did not feel a strong sense of verticality because I climbed on a very gentle slope. The Post Office in the example is really on the top of the hill, and the bank is on the lower part of the street. The bridge is located upstream the river; the bear was on top of the tree.

There are other informal considerations regarding the choice of up or down a street:

- \* For some people, if they leave through a door and turn right, they feel they are walking UP the street; if they turn left, they feel they are walking DOWN the street. I am not particularly fond of this logic.
- \* Another common consideration is the notion of north and south, which can come from your own sense of direction or from the street itself (for instance, if you walk DOWN Fifth Avenue in New York City, for example from the Lincoln Center subway station to Columbus Circle and crossing from 65<sup>th</sup> Street to 60<sup>th</sup> Street, you will really be walking south; if you walk on the opposite direction, you will be walking north).
- \* Some speakers tend to look at the flow of traffic to decide whether they are going up or down a street. In this case, if you are going with the flow, you are going DOWN, but if you are going against the flow, you are going UP the street.

The address numbers on the street is perhaps the second best reason to choose between UP and DOWN the street (after the inclination of the street). In other words, if you walk along increasing numbers, you are going UP; if you walk

along decreasing numbers, you are going DOWN the street. The example below is my real case:

I am at number 9. I live **down** the street from my friend Don, who lives at number 27.

UP and DOWN are often used in idiomatic prepositional phrases:

She is **up to her ears** in work.

A lot of money went **down the drain** when he decided to start a business.

The expressions above mean that she is *almost covered* by (so much) work, and that too much money was *wasted* when he decided to start a business. The example in (a) shows orientation with direction; the example in (b) is not possible:

- a) The dog looked **up** the tree.
- b) The dog looked **on top of** the tree. ☺

Also ADOWN. Archaic or regional.

We found a beautiful waterfall rushing **adown** the steep slope of the mountain.

UP and DOWN used in the figurative sense:

A car came **down** the road heading straight to us.

The information went **up** the chain of command.

### **UP AND DOWN: from one side to the other of**

The figurative phrase UP AND DOWN does not designate any vertical axis or specific side of the place being described:

He was worried, walking **up and down** the aisle.

The parade was marching **up and down** the square.

### **UP TO: as far as; not more than or beyond the specified referent**

UP TO is often used in the sense of extension, limit, or boundary:

She put her socks **up to** her knees.

They drive more than 1500 migrants a day **up to** the border.

UP TO used in the figurative and abstract contexts:

It is **up to** her boss to make the decision.

Manatees eat **up to** 10% of their weight a day.

I am sure she can do it--she is **up to** the challenge.

She used to be an assistant, but she worked **up to** professor of the Law School.

UP TO is also used in temporal contexts.

## Horizontal Projections

### IN FRONT OF & BEHIND: opposites on the other side of

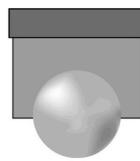
IN FRONT OF and BEHIND usually imply separation. To a certain extent (when BEHIND is not being used to imply delay, immobility or support) the rationale behind these two prepositions is quite similar. For example, if an entity is situated IN FRONT OF a referent, like the ball and the box shown in the figure below, we could say:

The ball is **in front of** the box.

The box is **in front of** the ball.

The ball is **behind** the box.

The box is **behind** the ball.



The ball is **in front of** the box.

according to our point of view. However, be extra careful when using these prepositions, as *volume* plays an important role in their choice. For example, if a house is the entity and the referent is a pen, it would not be coherent to say:

The house is **in front of** the pen. ☹

The house is **behind** the pen. ☹

Now, supposing that the entity is a house and the referent is a cat, we would say the sentence in (a) but should avoid using (b):

a) The cat is **in front of** the house.

b) The house is **behind** the cat. ☺

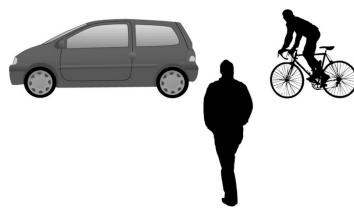
However, when entity and referent suggest an order or a front-back orientation, we tend to ignore the notion of volume. In addition, we do not need to be aligned with the referent and the entity in order to properly use IN FRONT OF or BEHIND when we are able to distinguish between them. For example:

The little child is **behind** the big tree.

In the figure above, the woman is the observer, the bicycle is the referent and the car is the entity. The woman can see the car behind the bicycle because the car is larger than the bicycle, but you may also use BEHIND if you are not aligned with the referent and the entity, in case you acknowledge their positions from your point of view. For instance, in the second figure, the man is the observer, the car is now the referent, and the bicycle is the entity.



The car is **behind** the bicycle.



The bicycle is **behind** the car.

We also know that one object is behind another when they have a front and back orientation. For instance, if you are the observer walking along a street and you see a red car parked behind a blue car, the front of the two cars will determine their position relative to one another, and the red car will be behind the blue car regardless of your position along the street.

Nevertheless, if you can only see the referent (but cannot see the entity) you

will still be able to use BEHIND if you know the whereabouts of the entity. For example:

The child is hiding **behind** the door.

We know that volume and the sense of horizontality play an important role in the choice of the preposition BEHIND or IN FRONT OF. We have also seen earlier that it is not coherent to say that *the house is in front of the pen*, *the house is behind the pen* or *the house is behind the cat*. However, a coherent combination of referent and entity can also influence the concept of volume. For example, we could say the sentence in (a), but I would not say the sentence in (b) because it is not coherent, despite being grammatically correct:

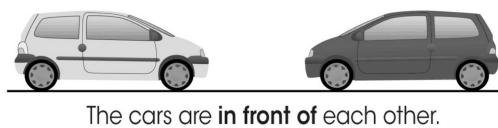
- a) The man **behind** the guitar is making the whole difference.
- b) The house **behind** the guitar is small. ☺

The idea here is that of volume, as seen earlier, in addition to the association of the entity with its referent. For instance, we know what a guitar player can do with a guitar, which means that the attribute of volume alone is not enough for us to re-evaluate the preposition in (a), but there is nothing a house can do with a guitar, which means that the attribute of volume in (b) alone does not work for the sentence (whereas in (a) we tend to accept BEHIND in a more figurative interpretation).

We have seen that the notion of front and back plays a natural role in our choice of the prepositions BEHIND and IN FRONT OF. Looking at the next figure, could you tell which car is BEHIND the other? Here there are two apparent choices, as follows:

The cars are **in front of** each other.

The cars are facing each other.



One curiosity regarding the notion of front and back: When we see a train

with many railroad cars, the railroad cars are not in front of each other. Since railroad cars do not have a front-back orientation, all railroad cars are behind one another and pulled by the locomotive (the front orientation).

IN FRONT OF and BEHIND used in the figurative and abstract world:

He's **behind** his classmates in math.

She doesn't like to be kissed **in front of** her parents.

The president was **behind** the senator in the polls.

The answer was **in front of** us the whole time.

She knew who stood **behind** her when she needed.

He had to wait because the train was **behind** schedule.

The mayor is the man **behind** the idea of Zero Tolerance policing.

The reporter gave us a look **behind** the scenes of the White House.

## AHEAD OF & IN ADVANCE OF: **in front of; before**

I use AHEAD OF to demonstrate that--or how much--something or someone is in front of, or further away from, the specified referent. For example:

The storm was 10 miles **ahead of** the boat.

The black horse is **ahead of** the white horse.

IN ADVANCE OF is almost always interchangeable with AHEAD OF and often used as a temporal preposition. I use it, though not very often, when I want to show forward distance or progress from a referent, regardless of a specific front orientation:

Twenty thousand soldiers were in line of battle, one mile **in advance of** the enemy.

The enemy was camped about five miles **in advance of** the village.

AHEAD OF and IN ADVANCE OF used outside the physical world:

She was extraordinary--a woman **ahead of** her time.

He never goes **in advance of** public opinion.

See also Chapter 5 for more examples of AHEAD OF and IN ADVANCE

OF.

### **AT THE FRONT OF: at the forward part of something**

We can use AT THE FRONT OF to designate the front or forward part of something or of a collective of things or people--inside or outside a place:

The violinists are **at the front of** the orchestra.

Supermarkets put their oldest products **at the front of** the shelves.

I was standing **at the front of** the line but the cashier ignored me!

or integrated with the place:

Most of the houses have porches **at the front of** the house.

We can say (a), but not (b):

She is **in front of** me.

She is **at the front of** me. ☺

### **IN THE FRONT OF: in the forward part of something**

IN THE FRONT OF shows something or someone in the front part of (inside) a place:

She prefers to sit **in the front of** the classroom.

Pain **in the front of** the knee is common among runners.

See IN THE FRONT OF also in Chapter 4.

### **IN BACK OF & AT THE BACK OF: behind; at the rear part of**

Also BACK OF.

IN BACK OF and BACK OF (American English) designate a position behind a referent:

The owner was **in back of** the shop when the thieves entered.

The gas station is **back of** the supermarket.

AT THE BACK OF normally designates a position at the rear part of something such as groups of people that are part of a collective noun, or

things that are inside or outside a place:

They like to sit **at the back of** the class.

Supermarkets put their newest products **at the back of** the shelves.

I arrived late and took my place **at the back of** the line.

or integrated with the place:

The teachers park **at the back of** the school.

We can say (a), but not (b), (c) or (d):

- a) She is **behind** me.
- b) She is **back of** me. ☺
- c) She is **in back of** me. ☺
- d) She is **at the back of** me. ☺

Used in the figurative sense:

I saw fear **in back of** his eyes.

Happiness is **at the back of** sadness.

## IN THE BACK OF: in the rear part of something

IN THE BACK OF shows something or someone in the rear part of (inside) a place:

The children sat **in the back of** the classroom.

Pain **in the back of** the head can have several reasons.

IN THE BACK OF used in the figurative sense:

He keeps his secrets **in the back of** his mind.

See IN THE BACK OF also in Chapter 4.

## ON THE BACK OF: on the opposite or rear part of something

ON THE BACK OF designates a part or component of, or contact with, the back or rear part of something:

I couldn't read the license place **on the back of** the truck.

The conditions were written **on the back of** the ticket.

## **ON THE FRONT OF: on the forward part of something**

ON THE FRONT OF designates a part or component of, or contact with, the forward part of something:

Please, put the stamp **on the front of** the envelope.

He wants the company's logo **on the front of** the T-shirt.

## **AT THE BEGINNING OF: at the initial part of something**

The sign **at the beginning of** the tunnel says "turn on your lights."

**At the beginning of** the novel, the author introduces the characters.

See also Common Expressions of Time in Chapter 5.

## **AT THE END OF: at the furthest or final part of something**

**At the end of** the road you can see the old castle.

The teacher's desk is placed **at the end of** the room.

Some English teachers avoid prepositions **at the end of** a sentence.

See also *Common Expressions of Time* in Chapter 5.

## **ABAFT: behind; nearer the stern**

Chiefly nautical.

The preposition ABAFT functions as the opposite of AFORE, though the latter is not too restricted to nautical terminology:

The storage room is located just **abaft** the engine room.

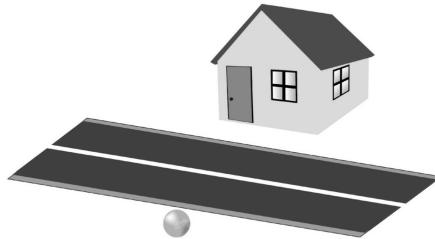
It's a comfortable ship. **Abaft** the foremast is a house 24 feet long by 16 feet wide.

## **ACROSS FROM & ACROSS: on the other side of; opposite**

In a way, ACROSS FROM resembles IN FRONT OF used with an obstacle *between* the entity and its referent or when the entity is at a relevant distance. For example:

The bus stopped **across** the street **from** the square.

The bus stopped **in front of** the building.



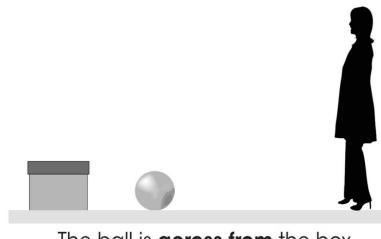
The ball is **across** the street **from** the house.

ACROSS FROM is also used as OPPOSITE or IN FRONT OF without indicating any (or with an imaginary) obstacle between the entity and its referent. Compare:

I live **across from** the store.

His office is **across from** mine.

He is sitting on the chair **in front of** my desk.



The ball is **across from** the box.

We have seen the directional preposition ACROSS in Chapter 1. Here, ACROSS takes an orientational attribute, however not exactly as in ACROSS FROM. For example, one can say:

The ball is **across** the street.

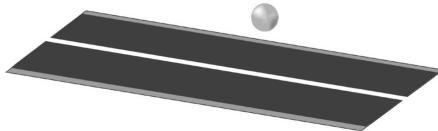
without any additional referent, and we will know the location of the ball relative to the street (on the other side), but will not know for sure its "exact point" (however, it will be "exactly" on the other side of the street). Normally, though, speakers use ACROSS to show a certain projection from where one stands, often with an intensifier adverb, as in the example below:

The ball is *right* **across** the street.

**ACROSS FROM** in the figurative sense:

She sat on one of the chairs directly **across from** his vision.

He performs **across from** talented actresses.



The ball is **across** the street.

See also ACROSS, ASLANT, and ATHWART in Chapter 1.

### **OPPOSITE & FACING: across from; on the other side of**

The preposition OPPOSITE functions much like ACROSS FROM, meaning "on the other side of, facing a referent." The subject and the referent object of the preposition are often (but not necessarily) of corresponding nature. We use OPPOSITE with or without a real or imaginary obstacle between the entity and its referent:

He sat **opposite** her in the restaurant.

The bank is on Oak Street, **opposite** the post office.

Before becoming friends, they fought **opposite** each other in the war.

FACING suggests a more contemplative front orientation and seldom requires a corresponding referent (i.e., entity and referent do not necessarily need to be of similar nature):

The hotel offered me a room **facing** the sea.

OPPOSITE is not always interchangeable with FACING. For example, both sentences below are grammatically correct, but the example in (b) is rather awkward:

a) The hotel has a window **facing** the city.

b) The hotel has a window **opposite** the city. ☺

OPPOSITE is also used figuratively as "together with" or "in a complementary role to (a corresponding referent)," to show participation in

the entertaining arts, especially in movies and plays:

The actor performed **opposite** a talented actress in several movies.

Sometimes FACING is used before abstract nouns to show some kind of expectation:

**Facing** the future, she was confronted with reality.

See also FORNENST in Chapter 3 and VIS-A-VIS in Chapter 6.

### **BEFORE: contrasting AFTER in front of you!**

The preposition BEFORE is frequently used as a temporal preposition, but it is also common as a preposition of orientation with the same spatial sense of IN FRONT OF, as in the examples below:

- a) Don't put the cart **before** the horses!
- b) The gangster was brought **before** the judge.
- c) School buses are supposed to stop **before** the railroad crossing.

The example in (a) is an old saying that means "don't lose quality by doing things in a hurry" (or "don't put the cart in front of the horses, the horses must pull the cart and not the other way around"). The sentence in (b) tells that the gangster was in front of a judge. In (c), the school bus drivers must come to a complete stop prior to crossing the tracks.

BEFORE, in the sense of IN FRONT OF, was often used in Early Modern English, like in this passage below from the play *Cymbeline*, by William Shakespeare:

*"I can see neither one way nor other, **before** me nor behind me, but all the ways are covered with an impenetrable fog."*

BEFORE is still preferred for a more solemn mode or to show submission:

Your Honor, I come **before** you to defend my integrity.

The case will be brought **before** the court.

BEFORE is quite an exact opposite of the preposition AFTER. For example, when I visited Sausalito, in California, I asked for directions to the Presidio

Yacht Club, on my way back to San Francisco, and someone told me:

Go straight ahead and turn right **before** the tunnel.

BEFORE used in the figurative sense and before abstract nouns:

I choose peace **before** war and health **before** sickness.

She puts work **before** love.

The preposition BEFORE is also explored in Chapter 5.

## **UP BEFORE: in the presence of**

Normally used in combination with a verb of action or motion:

The officer dragged the suspect **up before** the judge.

The president will put the matter **up before** the Congress for vote.

## **AFORE: before**

Also FORE or 'FORE. Archaic or regional.

He sat down and put his hands **afore** his eyes.

For his crime, he shall be taken '**fore** the judge!

The bishop took his cause **fore** his Holiness.

She stood **afore** him in silence.

AFORE and FORE can also be used in figurative and abstract senses:

He was born **afore** his time.

She was getting old '**fore** her time.

He was brought **afore** the law.

This preposition is also used in the temporal sense (see Chapter 5).

## **AFTER: always following something or someone**

AFTER can be quite an undetermined locator in terms of precision, therefore you must use it with coherence. For example, if some tourist stops you at the corner of Constitution Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Washington, D.C. asking for

directions to the White House, you could say something like this:

Go straight ahead and **after** five blocks turn left on Pennsylvania Avenue.

However, if you were one hundred miles away from Pennsylvania Avenue, it would not be normal for you to say something like:

Go in that direction, and **after** one hundred miles turn left on Pennsylvania Avenue.

because there are too many obstacles that literally block the construction of a coherent sentence with AFTER in a one hundred-mile--therefore unpredictable--path. However, if you think in terms of a more linear and less obstructed path, like a highway, for instance, then you would be able to say:

Drive straight ahead, and **after** 100 miles there will be a gas station.

Interesting here is the word *following* I used at the beginning of this section to introduce the preposition AFTER. The verb *follow* can be interpreted two ways on a horizontal plan, sometimes with the sense of a "behind" direction, at times with the sense of an "ahead" direction. For example, the sentence:

I am **after** the White House.

may mean that I have past the White House from the point of view of where I was before, or that I still have not reached it, starting from the same point of view (the corner of Constitution Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street). For instance, the captions below in (a) and (b) look the same, but they actually have two different meanings, as you can see in their respective illustrations:



a) The dog is **after** the cat.



b) The dog is **after** the cat.

In the examples of (a) and (b), I used the verb *be* to help demonstrate the position of the dog relative to the cat. If we added a dynamic verb in (a), such

as *run*, for example, we would produce a slightly different meaning:

The dog is running **after** the cat.

However, adding such a verb would not be possible for the example in (b).

Note that, in the example in figure (a), AFTER is the best choice of preposition because we can be sure that the dog is pursuing the cat, whereas in (b), the dog could also be BESIDE the cat or NEXT TO the cat (depending on the point of view of the observer). The prepositions BESIDE and NEXT TO are explained in Chapter 3.

AFTER, in the orientational sense discussed in this chapter, is similar to BEHIND; therefore you could also say:

The dog is running **behind** the cat.

The right choice of preposition will depend on the context. For instance, if the dog is *chasing* the cat, then AFTER is the appropriate preposition; if the speaker simply wants to *locate* the dog at a certain distance from the cat (the two animals are friends, and they are running *together*, one behind, or following, the other), then BEHIND is the appropriate preposition.

AFTER used with abstract nouns:

He is always going **after** success.

He called the cops because he was **after** justice.

In the figurative and abstract senses, AFTER may also be used to indicate a sequence or order of priority, or allusion to or imitation of something or someone:

**After** quality, price is critical.

Tertiary comes **after** secondary.

He named her daughter **after** his father!

Her portrait was painted **after** a photograph.

AFTER is also explored in Chapter 5.

## AT THE HEELS OF: near; following close behind

The hunters were **at the heels of** the herd.

The secret agents were **at the heels of** the terrorist.

Also used outside the physical world:

The African economy is **at the heels of** the Asian economy.

See also ON THE HEELS OF in Chapter 5.

### **BEYOND: on the other side of; further away than; behind**

BEYOND resembles BEHIND to a certain extent, especially in terms of close distances. You could say **behind these walls** or **behind this door**, and you could also say **beyond these walls** or **beyond this door**, regardless of the distance between the object behind or beyond the walls or the door. However, if you need to imply some distance, the preposition BEYOND is more appropriate. In the examples below, the sentence in (a) tells us of a dog that is on the other side of the door; the dog may or may not be close to the door. The example in (b) gives us a sense of distance; the dog is probably (although not necessarily) away from the door.

a) Be careful. There is a mad dog **behind** this door.

b) Be careful. There is a mad dog **beyond** this door.

BEYOND is also more often used in cases where the entity does not require an evaluation of the type of surface and volume of its referent. For instance, still comparing BEHIND and BEYOND, it is normal for us to say:

There are beautiful green meadows **behind** those mountains.

However, if from your point of view the green meadows are located between you and the mountains, you would say:

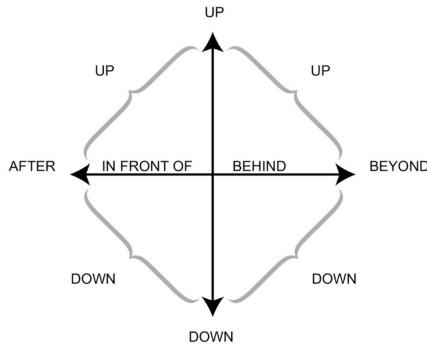
There are mountains **beyond** these beautiful green meadows.

The lack of relevant volume is very clear in the examples below, where the use of BEHIND would not be the best choice:

There is a pot of gold **beyond** the rainbow.

If we continue sailing, we may find land **beyond** the horizon.

The following conceptual schema shows the directions and constraints of six basic vertical and horizontal prepositions. The gray demarcated areas of UP are contained in a 90-degree angle representing possible UP situations from a vertical position to its horizontal limit (e.g., where increasing address numbers and a northward indication suggest the use of UP). The same goes for the gray demarcated areas of DOWN, which are also contained in a 90-degree angle representing possible DOWN situations from a negative vertical position (e.g., where decreasing address numbers from UP and a southward indication suggest the use of DOWN).



A vertical and horizontal prepositional schema.

The horizontal front-and-back prepositions IN FRONT OF and BEHIND are more immediate opposites, signifying a closer distance between entity and referent, without actually limiting their scope, whereas AFTER and BEYOND may suggest that the entity might be further away from its referent. Compare the two sentences below:

- a) There is a beautiful waterfall **behind** the mountain.
- b) There is a beautiful valley **beyond** the mountain.

In (a), the use of BEHIND suggests that the waterfall is *on the back of* the mountain, whereas in (b), BEYOND suggests that the valley lies *further away than* the mountain.

BEYOND used with abstract nouns:

The devastation the war could bring is **beyond** imagination.

It is **beyond** doubt that music gives pleasure to most people.

Sometimes BEYOND is used with a *that*-clause in the figurative sense:

There is nothing the war prisoner would say **beyond** that he fought for his country.

They have no knowledge about the house **beyond** that it was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## Reading the Story

### A Trip to Sausalito

Last weekend my wife and I visited Sausalito, a beautiful city in the San Francisco Bay Area, in California, near the famous Golden Gate Bridge, only thirteen feet (four meters) **above** sea level. We rented a small car at the airport to drive across the Golden Gate Bridge. We took the first right **after** the bridge, on the Alexander exit, to Bridgeway, and drove **up** Bridgeway to visit the Sausalito Ferry Terminal. We had already been there, but never on such a gorgeous weekend.

On Saturday, we met a friend **in front of** the Sausalito Marina and hired a sail boat to see the Golden Gate. The wind was blowing 23 knots with the water perfectly flat. It was quite an adventure! We sailed **underneath** a blue sky and passed **under** the bridge a couple of times, hours after we left the marina. We wanted to come back in time to see the sun going **below** the horizon from the marina, so I asked the captain to go back before sundown.

It was very hot **under** the sun, so after a while we all relaxed inside the main cabin. However, at around 6 p.m. we were still sailing, but now the wind was much cooler than in the morning, and we decided to warm ourselves up a bit. My wife chose to lie **underneath** a blanket she found **under** the seat inside the cabin; I was wearing a long-sleeve shirt **underneath** my weather jacket. We got out of the cabin in time to watch the boat enter the harbor. Suddenly, to our surprise and amusement, in the still waters **beneath** the boat we saw a great Orca! Beautiful sea, incredible blue, full of mysteries **below** the surface  
...

We drove back to San Francisco and rode through Waldo Tunnel, also known as the "Rainbow Tunnel," and still had time to drive **down** Lombard Street to visit Fisherman's Wharf. Suddenly, and to everyone's surprise again, who do I see right **before** me? My brother! He came from **behind** a store to get on a trolley that was right **across** the street and almost bumped into me. He told me about the charming wineries, wine tours and festivals, and breathtaking country scenery--all just **beyond** the San Francisco Bay--and that he and his friends had flown by helicopter **over** the Golden Gate Bridge and Sausalito.

On Sunday, we rented two bikes at the rental store right **across** the street **from** our hotel and rode at the shore along Crissy Field, from Fort Point to the marina and back. A nice, cool breeze blew throughout the day.

### **Practicing the Best Scenario**

Think carefully before answering the ten questions below. First, read all the questions, trying to relate them to the correct prepositions, and only then start from the first one. Make sure not to repeat a preposition (unless you are using a double preposition and you need to repeat one of them) and to use the prepositions introduced in this chapter only.

- 1) From my window I could see a balloon high in the air right \_\_\_ our building.
- 2) Her car was parked exactly \_\_\_ her house, on her sidewalk.
- 3) The blimp floated \_\_\_ the crowd, who looked straight up to see it.
- 4) The man stood \_\_\_ the judge waiting for the verdict.
- 5) My car was parked \_\_\_ the street.
- 6) The truck was parked \_\_\_ the street \_\_\_ the supermarket.
- 7) I always wear warm underwear \_\_\_ my winter clothes.
- 8) The cat was hiding \_\_\_ the sofa.
- 9) I work on the second floor. There is a bus stop \_\_\_ my office window.
- 10) One day astronauts will travel \_\_\_ the moon to explore other worlds.

## Chapter 3 : Prepositions of Location

The prepositions of location--or locational prepositions--are used to designate a *place*, a *position* or a *location* of an entity that is somehow *connected to* its referent, in contrast to the prepositions of orientation seen in Chapter 2, which are used to designate a region *projected from* its referent. Two examples of prepositions of location are:

The book is **on** the table.

The children are watching TV **in** the living room.

## Spatial Prepositions with Non-Spatial Relationships

Many times we use spatial prepositions to designate relationships between ideas or things, without resorting to spatial or temporal senses proper. For example, we use the preposition IN to say that we are *in the living room*, but we also use IN to describe that someone is *in a difficult situation*; you can use the preposition ON to say that you are *on the roof* or that your best TV show is *on the air* or *on channel 11*; you could use the preposition AT to describe that your friend was *at a stage in his life where he would no longer change*; or you could use WITH to say that *you are dealing with a feeling of anxiety*. These uses of prepositions, often in the figurative or abstract senses, are also considered in this chapter.

Let us start with the classic prepositions of location IN, ON, and AT, and begin an important discussion of the notion of "containment" (vs. "non-containment") and "surface." Exploring these spatial and non-spatial relationships can widen your perception of "location" and "place" in the prepositional and metaphorical world. The Notion of Containment and Surfaces

### **IN: a sense of containment; ON: a sense of surface**

Basically, entities can be IN a (three-dimensional) space or ON a (two-dimensional) surface. As seen earlier in Chapter 1, places and locations can have *volume*, which means that if you are walking *through* a forest, you are IN the forest, and if you are walking *across* an airport runway, you are ON the runway. In other words, a forest has a "sense of volume," while an airport runway has a "sense of area." You could also think in terms of *dimensions*;

for instance, a forest has a three-dimensional sense, while an airport runway has a two-dimensional sense (you cannot walk INSIDE a runway). To simplify, IN introduces a type of *container*, and ON designates a type of *contact*. (See more IN and ON in Chapters 4 and 5.)

Therefore, the preposition IN is used to designate a location or position inside any type of container, metaphorically and literally speaking. In this latter sense, a container may be a house, a drawer, a box, a cup, a car, a swimming pool, etc. Some metaphorical containers of IN could be your heart, your mind, your mood, a situation, etc. The problem with this rationale is that not always a container will look like one. First, let us deal with the notion of IN with "complete" containers in the examples below:

Kenzo is **in** his house.

Yoko is **in** the swimming pool.

The silverware is **in** the drawer.

The money is **in** the wallet.

There is water **in** the glass.

A box, for instance, may represent a complete container, and we do not even need to close the lid of the box in order to have the *container effect*; in other words, an open trash can or a glass of water, a closet with the doors open or closed, or a shoe box with or without the lid on it are all "containers of the preposition IN."

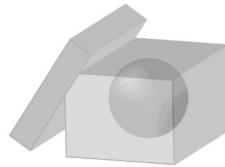
However, the preposition IN is not only used in situations where we find a complete container; that is, what we need is a "sense" of container. For example, compare the following sentences:

a) She is reading **in** the room.

b) She is reading **in** the chair.

In (a), a room has the basic configuration of a container; that is to say, a place where someone or something can be INSIDE, just like in a box. In (b), the chair, with only the seat and the back, definitely does not *look* like a container. However, in order to apply the prepositions IN and ON (and AT) correctly, we have to know how to distinguish between what is considered a container and what is not. For example, a person may be *sitting* IN or ON a

chair, but never *standing IN* a chair. This means that context plays a major role in the choice of these prepositions.



There is a ball **in** the box.

We have discussed the notion of "container," and we already know the concept of "complete container." Now we need to understand the concept of "partial container," which is what makes possible to contrast the two sentences below:

She is **in** the chair.

He is **on** the chair.

Thinking spatially, the seat and the back of the chair form a partial container the same way the walls of a room help form a complete container. The preposition **ON**, in contrast to **IN**, designates the location of an entity **ON TOP OF**, in contact with, or supported by a *surface*, regardless of shape, dimension or volume. For example:

a dot **on** a line

a ball **on** the floor



She is reading **in** the chair.

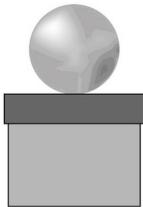


He is standing **on** the chair!

#### **THE NOTION OF CONTAINMENT ALSO INVOLVES THE SENSE OF CONTAINMENT!**

Just as a container can be represented by a cup, a box, a room, etc., a *surface* can be *any exterior boundary of an entity* and can also have many shapes, such as, for instance, the open flat surface of a table, the face of a ball, the runway where airplanes land, the walls of your house, a rose petal, a bottle,

your arm, and so forth.



There is a ball **on** the box.

There are three dots **on** the line.

## The Concepts of Container and Surface: The Groups of Situations

The concept of container encompasses all the spatial relations known to us. For instance, the universe is a container, for it contains everything, including all the galaxies, stars, planets, time, the contents of intergalactic space, and so forth. Our house is also a container. It contains our furniture, personal objects, etc. This concept is a meaningful prepositional finding, from which we can infer the different spatial relations connected to the prepositions IN, ON, and AT. In other words, if everything is IN, then the referents designated by the preposition ON are always *contained* in the referents designated by the preposition IN. The following examples confirm this relation:

There is a house **on** the street. The street is **in** the neighborhood.

The neighborhood is **in** the city. The city is **in** the state.

The state is **in** the country. The country is **in** the North America.

The continent is **in** the northern hemisphere, **on** planet Earth.

The planet is **in** our galaxy. Our galaxy is **in** the universe.

The idea behind the examples above is that, in a geographic or urban context, a larger region always acts as a container, containing all other *hierarchically smaller* areas down to the last possible one of the same group context, or *group of situations*, which will always behave as a *delimited surface*. For example, in an urban environment, the smaller *hierarchical* designation of a city is a street; consequently, a person or a thing will be ON the street, whereas the street itself and all the rest will be IN the city, and so on. The sentences below exemplify this rationale:

The beautiful store is **on** Fifth Avenue.

Fifth Avenue is **in** New York City.

New York City is **in** the state of New York.

The state of New York is **in** The United States.

The United States is **in** North America.

The five examples above have an *urban-to-geographic* hierarchical relation, which means that they belong to the same group of situations. Now let us suppose that you are faced with a *rural-to-geographic* context; in this case, we could use the following examples:

The horse is **on** the farm.

The farm is **in** Nelson County.

Nelson County is **in** North Dakota.

North Dakota is **in** the United States.

The United States is **in** North America.

The sentences below belong to the *maritime* group of situations:

The castaway is **on** the island.

The island is **in** the Caribbean Sea.

The Caribbean Sea is **in** the Atlantic Ocean.

When we talk about *outer space* we have another group of situations:

One day astronauts will walk **on** Mars.

Mars is **in** our Solar System.

The Solar System is **in** our galaxy.

Our galaxy is **in** the universe.

The physical size of the referenced surfaces should not influence our choice of the preposition **ON**. For example, we can be **ON** a large or **ON** a small island; **ON** a large or **ON** a small street:

Astronauts walked **on** the moon, but they will not walk **on** Jupiter.

We need to consider *delimited surfaces* that are within an "IN referent" of a specific group of situations. Therefore, every time we must establish a

relation of contact with a surface, we use the preposition **ON**, and for its *immediate container* we use the preposition **IN**. For instance, compare the following examples of delimited surfaces within their immediate containers:

The book is **on** the table. The table is **in** the house.

The store is **on** the street. The street is **in** the village.

The horse is **on** the farm. The farm is **in** the parish.

The castaway is **on** the island. The island is **in** the ocean.

The astronaut is **on** the moon. The moon is **in** the Solar System.

Consider our previous maritime group context. Think fast: is an island like a man **IN** the water or like a boat **ON** the water? That was a tricky question. An island is always **IN** the water (precisely **IN** the ocean or **IN** the sea) but not partially inside the water, as when we are swimming. Islands are a piece of land surrounded by water; they do not float, since they are part of the ocean floor.

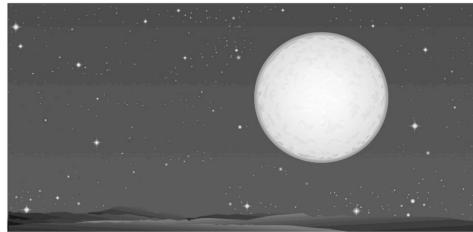
Just as a street is a delimited surface in a city, an island is also a delimited area in an ocean; consequently, the man and the woman in the following picture are **ON** the island, and the island is **IN** the ocean.



The man and the woman are **on** the island. The island is **in** the ocean.

The same rationale is true for the planets, moons, asteroids, stars, etc. that are **IN** space. All of these astronomical bodies are seen primarily as individual delimited surfaces in the universe in the same prepositional way that a street is related to the city and an island is related to the ocean. We could then say that:

Only twelve people walked **on** the moon during the Apollo program.



Is there life **on** other planets?

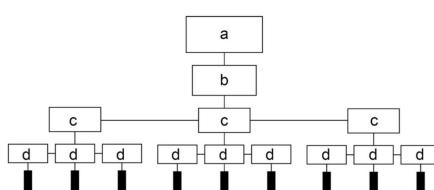
The tables below deal with the concept of "magnitude" of the prepositions IN and ON:

<b>IN</b>	<b>the UNIVERSE</b>	There are billions of stars <b>in</b> the Milky Way.
in	the continent	Maria lives <b>in</b> South America.
in	the country	João lives <b>in</b> Brazil.
in	the state	Mary lives <b>in</b> Florida.
in	the county	She lives <b>in</b> Durval County.
in	the city	She lives <b>in</b> Jacksonville.
<b>ON</b>	<b>the STREET</b>	She lives <b>on</b> Oak Street.
<b>IN</b>	<b>the UNIVERSE</b>	There are billions of stars <b>in</b> the Milky Way.
in	the continent	Maria lives <b>in</b> South America.
in	the country	João lives <b>in</b> Brazil.
in	the state	Jennifer lives <b>in</b> Florida.
in	the county	She lives <b>in</b> Orange County.
in	the city	She lives <b>in</b> Orlando.
<b>ON</b>	<b>the FARM</b>	She lives <b>on</b> her farm.
<b>IN</b>	<b>the UNIVERSE</b>	There are billions of stars <b>in</b> the Milky Way.
<b>ON</b>	<b>the MOON</b>	The astronaut is <b>on</b> the moon.
<b>IN</b>	<b>the OCEAN</b>	There are billions of fish <b>in</b> the ocean.
in	the city	John lives <b>in</b> Manhattan.
<b>ON</b>	<b>the ISLAND</b>	John lives <b>on</b> the island of Manhattan.

The preposition ON as the smallest magnitude of IN.

If you are a teacher, a simple diagram is a good tool to show your students how the prepositions IN and ON are related in a particular group of situations. Take, for instance, the geographic-urban and the geographic-rural contexts. The diagram could look like the one below; it does not need to be perfect, and you could draw it and describe it on the blackboard:

The description of your diagram could be something like this:



(a) = IN the continent (the continent contains the country).<sup>5</sup>

(b) = IN the country (the country contains the states).

(c) = IN the state (the state contains the cities).

(d) = IN the city/county (the cities and counties contain the streets and the farms)

**I** = ON the street/farm (the streets and the farms do not contain other official geopolitical delimited areas).

## What About the Addresses on the Street?

Addresses are specific points related to a place or position--they are not *regions* but zero-dimensional *points of reference*. The examples below show how IN, ON, and AT interact as prepositions of location:

The Prime Minister lives **in** the United Kingdom.

He lives **in** London, **on** Downing Street--**at** 10 Downing Street.

The president lives **in** the United States.

He lives **in** Washington, **on** Pennsylvania Avenue--**at** 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

We have invested our time and efforts in understanding the rationale of the prepositions IN and ON (and a little of AT) used to designate locations. See more on the preposition AT and the prepositions of proximity in [Expressing Proximity and Relative Exactness](#).

Remember: IN and ON are not restricted to one type of surface or container. In our daily lives, we have an almost unlimited number of these two references surrounding us. Here are some additional examples of surfaces and containers:

The pen is **on** the notebook. The notebook is **in** the drawer.

The boat is **on** the lake. The lake is **in** the woods.

The resort is **on** the beach. The beach is **in** the neighborhood.

The horse is running **on** the track. The track is **in** the county.

The boy is skating **on** the ramp. The ramp is **in** the park.

The woodpecker is **on** the tree. The tree is **in** the forest.

The children are walking **on** the tree trunk. The tree trunk is **in** the yard.

Sometimes students get confused with the use of IN and ON with the same referent. Again, when this is your case, **THINK SPATIALLY!** Compare the sentences below:

- a) The "For Sale" sign is **in** the yard.
- b) I had to spray herbicide **on** the yard.
- c) The plants are **in** the soil.
- d) The plants are **on** the soil.

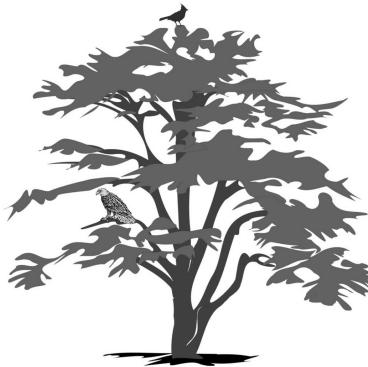
In (a), the "For Sale" sign is *surrounded* by grass and plants (the notion of volume). In (b), I sprayed herbicide *on the surface* of the grass and the plants, but I did not spray it *inside* the garden. In (c), the plants are *planted inside* the earth. In (d), the plants are laying *on the ground surface*--they are probably dead plants.

Sometimes an event ON a surface will result in an event IN a container of the same referent; that is, the same referent may function both as a surface and as a container--context dictates the rule:

The woodpecker is **on** the tree, looking for insects **in** the tree.

The hawk is **in** the tree; the smaller bird is **on** the tree.

Do not allow the concepts of surface and container to trick you--use your good sense to describe things that are IN or ON places and locations by observing and contrasting. For instance, if you hear of a hawk IN the tree it is because the hawk is on a branch underneath the leaves; if you hear of a bird ON a tree it is probably because the bird is on top of a leaf or of an exposed branch of the tree (however, we know that there are birds who actually build their nests INSIDE the trees, such as most parrots and macaws, for example).



There is a hawk **in** the tree and a smaller bird **on** the tree.

We could elaborate more on the example of the bird and the hawk by adding that the hawk is **IN** the tree, precisely **ON** a branch of the tree; the smaller bird is **ON** the tree (or **ON TOP OF** the tree), precisely **ON** a leaf.

Woodpeckers are a type of bird that is always **ON** trees. But we do not usually spot them on branches or leaves, although to be **ON** a tree is very important for them. Normally, we see them **ON** the tree trunks, regardless of the trunks' orientation:



The woodpecker is **on** the tree trunk.

The woodpecker is **on** the tree.

The notion of surface and container (i.e., of two-dimensional and three-dimensional space) is crucial if you want to master the prepositions **IN** and **ON**. The two examples below show a *container-to-container* relation and a *surface-to-surface* relation:

The notebook is **in** the drawer. The drawer is **in** the desk.

The horse ran **on** the track. The track is **on** an old airfield.

We could extend the examples above and create more **IN/ON** possibilities:

The desk is **on** the wooden floor. The wooden floor is **in** the office.

The airfield is **on** an old farm. The farm is **in** the Lake District.

The following sentences deal with the sense of containment and surface:

- a) She punched him **in** the face!
- b) She tapped him **on** the shoulder.
- c) She kissed him **on** the cheek.
- d) He shot the deer **in** the head.

In (a), the speaker is specifying the place where the punch was delivered. The use of IN instead of ON has a subtle but important logic, which makes us resort to the *container effect* discussed earlier. For instance, compare the sentences in (b) and (c). In these two examples, the preposition ON is applied in order to soothe the meaning in response to their preceding verbs. The rationale here is simple: if there is reasonable force or pressure involved in the action (thus the sense of a metaphorical container), we shall use the preposition IN, whereas if there is not, we shall apply the preposition ON (thus, the sense of surface). For instance, think of a Band-Aid ON your arm or an injection IN your arm.

In (d), the speaker is not applying the preposition AT because she chose to specify the place where the shot was actually inflicted, rather than speculating about the man's intention to hit the target (see more about the preposition AT in this chapter).

## Context Dictates How We Perceive the World

### IN the Rain?

Here we can observe the influence of context on the use of prepositions. The rain is perceived by native speakers in two different ways, which may be analyzed from the point of view of their perception of the phenomenon. The following sentences demonstrate the two nuances:

- a) People walk **under** heavy rain in Mumbai!
- b) I am happily walking **in** the rain!

Native speakers use the preposition UNDER, when followed by an adjective, perhaps to demonstrate *how* the phenomenon is *affecting* them, as described in (a). If the intention is to describe the *situation* or *state of condition* in which we may find ourselves during a rainfall event, usually our choice will fall on the preposition IN, as in the example of (b)--where the referent *rain* is

pictured as a *complete container* enfolding the speaker.

## What About the Snow and the Ice?

We can apply the same *container effect* rationale used to describe the rainfall to explain a snowy or icy event. The difference here is that there are some additional prepositional possibilities, as explained following the examples below:

- a) Every winter I walk **in** the ice, just as the polar bears do.
- b) Sometimes, looking for more adventure, I like to watch beluga whales **in** the ice.
- c) Last year, during one of my trips, I found a mastodon hidden **in** the ice!
- d) I also love to skate **on** ice in the winter. However, my wife prefers walking **on** snow!
- e) The other day we walked **in** the snow for hours after our bus broke down.
- f) As we walked, we could see several snowmobile tracks **on** the snow.

In (a), we could evaluate two strategies, considering the *container effect*: an environment *surrounded* by ice or the notion of "volume" of an ice storm. In (b) and (c), there is a sense of "complete container," which is *enfolding* the whale in icy water and the mastodon in solid ice. In (d), the two prepositions ON help convey the meaning of "surface" to their preceding verbs. In (e) and (f), the use of IN and ON helps draw a clear picture of two distinct situations: the referent *snow* is described first as a container and later as a surface.

## Walking IN the Water?

Yes, definitely! You simply cannot walk ON water--unless you have feet the size and shape of a boat! The rationale is simple: water in its liquid state cannot form a hard surface, such as that of ice, therefore acting as a container "enfolding" our feet every time we step IN it. See *IN the Swimming Pool, but IN or ON the Water?* and *People and Ducks* in this chapter.

## North, South, East, West, Etc.

Cardinal points, as well as their intermediate points, also have a sense of container. Prepositionally speaking, the four directions of the compass do not indicate a specific point or a surface, but a region:

Calais is **in** the north of France.

London is **in** the south of England.

Sydney is **in** the east of Australia.

California is **in** the west of the United States.

The adjectives derived from the cardinal points that are part of noun phrases also take the preposition **IN**. For example:

The South Pole is **in** the Southern Hemisphere.

The North Pole is **in** the Northern Hemisphere.

## Where in the Book? Where on the Book?

The preposition **IN** used to describe positions **ON** a page have a metaphorical sense of containment. For example, on a typical page you may find:

Text printed **on** the page.

A header **at** the top of the page.

A footer **at** the bottom of the page.

Numbers **in** the upper or lower right corner of the page.

The right margin **on** the right hand side of the page.

The left margin **on** the left hand side of the page.

Sometimes we find pictures **in** the center of the page.

Normally you can also find the name of the author **ON** the book cover and some text describing the book contents **ON** the back cover.<sup>6</sup>

## IN the Side, ON the Side or AT the Side Of

Sometimes we need to determine "which kind" of side we are referring to:

- a) The arrow tore a hole **in the side of** the barn.
- b) There is a sign painted **on the side of** the barn.
- c) The haystack was placed **at the side of** the barn.
- d) He didn't stretch properly and now he feels pain **in the side of** his back.
- e) A fall **on the side of** the shoulder can result in a painful fracture!
- f) She placed his arm in a position of comfort **at the side of** the body.

In (a), the hole is now part of the barn; in (b), the sign is painted on the outside wall of the barn; in (c), the haystack was placed beside the barn; in (d), he feels pain inside his back, perhaps in some of the lateral muscles; in (e), the speaker is describing an impact against the shoulder; in (f), the nurse placed the patient's arm parallel to his body--not *in* or *on* his body.

### **IN Used to Indicate Movement Toward a Container**

Sometimes IN borrows the *container effect* to imply movement and direction:

She went **in** the house to get her purse.

### **Figurative Uses of the Spatial Prepositions IN & ON**

We have seen earlier that spatial prepositions are also used in the real world to express non-spatial relations. However, we often do this by approximation to the spatial senses (but not always!), most of the time in figurative and metaphorical ways.

### **IN Used to Describe Metaphorical Containers**

In the following sentences, IN designates metaphorical containers:

He has New York **in** his heart.

He is **in** the A.A. classes right now.

His father lives **in** his memory.

She lives **in** my dreams.

I heard it **in** the news.

### **IN Used to Describe States**

Sometimes the metaphorical sense of containment is better explained by specific notions. For example, the preposition IN used in the following idiomatic phrases describes different *states of condition*. The sense of containment is easily established if one thinks of all the abstract nouns associated with the preposition IN below as a certain *condition* or *situation* (everyone in the examples below is IN some kind of condition or situation). For instance, **in love** in the first sentence conveys a sense of containment (love as the container of their feeling of affection) and it would be better explained as a *state of condition*:

- a) They are **in love**.
- b) The child is **in trouble**.
- c) The athlete is **in pain**.

In the examples in (a) and (b), they are experiencing the emotional condition in which they find themselves; the sentence in (c) describes a physical state, which may be related to the athlete's activity.

The idiomatic expressions **in love**, **in trouble** and **in pain** always have their abstract nouns attached to the preposition IN when following the verb *to be*; for instance, we cannot say *they are love* (without the preposition), or *they are on love* (i.e., use another preposition) and still preserve the intended meaning of the idiomatic prepositional phrase, as we can with the figurative expressions below (where the nouns are not attached to their prepositions):

He is **in** farming.

She is **in** music.

In the two examples above, we could also use the verb combination *be + into* to say *he is into farming* and *she is into music* without losing meaning.

In the following idiomatic examples, *in* is actually playing the role of an adverb for the prepositions FOR and ON:

You are **in for** a great treat!

He was not **in on** the game!

The first sentence tells us that there is a guarantee that you will have a great time, whereas the second example means that he was not interested or participating in the game. See also FOR in Chapter 1.

Sometimes IN is used with a *that*-clause:

These shoes are different from the others **in that** it has a more advanced technology.

The example with the idiomatic prepositional phrase below shows a figurative expression of containment with the preposition IN:

What **in the world** is a preposition?

Always bear in mind that using prepositions in the figurative sense is as

important as using them in the literal sense.

## ON Used to Describe Processes and States; the Notion of Interval

ON used figuratively often lends a sense of surface, or "interval," to the sentence:

I was the leader of the battalion; **on** my call the troops took the strategic objective.

If you look up the word *on* in a good dictionary, you will probably find a myriad of descriptions, and, obviously, they are all correct. However, I chose the word *process* to describe a dynamic category of prepositions that help distinguish ON applied in "processes" and "states" from ON used in spatial situations, as described earlier. The preposition ON, represented by the examples of state and processes below, has a strong sense of interval (the processes are temporary), and this is precisely what distinguishes it from IN and from the literal ON. Consider the examples below:

- a) The house is **on** fire.
- b) The football player is **on** fire.
- c) Exotic animals die **in** fire **in** national forest!
- d) Unfortunately, there were terrorist attacks **on** New York City!
- e) Unfortunately, there were terrorist attacks **in** New York City!
- f) Mary can't come to the door now, she is **on** the phone!
- g) Nearly a foot of snow fell **on** Boston this weekend.
- h) Nearly a foot of snow fell **in** Quebec City this weekend.
- i) The UN held an important meeting **on** Sri Lanka.
- j) John is overweight. He has been **on** a diet for months now.
- k) He is **on** drugs.

In (a), the entity *the house* is not going anywhere, meaning that we are not dealing with *direction*, *movement* and *reception* and with the *three connection phases* first described in Chapter 1. Moreover, it is clear that I am not referring to a physical position, a location, or to a geographic space. Furthermore, I am not introducing a temporal space either, which leaves us with the intuitive and more plausible meaning that the house is going through

the process of fire; in other words, *the house is burning*.

A good strategy is to analyze the meaning of the word following the preposition (in this example, the meaning of the noun *fire*) and look for an embedded "action" or "modifier" such as something that will distinguish it from an object or a location; that is, something that can express a *process*. Compare:

The house is **on** fire.

The house is **on** Governors Island.

In both sentences the entity is *the house*. A good trick here is to identify the referent *fire* as a "process" that will potentially *modify* the state of the entity--that is, *the house*--and *Governors Island* as a "location." Let us now analyze the meaning of the prepositions used in (a)-(k) above:

### **Identifying Meaning in Different IN and ON Situations**

Identifying a specific prepositional group of situations before speaking or writing a sentence in English is a very important matter. In order to choose the right preposition, first you have to understand the meaning of the object of the preposition, and then make the possible combinations as in **to him**, **at him** or **at the supermarket**.

When comparing the sentences in examples (a) and (b) above, the figurative meaning of (b) is that the football player is energized, stimulated by the game, whereas if he were a stuntman in a movie set, he could quite well have been literally catching fire. Here, the process is the same, and context plays a key role in conveying the message literally or metaphorically, therefore allowing us to say that both (a) and (b) do not suggest ON as a preposition of location but rather as a *modifier of a state of condition* (i.e., a process).

The prepositions used in (c), (d), and (e) all fall into the category of location and place. In (c), possibly from a newspaper headline or a TV news report, the message conveyed is that of exotic animals dying *inside* a forest that is catching fire (meaning that the animals themselves are not on fire, but being affected and dying as a result of the fire). Here, IN is used to represent the *location* or the *place* where there is a fire and not the process itself.

Contrasting is always a great tool to learn English prepositions. For instance, compare the two following sentences: in (d), the preposition ON indicates

that there were terrorist attacks *against* the city of New York. ON is used here as opposed to IN almost in a geometrical (or metaphorical) sense of surface (a generic sense of the city as a whole), while in (e) the speaker chose to use the *container effect* to narrate the fact that there were terrorist attacks somewhere *inside* the city of New York, not necessarily against the entire city but against a specific place or building *within* the city limits. One other option would be to use the preposition ON to refer to an island, as in *The police avoided an attack on the island of Manhattan*.

In (f), resorting to the notion of container, we know by elimination that someone cannot be *inside* a telephone; you will see in this chapter that if someone is *at* the telephone he or she is *next to* a telephone, but not necessarily using it. The use of the preposition ON here refers to the process of data transmission or to "using" a piece of equipment, a machine, etc., which belongs to the realm of figurative uses of prepositions and can be applied to telephone, computer, radio and television transmissions, including the Internet and all sorts of electronic storage interactions.

We could also think of a subclass of "process" called "telecommunications." The rationale behind this strategy is that the transmission of data functions like a means of transportation (see Chapter 4). For instance, by analogy, we could say that the electro-magnetic signals are transported by their *carriers*, and that they *travel* from one communication device to another (like from the broadcasting station to your TV set or from one telephone end-point to another) the same way that people travel from one place to another ON a bus. Here, it is important to note that people are not "on the phone" because they have the handset or the cell phone *on* their ears!

In (g), we have clear evidence that the speaker chose to use the type of surface of ON to narrate the fact that snow fell ON TOP OF the city (ON the buildings). Again, ON is used here to emphasize the speaker's narrative; in other words, the description of the sense of surface to where the snow was directed; the snow could or could not have melted before reaching the ground.

In (h), the preposition IN is used to simply indicate that snow fell somewhere *inside* the city. The speaker is not worried about the description of the snow falling, but rather about the fact that *it has snowed*; the snow did not melt before reaching the ground.

In (i), like in (d), the preposition ON conveys the notion of "interval," or the

metaphorical meaning of a "delimited surface" (like in *on the street*, *on the farm*, *on an island*, etc.), one that should be *covered* in the sense of "addressed," as opposed to the sense of a physical or geopolitical surface. ON, here, is introducing a *subject* with which we need to deal in its entirety (while the meeting or the subject lasts).

The preposition ON in (j) indicates a modifying state, a new *state of condition* that should last for the duration of his diet (again, the notion of interval). The same parameters are used to define the house and the football player on fire in (a) and (b).

The figurative sense in (k) also indicates a state modified by a process (i.e., using drugs may cause dependence). A literal reading would put him *over* the drugs like someone on a surfboard--which is not quite the idea here.

## **ON it Boss!**

Sometimes (often on crime drama television series, for example) we hear people saying *on it!* or *on it boss!* Again, the idea here is the notion of interval (the *it* of the phrase). In other words, the person who says *on it* means that he or she intends to tackle the problem to its entire extension, as in the example in (i).

## **Are You IN Good Hands or ON Good Hands?**

The figurative sense of containment of the idiomatic prepositional phrase below, using the preposition IN, contrasts with the literal sense of ON:

- a) I'm **in** good hands with my insurance company.
- b) The butcher can smell the blood **on** his hands.

In (a), there is a clear sense of "protection" (the hands playing the role of a figurative container), whereas in (b) the blood is literally on the surface of the butcher's hands. The example of the prepositional phrase below shows an idiomatic expression with a figurative sense of surface with ON, in a quite similar sentence:

The dictator had innocent blood **on** his hands.

## **IN Bed or ON the Bed: More Metaphorical Locations**

One common area of confusion for the non-native speaker, probably because

of insufficient contextual information, is whether one is ***in bed***, ***in the bed***, or ***on the bed***.

It is normal to say that a person *sits on the bed* (not *on bed* as also not *on chair*) and *sleeps in the bed*. The reason why someone may be ***in bed*** instead of ***on the bed*** is not simply a choice of preposition and not an exception to the rule either.

Generally, the use of the pattern **verb be + in + noun** (without the article) indicates metaphorical contexts; a state of mind or a state of being; a state of condition, mode or behavior. To be IN bed, thus, can have various similar meanings, such as "to be under the covers," "relaxing on the bed", "reading," or "having breakfast" (e.g., having breakfast ***on the bed*** may mean that one is using the bed as a table, whereas having breakfast ***in bed*** denotes one's state of condition during breakfast). Consequently, to be ***in bed*** does not mean that we are using the preposition IN as a specific physical locator, but rather, together with its subsequent noun, as a metaphorical *concept*, as we do when we say *he is in danger* or *she is in love*. We all know that *danger* and *love* are not places but states of condition and emotion--and metaphorical locations.

Nevertheless, native speakers tend to use metaphors and analogies to construct meanings; therefore, it is not too rare to find sentences such as:

It's too cold outside; I will stay **in** the bed!

meaning that "I feel cuddled and cozy under the blankets" (i.e., my warm metaphorical container).

### **IN BED WITH: sharing the bed with someone**

The complex preposition IN BED WITH may be used literally, as in:

He was **in bed with** his wife.

or figuratively, in the sense of "to be involved with someone," as in:

The senators are **in bed with** the lobbyists.

See also IN THE PAY OF in Chapter 6.

### **Spatial Complex Prepositions with ON**

Following are four common complex prepositions (a.k.a. phrasal prepositions

or prepositional idioms) used with ON in literal and metaphorical contexts.

### **ON THE BRINK OF: on the edge of a high area**

Also AT THE BRINK OF.

The hikers were walking **on the brink of** the abyss.

Their house is situated **on the brink of** the river.

ON THE BRINK OF is also used interchangeably with ON THE VERGE OF in the literal meaning and in the figurative senses of "in danger of," "on the point of," and "at the start of," often to introduce unpleasant or negative situations:

Some animal species are **on the brink of** extinction.

The company is **on the brink of** ruin.

### **ON THE EDGE OF: on the outside limit of something**

The hikers were walking **on the edge of** the road.

They are living **on the edge of** the desert.

ON THE EDGE OF is often interchangeable with ON THE VERGE OF in the figurative and literal senses. However, I personally prefer to use ON THE EDGE OF in sentences introducing positive situations (although this is not an absolute rule). Compare the examples below (see also next entry):

- a) Scientists are **on the edge of** the future.
- b) The country is **on the edge of** destruction.
- c) He was **on the edge of** a nervous breakdown.
- d) He almost failed, but now he is **on the edge of** success.

I prefer to use the sentences in (b) and (c) with ON THE VERGE OF.

### **ON THE VERGE OF: on the edge of an area**

I saw the ship **on the verge of** the horizon.

The hikers were walking **on the verge of** the road.

ON THE VERGE OF is often interchangeable with ON THE EDGE OF and ON THE BRINK OF. However, as a means of distinction, I prefer to use ON THE EDGE OF to designate spatial situations and ON THE VERGE OF to designate figurative situations.

Consider the sentence in (a) above. The message conveyed is that scientists are "idling" *near* the future, as if the future was always there, spatially close to the scientists. In the example of (a) below, I used ON THE VERGE OF to designate an event that may or may not happen (although there is a greater chance that the oil crisis will ultimately hit the economy). In addition, ON THE VERGE OF and ON THE BRINK OF are mostly used to introduce unpleasant or negative things:

- a) The economy is **on the verge of** recession.
- b) The novice singer was **on the verge of** a nervous breakdown.

## **ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF: on the bordering areas of a place**

My family lives **on the outskirts of** New York.

Those beautiful trees are mostly found **on the outskirts of** the forest.

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF used figuratively:

His brother was a priest, but he lived **on the outskirts of** religion.

For most of his career he has stood stubbornly **on the outskirts of** fame.

## **Exploring the Concept of Dimensions with IN, ON, and AT**

### **ON the Streets, IN the Street & IN the Streets, IN the Fields & IN the Hills**

In the examples below, I am briefly exploring the concept of "dimensions":

- a) The children are playing **in** the street.
- b) We shall fight **in** the fields and **in** the streets, we shall fight **in** the hills; we shall never surrender! (Winston Churchill).

We often hear **on the streets** or **in the streets** used as a general expression to refer to one or more undetermined streets. Most linguists, however, work with the "dimensional approach," in which **in the street** is understood as the

pavement, the area enclosed by the sidewalks on either side of a street. In this case, the complete street would be composed by the notion of ON (the area comprising the sidewalks and the pavement) and IN (the area comprising the pavement between the sidewalks). For instance, the children of the example in (a) above would be playing ON the pavement. Under this framework, the speaker may be implying that the children are playing ON the road--and not ON the sidewalk. We could, consequently, imagine the *container effect* and conclude that:

- \* ON the street = sidewalk + pavement.
- \* IN the street = pavement between sidewalks.

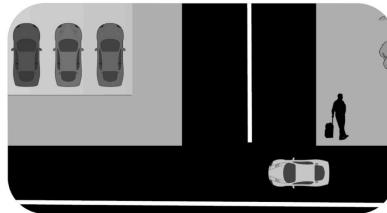
In (b), Sir Winston Churchill was referring to "an open field, not to a specific one." His choice of the preposition IN changes the geography of the field dramatically, sending us to a wider territory than that of a delimited field, such as a football field, for example. Churchill was referring to a broad expanse of land that could have been his home country or a battleground, therefore the use of IN instead of ON (as in *on a farm*, *on a baseball field*, etc.).

The same rationale serves the other two examples: *in the streets* has a broader meaning than that of a single street. The choice of IN here conveys the message that "no matter where in the city, we are going to defend ourselves"; *in the hills* replaces the concept of surface and the concept of a smaller delimited space demonstrated earlier, and represents a "broad range of hills"; that is, a large area--and not a surface or a specific geopolitically delimited area (which would require ON).

These dimensional considerations are spontaneously taken into account by native speakers, but this is normally not the case with non-native ESL/EFL students. However, a persistent contextual analysis will always show the best choice of preposition.

### **ON the Corner, AT the Corner, or IN the Corner?**

The man in the figure below is AT the corner. There is a parking lot with three cars ON the corner across the street from the man. What is the difference between AT and ON the corner?



The parking lot is **on** the corner. The man is **at** the corner.

English prepositions function as logical linking devices. By following their "families" or different groups of situations, the speaker is able to choose the best preposition suitable for each context, sometimes without even changing a single word in a sentence other than the preposition itself; that is, as already pointed out, context will always determine the right choice of preposition.

Here, ***on the corner*** is being used because the corner is a part of a street--which, as we have already seen, represents the smallest "prepositional" part of a city in terms of "magnitude." There are those who prefer the idea that ON is used because a street corner does not have a significant third dimension, being nearly a two-dimensional structure, so that an entity would be ON it, as ***on a surface***, which is also true.

In contrast, the use of ***at the corner*** functions as a reference, not as a dimension, meaning merely that the man is at *a point of intersection* between two roads, the *boundaries* where these roads meet (not necessarily a surface-like referent). In a dimensional perspective, this reference point can also be viewed as a zero-dimensional object. You can also think of AT as designating a *temporary* position and ON as designating a *fixed* position (whereas IN will always designate a sense of containment). For example, compare the three sentences below:

The bank is **on** the corner.

The broom is **in** the corner.

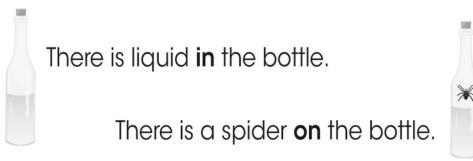
They will meet **at** the corner of Oak and Brook streets.

One basic difference between the use of the prepositions ON, IN, and AT is that the choice of ON or IN implies "thinking spatially," while the choice of the preposition AT implies "thinking referentially."

### **Exploring the Concepts of Surface and Depth**

I have already mentioned a bottle as an example of surface. But isn't a bottle

a kind of container? Yes, definitely--and, as seen before, containers also have surfaces! Compare the two bottles below:



Let us explore three senses of IN and ON. A bottle with liquid is a classic example of container for the preposition IN, for the liquid goes IN the bottle. If you see a spider ON the bottle, chances are that the arachnid is crawling outside the bottle, but nothing can guarantee that the spider will not be IN the bottle, ON its internal surface. This shows that surfaces are not only flat horizontal spaces; in other words, ON considers *any* type of surface, including clingy attachments, such as *a Band-Aid on the wound*, *a label on a new product*, etc.

However, in the prepositional world, we must always pay attention to context. For instance, we could use more prepositions IN and ON with a bottle: We could put it ON a shelf, IN the refrigerator that is IN the kitchen. Incidentally, did you notice the reflex of light ON the bottle?

### **IN or ON a Mirror?**

Now think of a mirror. Should we use IN or ON the mirror? The answer will depend on the *function* of the mirror--that is, the context. The two sentences below reflect what I know about mirrors and prepositions:

She admires herself **in** the mirror every day.

There is a scratch **on** the mirror.

Unless you are a vampire, chances are that you will always see yourself when you look IN a mirror. The other day, as I was shaving, I saw my breath ON the mirror.

The expression *in the mirror* is quite metaphorical, since a mirror is definitely not a container-like object. Nevertheless, the *sense* of containment is present in our sensorial perception, and it is exactly this perception of depth that helps us define what is IN or ON a referent.

### **IN or ON a Photo**

By now you must be mastering the prepositions IN and ON. Compare the examples below and see how interesting the perception of containment and surface can be with the help of these two prepositions. Most importantly, you do not need to see the images depicted in the two sentences in order to fully understand the difference between them:

- a) There is a flower **in** the photo.
- b) There is a flower **on** the photo.

In (a), someone photographed a flower; in (b), the photo is under the flower.

## Choosing Your Primary Location

The notion of "referent" should play an important role in helping designate the *primary* location of an entity. Take, for example, the three following sentences:

- The cat is **on** the stool.
- The man is sitting **on** the stool.
- The boy is standing **on** the stool.

In the figure below, the cat is a small animal and fits *entirely* on the stool. The man sitting on the stool has both feet ON the floor--but is he on the floor? Our natural notion of referent (and I mean our perception of context) tells us that he is not! He may have his feet on the floor, but he is *primarily* sitting ON the stool. The boy in the figure has one foot on the stool and one in the air, but he is essentially standing ON the stool. The notion of gravity makes us quickly consider the stool--and not the air--as the main referent for the boy's location.



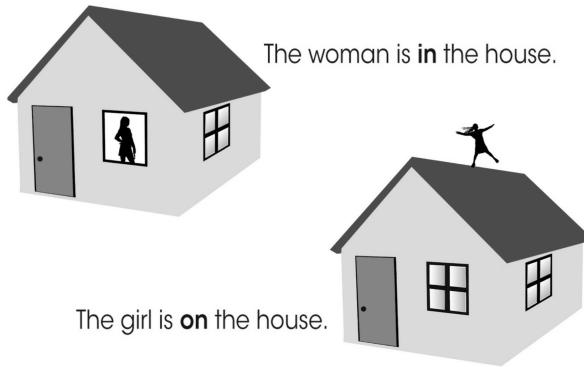
To explore more referents using the figure above, we could say:

The cat is **on** the stool. The stool is **on** the floor.

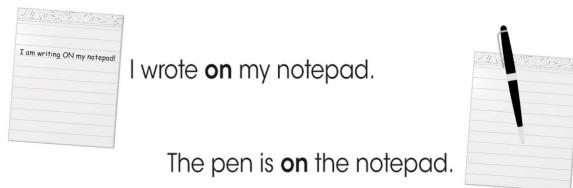
The man is sitting **on** the stool, but his feet are **on** the floor.

The boy is standing **on** the stool. His right foot is **on** the stool; his left foot is **in** the air.

A house is an almost inexhaustible source of prepositional examples. Let us explore the prepositions IN and ON with the noun *house* and later compare them to the preposition AT. The next two figures show a woman IN the house and a girl ON the house. However, you could also say that the woman is INSIDE the house and that the girl is ON TOP OF the house, or, more precisely, ON/ON TOP OF the roof (see INSIDE and ON TOP OF in this chapter).



We may put a pen ON a notepad or ON a notebook, but when we write, normally we do it IN the notebook (but ON a page) and ON the notepad. The figures of this book are IN the book; the text of this page is ON the page and the chapters are IN the book.



## IN the Swimming Pool, but IN or ON the Water?

When we are swimming, the swimming pool acts as a container, and we are IN the swimming pool. However, the water itself also acts as a container, but it has a surface--which means that we can be IN the water and ON the water (and also INSIDE or UNDER the water). On the other hand, context will always play a major role in our choice of the correct preposition, for instance, as we may have only part of our body inside the water and still be IN the

water. Again, the notion of "partial container" is crucial for us to contrast IN and ON the water, as we did earlier with the flowers and the photographs, and with the examples of the mirror (see also UNDER in Chapter 2 and INSIDE in this chapter).

## People and Ducks

As seen earlier, context is a major player when it comes to choosing the right English prepositions. Let us compare, for instance, people and ducks. We know that people are not aquatic animals. When we go to the beach or to a swimming pool, we get in the water for recreational or professional purposes. In the prepositional world, this means that we are expected to get IN and OUT of the water. Normally, at the end of the day, we sleep IN a room--or at least some of us try to find a shelter IN which to sleep. However, we know that ducks are mostly aquatic birds that spend their lives IN or around water. On the other hand, in order to avoid predators, waterfowl are often seen sleeping ON the water.

Early in the morning ducks are active again, normally IN the water looking for food. Some ducks find food ON the surface of the water.



The man is **in** the water and the boat is **on** the water.

Therefore, because of their natural habits, and after analyzing the specific contexts, one could say:

I saw ducks **in** the water.

I saw ducks **on** the water.

Diving ducks look for food **in** the water.

Some ducks look for food **on** the water.

Note that I am not introducing an *exception* to the rationale of the prepositions IN and ON. Again, context plays a key role in our decision to

use IN or ON. The examples below show my choice of preposition connected to my interpretation of a particular context:

I was walking around the lake when I saw ducks calmly floating **on** the water.

I saw ducks playing and looking for food **in** the water.



The duck on the left is playing **in** the water.

We could also say that it is floating **on** the water.

The other duck is diving **in** the water.

We could also say that it is swimming **under** the water.

## UPON: an elevated ON; on top of

While for many writers ON and UPON have become interchangeable--and sometimes they are--there are important distinctions between them. The most important is the specific sense of verticality, or elevation, suggested by UPON. For instance, although possible, I never use the constructions below:

The policewoman is **upon** the corner. ☺

She spilled coffee **upon** the floor. ☺

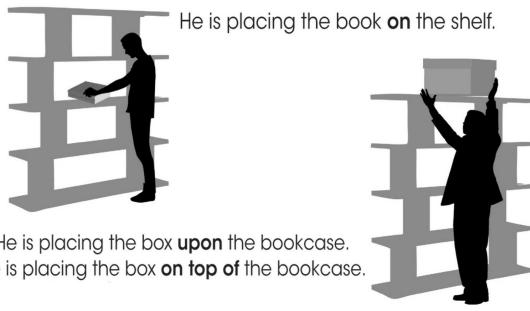
We use ON, UPON or ON TOP OF to indicate a surface referent--but I only use the latter two for (more) elevated surfaces (in relation to ON). For example:

He placed the book **on** the shelf.

He placed the box **upon** the bookcase.

He placed the box **on top of** the bookcase.

Note that UPON and ON TOP OF are better choices than ON when we need to designate an elevated position relative to a lower surface. The figures below illustrate the two situations with three prepositional implications:



When verbs of motion indicate an effort towards a higher surface--for instance, when you have to move upwards in order to be (or to place or find something, etc.) on a surface--UPON is often the choice of preposition:

The children climbed **upon** the wall.

The cowboy climbed **upon** the horse.

Similar situations are also frequently used with ON TOP OF:

The children climbed **on top of** the wall.

UPON is especially used in abstract, non-spatial situations. At a first glance, UPON seems perfectly interchangeable with ON. Compare these two prepositional verbs:

- a) The project **depends on** new investments.
- b) The project **depends upon** new investments.

In (a), the project needs new investments *now*; in (b), the project needs new investments *if it wants to have a future*. Now compare the two following examples:

- c) What will happen in 2014 **depends on** the economy.
- d) The production of wealth **depends upon** the economy.

In (c), the state of the economy today will dictate how we will live in 2014; in (d), the outcome of the economy in the next months or years will influence the production of wealth.

The preposition UPON is also used as a temporal preposition (see Chapter 5).

**ON TOP OF: a high surface; AT THE TOP OF: the highest point**

The complex preposition ON TOP OF is similar to ON in the general sense of surface on a horizontal plane. However, the selection of ON or ON TOP OF will sometimes depend on the specific type or orientation of the surface--which *might* also include its inherent top. For example, consider the three sentences below:

- a) The woman is standing **on** the border.
- b) The man is **on top of** the Sears Tower.
- c) There was a cork **on top of** the old bottle.

In (a), the woman is standing on the ground, on a line (which could be imaginary or not). It would not be correct to say *The woman is standing on top of the border.* <sup>®</sup> In (b), the man is on the highest part of the building. In (c), the old bottle could be lying on the beach. Now consider ON, ON TOP OF and AT THE TOP OF in the examples below:

- a) The man is **on** the edge, **on top of** the Sears Tower.
- b) The mother is waiting for the child **at the top of** the escalator.
- c) The man is **on** the suspended scaffold **at the top of** the Sears Tower.

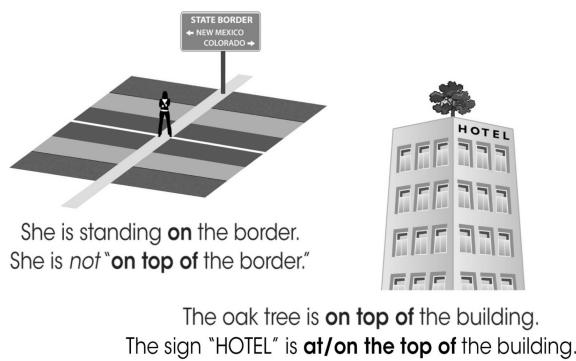
In (a), ON is describing a limited surface area (the edge) that belongs ON TOP OF the building. In (b), the speaker used AT THE TOP OF to say that the woman is on the upper floor at the end of the escalator. In (c), AT THE TOP OF tells us that the suspended scaffold is situated somewhere at the uppermost floors (it would not work if placed on top of the building!); in other words, we must consider the different types of surface and the context in which they occur in order to choose the right preposition. For example, we could say *The book is on the floor*, but we could not say *The book is on top of the floor.*<sup>®</sup> However, we could use both, *The book is on the table* and *The book is on top of the table*--but it would be better to say *The book is on the table* and *The book is on top of the closet*.

The reason for this specific rationale is that, generally, when we are able to see the surface below our eye level, we tend to use ON; when the surface is above our eye level, we tend to use ON TOP OF. In addition, our perception of surface also plays an important role in the choice between the two prepositions; for instance, we need to contrast ON and ON TOP OF because we know that the surface of an edge is normally perceived as a thin border of

a much larger area; that is, our natural perception will tell us if an entity is ON TOP OF a high or elevated horizontal surface, or ON a specific part of that surface. For example:

- a) The cat is **on top of** the roof.
- b) The cat is **on** the edge, **on top of** the roof.

In the example in (b), we could not have used ***on top of the edge***.



## AT THE TOP OF and ON THE TOP OF

They are often interchangeable. However, AT THE TOP OF is more frequently used to designate a position "inside the upper part of," as in (a) and (b), while ON THE TOP OF is used in place of ON TOP OF to designate a position on the intrinsic top, as in (c), or simply on a horizontal plane, "on the uppermost or superior part of," as in (d). Notice that, in (a), (b), and (d), the entities are an integral part of their referents:

- a) The restaurant is located **at the top of** the hotel, on the 34th floor.
- b) The Ocean-view suites are located **at the top of** the ship, on decks 16 and 17.
- c) There's a spider **on the top of** the overturned hat.
- d) The swimming pool is **on the top of** the hotel.

AT THE TOP OF and ON THE TOP OF are also used to designate the top of a vertical surface (with a significantly higher frequency of AT THE TOP OF), as in (e), (f) and (g), but AT THE TOP OF is the only one recommended to describe the uppermost or the forwardmost part of something indivisible, regardless of its horizontal or vertical plane, as in (h) and (i):

- e) The name of the hotel is emblazoned **on the top of** the building.

- f) The name of the hotel is emblazoned **at the top of** the building.
- g) The sign **at the top of** the door reads "Welcome."
- h) The head of the guitar is **at the top of** the neck.
- i) The head is **at the top of** the body.

ON TOP OF is also used in the sense of ON to denote position on a surface (often above or over another surface), or in the sense of "covering a surface," as in:

We placed the sculpture **on top of** the carpet.

Caravaggio painted David and Goliath **on top of** a painting by a different artist.

See ON TOP OF also in Chapter 4.

### **ON THE BOTTOM OF, IN THE BOTTOM OF & AT THE BOTTOM OF**

They are quite the opposite of ON THE TOP OF and AT THE TOP OF for bottom positions and surfaces--including their dimensional and orientational properties:

The serial number is located **on the bottom of** the notebook.

The frogman was walking **on the bottom of** the sea.

A school of fish was swimming **in the bottom of** the sea.

I saw her coming, so I waited **at the bottom of** the escalator.

Figurative use:

She is **on the top of** the game.

The government is **on top of** the situation.

Her Greatest Hits is **at the top of** the chart.

Key West is located **at the bottom of** Florida.

### **ALOFT: on top of; at the top of; high up in the air**

The noun that precedes ALOFT is often related to the sense of "up in the air," meaning something that is generally higher than the referent indicated by the

preposition:

He placed the television antenna **aloft** the roof.

The national flag was flying **aloft** the gate.

He was waving a flag **aloft** his shoulders.

## ATOP: on top of; on the top of; at the top of

Her suitcase is **atop** the closet.

The towels are hanging **atop** the pool house.

I'll meet you **atop** the stairs.

ATOP is also used in the figurative sense:

Her album was **atop** the Billboard charts for several weeks.

I'm trying to master my emotions in order to be **atop** the situation.

## OFF: separation from ON

Also OFF OF.

Most of the time, the preposition OFF acts as the converse of ON, indicating separation--and sometimes conveying a sense of source and direction (see ONTO & OFF in Chapter 1). For example, consider the sentences in (a) and (b):

a) They took the painting **off** the wall.

b) The plaster came **off** the wall.

In (a) the staff of the museum removed the picture *from* the wall; the picture was taken *to* someplace else. In sentence (b), the plaster fell from the wall, revealing the original paint.

Sometimes using OFF as the opposite of ON is not the best solution (especially when we are not helped by a verb of motion, such as *take* or *get*, for example):

c) The book is **on** the table.

d) The book is **off** the table. ☺

The example in (d), although possible and grammatically correct, is not a standard English sentence--except when justified by a specific context. For instance, one option would be to simply say:

The book is not **on** the table.

unless the book was already on the table and someone asked or insisted that you take it off the table, in which case you could take the book off the table and then say: *The book is **off** the table!*--but *I took the book **off** the table* would be a better option.

Below, OFF is not acting as the converse of ON TOP OF:

- a) He jumped **on top of** the bridge.
- b) He jumped **off** the top of the bridge.

In (a), he was already on top of the bridge when he thrust himself up and down (he remained on top of the bridge); in (b) he jumped from the bridge to the river.

### **The Variant OFF OF**

More often used in spoken American English, the idiomatic (a.k.a. double preposition) OFF OF is generally considered incorrect or "non-standard." For example,

She knocked the glass **off of** the table.

can be rephrased as:

She knocked the glass **off** the table.

Following are a few pairs of examples with ON and OFF:

She drove **on** the road.

He drove **off** the road.

The ship is **on** its course. It will arrive on time.

The ship is **off** its course. I'm not sure where we are going!

He was **on top of** the ladder.

He fell **off** the ladder.

There was grease **on** my hand.

I washed the grease **off** my hand.

She jumped several times **on** the trampoline before diving.

Then, she jumped **off** the trampoline into the water.

Victor Harbor is **on** the Coast of Australia.

Kangaroo Island is **off** the Coast of Australia.

The airplane landed **on** the runway.

The airplane flew **off** the runway.

Pay special attention to the verbs preceding the preposition. Note, for instance, that some verbs can be logically used with both prepositions (e.g., you can *jump ON* and *OFF* a trampoline), whereas others cannot (e.g., an airplane cannot *land ON* and *OFF* a runway!).

ON and OFF are often used in figurative and idiomatic contexts:

The offer was **on** the table until the end of October.

It is now November; the offer is **off** the table.

The celebrity was **on** drugs.

He spent some time in rehab, and now he is **off** drugs.

My favorite TV show is **on** the air now.

That famous comedy show went **off** the air.

OFF used in some idiomatic prepositional phrases:

Their marriage was **off the rails**. Alcoholism was to blame.

The baby is **off the charts**. She is much taller than the average height for her age.

The senator didn't want to go public; he promised to brief the journalist **off the record**.

See also Chapter 4 for examples of OFF as a preposition of transportation.

**ASTRIDE: on both sides of; with legs on each side of**

Also ASTRADDLE or ASTRIDE OF.

This preposition can be replaced by the preposition ON; however, ON does not specify the position of one's legs as does ASTRIDE/ASTRADDLE. Compare:

The colossal statue used to stand **astride** the harbor.

The school bus stopped **astride** the railroad track.

The princess didn't like to ride **astraddle** a horse.

The children were all sitting **astride** the fence.

We came up to a fallen tree **astride** the trail.

The province stands **astride of** the river.

## **INSIDE: on the inner side or in the interior of**

Also INSIDE OF.

INSIDE deals with the idea of containment or surround, related to complete containers, whereas IN is used to designate complete or partial containers. Both prepositions can indicate "concrete" containers: (area vs. volume)

The brain is **inside** the skull.

Draw an "x" **inside** the circle.

The two examples above could have been written with IN.

INSIDE does not accept the concept of partial container. For example, the sentence in (b) is not possible, and the example in (c) means that the whale can be "completely immersed" in the water, without breathing, for a long time; on the other hand, the penguin of example (d) was not completely immerse in the water:

- a) She is reading **in** the chair.
- b) She is reading **inside** the chair. ☺
- c) A whale can stay **inside** the water for a long time.
- d) He saw a penguin **in** the water.

See *IN the Swimming Pool, but IN or ON the Water?* and *People and Ducks* in this chapter.

INSIDE is also used to denote the inner side of something:

The wooden horse was **inside** the walls of Troy.

The fact that INSIDE functions (mostly, but not always) in the realm of concrete objects makes easy to distinguish real from figurative examples:

I am **in** trouble.

I am **inside** trouble. ⊗

In the first example above, *trouble* is not a place but a state of mind that is conceptualized as a location. However, *trouble* does not suggest concrete shape or containment (see below). The second example is definitely not recommended. Nevertheless, sometimes we use INSIDE to give more intensity to expressions consisting of abstract ideas--however with concrete referents or a clear notion of containment. For instance, we could say:

The author took the readers **inside** his life.

I went **inside** my mind and found the answer.

She believes she is trapped **inside** another body.

The president has many supporters **inside** the army.

I feel I am **inside** a fairy tale.

My family is **inside** my heart.

In the examples above, all the ideas are metaphorical, with the nouns *life*, *mind*, *body*, *army*, *fairy tale* and *heart* acting as metaphorical containers. For example, our *life* has a time span (a metaphorical container full of experiences). We keep information in our *mind* through one of the mental processes called "memory." The *body*, on the other hand, is a real physical container (it contains our organs and our blood, for example). A *fairy tale* is a story that contains specific *ingredients* in the narrative, such as a prince and a princess, a happy ending, perhaps some magic, etc. The *heart* is another example of physical container, although here both body and heart are playing figurative roles of containment for the preposition INSIDE. By extension of its spatial sense, INSIDE is also used as a temporal preposition (see Chapter 5).

INSIDE can imply being more "hermetic." Compare:

- a) **Inside** Cuba: history, culture and politics.
- b) His parents are **inside** Cuba.
- c) His parents are **in** Cuba.

In (a), the headline is introducing an eyewitness view of the inner workings and the inner circles of Cuba. The sentence in (b) could mean that his parents cannot leave Cuba or that they have secretly entered Cuba. The example in (c), could mean that his parents live in Cuba or that they are just visiting the country.

Since INSIDE is more specific than IN when dealing with the concept of complete containers, it is often used in sentences with IN to designate a complete container relative to another (larger) container. For example:

I am **in** my house, **inside** the bedroom.

The pen is **in** the car, **inside** the glove compartment.

The dishes are **in** the kitchen, **inside** the kitchen cabinet.

INSIDE can also be used with dynamic verbs. For example:

It's hailing! Go **inside** the house!

They dragged the horse **inside** the walls of Troy.

### **WITHIN: inside or contained in the limits of something**

WITHIN is *not* a perfect synonym for IN or INSIDE. For instance, if your pen is in the drawer, you could say (a) and (b) but should not use (c):

- a) The pen is **in** the drawer.
- b) The pen is **inside** the drawer.
- c) The pen is **within** the drawer. ☺

WITHIN is often used to express an idea related to a concrete or abstract referent:

The Introduction is almost a book **within** the book!

There is always a story **within** the story.

The preposition WITHIN designates the limits of an inner area--in both,

physical and figurative ways. Therefore, you could say:

The farm is **within** 15 miles of the park.

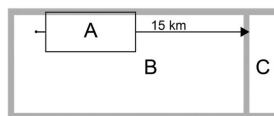
The farm is **within** walking distance of the lake.

This important decision is not **within** my power.

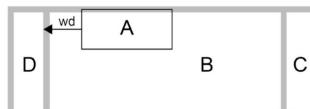
The following figures exemplify some possible spatial relations of **WITHIN**.



Area A is **within** area B.



Area A is **within** area B and **within** 15 km of area C.  
Area C is **next to** but **not within** area B.



Area A is **within** area B and **within** walking distance of area D.  
Area C and area D are **next to** but **not within** area B.

Looking at the graphic representations above, we could also say that area C is within 15 km of area A and that area D is within walking distance of area A; or that areas C and D are **OUTSIDE** areas A and B.

## INSIDE vs. WITHIN

Both **WITHIN** and **INSIDE** can designate the complete *enclosure* (do not confuse with *inclusion*, in the specific sense of volume) of an entity relative to its referent. However, **INSIDE** is more often used with verbs of motion:

It's raining, let's go **inside** the house.

It's raining, let's go **within** the house. ☺

The notion of "boundary" (especially when the entity is already inside or within its referent) often makes **INSIDE** and **WITHIN** interchangeable, like in the four sentences below:

We need to rearrange the furniture **inside** the house.

We need to rearrange the furniture **within** the house.

The genie is imprisoned **inside** the bottle.

The genie is imprisoned **within** the bottle.

Compare the examples below. In (a), the prison is "surrounded" by the fence; in (b), the plaintiff claimed everything that was "on the other side of the fence," which is owned by the property (but not necessarily surrounded by the fence):

- a) There is no freedom **within** the prison fence.
- b) The plaintiff claimed everything that was **inside** the fence.

Now compare the three following examples:

- a) The book is **in** my hand.
- b) The book is **inside** my hand. ☺
- c) The book is **within** my hand. ☺

Only the example in (a) is a coherent sentence. In (b), I believe I would need a surgeon to operate on my hand in order to take the book out of it! In (c), I would need to have a hand the size of a bookstore or a book the size of a bead!

**WITHIN** used before abstract nouns:

He learned to live **within** his possibilities.

She has taught courses **within** the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology.

See more examples of **WITHIN** in Chapter 5.

### **WITHINSIDE: within; inside**

Also **WITHINSIDE OF**. Archaic or regional.

**Withinside** the church the view of the ceiling was superb!

Do you know what passes **withinside** your own mind?

### **OUT & OUTSIDE: away from; through; not inside**

**OUTSIDE** is the converse of **INSIDE**. For example:

I am **outside** my house.

The car is parked **outside** the garage.

The catacombs were **outside** the walls of Rome.

We can be a little more specific with IN FRONT OF than with OUTSIDE in some cases. For example, the sentence in (a) indicates an orientation, while the example in (b) shows a vaguer relation (of proximity) to the front referent:

- a) I parked my car **in front of** the house.
- b) I parked **outside** the post office.

OUTSIDE is often used with the modifiers *right* and *just* to indicate adjacency:

She was sitting on a sofa right **outside** his office.

The dining room was just **outside** our room.

## The Variants OUT OF and OUTSIDE OF

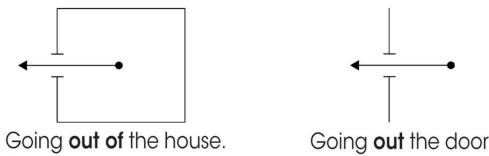
We know that there is a different rationale behind the English prepositions and the prepositions used in other languages. English prepositions do have *logic*; they deal with spatial relations, volume, area, etc. like in no other language. However, British and American English also have different rationales for different applications of some prepositions. For instance, in the U.S. we say **on the weekend**, while in British English we say **at the weekend** (see IN, ON, and AT in Chapter 5).

The prepositions OUT and OUTSIDE have the variants OUT OF and OUTSIDE OF (also known as double prepositions), which are used in a slightly different way in British and American English. For instance, compare the examples below:

- a) You walked **out** the door.
- b) You walked **out of** the door.
- c) You threw the ball **out** the window.
- d) You threw the ball **out of** the window.

American English prefers (a) and (c) to (b) and (d). However, they have a slightly different meaning. The rationale behind (a) is that if you walk *out*

something it is *implicit* that you were *inside* something before you started walking towards the exit. On the one hand, the role of the auxiliary preposition OF is to *explicitly* associate the sense of containment to the noun, as, for example, in *liquid out of the bottle* and not *liquid out the bottle*. Thus, if the noun *door* does not contribute to the concept of container (you cannot be inside a door--although a termite can), then we should not use the auxiliary OF. This idea is illustrated in the figures below:



On the other hand, British English considers that if one went *out of* the door it is because that person was indeed *inside* "a place with a door" (or "on the other side of the door"), with the door acting as a conceptual container (as in *out of the bottle*). The same is true for *looking out the window* vs. *looking out of the window*, or *throwing something out the window* vs. *throwing something out of the window*.

The same rationale works for the examples in (c) and (d) above.

Sometimes, the notion of container is very clear and makes it grammatically unsound or awkward to use OUT without the complement OF. For example:

The coffee is **in** the cup.

The coffee is **out of** the cup.

The coffee is **outside** the cup.

OUT would not work without OF in the sentence above because the verb *be* is playing a major role in defining a static relation between the entity *coffee* and the referent *cup* (i.e., the coffee is either inside or outside the cup; the coffee is not leaving, and it is not going into the cup). Nonetheless, if you bought a tarantula, and your tarantula escaped from a cup, you could say (a), but I prefer (b):

a) My tarantula ran **out** the cup.

b) My tarantula ran **out of** the cup.

In the examples above we are using a dynamic verb that helps us understand the context--and consequently the use of OUT without the complement OF (as in *throw something out the window* or *run out the door*, etc.).

OUTSIDE and OUTSIDE OF are often used interchangeably:

I'll be waiting for you **outside** the house.

I'll be waiting for you **outside of** the house.

However, British and American English speakers seem to prefer the first form, although we often see the second used in the U.S.

The three sentences below are quite different:

I'm running **outside** the gym.

I'm running **out of** the gym.

I'm **running out of** gin.

In the first sentence, I am saying that I am not in the gym (and I may not even have entered the gym yet); I decided to run on the beach today. In the second sentence, I am saying that I am in the gym, but I decided to leave running (because I want to run or because I am in a hurry). The phrasal verb in the third example has a figurative meaning: *to run out of something* means "to have no more of something" (which means that I do not have enough gin to use in the roast partridge dish I am preparing for a friend!).

Some combinations of OUT OF and OUTSIDE will not work:

I am **out of** my house, **outside** the bedroom. ☺

The example above would not be coherent because if I am out of my house it does not make sense to complement the sentence conveying the new idea that I am outside the bedroom (given that the bedroom is inside the house).

Consider the next examples below to compare OUT OF with OUTSIDE:

I have just got **out of** my house.

I noticed a strange man **outside** my house.

In the first sentence I am telling that I was in my house before I got out. In the second sentence, I saw a man outside, but he was never inside the house.

The two sentences below have different meanings:

Please, put the cat **outside** the house.

Please, put the cat **out of** the house.

In the first sentence, the cat could be inside the house, or it could be a cat that does not belong to the house (some guests are coming for dinner, and they brought their beloved cat, but their friends do not seem to like cats inside the house! It would be better to use: "Please, *leave* the cat outside the house"). In the second example, the cat must be inside in order to be put out of the house.

Some examples of OUT, OUT OF and OUTSIDE in the figurative and abstract senses:

The minister walked **out** the meeting.

The angry man was blowing steam **out** his ears.

They keep bad influences **out of** their lives.

She wants to keep him **out of** her future.

The conspiracy did not exist **outside** his imagination.

The law gives no remedy **outside** the contract.

OUT OF has a broad figurative extension and can express the senses of "made from something," "because of something," "in deference to someone," "from," "from a group of," and "not a part of or involved with." For example:

Her shoes were made **out of** artificial leather.

He is working **out of** necessity, not **out of** choice.

They nodded their heads **out of** respect for the Queen.

The teacher paid for the new classroom equipment **out of** her own money!

Five **out of** ten people live without adequate sanitation in the developing countries.

She **is out** of the team that will dispute the next games because she has to work.

See OUT OF also in Chapters 1, 4 and 5.

## **OUT THE BACK OF, OUT THE FRONT OF and OUT THE SIDE OF**

The preposition OUT is also often used with the idiomatic variants OUT

THE BACK, OUT THE FRONT and OUT THE SIDE OF (something). For example:

There is a camera **out the back of** the device.

There is a camera **out the front of** the device.

He was hanging his head **out the side of** the car.

The kids were playing baseball **out the back of** the school.

There is a clear distinction between using *in the back of something* and *out the back of something*. For example, a camera may be IN the back of something but not necessarily exposed to sight or ready to be used--as in *a camera in the back of the car*.

## **OUTBOARD OF: on the exterior part of**

Also OUTBOARD (chiefly nautical).

The word *outboard* may be used as an adjective, an adverb or a noun but is often accepted as a preposition--specially, though not exclusively, when used with the complement OF (see also INBOARD OF):

They sat on a bench that was **outboard of** the edge of the roadway.

From their new posts, the officers could see all around, within and **outboard of** the ship.

The wheels are **outboard** the trailer; there are no wheel wells to take away cargo space.

## **INBOARD OF: in the internal or the center part of**

Also INBOARD (chiefly nautical).

The word *inboard* may be used as an adjective, an adverb or a noun but is often accepted as a preposition--specially, though not exclusively, when used with the complement OF (see also OUTBOARD OF):

They found diamonds 10 km **inboard of** the shoreline.

The compartment is located **inboard of** the driver's seat.

As soon as the captain got **inboard** the ship, they weighed anchor and departed.

## **OUTWITH: outside; beyond**

Archaic or regional.

They lived most of their lives **outwith** Scotland, now they are back!

They were not allowed to go **outwith** the city boundaries.

**OUTWITH** is also used figuratively:

They are professional thieves. They live **outwith** the law.

The small farm does not employ anyone **outwith** the family.

### **AT A RANGE OF: at a specified distance or degree**

Also IN THE RANGE OF.

**AT A RANGE OF** can be used to designate a specified amount or quantity:

The artillery was firing **at a range of** 2000 meters.

Gas is presently **at a range of** 50% higher than last year.

Sometimes, **AT A RANGE OF** is used in the sense of "a variety of something measurable or countable," without specifying any limits, as in:

Impure substances boil **at a range of** temperatures.

**AT A RANGE OF** is often used to specify the lower and the higher limits of a unit:

The articles are fabricated **at a range of** 60 to 95 Cdeg

Payments started **at a range of** \$1000 to \$1500 a month.

Humidity was **at a range of** 80 to 100%.

**IN THE RANGE OF** is often used to designate a particular, though imprecise, amount:

The celebrity judge makes **in the range of** \$80 million per year!

Production is somewhere **in the range of** 1 billion kilograms annually.

## **Expressing Proximity and Relative Exactness**

### **AT: just there!**

The preposition **AT** is very exact when it comes to designating a specific time:

I have an appointment **at** 3 p.m.

For locations, AT also has the sense of exactness--but not quite when we have to consider the dimensional complexities of locations and places. Compare:

- a) The president works **at** the White House.
- b) The White House is **at** 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Both sentences are true. However, if I come up with the question: "Where *exactly* is the White House?", the answer is complete in (b); but if I ask you: "Where *exactly* does the president work?", the sentence in (a) does not have quite the *exact* answer. For instance, the *exact* answer could be *the president works in the Oval Office*.

When we say *the president is at his desk*, we may be referring to the president's location relative to the desk or that the president is working--reading, writing, etc. --suggesting some kind of activity.

Then, what exactly is the quality of AT?

AT, in the sense of location, can function as a byproduct of IN and ON to indicate *nearness*. For instance, the president can be AT the White House, but more exactly IN the Oval Office or ON the State Floor. Consequently, the preposition AT indicates that an entity is simply *there, somewhere near the boundaries* of the designated location.

In the example below, the use of IN or ON would be grammatically possible, but the consequences would be unpredictable:

He was **at** the crater of the Kilauea Volcano.

AT does not require the notion of size, area or volume. You can be AT the farm, AT the store, AT school or AT home, and everyone will understand where you are, although not exactly. For example, the sentences below relate Jose to his farm:

Jose has a 100-acre farm **in** Mexico.

He has many horses **on** the farm.

Right now he is **at** the farm, trying to sell it.

The use of ON indicates that the horses are part of the farm (the farm comes with the horses and all the other assets that belong to the farm), while the use of AT suggests that Jose is *somewhere* on the farm, not necessarily farming, or perhaps not even within the boundaries of the farm (for instance, he may be at the farm gate, discussing business with other farmers of the area).

Consider the sentences below:

- a) Maria is **on** the beach, **in** Mexico.
- b) Felipe is **at** the beach, **in** Mexico.

In (a), Maria is probably on the sand or in the water; in (b), Felipe is probably in a bar or strolling along the beach, or even in a hotel in front of the beach. However, Felipe may be strolling on the beach sand, dressed in his summer clothes, in which case he could still be considered AT the beach if he is clearly not taking part in the normal beach activities. Remember this: You can be **at the beach** without being **on the beach**; you can be **at the pool** without being **in the pool**, and so on. Compare:

Jose is **at** the barn, **on** the farm.

Jose is **in** the barn, **on** the farm.

In both of the examples above, Jose is ON the farm (the barn is on the farm). However, the first sentence indicates that Jose is simply *there--not necessarily IN or ON* the barn--whereas the second example states that Jose is *inside* the barn.

### **AT London, AT Paris, Etc.**

The example in (a) may mean that I'll see you when we arrive at the airport, at the train station etc.--in which case I would not be referring to the city as a large area but as an arrival or meeting point. The sentence in (b) might mean that I am referring to an event to be held IN Moscow (such as the World Cup, for instance). Also often used after the verb *to be* expressing a point of reference (c):

- a) See you **at** London.
- b) See you **at** Moscow 2018.
- c) I recommend that you be **at** Paris before 4 p.m.

Be careful with your prepositional rationale. For instance, the sentence in (a) below is correct and plausible; the sentences in (b) and (c) are grammatically correct, but they are either not plausible or not possible:

- a) The man is **at** the door.
- b) The man is **on** the door. ☺
- c) The man is **in** the door. ☺

Now compare the following examples:

See you **at** school tomorrow.

See you **in** class tomorrow.

The first sentence suggests a loose or vague attachment; that is, we may or may not go in the same class, which means that we expect to meet *anywhere* on the school premises, *anytime* during the school hours. The second example defines the place *inside of which* I expect to meet you, as well as the probable time (for instance, sometime during class, with the exception of the interval).

We could say that the preposition AT has a sense of "detachment" or "vagueness" when contrasting with IN and ON. For example, compare the following sentences:

The woman is **in** her house.

The girl is **on** her house.

The man is **at** his house.

By reading the first two examples, we know exactly where the woman and the girl are relative to the house. However, we do not know if the man is IN or ON the house--we just know that he is *there*. On the other hand, the choice of AT is interesting because it would be very awkward if, for instance, we always knew and specified the exact location of a thing or a person at the time of speech. For example:

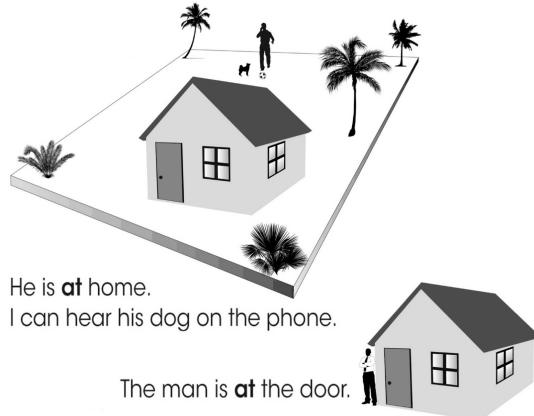
I know John is **on** the roof. I can hear his dog on the phone. ☺

I know John is **in** the bathroom. I can hear his dog on the phone. ☺

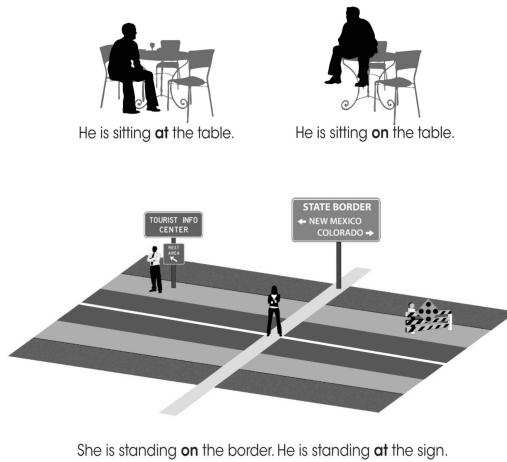
I know John is **in** the house. I can hear his dog on the phone.

The last example is more plausible than the first two but does not replace AT as the best choice of preposition (for instance, we cannot be sure that John's dog is allowed inside the house). Our best choice would be:

I know John is **at** home. I can hear his dog on the phone.



When we go to a restaurant, we normally sit **AT** a table. AT is perfect as a contrast to IN and ON here. For instance, it would not be very polite to sit *on top of* a table to eat, and I believe it would be impossible to sit *inside* a table.



Now compare the two sentences below:

He shot the deer **in** the head.

He shot **at** the deer.

By saying **in the head** the speaker is localizing the wound; that is, the shooter did not miss the shot. By saying **at the deer** the speaker is not sure if the

shooter hit or missed the target (all the speaker knows is that he fired a shot towards the deer).

### **Figurative Uses of the Preposition AT: Comparing AT and IN**

The preposition AT often lends its meaning of physical space to certain nouns to designate the involvement in an activity connected figuratively to a concrete location or to an abstract noun.

#### **AT Home, AT School, AT Church, AT Work, AT Sea, AT War ...**

These common expressions are very meaningful, even though they do not *necessarily* describe literal places or positions--despite the use of the preposition AT before the noun. Nevertheless, from their use we can infer where someone is, or what someone is doing--as seen in the earlier example of the president *at his desk*. For instance, when we say that someone is *at work*, we know that the person is *working, doing his or her job* (most probably IN the work place). Likewise, when we say that someone is *at sea*, we may mean that the person is on a mission or traveling aboard a ship. When we say that someone is *at school*, we mean that she or he is *studying, attending school*. If a person is *at church*, she or he is *praying or listening to a sermon*, and when we say that we are *at home*, we are actually describing *the feeling of home* or a reference to our *domicile*, which could be interpreted as our own home even if we were in someone else's house--or perhaps in our city or in a cozy hotel; and when we say that a country is *at war*, we are not saying that the country is "somewhere else" or in any specific place called *war*--what we mean is that the country is *involved in the activity of warfare*.

All these examples describe "ideas" derived from a collective linguistic context, but bear in mind that these expressions were created according to particular circumstances; we understand their meaning because they have become a tradition; therefore, do not use, for instance, "at swimming pool" (without the article) just because you or someone you know has the habit of swimming IN a swimming pool; or "at restaurant," because you or someone you know has the habit of eating IN a restaurant. Note also that the use of AT in these contexts is often connected to the *institutions* they represent (e.g., *at Oxford, at Harvard*, etc.)--though this explanation is only a complement and does not exhaust the subject.

#### **IN Class, IN Church, IN Jail, IN Prison ...**

IN is often used in quite similar metaphorical locations to AT. However, these "IN expressions" have a stronger sense of *engagement* than AT. On the other hand, they are not as attached to the particular physical place they represent as AT is. For instance, **in school** may mean enrolled in a course; that is to say, it may designate one as a student, regardless of the fact that the student may not even be on the school premises at the time of speech. Now compare the examples below:

- a) Felipe is **at** school; he is **in** class now.
- b) Joseph is **in** the school.
- c) Pamela learned French **in** school.
- d) We love the new roof **on** the school.
- e) Joseph and Pamela are **in** church.
- f) The tourist is **in** the church, taking photographs.
- g) Everybody **in** church likes to pray.

In (a), the first clause tells us that Felipe is attending school. We know he is inside the school because the second clause tells us that he is having class now (for example, he could be playing football on the school field and still be at school). If it were not for the second clause, we would never know for sure if Felipe was or was not inside the school building. In (b), Joseph works for a construction company, and he is working inside the school building. This does not mean that Joseph is attending school. In (c), Pamela did not learn French by herself. In (d), Joseph finished his job by installing a new roof to cover the school. In (e), Joseph and Pamela are members of the church. The sentence does not guarantee that they are inside the church building at the moment of speech. In (f), the tourist must be in the church building in order to take photographs inside the church (for instance, the specific context will help determine if a worshipper is at church or in church; a tourist is normally *in* the church). In (g), the fact that the members of the church like to pray does not mean that they are in the church now. One extra particular difference between IN and AT is *time*. Compare the following sentences:

Felipe is **at** school.

Pamela is **in** school.

When Pamela was **in** school, she befriended Felipe.

We would only use the first sentence if Felipe was studying at the moment of speech; for instance, we would probably not use AT on a Sunday. We should use the second option if Pamela is currently *enrolled* in a school but was *not necessarily* in the school building at the moment of speech. The third example tells us that both Pamela and Felipe were friends *during* the time they spent together *as students*. Now compare the examples below:

- a) The man is **in** jail.
- b) The man is **in** prison.
- c) The woman is **in** the prison.
- d) His friend is visiting him **at** the prison.

The sentence in (a) tells us that the man is incarcerated. Again, I am not interested in describing a place, such as the noun *jail*, but an *idea* or a *situation*. However, a person *in jail* will obviously, in most cases, also be *inside* a jail. The example in (b) functions much like (a), with the exception of the noun *prison*; that is, the man is *in jail* awaiting trial; if convicted, he will be *in prison*. Once more, the noun *prison*, here, is an idea, any place where people are physically (sometimes mentally) confined. For instance, one can be in prison at home (under house arrest, but not necessarily *inside* the house at all times). The sentence in (c) stresses that the woman is *inside* the building. She could be a visitor or a worker who happened to be there at the moment of speech, but not necessarily a prisoner. The last example tells us that the visitor is *there*, on the prison's *premises*, but *not necessarily* inside any particular prison building. Compare these examples of the preposition IN:

Mohamed is **in** town.

Farah wants to discuss the legal issues **in** court.

The president has been **in** office for over two years.

The first example tells us that Mohamed is *back* or *present* in the city where he lives. This is more related to the fact that Mohamed is *here/there* than to the designation of the place itself. In the second sentence, Farah prefers to discuss the legal issues *before the law*. Eventually, *but not necessarily*, she

will have to be physically present in a court of law. The third example tells us that the president has been *employed as a public servant* for more than two years; it does not mean that the president has been *inside* his or her office for more than two years.

AT is often used figuratively with abstract nouns:

The hunter was watching the ducks **at** a distance.

Did you know that you can buy gift cards **at** a discount?

## **AT vs. WITH**

Sometimes AT is used interchangeably with the preposition WITH:

The street numbers in this area begin **at** 100.

The street numbers in this area begin **with** 100.

However, the two uses can be quite different. Consider the examples below:

- a) Some scientists agree that outer space begins **at** 100 km from the Earth's surface.
- b) A typical dosage regimen would begin **with** 100 mg three times daily.

In (a), outer space cannot simply begin *with* an altitude of 100 km because this would mean that the first 100 km from our planet are part of outer space (whereas, according to some scientists, outer space begins *right after* the 100 km mark). In (b), the person taking the vitamins should begin *with* 100 mg daily (100 mg is not the starting point but the complete recommended dosage).

## **Expressing Proximity and Distance**

### **NEXT TO: immediately beside; adjacent to**

The prepositions NEXT TO, NEAR, CLOSE TO and BESIDE are very similar in their general aspect of proximity. However, when we need to be specific, there are some important spatial considerations that must be addressed, as these prepositions have different semantic properties and can also be used in directional contexts. NEXT TO indicates close proximity or the order existing between two referents, whether in place or succession. Like BEHIND, seen in Chapter 2, NEXT TO often has a horizontal sense of

direction related to its referent. For example, compare:

Indira lives in apartment 101. She lives **next to** Chandra, who lives in apartment 102.

George lives on the second floor, in apartment 201. He lives **near** Indira and Chandra.

Notice that, although Indira and Chandra live close to George, they do not really live *adjacent* to him but below him. Now imagine that you are Chandra, in apartment 102, and compare the rationale of BESIDE and NEXT TO:

Apartment 102 is **next to** apartment 103 and **beside** apartment 101.

Apartment 103 is **next to** mine.

In both sentences, the central point of view is apartment 102. Now suppose that these numbers increase from your point of view to the right; in the first sentence, you are saying that "your apartment is next to the apartment on the right," and in the second example you are saying that "the apartment on the right is next to yours." In both cases the direction used was *to the right*. However, despite the apparent unidirectional attribute of the preposition NEXT TO, you could also say that apartment 102 is next to apartment 101. Consider the next three examples:

Apartment 102 is **next to** apartment 101 and 103. ⊗

The sentence above would be (correct but) a bit awkward since we have more appropriate solutions for this situation, such as the two following possibilities:

Apartment 102 is **between** apartment 101 and 103.

Apartment 102 is **in front of** apartment 101 and 103.

Nevertheless, we could overrule the sense of "right directionality" and work toward a "left directionality" and still produce the same correct results, as long as they are coherent; that is, as long as they follow a sequential or logical order:

Apartment 106 is **next to** apartment 105, which is **next to** 104.

However, NEXT TO often yields a sense of "order" or "alignment" that our

human natural sense of direction uses to remind us to always choose right or forward every time we have to think in terms of adjacency or of a lateral or horizontal proximity. Just as we always see a *right* arrow indicating where to go *next* when we are browsing on the Internet, or are requested to go one step *forward* in a theater queue, NEXT TO suggests the same spatial rationale. For example:

- a) On the piano keyboard, the black key **next to** the C key is the C sharp.
- b) On a computer keyboard, the key **next to** the G key is the H key.
- c) On the acoustic guitar, the string **next to** the D string is the G string.

Notice that both the examples in (a) and (b) depict a horizontal surface, but the surface described in (c) could be horizontal or not. However, the sentence in (a) shows an intriguing context: There are actually two keys adjacent to the C key on the piano keyboard, the shorter black C sharp and the white D keys. Notice that the speaker identified the color of the key; now consider the following question:

On the piano keyboard, which key is **next to** the C key?

We can answer this tricky question by considering the sequential order of the keys (the black key would then come first), or the adjacency of the next white key (in this case the D key would be the one next to the C key).



Nevertheless, NEXT TO also suggests *contact*, *virtual contact* or *quasi-contact* between the entity and its referent (independently of a specific orientation). For example:

- the country **next to** the other
- the country **next to** the equator
- the country **next to** the islands

In the first example, the country **next to the other** could be Colombia (and Venezuela). In the second example, the country **next to the equator** could be

Peru, and in the third example, the country **next to** the islands could be Ecuador, and the islands could be the Galapagos Islands (which, incidentally, belong to the country).

Often, especially when we refer to a variable or temporary entity, a visual contact is enough for us to use NEXT TO without further spatial implications:

a woman **next to** the president

The man standing **next to** the telephone booth.

Compare the following examples with the preposition NEXT TO:

- a) Our house is **next to** the supermarket.
- b) I like to sit **next to** the window.
- c) They are sitting **next to** each other.
- d) The dog ran **next to** the lake.
- e) The road ran **next to** the lake.

In (a), our house could be adjacent to the supermarket or at least very close to it (sometimes we see the term "door-to-door," for example, as in *he is a door-to-door salesman*, used in place of NEXT TO to indicate proximity, as in *Collins Street shopping is door-to-door with the most famous boutiques in the world*). In (b), apart from irrelevant or out-of-context referents, there is a clear notion of contact (i.e., I do not expect another table between my table and the window--except, perhaps, for a flower arrangement, a vase, etc.). In (c), we can only sense the speaker's notion of proximity, as there is no clue whether they are in front of each other, sitting side-by-side or in any hierarchical order (they could be sitting at a table or on a bench, etc.). In (d), the dog ran as far as or along the edge of the lake; note that NEXT TO generally requires the static sense of place of the example in (e) (as opposed to the sense of movement and direction of (d)).

NEXT TO used in the figurative senses of comparison, proximity and order:

**Next to** my colleagues I feel like an incompetent.

His fever was down, and his temperature was **next to** normal.

**Next to** going to the mall, her favorite pastime is watching TV.



A couple is walking **on** the sidewalk **next to** the house.

## CLOSE TO and NEAR: which one is less distant?

CLOSE TO and NEAR differ from NEXT TO and BESIDE because they help designate an entity that can be near its referent without the attributes of order, contact and horizontality (e.g., *The asteroid was near the Earth*). However, CLOSE TO is a bit more *intense* than its cousin, the preposition NEAR. For example, if a child places a bottle of water on the edge of a table, the mother may say:

The bottle is **close to** the edge of the table, it will fall!

Don't put the bottle **near** the edge of the table!

Although CLOSE TO and NEAR are practically synonyms (using both prepositions would also be acceptable in the two examples above), CLOSE TO brings the regions of the entity and its referent *closer* than NEAR. The range of NEAR is a little vague in terms of proximity and intention (the directional preposition TO that helps form the complex preposition CLOSE TO is a connector *per se*). However, the preposition NEXT TO also uses the directional TO; therefore, how to differentiate them? By considering the meaning of their adjectives! For example, *next* means "nearest" or "adjacent," while *close* means "not far" or "in a short distance away." Consequently, NEXT TO gets the "nearest" priority; that is, in a way, NEXT TO is more related to the sense of connection of TO, while CLOSE TO is more related to the sense of direction of TOWARD (see Chapter 1 for more details on TO and TOWARD). Now consider the following examples:

Drive **close to** that barn.

Drive **near** the barn.

In the first example, the use of CLOSE TO could indicate that the car is already in the proximity of the barn and that we will simply drive without getting away from it (or **to** a closer distance) keeping a certain--or perhaps a

steady--distance from the barn. In another sense, since the directional preposition TO functions as a connector, it could indicate an even closer distance from the barn; that is, until a *reasonable connection* is established between the car and the barn. If the driver were to drive closer than the range of the preposition CLOSE TO, the car would be NEXT TO the barn instead of CLOSE TO it. On the other hand, if the car were to go away from the barn, it would be NEAR the barn as soon as it crossed the "CLOSE TO border" into a "NEAR region," and the converse is also true--if the car were to approach the barn from a great distance, it would be NEAR the barn as soon as it crossed the border into the "NEAR region" coming from the opposite direction.

The preposition NEXT TO borders the limits of CLOSE TO--which borders the limits of NEAR--but there is no such a thing as a precise measure of their range distances; that is, they always mean "reasonable proximity." For instance, suppose I want to walk from my house to visit three distinct historic buildings:

I live in NYC, on 4th Street. My house is **near** the historic building, on 1st Street.

I live in NYC, on 4th Street. My house is **near** the historic building, on 125th Street.

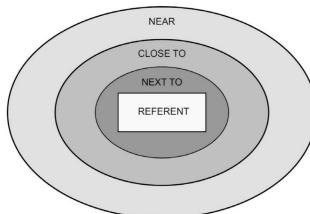
I live in NYC, on 4th Street. My house is **near** the historic building in Europe. ®

The first example is perfectly acceptable, as all I have to walk is a little over three blocks to reach the historic building. In the second example, I would have to walk over two hours from my house in order to reach the historic building on 125th Street. My question to you now: Is this *near*? If someone thinks it is, I know some people who think it is not, consequently, we may have what I term a "reasonable region" for the preposition NEAR. Perhaps we could consider the preposition CLOSE TO in the first example (it is also reasonable to believe that walking three blocks makes the historic building on 1st Street CLOSE TO my house). However, there is nothing reasonable about the third example, which could be rephrased as:

I live in NYC, on 4th Street. My house is **far from** the historic building in Europe.

In the following graphic representation, I REFERENT could be a gas station, your house, your desk, etc. NEXT TO and CLOSE TO are both inside the NEAR range (in other words, if you are NEXT TO or CLOSE TO, you are

also NEAR, but if you are NEAR, you are *not necessarily* NEXT TO or CLOSE TO a referent). For instance, you could use CLOSE TO and NEAR as synonyms in similar situations, as in *The house is close to the power line* and *The house is near the power line*.



"Reasonable ranges" of NEAR, CLOSE TO and NEXT TO.

In the first case, the house is within a shorter distance of the power line than in the second example (that is, CLOSE TO is *closer* than NEAR!). As we have seen, the rationale behind these two prepositions is that CLOSE TO suggests a sense of "attraction" loosely equivalent to the preposition of direction TOWARD; in other words, the entity's target is its referent, but, like with TOWARD, the two never need to touch (see TO and TOWARD in Chapter 1 for a comparison), whereas NEXT TO designates a region that starts in the boundaries of CLOSE TO and ends touching its referent. For instance, consider the two following figurative examples:

She is **close to** her brother.

We got **close to** the expected results.

In the first example (which could also be used with CLOSE WITH), NEAR would not express a strong connection between brother and sister, rather a vague or mild (and perhaps literal) proximity, whereas in the second example, NEAR would mean "not enough" proximity. On the other hand, if we had used NEXT TO in the first sentence, we would have specified that brother and sister were *physically* side-by-side, whereas if we had used it in the second sentence, we would have shown a certain *lack of congruence* between the ideas of physical and figurative proximity--since NEXT TO is more often used in the literal sense when designating proximity.

## Why NEAR Is Close to AT

We have seen earlier that AT has a "detachment" attribute relative to the prepositions TO, IN and ON; that is, it designates *vague* areas which connect

entities with their referents (in directional, locational and temporal situations—including their figurative uses). For example, *she is at home* (we don't know *exactly* where she is in relation to her house), as oppose to *she is in the house* (we know *exactly* that she is *inside* the house). The preposition NEAR has this same attribute in relation to the prepositions CLOSE TO and NEXT TO, which allows for a more subjective interpretation, such as in the sense of "near enough for something to happen." As an example, suppose Mary phones John because she needs an urgent work to be done on the computer:

Hello John, are you **near** your computer? I need you to print an urgent report!

Why did Mary use the preposition NEAR if she wants to know whether John is very *close to* or *next to* his computer? Because, just as with AT, Mary cannot be sure of John's *exact* location relative to his desk or to his computer at the moment of speech. It would be the same as if someone called you on your cell phone asking:

Hi Andrew, I accept your invitation to visit you tonight. Are you **in** the toilet now?

In other words, it would be awkward (and sometimes even rude) to try to guess *exactly* where one is in the house during a normal social conversation. Hence, the example above would sound better if rephrased as follows:

Hi Andrew, I accept your invitation to visit you tonight. Are you **at** home now?

This also means that CLOSE TO and NEXT TO are more "precise" than NEAR, just as TO, IN and ON are more "precise" than AT in terms of general places and locations.

Do not confuse the adverb *near* in the sentence below with the preposition NEAR:

As the bear came *near*, I stood silent and motionless.

NEAR used in the figurative and abstract senses:

The child was **near** tears.

The simulated results were **near** the results obtained by practical experiments.

He was **near** a nervous breakdown and having financial problems.

## **NEAR TO: close to; fond of**

NEAR TO generally suggests more proximity than NEAR and is often used preceding an abstract noun--but not always. NEAR TO is also frequently used before a gerund indicating that something was not--or was almost--accomplished:

There was a man standing **near to** us.

They came **near to** fighting during the discussion.

Our hotel rooms are **near to** the best rooms in the region--perhaps even better.

In the figurative sense, NEAR TO is often similar to *dear to*:

My family is **near to** my heart.

NEAR TO also has a sense of "togetherness," as in:

At Christmas our friends gather **near to** us.

Sometimes we use NEAR TO in the sense of "similar to," as in:

The replica is as **near to** the original as possible.

## **ANYWHERE NEAR: within any extent of proximity**

This idiomatic phrase is used as emphasis for NEAR; that is, in the three examples below you could drop the adverb *anywhere*:

I don't want you **anywhere near** my house.

If I see you **anywhere near** my daughter, I will call the police!

Your results are not **anywhere near** the results that you need.

## **AS FAR AS: to the specified extent or limit**

Also SO FAR AS.

We can use a literal form, such as in (a) and (b), or expressions such as in (c):

a) The astronauts went **as far as** the moon.

b) He lived in Miami but traveled **so far as** China.

c) I know history **as far as** the Roman Empire.

Also frequently used in the sense of AS FOR and REGARDING:

**As far as** the view, I promise it will be spectacular!

**So far as** literature, I love the Romantic period.

She did not agree with her father **so far as** marrying John.

### **BESIDE: on either side of; at the side of; next to**

The preposition BESIDE also has a horizontal attribute and is very similar to, and often interchangeable with, NEXT TO. However, BESIDE does not suggest an order or a physical or close contact as NEXT TO does, besides dealing mainly with a more lateral sense of localization. In terms of rationale, BESIDE is almost equivalent to IN FRONT OF. I mean *almost* because IN FRONT OF is very directional relative to a longitudinal orientation to the front, but it does not suggest a specific or reasonable distance between entity and referent as does BESIDE, which suggests a closer range. For instance, one could say the nearly equivalents:

The dog house is **in front of** the house.

The dog house is **beside** the house.

However, in the following examples, one could say the first phrase, but it would be a bit awkward (although possible) to say the second:

the mountains **in front of** the house

the mountains **beside** the house  $\circledast$

Perhaps the best alternative for the second example above would be to use the preposition NEAR or AROUND (regardless of the fact that the mountains could be on either side of the house).

BESIDE is often used when we do not need to specify the arrangement of an entity relative to its referent or the distance between entity and referent--as long as they inhabit the same *reasonable* region. For example:

the phone **beside** the bed

the car **beside** the house

The two examples above leave a clear picture of the localization of the phone

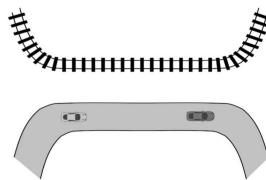
in relation to the bed and the car in relation to the house.

Sometimes it is easy to confuse BESIDE with ALONG in certain contexts. In such cases, we need to contrast the spatial relation of the entity with its referent in order to use the best choice of preposition. For instance, compare the examples below:

the road **beside** the railroad track

the road **along** the railroad track

The examples in (a) and (b) are different. In (a), both the road and the railroad track are side-by-side only in the particular stretch of the area where the speaker sees them. In (b), both the road and the railroad track follow an undetermined parallel path. This could never occur in *the road beside the house* and *the house beside the road*, for instance, where there is more contrast between *house* and *road* than between *road* and *railroad track* in terms of parallel longitudinal extensions (that is, a house cannot possibly be so long as to run along a road or a railroad track).



There is a railroad track **beside** the road.  
Part of the railroad track runs **along** the road.

Sometimes BESIDE is used interchangeably with AGAINST--but the two prepositions are not to be confused:

the ladder **beside** the house

the ladder **against** the house

BESIDE is also often used in the sense IN COMPARISON WITH:

He looks older **beside** her.

BESIDE used in the figurative and abstract senses:

That reporter brings you the story **beside** the story.

The philosopher said, "Evil happens **beside** the intention."

## **BY THE SIDE OF: beside**

This complex preposition can be used interchangeably with BESIDE, and, like its counterpart, it has a horizontal sense and does not designate a specific side:

They live in a house **by the side of** the road.

The men were standing **by the side of** the sheriff.

BY THE SIDE OF is often used with verbs of motion:

They drove **by the side of** an old castle.

BY THE SIDE OF used in the figurative and abstract senses:

He passed **by the side of** happiness and missed it!

## **NEXT DOOR TO: in the adjacent room or building; next to; close to**

This idiomatic complex preposition is used to emphasize the proximity effect between an entity and its referent--both in the literal and figurative sense:

Sarah is **next door to** the living room.

A new family moved **next door to** our house.

NEXT DOOR TO used in the figurative sense with an abstract noun:

The people of that country are **next door to** starvation.

The sentence below may be interpreted both in the literal and figurative sense:

The drunken man is **next door to** a fool.

In the figurative sense, the drunken man is either a fool or acting like one; in the literal sense, there is a fool living, standing, etc. next door to the drunken man.

## **OVER AGAINST: next to; in relation to; as opposed to**

There are beautiful fields **over against** the town.

He built a hotel on that part of the island **over against** the mainland.

OVER AGAINST in the figurative sense followed by abstract nouns:

The future is **over against** the present.

She puts friendship **over against** love.

He defends philosophy **over against** religion.

### **ALONGSIDE: close to the side of; along; beside; together with**

Also ALONGSIDE OF.

Sometimes ALONGSIDE is used interchangeably with the directional preposition ALONG to designate entities next to and parallel to static referents. For example:

The trail is **alongside** the Little Missouri River.

ALONGSIDE is also often used in contexts that describe things or persons *together* or *side by side* in a place or event. For example:

Two horses ran **alongside of** each other.

Car parking will be provided **alongside** the arena.

There were several small car dealers **alongside** the road.

They worked **alongside** him for many years. Now he is retiring.

Prepositions are often used **alongside** certain nouns, adjectives and verbs.

Do not confuse ALONGSIDE with ALONG WITH. Compare the two forms:

a) The oil company will participate in this operation **along with** other organizations.

b) The oil company will participate in this operation **alongside** other organizations.

In (a), the oil company will not be alone in the operation (other organizations will *also* participate in the operation, but not necessarily at the same time or together with the oil company). In (b), the oil company will participate in the operation *together with* or *side by side* with other organizations.

ALONGSIDE is also used to demonstrate figurative proximity. For example:

Ghana, **alongside** Brazil and Nigeria, is regarded as the new hot spot of the oil industry.

### **ALONG WITH: together with; in association with**

Despite its interchangeability with ALONGSIDE, the complex preposition ALONG WITH is not necessarily used to designate a specific position in physical space:

He left a small apartment to her, **along with** a house and a farm.

ALONG WITH and TOGETHER WITH are often used interchangeably--including in the figurative sense. However, when I am referring to associations with people, I personally prefer to use TOGETHER WITH (see next entry):

Summer is here, **along with** fun!

Fun is important--**along with** responsibility.

The hamburger is on the table, **along with** the ketchup.

The FBI, **along with** the CIA, is working to coordinate the investigation.

**Along with** his secretaries, the president began a dialogue with foreign leaders.

See more uses of ALONG WITH in Chapter 5.

### **TOGETHER WITH: along with; as well as**

TOGETHER WITH and ALONG WITH are often interchangeable. However, when I refer to associations with people, I personally prefer to use TOGETHER WITH:

The minister, **together with** his aids, left the building in a hurry.

John, **together with** Mary, will be responsible for the party.

**Together with** his secretaries, the president began a dialogue with foreign leaders.

TOGETHER WITH in the figurative and abstract senses:

She was given an excellent salary **together with** fantastic benefits.

TOGETHER WITH is also used as a temporal preposition (see Chapter 5).

### **IN COMPANY WITH: together with**

The aircraft carrier was sailing **in company with** the frigate.

You ought to speak English constantly when you are **in company with** native speakers.

## **BEHITHER: on this side of**

Archaic or regional.

This is a very rare preposition--nevertheless still used:

The enemies are **behither** the river.

The alpine villages **behither** and behind the mountains.

## **ANENT: alongside; beside; about**

Archaic or regional.

They live **anent** the road.

A gate stood **anent** the building.

ANENT used figuratively in the sense of ABOUT, REGARDING or CONCERNING:

I have a lot to say **anent** your attitude.

We found documents **anent** a Scottish pirate in Edinburgh.

Compare ANENT in both the spatial and non-spatial sense of ABOUT:

There are trees **anent** the river.

There are stories **anent** the river.

## **FORNENST: alongside; opposite**

Also FORNENT, FERNENST or FORNINT. Archaic or regional.

The preposition FORNENST is often used interchangeably with OVER AGAINST, IN FRONT OF and NEAR:

The cat walked **fornenst** the dog.

They sat at the table, **fornenst** each other.

Sometimes FORNENST is used in the sense of NEAR TO:

They sat on the bench **fornenst** each other.

Figuratively, FORNENST is also used in the sense of AGAINST or REGARDING:

This is a payment **fornenst** the products and provisions of this month.

### **NIGH: near**

Archaic or regional.

NIGH can be used in both literal and figurative senses:

I advise you that your vessel shall not come **nigh** my ship.

The moon is **nigh** the horizon.

My family is **nigh** my heart.

NIGH is also used to indicate approximate time (see also Chapter 5).

### **FORBY: near; past**

Also FORBYE. Archaic or regional.

He passed **forby** the house as she came **forby** the town.

FORBY can be seen in old literature as well as in American English--though not too often. Sometimes it is used in contexts where NEAR is also used in the same sentence, as in the example below:

The condo is **forby** the sea **near** Daytona and Orlando, Florida.

FORBY used in figurative contexts has the sense of IN ADDITION TO or BESIDES:

He looked at her and, **forby** her eyes, he saw what was inside her heart.

He had many other feelings, **forby** love.

The following complex prepositions are used with literal or figurative proximity.

### **IN THE VICINITY OF: near the specified place or region**

This complex preposition cannot always be used interchangeably with IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF and IN THE PROXIMITY OF. IN THE VICINITY OF is used in literal or figurative contexts to describe something or someone near or surrounding an area, location, or amount (see additional examples of IN THE VICINITY OF in Chapter 5):

The lake is **in the vicinity of** the river.

The man was seen **in the vicinity of** the school.

The rate of unemployment was **in the vicinity of** 10%.

## IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF: near; within the range or region of

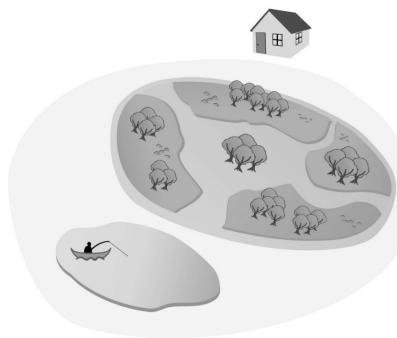
The "region" specified by IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF can be physical or figurative:

The Earth is **in the neighborhood of** the Sun.

The ambient temperatures are **in the neighborhood of** 25 to 35degC.

The cost of the new football stadium will be **in the neighborhood of** \$1.3 billion.

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF is also used in temporal situations.



The lake is **in the neighborhood of** the park; the house is **in the vicinity of** the park.

## IN THE PROXIMITY OF: near; at a nearby place; not far from

This complex preposition can be used both in the physical and figurative senses; however, it should not be used as a synonym for IN THE VICINITY OF or IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF. For instance, you could say:

Sea-lions are very timid when **in the proximity of** people.

but this sentence would be odd (although grammatically correct) if used with IN THE VICINITY OF or IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF:

Sea lions are very timid when **in the neighborhood of** people. ⊗

IN THE PROXIMITY OF is not the best choice to indicate a "region" as are IN THE VICINITY OF and IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF. For instance,

the sentence below makes better sense with IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF:

The Earth is **in the proximity of** the Sun. ☺

The sentence above is grammatically correct. However, the sense of "proximity" of the earth relative to the sun is not a very pleasant feeling, whereas the astronomical fact that the Earth is in the "neighborhood" of the Sun does not produce the same scary effect.

Like NEAR, IN THE VICINITY OF and IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF, IN THE PROXIMITY OF does not indicate how near an entity is to its referent.

IN THE PROXIMITY OF used in the figurative sense:

He grew up **in the proximity of** violence.

The courtroom was tense **in the proximity of** the truth.

IN THE PROXIMITY OF is also used in temporal situations.

**IN SIGHT OF: at an angle or distance that makes possible the view of; within reach of**

Also WITHIN SIGHT OF.

IN SIGHT OF can be used in literal or figurative contexts:

The boat is anchored **in sight of** the house.

She has worked for over 30 years, and now she is **in sight of** retirement.

When used with a gerund, the complex preposition IN SIGHT OF may indicate a sense of "being inclined to do something," as in:

She is **in sight of** buying a new house.

I'm not **in sight of** going to London yet but have said I'll be ready in one or two years.

**INSHORE OF: toward the shore of; nearer to shore than**

The fishermen went directly **inshore of** the fishing area.

The majority of finfish species are **inshore of** the current location of the oil spill.

**BY: near; close to; beside; next to; alongside of; at; on**

BY designates different levels of nearness and orientation in the horizontal plane:

- a house **by** the lake
- a village **by** the mountain
- a person sitting **by** the door
- a stranger who came **by** the door

We have seen BY in Chapter 1 as a directional preposition used with verbs of motion. Here, we extend our discussion of BY to its sense of location and compare its use with the use of NEAR, CLOSE TO, BESIDE, NEXT TO, ALONGSIDE OF, AT and ON. For instance, the following sentences are all using prepositions of proximity:

Their house is **near** the supermarket. It takes them only ten minutes walking.

Our house is **next to** the supermarket. It takes us less than one minute walking.

This means that the supermarket is right **beside** our house!

There is a car parked **by** the curb.

While NEAR can be used in dynamic and static senses, as in *The comet passed near the Sun* or *The house is near the supermarket*, it does not place the comet and the house as close to the referent as NEXT TO. On the other hand, personally, I seldom use NEXT TO or BESIDE with a *temporary motion entity*. Besides being similar in terms of horizontality, these two prepositions somewhat resemble BY (both express relative proximity), but they have a stronger lateral orientation. For example:

The river runs **next to** the road, snaking its way into the ocean.

The river runs **beside** the road, snaking its way into the ocean.

The river runs **by** the road, snaking its way into the ocean. ☺

The car passed **by** the house at high speed.

A river is not a temporary motion entity because the river itself does not move or go away from the road; it remains in place, with its flowing waters, NEXT TO (or BESIDE) the road; we could call it a *stationary motion entity*. Even when it is dry, we say that "the *river* is dry" (that is, "the river" is still

there!). A moving car, on the other hand, is a temporary motion entity because it moves past and goes away from its referent; in other words, it is only *temporarily* related to its referent, in terms of proximity, for the duration of its motion in relation to it.

I would use NEXT TO or BESIDE in (a) and (b) because both show strong lateral orientation and static properties relative to their referents (e.g., although the snake moved, it did so without moving away from the house at the moment of speech):

- a) She sat **next to** me on the sofa.
- b) The snake slithered **beside** the house.

Consider the sentences below:

- c) They are kissing **by** the window.
- d) Their bed is **next to** the window.

The example in (c) does not describe a narrative of a past event; in fact, the verb is in the present continuous, which means that the action is happening right now. Then, why did I use the preposition BY instead of NEXT TO? Because the *entire situation is temporary*, while in the example in (d), we have a true stationary situation.

BY is vaguer than NEXT TO in terms of the exact localization of an entity relative to its referent, but do not confuse the distance suggested by the two prepositions. For instance, consider (a) and (b):

- a) John and Mary are walking **by** the beach.
- b) Javier and Selma are walking **next to** the beach.

In (a), John and Mary can be walking *alongside* the beach (on the sand or on the beach sidewalk) or *near* or *close to* the beach; in (b), Javier and Selma are definitely not *on* or *at* the beach (they could be walking in a park right beside the beach, for example). BY, in this geographic sense of area, can be used as ON or AT. The three examples below are closely related in meaning:

- I walked **by** the beach.
- I walked **on** the beach.

I walked **at** the beach.

The difference between BY and ON and between BY and AT in the three examples above is that **by the beach** suggests *any* location *near, close to, on, or at* the beach; **on the beach** specifies the beach sand, and **at the beach** indicates the specific area ranging from the beach sidewalk (and perhaps a little further) to the wet sand that borders the sea water (thus, we can infer that BY is more closely related to AT than to ON).

AT has a stronger sense of detachment than BY. For instance, the sentence:

I stood **at** his side when the president announced the good news.

describes my position when the president announced the good news. I was not *necessarily* involved with the good news (I could have been a reporter with the exclusive interest of informing the public!). The example below tells a different story:

The nurse stood **by** the soldier's side, holding his hand.

Both prepositions denote a type of proximity, but BY, as used above, is our best choice to show a closer relation between the nurse and the soldier.

Do not confuse IN with BY. When designating *volume*, BY is completely different from IN. Compare the two sentences below:

Mary walked **in** the tunnel.

John walked **by** the tunnel.

The examples above are almost opposites in meaning. For instance, in the first sentence, Mary was *inside* the tunnel; in the second example, John was close to, but *did not* enter, the tunnel (which also means that he was *outside* the tunnel).

BY does not have *exactly* the same sense of proximity of NEXT TO. For example:

I live **by** her house.

I live **next to** her house.

To live BY someone's house may mean to live close to or beside someone's house; to live NEXT TO someone's house means to live *side-by-side* with

someone's house.

BY is more neutral than NEXT TO and BESIDE in terms of proximity. Compare:

- a) The couple is sitting **by** the fire.
- b) There is a museum **next to** the station.
- c) The ladder is **beside** the house, on the ground.

In (a), the preposition BY does not specify the distance or any specific side of the fire. Using *at the fire*, *in the fire* or *on the fire* would be possible, but the consequences would not be very pleasant. Using NEAR would not necessarily place the fire in the desired cozy distance from the couple, while using *next to the fire* or *close to the fire* would place the fire too close to the couple. Using *beside the fire* would be possible but a bit awkward as normally we do not choose a specific side of a fire. One alternative could be *in front of the fire*; however, BY is a more appropriate preposition for this context due exactly to its "neutrality" in terms of relative position.

In (b), the preposition NEXT TO places the museum immediately adjacent to the station (not IN FRONT OF and not BEHIND the station).

In (c), I used BESIDE because I wanted to place the ladder on a specific position relative to the house (BY, if used here, would not imply a specific location).

### **Figurative, Instrumental Uses of BY and Its Attribute of Source**

The preposition BY is often used to indicate agency:

The book was written **by** a good author.

The license was approved **by** the Chinese government.

BY is often interchangeable with the preposition WITH in the figurative sense:

The secret meeting was convened **by** order of the president.

The secret meeting was convened **with** order of the president.

However, BY and WITH are not always interchangeable. For instance, in the following examples, BY used in the first sentence indicates that the vacancy

shall be filled "***according to*** the president's indication," and WITH, as used in the second sentence, is not exactly interchangeable with BY:

A vacancy in the office of Vice President shall be filled **by** appointment of the President.

The vacancy shall be filled **with** the appointment of the new Vice President.

We could also say that the attribute of agency of BY conveys some kind of source. For instance, the two examples below also show the attribute of source of the preposition BY (the appointments come *from* the Queen and *from* the Prime Minister).

The Prime Minister is **by** appointment of the Queen.

Government posts are **by** appointment of the Prime Minister.

BY has certain similarity with OF in terms of the source attribute in dynamic relations. In this sense, BY specifies the instrument or agent of an action or event. For instance, the sentence in (a) shows the source of or the agent that caused the sting (a wasp or a bee); the example in (b) is using OF in a static relation; and the example in (c) shows an OF/BY relation, where OF has a sense of source, and BY has an instrumental sense:

- a) To be stung **by** a wasp is more painful than to be stung **by** a bee.
- b) The sting **of** a wasp is more painful than the sting **of** a bee.
- c) The furniture was made **of** wood **by** hand.

A few more examples of BY:

The U.S. passport size is 2" **by** 2".

Roosevelt won the presidency **by** a landslide.

The princes had rights on the German crown **by** heritage.

The goddess of hunting was known **by** the name of Diana.

Administrative expenses were increased **by** 10%

He carried the heavy bucket **by** the handle.

He swore **by** God that he had not lied.

There are several idiomatic prepositional phrases with BY. For example:

- a) She is **by far** the most intelligent student in the class.
- b) The killer was taken **by force** to court.
- c) He knows all the songs **by heart**.

In (a), she is *much more* intelligent than the rest of the students in her class; in (b), the authorities had to *use force* to be able to take the killer to court; in (c), he has *memorized* all the songs. See other uses of BY in Chapters 1, 4 and 5.

## WITH: proximity, togetherness and companionship

Sometimes also seen as directional, WITH is an instrumental preposition used in the spatial senses of proximity, containment, or in the sense of "in the same place as":

a drawer **with** a mirror

a computer **with** a mouse

a house **with** a swimming pool

John loves to go to the movies **with** Mary.

He got out of the car in the reserve to walk **with** the wild animals.

The problem emerges when some non-native speakers try to translate WITH in the same sense of connection of the preposition TO. For instance, in Spanish we would say:

Jose esta casado **con** Maria.

The same sentence in English would read:

Jose is married **to** Maria.

The preposition *con* in Spanish has the same meaning as WITH in English--thus the common and frequent incorrect translation:

Jose is married **with** Maria. ⊗

Accordingly, one could not say:

John loves to go to the movies **to** Mary. ⊗

The idea behind the attribute of proximity of WITH and TO is that TO has a sense of "direction" and "connection," while WITH has a sense of "proximity," "companionship" or "togetherness." Compare the two prepositions in the example below:

Maria walked **to** her dog, put a leash on the dog and then walked **with** the dog.

## Speaking and Talking WITH

As seen in Chapter 1, we speak or talk TO someone, which shows *direction*, *movement* and *reception*. However, we can also talk or speak WITH someone, which means that we are *engaged in a conversation*. Compare the examples below:

The president is speaking **to** the nation.

They are speaking **with** their friends.

This example is not an exception to our logic--actually we could say that it is an affirmation of the rule discussed in Chapter 1. For instance, when we are speaking WITH our friends, it is because we are talking TO each other. Therefore, in the last example above we could say that WITH is playing the role of a "collective of TOs."



Also WITHAL. Archaic or regional.

The old form WITHAL is normally used after its object:

*They act like monsters and are to be dealt withal as monsters.*

## ALONG OF: with

Also LONG OF. Archaic or regional.

ALONG OF is rarely used in spoken discourse nowadays, although frequently found in English literature--including its senses of BECAUSE OF and THROUGH:

She came **along of** me.

I will stay here **along of** the group.

The old man died happy **along of** her love!

It was **along of** him that I got out of this difficulty.

ALONG OF can also be used as a preposition of direction. See Chapter 1.

### **WITHOUT: outside; away from**

In Modern English, the preposition WITHOUT is not the converse of WITHIN--but things were different in Old English. For instance, the following first two sentences place the archaeologists *inside* and *outside the limits* of the ruins; in the third example, the motion verb *go* helps convey movement of the archaeologists *away from* the ruins; the last sentence tells us that he went to the movies alone:

The archaeologists stood **within** the ruins.

The archaeologists stood **without** the ruins.

The archaeologists went **without** the ruins.

He went to the movies **without** his girlfriend!

Nowadays, WITHOUT does not have the spatial sense described in the previous examples and is mostly used as the opposite of WITH (which does have a spatial sense) to express *absence* or the *lack* of something. For instance, the last two examples mean that the archaeologists went home *but did not take* the ruins with them, and that the man went to the movies, *but his girlfriend did not go with him*. Nevertheless, even in present-day English, the preposition WITHOUT can often be interpreted in two ways--and only the correct interpretation of the context can explain the most appropriate one for each case. For example:

He went to work **without** breakfast.

The example above could mean that he *did not have* breakfast before going to work, or that he *did not take* his breakfast *with him* to work.

The use of WITH in the following examples in (a) demonstrate the spatial sense of proximity between the "with entity" and its referent. On the other

hand, the examples in (b) show that the preposition WITHOUT should not be used as the converse of WITH in spatial contexts:

- a) Please, put the pens **with** the notebooks and the book **with** the other books.
- b) Please, put the pens **without** the notebooks and the book **without** the other books. ☺

## FAR FROM and AWAY FROM: remoteness; separation

The complex prepositions FAR FROM and AWAY FROM are not quite synonyms. For instance, you can be away from something or someone and at the same time not far from them. For example:

I need to learn how to keep the bears **away from** the garbage can.

In fact, bears should live **far from** the cities.

Bears are always close to my home, but I have been trying to keep them away from the garbage cans even though I don't mind the fact that they live close by.

When used with verbs of motion, AWAY FROM is often chosen because it gives a sense of "gradual" separation of the entity from its referent, while FAR FROM suggests a more remote distance. In either case, the following sentences are all correct:

He went **away from** his home.

He went **far from** his home.

Traveling **far from** home can be an adventure.

Traveling **away from** home can be an adventure.

AWAY FROM is vaguer than FAR FROM, just as AT, BY and NEAR are vaguer than their prepositional relatives (see AT, BY and NEAR in this chapter), and it does not imply a specific degree of distance, therefore functioning as a *hedge*, indicating that the speaker is not sure of or does not want to imply a particular distance. However, you can use the particle *away* as an intensifier of FAR FROM:

He went **far away from** his home.

FAR FROM and AWAY FROM in the figurative and abstract senses:

He is **far from** done.

I am **far from** finishing my homework.

We got **away from** the expected results.

The country moved **away from** his ideas.

See FAR FROM and AWAY FROM also in Chapter 5.

### **ALOOF FROM: distant from**

The combination ALOOF FROM normally indicates metaphorical distance, but it is also used to designate physical distance or proximity:

He always stayed **aloof from** the neighbors.

The new condo is minutes **aloof from** the beach.

The smart politician preferred to stay **aloof from** the actual government.

### **BETWEEN: in the space separating two (or more) referents**

See also AMONG.

Primarily, we use BETWEEN to separate (or to place one or more things, ideas or persons in the space that separates) two concrete or abstract referents (i.e., BETWEEN always introduces two objects):

He likes to sit **between** the two most popular girls in the classroom.

Sometimes there are a lot of problems **between** couples.

Most cyclists say their average speed is **between** 15 and 18 mph.

She had to choose **between** the dog and the cat.

They were talking **between** themselves.

Simon lives **between** London and New York.

There was a wall **between** the two properties.

I travel a lot. I need to relax **between** trips.

However, we can also use BETWEEN to separate more than two referents which are not part of a collective or a mass. For example:

If you had to choose **between** Rome, Venice, and Florence, which would you choose?

Nevertheless, in the example above, BETWEEN is actually still separating two objects, as we would have to think "between Rome and Venice," or "between Venice and Florence," or "between Florence and Rome," before answering the question.

This means that you should not say:

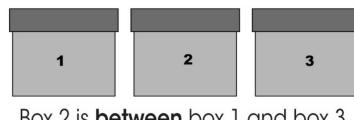
European cities are **between** the best in the world for quality of living. ☺

Consider the examples below:

- a) Estimated travel distance **between** European cities.
- b) A treaty **between** France, England, Holland and Spain was signed in Paris.

In (a), by "travel distance between European cities" I mean the distance BETWEEN any of two cities in Europe, not restricted to a specific number of cities; in (b), a treaty between these countries is possible because France, England, Holland and Spain are distinct individual items (like Rome, Venice or Florence above).

BETWEEN is often used in a horizontal sense:



Box 2 is **between** box 1 and box 3.

When expressing movement, BETWEEN does not need to designate a precise path:

Walking **between** Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus is now faster and safer.

## Walk Between Two Points

There are basically two ways to use BETWEEN to show movement relative to two points: movement from one point *toward* another point or movement *in the middle* of two points. The first diagram ahead shows one interpretation:

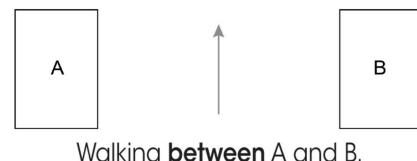


Walking **between** A and B.

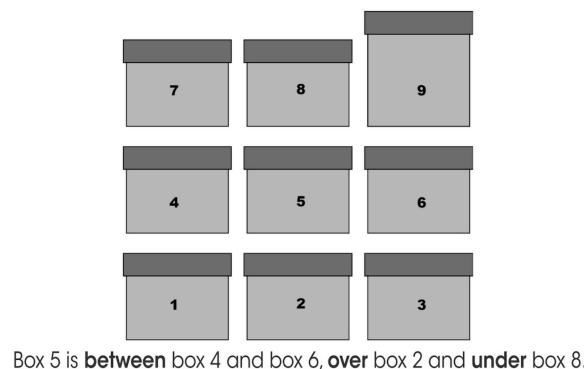
However, for spatial considerations, you do not need to be *in the middle* of two points in order to be BETWEEN the two points, as long as you are not outside their extremities:



Nevertheless, BETWEEN does not always mean "from one point to another," as the diagram below illustrates:



As seen above, BETWEEN is often used in a horizontal sense. For example, in the following figure, box 8 is BETWEEN box 7 and box 9; box 5 is BETWEEN box 4 and box 6; and box 2 is between box 1 and box 3--but box 4 is over box 1 and under box 7 and box 6 is over box 3 and under box 9.



However, BETWEEN is not restricted to a horizontal path. For instance, we could also consider a vertical path and say that box 5 is also BETWEEN box 2 and box 8.

In the examples below, BETWEEN is being used exclusively in the vertical sense:

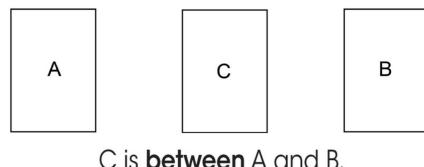
The elevator stopped **between** the first and second floors.

The alpinist had several wounds **between** the foot and the knee.

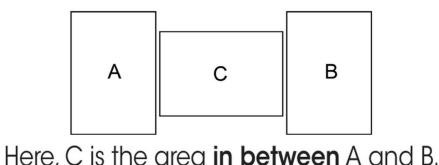
BETWEEN is also used after IN to form the double preposition IN BETWEEN (or the adjective *in-between*), meaning "a location between two endpoints or two extremities of a referent," or an intermediate and often temporary position, condition, etc. Consider the examples below:

- a) He planted hot peppers **in between** the pineapples.
- b) I'm **in between** patients right now. Can I help you?
- c) **In between** drinking and eating, they talked about politics.

In (a), the farmer used the space going from one extremity to the other of the pineapple rows, perhaps using all the space available between two rows. In (b), using the single BETWEEN would not produce exactly the same result (here IN BETWEEN is describing an intermediate and figurative situation). The example in (c) shows an intermediate activity that happened between two events.



C is **between** A and B.



Here, C is the area **in between** A and B.

See more examples of BETWEEN as a preposition of time in Chapter 5.

### **BETWIXT, ATWIXT, and ATWEEN: between**

Also TWIXT or 'TWIXT. Archaic or regional.

The river lies **betwixt** the sea and the city.

The beast came out from **atwixt** the two cliffs!

There is no relevant difference **atween** the two,

### **AMONG: mixed with; surrounded by or included in a group**

Also AMONGST. See also BETWEEN.

The preposition AMONG is not used to separate two or more referents but to designate a relationship of one or more entities with a collective referent, generally of the same group--for this reason, AMONG is pretty much restricted to plural or collective nouns (see also AMID). For example:

The Celts fought **among** themselves.

The baby was **among** the few survivors in the earthquake.

Mixed Martial Arts has gotten popular **among** the military.

The Canon of Medicine is **among** the most famous books in the history of medicine.

AMONG is vaguer than BETWEEN:

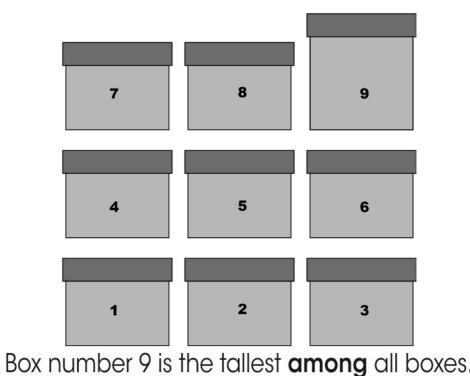
spectacular comets **among** the stars

spectacular comets **between** the stars

By *vaguer* I mean "not in a specific location" (but *integrated* with the cosmic scenario of the stars), while the second example is more specific about the comet's location relative to the stars. Now think of the word *love* and compare:

The word *love* is the most beautiful word **among** all the words in the dictionary.

The word *love* is the most beautiful word **between** all the words in the dictionary. ☺



Consider the two examples repeated below with the preposition BETWEEN:

a) The baby was **between** the few survivors in the earthquake. ☺

b) Mixed Martial Arts has gotten popular **between** the military. ☺

In (a), BETWEEN is wrong because I am not describing a spatial situation but including someone as part of the same group (the plural noun *survivors*). In (b) BETWEEN is also wrong because, once again, it is not describing a spatial situation relative to the collective *military* (something cannot be popular *between* the military as it cannot be popular *between* the crowd, etc.). Now compare the following--there is only one correct sentence below:

Are angels living **among** the human race?

Are angels living **between** the human race? ®

The following examples reveal two different (and grammatically correct) situations:

walking **among** the dinosaurs

walking **between** the dinosaurs

Theoretically, to be able to walk *between* dinosaurs you would have to first be able to walk *among* them. In other words, "to walk among the dinosaurs" means "to walk *with* the dinosaurs" (the dinosaurs must be alive!), whereas "to walk between the dinosaurs" could mean that one is in a museum walking between these Jurassic friends!

AMONG used figuratively and with abstract nouns:

A miracle is just one sign **among** the signs of God.

Democracy and religious freedom were **among** his dreams.

### **AMID: surrounded by or in the middle of**

Also AMIDST.

AMID is often used as a synonym of AMONG:

Marco Polo walked **amid** the people of that land.

Marco Polo walked **among** the people of that land.

There are beautiful white flowers **amid** the green leaves.

There are beautiful white flowers **among** the green leaves.

However, as seen above, AMONG (or AMONGST) is more restricted to plural or collective singular nouns, while AMID (or AMIDST) can move

freely into spatial or abstract contexts. For example, the following sentences in (a) and (c) are correct; the sentences in (b) and (d) are incoherent:

- a) Investors see hope **amid** the turbulence.
- b) Investors see hope **among** the turbulence. ☺
- c) Gold price went up **amid** the world crisis.
- d) Gold price went up **among** the world crisis. ☺

Also MID, 'MID, or MIDST (archaic or regional):

His boat was caught **mid** the ocean's roar.

A white flower grew '**mid** the red flowers.

I will write about my story **midst** the cannibals.

Also IN THE MIDST OF:

a river **in the midst of** the valley

She photographed the athlete **in the midst of** his jump.

She was always a voice **in the midst of** adversity.

See more uses of MIDST and IN THE MIDST OF in Chapter 5.

## Location as Source

### OF: source, relative position and general relations

The preposition OF denotes relation in general. We think of it as a preposition of location by its extension into the spatial domain of FROM (i.e., source), but we can also use OF in the senses of possession, relative position, cause and direction, which are somewhat related to source or origin. For instance, the man in the example below is metaphorically *positioned* before God:

He is a man **of** God.

OF is also used (often after WITHIN) to express distance:

The battle took place within one hundred kilometers **of** London.

We use OF to relate a part of something to the whole. For example:

the fingers **of** the hand

the waters **of** the ocean

Most usages of OF can be traced to some kind of source or possession, or to help describe a connection or relationship between people or things--often indicating the content or characteristics related to the preceding noun, pronoun, verb or adjective, as exemplified next:

She is the mother **of** the bride.

He is in front **of** the TV with a bag **of** popcorn.

They knew nothing **of** the plot to kill Lincoln.

The sculpture was made **of** marble.

It was very nice **of** you to come.

The sentence below shows a possessive relation. Note that the attribute of possession is very nearly related to the attribute of source (the players are *from* that team):

The players **of** that team are better than our players.

The use of the preposition OF in the example above shows two close relations; the first is the sense of "possession" (the players *belong* to that team), which is close to the sense of "position" (the players are *in* or *on* the team). Sometimes OF is used to distinguish meanings with a source-possessive attribute from meanings with a pure source attribute. Compare the two examples below:

He is a man **of** God.

He is a man **from** God.

In the first example, as seen earlier, he is *positioned* before God; or we could also say that he *belongs* to God--that is, he is a *religious* man. In the second sentence, the man must be a *messenger* of God--the speaker is telling us that he was *sent* by God. The following examples describe two types of source relation:

She drank a glass **of** wine.

She used a beautiful glass **of** crystal.

Wine--the content of the glass--was her source of pleasure, made possible by the verb *drink* (she could not, for instance, "drink a glass of crystal," unless the speaker was referring to a drink called "Crystal" and not to the solid material).

The preposition **OF** can be easily distinguished from **BY** in static vs. dynamic relations. For instance, compare these two sentences seen earlier:

The sting **of** a wasp is more painful than the sting **of** a bee.

To be stung **by** a wasp is more painful than to be stung **by** a bee.

Again, the attribute of source (or source-possessive) is present in the first example (the sting that comes *from* a wasp ...). Now compare **BY** and **OF** in the next sentence:

He traveled down the Amazon River **by** boat and died **of** malaria.

In the sentence above, malaria caused his death (malaria was the *source* of the problems that ultimately caused his death). See more about **BY** in this chapter. Now carefully compare the following:

a) She has a taste **for** wine.

b) She has a taste **of** wine. ☺

In (a), when you have a taste **for** something it means that you *like* it. In (b), a taste **of** something means its *flavor* (normally--unless the speaker is a cannibal--a person does not have a flavor!). Compare the two sentences below:

c) He is a man **of** principles.

d) He is a man **with** principles.

In (c), a person **of principles** is someone who has an accepted standard rule of conduct as a *source* of social values. In (d), a person **with principles** may indicate that this person *uses* a set of principles of his own. Now compare the three sentences below, where only (e) is correct:

- e) She is a friend **of** mine.
- f) She is a friend **by** mine. ☺
- g) She is a friend **with** mine. ☺

In the three examples above, only (e) shows the attribute of possession. The example below also shows a sense of source:

Paris is the city **of** light.

In the sentence above, the preposition OF is used to imply figuratively that Paris is a city *made with* light (that is, light is the *source* of the city's visual appeal). In the figurative examples below, OF implies a sense of source (the origin or reason for our caution; the original cause of his death):

Beware **of** the dog.

He died **of** heart attack.

## **FROM: an original location or source**

Also FRAE. Archaic or regional.

In this book, FROM inhabits the directional, the locational and the temporal prepositional worlds. FROM does not designate a location where something or someone is, but the source or the original location of something or someone. For example:

- a) She is coming **from** London, but she is actually **from** Paris.
- b) This wine on top of the fridge is **from** Italy.
- c) He graduated **from** Oxford.

In (a), the first preposition FROM is acting in a directional mode, whereas the second and the ones in (b) and (c), are both designating some kind of source or origin.

## **Made OF vs. Made FROM:**

Use OF when the basic form of the material is not changed; use FROM when its original form is transformed and changed into something else:

The boat is made **of** wood.

The paper is made **from** trees.

## Reading the Story

### The Riveras

Miguel and Maria Rivera live **in** California **with** their daughter, Julica. They live **on** Teotihuacan Street. They love their jobs. Miguel works **at** a publishing company. Normally he sits **at** his desk, **in** his office, and writes **on** his computer five days a week. Maria is an experienced nurse **at** the local hospital, working **in** the emergency room. Like Miguel, she also works five days a week. Julica is still **in** school, but today she will be home all day helping prepare the New Year's Eve menu.

On her daily breaks, Maria likes to walk **in** the park **beside** the hospital. She enjoys strolling **among** the trees and browsing the Internet **amid** the flowers. The hospital is **near** their home, **within** walking distance.

During his intervals, Miguel always reads a few pages of the historic novels and biographies that he keeps **on** a small bookshelf **by** the window. However, at least three times a week he swims **at** the club **next to** his house. He enjoys relaxing **in** the swimming pool before starting his working day.

Every Saturday, the family has breakfast together **at** the Breakfast House, which is **close to** the park where they like to walk **with** their dog, Tortilla. Every other week, they walk by the supermarket, which is **near** their house--but not really that close.

Tortilla is a well-trained dog and always walks **alongside** Maria or **between** Maria and Julica. The dog loves to play **outside** the house, **away from** the furniture--but always **within** the limits of the fence and very **close to** his favorite smoked bone!

Timoteo, the neighbor's cat, loves to jump **over** the fence to provoke Tortilla. On New Year's Eve, Timoteo decided to trespass. The cat went **inside** the house to eat the dog's food and a few minutes later ran **out** the door like crazy, with Tortilla chasing him **all over** the place. That night Timoteo slept **on top of** the roof **of** the Rivera's house just to tease Tortilla a little more. However, in the middle of the night, things changed dramatically. The cat fell **off** the roof **amid** the loud noise of the fireworks that were flying in aimless directions. Everyone came **out of** the house to watch the show **of** fireworks and the duo Tortilla and Timoteo!

This year Julica will start college in fall. She will move to Boston and, at least for the next four years, she will live **far from** home and **within** a tight budget. This will be a difficult experience because Julica is very **close to** her family and friends (including Tortilla and Timoteo).

### **Practicing the Best Scenario**

Think carefully before answering the ten questions below. First, read all the questions, trying to relate them to the correct prepositions; review the chapter, and only then start from the first one. If two prepositions are possible, try to use the most appropriate one, but do not repeat a preposition. Make sure to use the prepositions introduced in this chapter only.

- 1) I live \_\_\_ a house. I do not live \_\_\_ a farm.
- 2) I'll meet you \_\_\_ the door!
- 3) When it's raining I prefer to stay \_\_\_ the house watching TV.
- 4) She helps her students by working \_\_\_ them.
- 5) Maria and Miguel like to drink coffee \_\_\_ milk.
- 6) I parked my car \_\_\_ Main Street and Oak Street.
- 7) The truck was too big. I parked it \_\_\_ the garage.
- 8) The Prime Minister acted rightfully, \_\_\_ the limits of his powers.
- 9) John can hear Mary's TV. She lives in the apartment \_\_\_ to him.
- 10) Tunisia is \_\_\_ Europe but \_\_\_ Chile.

## Chapter 4 : Prepositions of Transportation

The basic prepositions of travel and transportation are IN, ON, OUT OF, OFF and BY. These five prepositions are used to indicate position relative to means and modes of transportation, including expressions describing locomotion and its forms. However, this chapter deals with a few other prepositions--borrowed from their primary senses of location, orientation and direction.

### **IN & OUT OF, ON & OFF: embarking, riding and disembarking from vehicles**

The prepositions that deal with means of transportation are often used in idiomatic expressions, which are reflected by the use of some prepositional verbs. For instance, *I traveled on the bus* is not idiomatic, whereas *I got on the bus* is an idiomatic expression formed with the verb *get* and its associated preposition ON.

Generally, these prepositions are very easy to use. First, let us work with IN/OUT OF and ON/OFF. We get IN and OUT OF a vehicle; we get ON and OFF a vehicle:

Mary **got in** the cab on Main Street and **got out of** the cab on Oak Street.

John **got on** the bus in New York and **got off** the bus in New Jersey.

However, how do we *really* know which preposition to use with different kinds of transportation? Let us try to solve this long-standing mystery together. First, there is some confusion among ESL and EFL speakers regarding the appropriate use of the prepositions IN and ON when they are related to private and commercial vehicles. A good solution is to apply a specific rationale to each individual context--because they are different! For instance, the examples in (a) and (b), taken respectively from CNN.com (January 5, 2003) and <http://www.planecrashmap.com/plane/ga/N47WD>, describe two real cases of a pilot in a small aircraft with a passenger on it; another pilot in a private plane, and one passenger on a small commercial plane:

- a) FRANKFURT, Germany -- An armed man who stole a small plane from a German airfield is circling the city of Frankfurt, threatening to crash. Several skyscrapers in the financial capital have been evacuated. Streets have also been cleared as a precaution. Initial broadcast reports say the man

could have one passenger **on** the plane and that he contacted air traffic control. The presumed hijacker reportedly plans to crash the plane into a tall building reported to be the Euro Building, MSNBC reports. CNN reports the man is flying **in** a single-engine Cessna 172 plane and is taking sharp turns.

b) On April 27, 1993, at about 20:03 eastern daylight time, an American AA1A, N9317L, and a Cessna 414A, N47WD, were destroyed following an inflight collision at the Statesboro Municipal Airport, Statesboro, Georgia. The student pilot **in** the American AA1A and one passenger **on** the Cessna 414A were fatally injured in the accident.

Let us begin to warm up with the following examples:

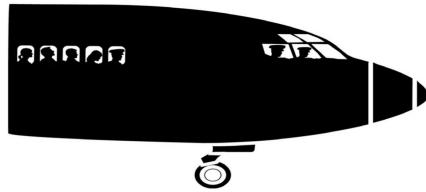
- a) We fly!
- b) We fly a plane.
- c) We fly **in** a plane.
- d) We fly **on** a plane.

The verb *fly* makes all the examples above possible, although their meanings are slightly different. In (a), the speaker is simply saying that "we are able to fly," or that "we fly on a regular basis"; in (b), the speaker is saying that "we pilot a plane"; in (c), the speaker is also saying that we pilot a plane; however, because of the choice of the preposition **IN**, the speaker is making sure to describe us as *crew members* or the aircraft as a *private plane*, or perhaps that we occasionally take a (free) ride in a friend's plane. In (d), the choice of the preposition **ON** indicates that we fly as a *passenger* of a plane. These distinctions are extremely important for non-native speakers of English and help define all other choices of prepositions used to designate position relative to vehicles and means of transportation.

In the following illustration of a commercial plane, the passengers are **ON** the plane, but there is a pilot **ON** the plane too, sitting in the front row--and there are two pilots **IN** the plane (the captain and the co-pilot). The pilot **ON** the plane is actually a passenger. He is off duty. The captain and the co-pilot are in the cockpit, and they are on duty; they are **IN** the plane. For instance, consider these next examples:

My brother is a pilot. He is on vacation now. He is **on** that plane.

My sister is a pilot too. She is working now. She is **in** the plane.



There are passengers **on** the plane.  
There is a pilot **on** the plane too, in the first window row.  
There are two pilots **in** the plane.

Accordingly, one can be **ON** a vehicle as a *passive passenger* or **IN** a vehicle as a guest or crew member; or **IN** the vehicle as an *active passenger*--which would correspond to someone in a taxi, or a president **IN** the presidential plane (both as active passengers). These concepts of "crew member," "passive passenger" and "active passenger," determine the status of a person in relation to *commercial, official* or *private* vehicles--and not to the size or configuration of the vehicle (see *The Concept of Cabin & Why Always IN the Car, Etc.*).

This means that an Air Force pilot is **IN** a fighter jet plane, the taxi driver is **IN** the taxi, the bus driver is **IN** the bus, the captain of the ship is **IN** the ship and the train engineer is **IN** the train. However, the sense of surface of **ON** takes the priority here:

The jockey is **on** his horse.

The motorcycle pilot is **on** his motorcycle.

Now compare the following two similar sentences:

George Washington rode **on** a carriage driven by six horses.

George Washington rode **in** a carriage driven by six horses.

In the first sentence, the preposition **ON** is linked to an *open* carriage. Maybe it was a sunny day because in the second example **IN** is linked to a *closed* carriage--perhaps because it was raining or because it was cold. However, these two examples were taken from real texts from the White House 2005 State of the Union official page. The same page tells that president George Washington rode "in/on" his carriage in the morning of a cold January day (which leaves us with a closed carriage).

We can project this rationale to other means of transportation--with no exception.



Both the driver and the passenger are **in** the car.

Bear in mind that official vehicles are used for transporting both *passive* and *active* passengers (e.g., the prime minister and the president). The following tables demonstrate the three concepts. See *The Boat and the Ship & the Concept of On Board*.

Prepositions and Means of Transportation		
User	Commercial	Example
Crew member	IN	The driver is <b>in</b> the blue bus.
Passive passenger	ON	There are three passengers <b>on</b> the bus.
Active passenger	IN	Mary is <b>in</b> the yellow cab.

Prepositions of commercial means of transportation.

Prepositions and Means of Transportation		
User	Private	Example
Crew member	IN	The pilot is <b>in</b> his own plane.
Passive passenger	IN	There are three friends riding <b>in</b> his van.
Active passenger	IN	Mary is <b>in</b> her friend's car, going to work.

Prepositions of private means of transportation.

Prepositions and Means of Transportation		
User	Official	Example
Crew	IN	The pilot is <b>in</b> Air Force One.
Crew	ON	She is an airwoman <b>on</b> the Ronald Reagan.
Passive Passenger	IN	The prime minister is <b>in</b> the president's car.
Passive Passenger	ON	The reporters are <b>on</b> Air Force One.
Active Passenger	IN	The president is <b>in</b> Air Force One.

Prepositions of official means of transportation.

In the figure below, the girl is **ON** the car. In order to avoid confusion between the preposition **ON** used to designate surface and **ON** used to designate position as passenger, we could also say that she is **ON TOP OF** the car. The same rationale goes for the following illustration of the bus.

The real examples expressed in paragraphs (a) and (b) below were taken respectively from The Washington Post (September 20, 2004; page A02) and

from Rediff India Abroad (March 1, 2006). These two examples, which may be compared to the following table, show the relationship of *crew* x *passive* x *active passenger* and the means of transportation represented by the large Jumbo 747 airplane:

- a) Bush flew **in** Air Force One to Pensacola Naval Air Station from Maine, where he had spent the weekend at his family's compound in Kennebunkport...
- b) When former president Bill Clinton visited Pakistan from India in 2000, the visit was kept a closely-guarded secret. He did not fly directly to Islamabad from India. He flew **in** Air Force One from India to Qatar, left his plane there, got **into** a smaller aircraft of the US Air Force and flew to Islamabad.



There are two people **in** the car and one girl **on** (**on top of**) the car.

Compare the sentences below:

Some passengers put their luggage **in** the bus.

Some passengers put their luggage **on** the bus.

You can take your carry-on luggage **on** the bus.

The three examples above are different. In the first sentence, the luggage is inside the luggage compartment of the bus. In the second example, the luggage is traveling on top of the bus, on a rack; in the last example, as a passenger you can take your carry-on luggage *with you inside* the bus--and travel on the bus with it.



There are four passengers **on** the bus and one driver **in** the bus.  
There is a man sitting **on** (**on top of**) the bus too.

Now compare the following examples:<sup>7</sup>

The driver **in** that bus is on duty.

There are only three passengers **on** the bus right now.

Both the passenger and the driver are **in** the taxi.

The crew worked hard **in** the ship, while the passenger **on** the ship watched.

The conductor is **in** the train checking the tickets of the passengers **on** the train.

However, as we have seen, native speakers generally resort to the preposition **ON** to describe the relationship of people and cargo with large vehicles such as buses, ships, trains, etc. Thus, the use of **ON** as in the example below is not uncommon:

The conductor **on** the train was very helpful.

Conversely, if you are faced with a situation in which there are two conductors inside your train--one on duty and the other on vacation, for instance--the preposition **ON** will not work for both cases. The following example would be a little awkward (but grammatically correct) if the conductor was **on** duty:

The conductor was sleeping **on** the train. ☺

## **The Boat and the Ship & the Concept of On Board**

Why do people often say that everyone is **ON** the ship and **ON** the boat? The rationale is very simple. For example, sometimes we hear people saying *The lieutenant was **on** the ship*, referring to a military ship, or *The crew **on** the ship was excellent*, referring to a cruise ship. If they are not passengers, then why did the speaker use the preposition **ON** instead of **IN**?

We say that we are **ON** a private boat because we tend to prioritize the concept of "platform," or the notion of "journey," rather than the private-crew-passenger relation. For instance, the people in the figure on the next page could be **IN** the boat (because they are not on a commercial boat or because they are not cruising) or **ON** the boat. Now consider a ship. Most of the time we simply do not think about the passive vs. active passenger relation, or about the crew, before using **ON**--and there is nothing wrong with that--since most crew members are not involved in steering the ship, and the ship is normally full of decks, which are really the floors of the ship (the concept of platform); but ships also have rooms (the concept of container), such as the staterooms, the restaurants, the engine room, etc. However, for

some speakers, the sense of "on board" prevails--therefore the indiscriminate use of ON. One of these senses will always determine our priority in terms of prepositional choice. ON is overwhelmingly predominant in this context because a ship carries a strong sense of "on board" or platform, which is often associated with the sense of journey (i.e., the idea of contact with a surface, where one can walk during a trip, for example). See *A Word on the Platform Theory* on page 205; see also *The Notion of Journey* on page 206.

All the examples below are correct:

The lieutenant is **in** the ship.

The lieutenant is **on** the ship; he is **in** the engine room.

The lieutenant is **on** the ship; he is **on** the bridge deck.

Ships also carry cargo, and the cargo can go ON and OFF or IN and OUT OF the ship. Compare the examples below:

The manifest shows the disposition of the cargo **in** the ship.

The cargo will be taken **out of** the ship two days after the ship docks.

Is the cargo **on** the ship exposed to more risks than the cargo **in** the ship?

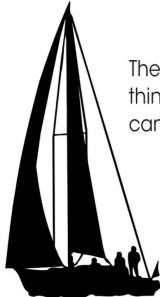
First they will take the cargo **off** the ship before the storm becomes more severe.

On the other hand, sometimes native speakers treat both cargo and private passengers as "passive passengers" (like in *reporters on Air Force One*):

The cargo **on** the ship was destroyed by sea water flowing **into** the ship.

They were **on** the sailboat for more than a year.

Nevertheless, note that most means of transportation can be of commercial or private use--which means that the passengers could be ON or IN the sailboat.



There are three people **in** the boat. If we think of the boat as a large surface, we can also say that they are **on** the boat.

Sometimes we do not even need to identify the means of transport when using a preposition of transportation in the figurative sense:

Suzy and Duong went **on** a cruise.

Compare the sentence above with the literal meaning of the example below:

Suzy and Duong went **on** a cruise ship.

### **IN the Taxi: an Exception?**

Some authors prefer to use the notion of space in order to demonstrate the difference between the prepositions IN and ON used in the context of means of transportation:

"If you can walk inside the vehicle, then you are on it; if you can't, then you are in it."

However, this approach will not work in all cases. For instance, the driver or the pilot on duty may walk around their vehicles (airplane pilots often do that), but they would still be in them. Passengers are also often described as "standing IN or ON a large commercial vehicle" according to the speaker's perception of the vehicle's internal space (e.g., the same speaker may identify a passenger as "*sitting ON* the bus" and another as "*standing IN* the bus," denoting a clear difference in perception between the bus as a commercial vehicle and the bus as a conceptual container).

The fact that someone is IN a vehicle does not mean that he or she is not able to walk inside the vehicle. Consider the concepts of passive and active passengers: A *passive passenger* is the person who does not influence the route of a commercial or official vehicle--the route is pre-established; for example, a person who buys a ticket and boards a train or a bus to Chicago, or the reporter who boards Air Force One to Asia to follow the president of the United States of America on an official visit. An *active passenger*, however, can influence the route of the vehicle; the route is not pre-established or is not immutable; for example, a taxi passenger or the president.

### **The Concept of Cabin & Why Always IN the Car, Etc.**

Cars are seen as an exception to this rule, perhaps (1) because cars and small vehicles--especially the closed ones--tend to be conceptualized as containers,

for no grammatical reason; in other words, this "concept of cabin" is often used to distinguish between IN meaning "enclosure" and ON meaning "surface," including IN-constructions as in *He got in the truck and drove home*, and ON-constructions as in *Fifteen people got on the truck*; (2) because of their historic *private-active passenger* relation, as opposed to vehicles operating on commercial routes (cars were seldom pictured as travel vehicles); that is to say that we normally use IN to distinguish an automobile from other types of cars such as a railroad car, a street car, etc. For example, *there were 50 passengers on the car* probably means that the 50 passengers were traveling ON a train, while *the prime minister was in the car with the president* shows that passive passengers always travel IN a car, regardless of its commercial, private or official status.

### A Word on the "Platform Theory"

The use of the preposition ON to indicate position relative to large vehicles, based on the concept or perception of surface--i.e., on the premise that the floors of these vehicles suggest contiguity, as in a type of platform where passengers can stand up and walk around--is generally accepted by most writers. However, this theory seems to contradict logic when considered in some specific contexts. For instance, the two examples below are commonly accepted:

They traveled **in** a van to New York.

They traveled **on** a van to New York.

### The Notion of Journey

Some speakers associate the use of the preposition ON + *a large vehicle* with the notion of "journey," as opposed to the use of IN when describing, for instance, a short ride from one place to another in the same neighborhood or restricted area. For example, the other day I read on NASA's official website that:<sup>8</sup>

Reporters were invited to travel **on** a van to the tour site to see the new Mobile Mars Laboratory (SAM). NASA's specialists rode to the pad **in** a van specially equipped ...

Whether using ON, as in *passengers on the ship* or *restaurants on the ship*, or IN, as in *officers in the ship* or *goods in the ship*, the primary location and the subsequent choice of preposition will depend on the speaker's

interpretation of the particular context.

According to Ray Jackendoff and Barbara Landau, in *Bridges Between Psychology and Linguistics* (1991), Edited by Donna Jo Napoli, Judy Anne Kegl, Judy Kegl, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., pp. 161:

*It seems that in English, large vehicles (buses, yachts, trains, large airplanes) are conceptualized either as containers or sorts of platforms, but small vehicles (cars, rowboats, small airplanes) are conceptualized only as containers. This is just an idiosyncratic fact of English, as far as we can tell, having nothing to do with principles of spatial representation.*

Some figurative and idiomatic uses of IN, OUT OF, ON and OFF:

Everywhere I go his paintings will be riding with me **in** my mind.

She walked **out of** the plan. Now there are only the two of us.

They took a ride **on** the new idea.

**Get off** my back--leave me alone!

See IN, ON and OUT OF also in Chapters 1, 3 and 5, and OFF in Chapters 1 and 3.

### **ON TOP OF: never inside**

ON TOP OF helps distinguish between the use of IN and ON to designate the position of something (or someone) relative to a vehicle; for example, if the cargo is inside or outside the vehicle (see ON TOP OF also in Chapter 3):

There is a rack **on** the bus.

The example above is tricky, as the rack can be ON one of the sides of the bus (e.g., a bike rack or a ski rack), ON TOP OF the bus, or INSIDE the bus, traveling with a passenger. In this case, using ON TOP OF would solve the mystery. Now, compare the two following sentences:

The passenger is carrying a rack with him **on** the bus.

The passenger is carrying his rack **on top of** the bus.

### **ABOARD: on board; on or onto; in or into**

ABOARD often suggests a large or public means of transportation, though some would say *the children are aboard the car*, *the child climbed aboard the car*, and so on (see also OUTBOARD OF and INBOARD OF in Chapter 3):

the advantages of living **aboard** a boat

One by one the passengers climbed **aboard** the ship.

Everybody **aboard** the train was impressed by its speed.

Everyone **aboard** the plane applauded the perfect landing.

ABOARD in the figurative and abstract senses:

They brought the scientist **aboard** the project.

She hopped **aboard** the idea, and now they will work together.

## IN THE FRONT OF & IN THE BACK OF: position inside a vehicle

She sat **in the front of** the car, next to the driver.

The teacher sat **in the front of** the bus, behind the driver.

He was unaware that there was a baby **in the back of** the car!

She likes to sit **in the back of** the bus with the popular kids.

## BY: the method or instrument of transportation

The preposition BY can be used to distinguish between methods of transportation (see BY also in Chapters 1, 3, and 5). Compare the prepositions in the sentence below:

My friends drove home, but I went **on** foot. Susan went **by** bus.

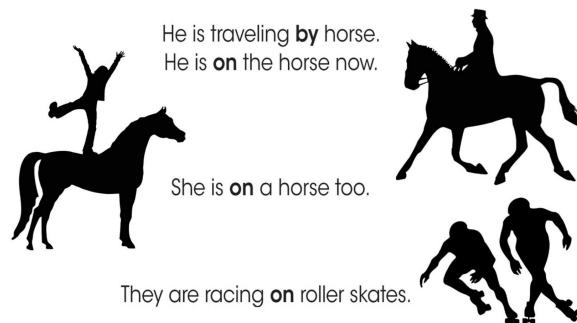


They are going **by** bicycle. They are **on** the bicycle now.

BY does not specify a position relative to the vehicle, but a *method*, or *instrument* used as a means of transportation. However, when describing a clear sense of surface, the preposition ON usually gets the priority, compare:

*She went to the barn **on** a horse; He went to the farm **by** bus; I went to school **on** a scooter; The president traveled **by** motorcade; I enjoy riding **on** a bike. I go to school **by** bike every day.* However, note that we can travel, go, come, etc., BY any means of transportation, but we generally ride ON or IN a (or *the*) vehicle, as in *I ride **on** a bus; I ride **on** a bike; I rode **in** the van*. It would be awkward, for example, to say *I ride **by** a bus*. ☺

The verb *ride* is often attached to the preposition IN or ON, which helps explain the concept of active vs. passive passenger or commercial vs. private vehicle, or if the referent is to be considered a container or a surface.



BY always has a passive sense (there is always an object or machine responsible for, or facilitator of, the action; in other words, a means of transportation or a means of access; that is to say, BY designates *something that will take you to your destination*). For instance, although often used, I don't see how you can travel **by** foot--unless someone else's foot is transporting you! Therefore, when you walk, make sure you travel ON foot. The same rationale is true for the examples below:

She used to go to school **on** roller skates.

I traveled **on** skis from France to Switzerland.

In addition, BY is frequently used in the figurative sense to designate the *condition* or *element* in which the transport occurs, instead of the *means* of transportation by which people travel:

I prefer to travel **by** day rather than **by** night.

You can travel **by** air, **by** road, **by** sea, **by** river, **by** lake, or **by** rail--you choose!

Note that it is wrong to say:

We were a large group of people, so we decided to come **by** buses. ☺

The three of us came **by** three bicycles. ☺

The reason for this restriction is that the preposition BY does not designate the vehicle itself (i.e., a countable noun) but the *type* of transportation being used (i.e., the *means* of transportation). And please, make sure you never say:

We came **by** feet. ☺

## Other Means of Transportation

We know that we can go to a place BY bus, BY train or ON foot. But BY is also used to designate other types of transportation. For example:

It's going to take a long time to send the letter **by** plane. I'll send it **by** E-mail.

A flock of white herons was transported **by** a storm from Africa to America.

Electrical energy is energy transported **by** an electric current.

You can send your letter **by** fax if you prefer.

## BY MEANS OF: via; through; using

Transportation will be provided **by means of** a bus.

The cargo was transported **by means of** a large truck.

BY MEANS OF in the figurative and abstract senses:

**By means of** hard work she became the president of the company.

We arrived at this conclusion **by means of** an extensive research.

See also BY DINT OF in Chapter 6.

## BY WAY OF: via; by means of; as a form of

The new species was introduced into this country **by way of** a ship.

She was the first woman to enter space **by way of** a balloon ascent.

BY WAY OF in the figurative and abstract senses:

**By way of** punishment, he was banned from the tournament.

See BY WAY OF also in Chapter 1.

### VIA: by means of; through a particular medium

Originally, VIA--a Latin word meaning "way" or "road"--was used to indicate the route taken to a place by way of or through another place. It is now widely (but not unanimously) accepted in the extended meanings shown in the examples below:

You can go from London to Paris **via** Eurostar.

The postcards were sent **via** regular mail.

See VIA also in Chapter 1.

### Reading the Story

#### A Trip to Alaska

Suzy and Duong Nguyen live in Seattle, Washington. This summer they decided to visit Alaska **on** a cruise ship, a long-planned dream project. They boarded the ship in the "Emerald City" in early September and headed for Ketchikan, a small city in Southeast Alaska, known for its salmon and natural attractions, such as the Misty Fjords National Monument, a beautiful wilderness park in the Tongass National Forest. While in Ketchikan, Suzy and Duong could watch cultural performances, ride **on** a bike in the downtown area and **in** a canoe on a lake in the national forest. From Ketchikan, they sailed to Tracy Arm Fjord, where they saw whales and seals **on** an unforgettable glacier and fjord cruise.

The crew **on** the ship was amazingly professional. On the third day, the captain threw a party **on** the ship. The ship's ballroom was an extravagant space, with its two-deck-high ceiling and giant chandeliers. For their total surprise, there was an ice-skating rink **in** the ship, located **on** Deck 2, where Suzy and Duong spent at least one hour **on** skates every day when the ship was at sea.

The couple **got off** the ship again in Juneau--the capital of Alaska--where they traveled from the rain forest to the mountains **on** Juneau's Mount Roberts Tramway, an enclosed gondola that climbs 1,800 feet up Mount Roberts to showcase a view of Gastineau Channel, Douglas Island and Silver Bow Basin, where Alaska gold was discovered in the 1800s. The gondola had

seats **in** it, so Suzy could rest a little on the way back to the ship. They **got on** the ship right before departure, through one of the two controlled access points, after clearance by the ship's security personnel, who were **aboard** the ship checking IDs and screening passenger lists.

From Juneau, Suzy and Duong sailed back to Tracy Arm Fjord and then through the Inside Passage, one of the most famously beautiful passages in the world, with rain forests, glaciers, fjords and white-capped peaks. All of which create a setting that is perfect for viewing whales and sea lions.

Next, they sailed to Skagway, where they **got off** the ship early in order to ride **on** a train to the White Pass summit and the Yukon route, and to the 1903 Station at Lake Bennett. Later, Suzy and Duong traveled **via** motor coach on the Klondike Highway, back to the Skagway port, where they boarded the ship to sail to Victoria, British Columbia, last port of call before returning to Seattle.

Victoria, named after Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom, is the capital city of British Columbia, Canada, and it is located on Vancouver Island. Suzy and Duong rode **on** modern double-decker buses to several points of interest. They saw the Victoria Symphony at the Royal Theater before going to the Royal British Columbia Museum--when they realized they were going to miss the ship! The couple decided to go **by** taxi to the port. They **got in** a cab in front of the museum and **got out of** the car exactly three minutes before the ship closed its boarding deck!

A week after boarding the ship for the first time, Suzy and Duong disembarked the ship safe and sound in Seattle. Next year, Australia and New Zealand!

### Practicing the Best Scenario

Think carefully before answering the ten questions below. First, read all the questions, trying to relate them to the correct prepositions, and only then start from the first one. If you believe that two prepositions are possible, review the chapter and try to use the most appropriate one. Hint: two prepositions are repeated five times. Make sure to use the prepositions introduced in this chapter only.

- 1) Suzy and Duong went on a trip \_\_\_\_ a big ship.
- 2) They got \_\_\_\_ the ship exactly at embarking time.

- 3) Miguel got \_\_\_\_ the bus right in front of his work, after a one-hour trip.
- 4) Maria took a taxi. She got \_\_\_\_ the cab at 7 a.m. and got \_\_\_\_ the cab at 7:30 a.m.
- 5) Solar panels were installed \_\_\_\_ the roof.
- 6) Miguel went walking. Maria preferred to go \_\_\_\_ bus. Junior went \_\_\_\_ foot.
- 7) The travel agency sent the documents \_\_\_\_ email.
- 8) Maria prefers to travel \_\_\_\_ air. She often travels \_\_\_\_ plane.
- 9) I was late to work today and had to go \_\_\_\_ taxi. I read the papers \_\_\_\_ the car.
- 10) Yesterday I went \_\_\_\_ bus. I was still \_\_\_\_ it when I saw the children \_\_\_\_ skates.

## Chapter 5 : Prepositions of Time

The prepositions of time--or temporal prepositions--designate exact and relative time, including indefinite time, periods of time and duration of time and events. For instance, we may use the preposition IN to indicate different periods of time:

I will swim **in** the summer.

Life was difficult **in** the Stone Age.

We also use IN to designate duration:

I will be ready **in** a few minutes.

We may use AT to designate a specific time or event:

I'll see you **at** 10 o'clock.

I'll see you **at** dinner.

And we can use ON to specify a day of the week or of the month:

I'll see you **on** Monday.

I'll see you **on** January 15.

Some prepositions are used to express duration of periods of time or extended time:

I've been teaching English **for** 30 years.

I've been teaching **since** the 1980s.

Others are used to designate events or periods of time relative to other events:

He will go to the beach **before** breakfast.

She will go shopping **after** skiing.

The prepositions in this chapter are listed under general descriptions of temporal situations--and not necessarily in a specific logical order. However, I tried to organize them in a loose hierarchy in terms of their classification as exact time, approximate time, period of time, duration of time, or event in

time. Some prepositions and phrases are time-specific, while most are prepositions of direction, orientation or location, whose meanings have been extended to temporal contexts.

## Specific Time, Events and Periods of Time

### IN, ON, and AT: location in time

We have seen the concept of "magnitude" of the prepositions IN and ON in Chapter 3. In this chapter I intend to demonstrate that--and why--the preposition ON functions as the "smallest" part of the preposition IN also in periods of time.

The prepositions IN, ON, and AT, in the context of time, have similar functions to IN, ON, and AT used for locations, as described in Chapter 3, in terms of *containment*, *surface* and *detachment*. See AT also Chapter 1; see more examples of IN and ON in Chapter 4.

### Time and the Calendar

Compare de examples in the table below with the tables shown in Chapter 3.

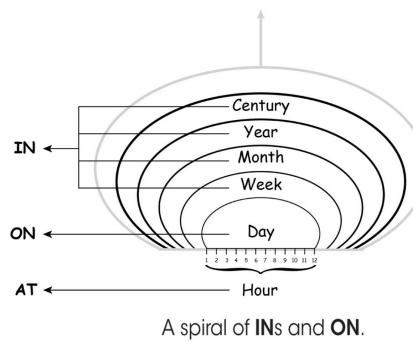
IN	the CENTURY	We went to the moon <b>in</b> the twentieth century.
in	the decade	Music was great <b>in</b> the sixties!
in	the year	The movie was released <b>in</b> 2011.
in	the semester	You need to start school <b>in</b> the first semester.
in	the month	We will have a vacation <b>in</b> February.
in	the fortnight	The patient will be well <b>in</b> a fortnight.
in	the week	It's impossible to learn Chinese <b>in</b> a week!
ON	the DAY	Let's go to a movie <b>on</b> Saturday!

The preposition **ON** as the smallest magnitude of **IN**.

Analyzing the periods of time in a decreasing order of hierarchy and calendar divisions, being the century the top representation, the result could be expressed as in the examples of the previous table and according to the diagram below; compare with the rationale shown in the following *spiral of time*.



The illustration of our prepositional *spiral of time*, as shown below, demonstrates an *x quantity* of days up to a century or further, and down to the last period of time of a calendar--a day, with its subdivisions in hours:



Two sentences using prepositions of time:

I met Susan at the Vancouver Olympic Games **in** 2010, **on** a pleasant Saturday.

We had lunch together, and **at** 5:30 sharp she won her competition!

A day is the base of the calendar, represented by the preposition **ON**, just as a street is the "smallest" unit of space in a geopolitical setting. In this way, the hours are treated with the preposition **AT** as subdivisions of a day, just like the address numbers of a street.

The *spiral of time* also brings an additional insight to the idea of magnitude of **IN**, **ON**, and **AT** introduced earlier in Chapter 3: there are little over 365 days in a year or 36,524 days in a century, and any chosen day should be treated with the preposition **ON**, as long as it is not *added* to another day to form a *period of time*, which would then have to be treated with the preposition **IN**, as in the sentence:

I will keep the promise to finish my project **in** two days.

On the other hand, speakers have to be extra careful with their choice of

preposition, as well as with the choice of verbs and objects of the prepositions, because prepositions do not change to agree with the words they modify. The period of time described in the example above was determined by the choice of preposition, not by features of the direct object or the prepositional object. The sentence:

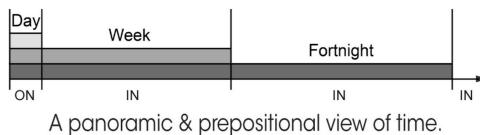
I will finish my project **in** one day.

determines that an *x period of time* is allocated to the preposition IN and not the contrary. The period of *one day*, therefore, represents 24 hours maximum. The sentence:

I will keep the promise to finish my project **for** two days.

does not have the same meaning of *in two days*--where the speaker promises to complete the project in a period of two days maximum; in the example above the speaker is making a promise that will *last* two days. ("...*But if the client doesn't pay me in two days, I will not keep my promise and will not finish the project!*"").

We could imagine a partial, longitudinal view of a period of time such as the one in the following diagram, where a day represents the "smallest" (i.e., the shortest) unit of time in a calendar. There are seven days in a week and fourteen days in a fortnight, and so on, continuously. If the hour system was to be included, it would have to be on the left side of the diagram.



Some ESL/EFL students may question why we use the preposition ON with the noun *weekend* "if the weekend is represented by two days, Saturday and Sunday!" For those who defend "exceptions," the "weekend" is not a representation of two days; it is mathematically impossible to have two days as *the end* of the week. For example, the sentences:

John goes to church **on** every weekend.

John goes to church **on** the weekends.

probably mean that John goes to church on Sundays.

The use of IN, ON or AT the weekend varies in different English speaking countries and in different audiences. *On the weekend* is more common in American English, and represents the exact *end of the week*, which can only be one day. The preposition IN may denote a period of time longer than one day, such as *in two days*, while AT denotes a specific event in time, such as *at Christmas, at Easter, at the weekend* (British English denoting an event, or "the end," and not a specific day). Note that the workweek--as well as its weekend--varies according to the customs of each nation.

## The Notion of Interval

I would like to add a complementary view of time: the concept of "interval," which was introduced in Chapter 3. Take, for example, the notion of "weekend." We know that *weekend*, in the strict definition, represents only one day--the end of the week; however, considering a more flexible definition, we could accept the idea of the weekend as an event that lasts two days, just as a holiday period is represented by its number of days. For instance, the Jewish holiday Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days; the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha generally lasts for three days, while Christmas is celebrated on December 25. In this framework, a holiday does not mean necessarily *one* unique day, but rather the preprogrammed interval of time on which a festivity or a leave of absence takes place. We can observe the same phenomenon in the example below, with the notion of "vacation" meaning a preprogrammed interval of time. We could say that *vacation* and *holiday* relate hierarchically to the calendar (and to a day) as a *farm* and an *island* relate to a city and the ocean:

Mary is **on** vacation, watching a lot of movies on TV.

One must not confuse the interval of a vacation with it as being "longer" than one day (as in a 30-day vacation, for instance). Both are conceptually delimited spaces (in this case, temporal spaces) in their own right. Therefore, we could say that a *day* represents the shortest period of time in a calendar in the same way that a *vacation* represents the shortest period of time during which a worker will be able to rest, as compared to the longest working period. Both could be viewed as independent and delimited spans of time--which do not necessarily have the same duration, however having the same *prepositional magnitude*. The following sentences show the same rationale:

The football team is **on** a trip to South Africa.

Thousands of subway workers went **on** strike in Paris.

**On** the morning of her wedding, she was dressed by her mother.

The celebration will take place **on** the evening of Wednesday, July 4.

The use of **ON** in the examples above shows that these events are all *intervals*, regardless of their duration in time (see *IN the Morning, AT Night & More* ahead).

## IN a Season

A season of the year is a period of time that contains days, weeks and months and is designated by the preposition **IN**. For example:

I like to ski **in** the winter.

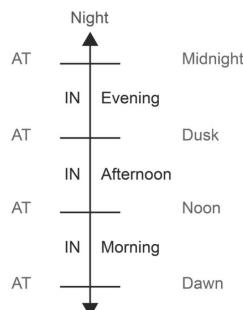
The beautiful yellow leaves bloom **in** the spring.

Abdul likes to swim in the Dead Sea **in** the summer.

Mallika likes the color of the leaves **in** the autumn.

## IN the Morning, AT Night & More...

As seen earlier, while **IN** and **ON** function at calendar level, and **AT** indicates precise time (hours) or events of a day, the preposition **IN** also indicates periods of time, as the diagram below demonstrates. Note that *on the morning (afternoon or evening)* OF a day, as just introduced, represents an interval--and not a period--of time.

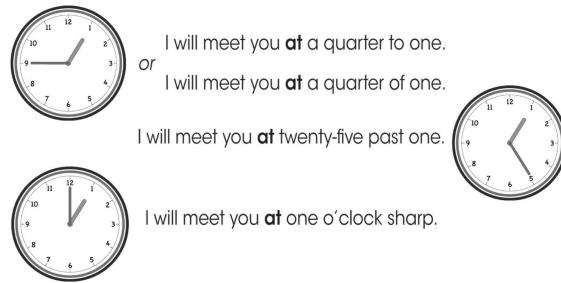


Prepositions of precise and non-precise time.

The preposition **AT** treats *dawn* and *dusk* as precise *events* of a day, while *noon* and *midnight* are treated as precise *time*. *Night*, as the period between

sunset and sunrise (considered by some as the period after midnight to dawn), can be used with the preposition IN, as in *strangers in the night*; nevertheless, it is used with the preposition AT to indicate a precise event of a day (a 24-hour day); *see you at night* may mean that we will meet each other after it gets dark, probably at the usual time and place; an appointment; *see you in the night* means that we may encounter each other sometime and somewhere *during* the night, without a previous appointment.

The preposition AT is used to designate any point in time. For instance:



Compare some examples of IN, ON, and AT:

See you **at** night, **at** the wedding!

I spoke with him **on** many occasions **in** 2011.

Breakfast will be served **at** seven **in** the morning **on** holidays.

**In** the winter, the family met **at** Christmas, **on** a beautiful Monday.

They first met **on** a Sunday, and **on** the following weekend they were engaged!

## INTO: advancing to the next or a later period of time

INTO is used with verbs of, or nouns that suggest, action or motion:

She studied through the day and **into** the night.

As we moved **into** the 21st century, technology moved with us.

We could say:

I will *slide* my December vacation **into** January.

but it would be awkward to say:

Next year I will *take* a vacation **into** January. ⊗

In other words, the preceding verb must show the possibility of motion from one point in a period of time **INTO** another.

The verb-preposition combination *cut + INTO* used in the sense of "occupy":

You should hire a manager! Running the store yourself may **cut into** your time.

You can also see **INTO** as a preposition of direction in Chapter 1.

### **ONTO: extending an interval of time**

**ONTO**, like the preposition **INTO**, is used with words that suggest motion or action:

You could add some days **onto** your vacation.

However, note that the notion of "interval of time" is often converted to the sense of container once the interval has already been established. For example:

My boss asked me to cover for John 20 minutes **into** my break.

In the example above, the preposition **INTO** denotes a sense of "invasion" in an established period of time (as opposed to an "extension" of an interval of time).

**ONTO** in a more figurative sense:

If you have money, you can add an Italian villa **onto** your vacation!

**ONTO** is also used as a preposition of direction (see Chapter 1).

### **ON THE STROKE OF: at the exact time or event**

I'll meet you **on the stroke of** twelve!

I'll meet you **on the stroke of** lunch!

**On the stroke of** midnight, the princess ran away and lost one shoe.

### **BEGINNING: starting in, on, or at a period or event**

**IN**, **ON** or **AT** can be used interchangeably with **BEGINNING**--though with a slight change in meaning--when designating a starting point. For example:

**Beginning** January we start saving money.

He was assigned to another project **beginning** Monday.

**Beginning** the meeting, I emphasized the importance of our company.

BEGINNING *must* indicate a starting point. For example, it would be wrong to say:

I never work **beginning** Sundays. ☺

### **AS FROM or AS OF: beginning at the specified time or date**

AS FROM and AS OF can be used interchangeably with IN, ON or AT when designating the starting point of a period (generally of an unknown duration). For example:

- a) This facility will close **as of** January 2014.
- b) Prices will change **as from** March 1, 2014.

If the examples above were used with the prepositions IN and ON, there would be a slight but important change in meaning:

- c) This facility will close **in** January 2014.
- d) Prices will change **on** March 1, 2014.

In (a), the facility will close *starting* January 2014; in (b), prices will change *starting* March 1, 2014; in (c), the facility will close sometime *during* the month of January or *for the entire period*; in (d), prices will change *on* Thursday, March 1; however, we cannot know for sure if the events in (c) and (d) will only be temporary or not.

### **COME: when the specified time is reached; in, on or at**

As a preposition, the verb COME designates the arrival of a particular time, period of time or event. It can be interchangeable with IN, ON or AT:

It was 10 years ago **come** Friday the 15th.

**Come** January, we hope to start skiing again.

**Come** Christmas the festival started, and everyone had a great time.

## **ALONG: within a certain length of a period of time**

I'll do it **along** the holidays, if I have time.

She made a lot of progress **along** the way.

You can make several payments **along** the month.

See also Chapter 1 for examples of ALONG as a preposition of direction.

## **DURING: within the duration of a period or event**

DURING does not specify an exact period of time but an action occurring within the duration of a particular event; that is, there is always an action or event that happens *within* the particular period of time defined by DURING. For example:

I worked in a ski area **during** the winter.

Mary did not smoke **during** her pregnancy.

I watched the game **during** my lunch break.

**During** my stay in London I practiced English.

Students will travel for fifteen days **during** the semester.

Derek worked hard **during** the whole year before going on vacation.

In the examples below, DURING is designating "less determined" temporal events:

They photographed the singer **during** her performance.

The former athlete admitted to using steroids **during** his career.

He learned survival techniques **during** his experience with the army.

## **IN THE COURSE OF: during**

Also OVER THE COURSE OF or DURING THE COURSE OF.

Many languages will disappear **in the course of** the present century.

**In the course of** history, the country has been invaded by many foreign forces.

The company sold more than fifteen million tablets **over the course of** 12 months!

**During the course of** history, the country has been invaded by many foreign forces.

Compare with IN COURSE OF.

### **IN COURSE OF: going through the process of**

The bridge is **in course of** construction. It will be inaugurated next year.

The books are **in course of** publication. They will be ready in two weeks.

See also IN THE COURSE OF.

### **IN THE PROCESS OF: during; in course of; in the course of**

IN THE PROCESS OF is not always interchangeable with IN THE COURSE OF. For instance, the example below is not a coherent sentence:

Many languages will disappear **in the process of** the present century. ☺

The example above would be better with IN THE COURSE OF or DURING:

Many languages will disappear **during** the present century.

IN THE PROCESS OF used in the senses of DURING and IN COURSE OF:

A photo of a building **in the process of** construction.

The books are **in the process of** publication. They will be ready in two weeks.

IN THE PROCESS OF is not always interchangeable with the preposition DURING (i.e., the verb *to be* does not allow the use of DURING):

The bridge is **during** construction. It will be inaugurated next year. ☺

### **IN THE ACT OF: in or during the process of**

She photographed the lions **in the act of** hunting.

The burglar was caught **in the act of** breaking into a house.

### **THROUGHOUT: during the entire period or event specified**

While DURING specifies duration within a period of time, THROUGHOUT is used in contexts where an event occurs during the entire period described. For example:

That author was interested in a variety of subjects **throughout** his life.

The children felt confused and conflicted **throughout** their teen years.

**Throughout** the meeting, large quantities of coffee were consumed.

**Throughout** the year I teach my students how to use prepositions.

The top model made sure to exercise **throughout** her pregnancy.

Now, compare, for instance, the last sentence above with the preposition DURING in place of the preposition THROUGHOUT:

- a) The top model made sure to exercise **throughout** her pregnancy.
- b) The top model made sure to exercise **during** her pregnancy.

Whereas in (a) the top model exercised through all phases of her pregnancy, in (b) she may have exercised only at some point--or some phases--of her pregnancy. Actually, we could say that if we exercise *during* our life, we may or may not be fit, whereas if we make sure to exercise *throughout* our life, we will certainly be fit.

You can also see THROUGHOUT as a preposition of direction in Chapter 1.

## THROUGH: within the specified period of time

While the preposition THROUGHOUT specifies an action *repeated during an entire* event or period of time, THROUGH designates the period of time *within* which an event occurs. For example:

John worked **through** the night, and in the morning he was ready to go.

In the sentence above, John did not necessarily work *throughout* the night (all night long) but rather *overcame* the night while working, and in the morning he was awake; that is, working *throughout* the night may imply that one worked much more than someone who worked *through* the night. However, bear in mind that, for most native speakers, the distinction between THROUGH and THROUGHOUT in this specific sense of "duration" is not always considered relevant; in other words, examples like the ones below are commonly used:

Rescuers worked **through** the night looking for survivors.

City crews worked **through** the night to repair the water lines.

Nevertheless, as a method, I would prefer to say:

Rescuers worked **throughout** the night looking for survivors.

City crews worked **throughout** the night to repair the water lines.

THROUGH is first explained in Chapter 1.

### **FOR: defining the duration or time of an event**

The preposition FOR, first introduced in Chapter 1, is also used to designate the duration of a period of time or event, or to indicate a specific time. For example, in the first sentence below, FOR defines *one week*, while DURING designates the period within which the event will take place; in the second example, FOR indicates the exact time of a meeting:

I will travel to London **for** a week **during** the next semester.

The meeting is scheduled **for** 8 p.m. tonight.

As with other prepositions of time, FOR is often used with the simple present to designate a period of time that was not yet completed:

I am in New York **for** three days. After that, I am going back to London.

I am in New York **for** three days **during** this month.

The duration of the event may be unknown or uncertain:

**For** how long have you studied English?

I'm tired. I've been working **for** hours.

### **SINCE: from or between points or events in time**

SINCE is used to show the point in the past when an event started or last took place, or the period of time extended from that particular time or event until now or until a more recent point in time. SINCE is generally used in combination with a perfect tense in the sentence. For example:

She has been traveling to Colorado every winter **since** 1990.

I haven't had a meal like that **since** 2001.

I've been doing my homework **since** 7 o'clock.

Other perfect tenses and the simple past are also used with SINCE:

We have been in this school **since** last year.

It's snowing in Miami, something that had not happened **since** 1977.

Before retiring, she was a doctor at the hospital, where she worked **since** 1978.

However, non-standard grammatical constructions in the present tense are frequently found among English speakers:

I'm only here **since** about six months now. ☺

## SEEING: since

Archaic or regional.

The word SEEING (originally a present participle verb form) was sometimes used as a preposition in place of SINCE for both temporal and non-temporal meanings:

The player was never the same **seeing** his expulsion.

I shall work hard **seeing** no effort will be in vain.

SEEING was often used with a *that*-clause in the sense of "considering," as in:

I shall work hard **seeing that** no effort will be in vain.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

I shall work hard **seeing the fact that** no effort will be in vain.

## FROM, TO, UNTIL, TILL: periods between endpoints of time

The preposition FROM is often used to designate the starting point of an event in time. The combination with TO and UNTIL (or TILL) is used to designate the end point of a continued event; that is, FROM designates the beginning, and TO or UNTIL indicates the goal after the duration of the event. For example:

I normally work **from** 9 **to** 5, but today I worked **until** 10!

I normally work **from** 9 **to** 5, but today I worked **till** 10!

Like in its spatial sense, FROM can be used without TO:

She is two days **from** arriving.

The noun preceding the preposition TO helps designate the amount of time needed to complete the hour or to reach the start of an event:

It's fifteen **to** midnight. We are counting down the minutes **to** the New Year!

The preposition TO and the noun *date* form the idiomatic prepositional phrase TO DATE, meaning **to this time**, or **until this date**:

I've heard of perfect friends, but **to date** I have never seen one!

UNTIL and TILL have a sense "not before" that TO does not possess:

She did not leave **until** the morning of the next day.

The word TILL is not an abbreviation of UNTIL, but most of the time these two prepositions can be used interchangeably:

I intend to work **till** 5 p.m.

In intend to work **until** 5 p.m.

In Modern English, UNTIL is more formal than TILL and it is preferred when used at the beginning of a sentence. For example:

**Until** the end of the Cold War, there was little humanitarian intervention in the world.

There was little humanitarian intervention in the world **till** the end of the Cold War.

UNTIL and TILL used in the figurative and abstract senses:

I can't wait **until** the next episode.

I will stay on the train **until** New York.

You have **till** the next moon to make a decision.

See more examples of FROM in Chapters 1 and 3; see TO also in Chapter 1. See also *Common Expressions of Time* in the last part of this chapter.

## UNTO: until

Archaic or regional.

I shall work **unto** the day I die.

The chancellor of Norwich lived **unto** the age of ninety years.

UNTO is also used as a preposition of direction.

### **WHILE: until**

Archaic or regional.

Wait **while** dinner.

He worked hard **while** the morning sun.

### **ALONG WITH: at the same time as**

It's easier to prepare lunch **along with** dinner.

They celebrate Christmas **along with** Kwanzaa.

You can also see ALONG WITH in Chapter 3.

### **TOGETHER WITH: along with**

Every year I have my birthday celebration **together with** Diwali.

My ideas were formed **together with** my work on the text, not before.

See other examples of TOGETHER WITH in Chapter 3.

### **BY: not later than; before a particular time or event; during**

We use the preposition BY to say that something will happen or be achieved before or no later than a particular time or event. For example:

The work has to be finished **by** 5 o'clock.

I'll return from my vacation **by** the end of the month.

BY can also be used to narrate a particular time or event that has already happened:

She met him **by** noon.

**By** noon they had already met.

We also use BY to indicate the period during which something happens:

Working **by** day and studying at night I got my education.

The sentence in (a) is grammatically incorrect; you should use the sentence in (b):

- a) I was sleeping *by* a minute ago. ☺
- b) I was sleeping **until** a minute ago.

The chief difference between BY and UNTIL (TILL) is that BY is used in contexts where something happens *not later than a particular time*, while UNTIL is used for situations that *continue up to a particular time*. For example:

I will stop playing *by* 5 o'clock.

I played soccer **till** 5 o'clock.

The use of TILL in the example above includes the hour; the use of BY designates a time before (and normally does not include) the hour.

See more examples and uses of BY in Chapters 1, 3 and 4. See also *Common Expressions of Time* in the last part of this chapter.

## **UP TO: not beyond the specified time**

Also UP UNTIL.

UP TO and UP UNTIL are often used interchangeably to indicate a time or date limit.

You have **up to** tomorrow to confirm your reservation.

**Up until** now we have been lucky.

When indicating an amount of time, UP TO and UP UNTIL are not interchangeable:

The penalty will be **up to** three years in prison.

UP TO is also explored in Chapter 2.

## **OVER: throughout; during; until the end of; beyond**

OVER indicates the extent or amount of time throughout or during which something happens. In this sense, we use it to help describe an event that has been happening continuously up until the present, may happen continuously in the future, or that has already occurred in the specified elapsed time:

Over the last several years I've been working on a biography.

We expect the market to be stable over the next twelve months.

They expected a raise over the last months of 2010, but it never happened.

I'd like to thank my colleagues for working on this project over the last 4 years.

Small businesses have struggled over the last six months.

She stayed in my house over the weekend.

Used in the sense of "beyond" (or "more than"), as in (a) and (b), or to indicate an action taking place until the end of the specified period or event (c):

- a) She can play in the casino; she is **over** 21 years old.
- b) It's been **over** a year now, and I still haven't heard from him.
- c) I came for several meetings and I need to stay **over** the week.

OVER is also used as "in relation to" to help convey a sense of comparison:

We expect an increase over the last twelve months.

See OVER also in Chapter 2.

## **UNDER: younger than; less than; in the process of**

You must be **under** 18 in order to qualify.

The task took a little **under** two years to complete.

The new jet can fly from New York to London in **under** two hours.

The houses were **under** construction when the hurricane struck.

See UNDER also in Chapter 2.

## **INSIDE: (in) less than the specified period of time**

She wants to run the 100-meter dash **inside** ten seconds!

Her previous time was already **inside** her best time last year.

See INSIDE in Chapter 3.

## **WITHIN: inside the limits of a period of time**

WITHIN helps describe an event inside the limits of the specified period of time:

The company used to ship the products **within** two or three business days.

The sales are expected to increase 10% **within** 2012.

The holiday will fall **within** my vacation.

The time span defined by WITHIN does not need to be long:

Sorry, I am busy now, but I will call you back **within** the hour.

The explosion occurred **within** seconds of impact.

See more examples of WITHIN in Chapter 3.

## **BETWEEN: in the period separating two points in time**

As a preposition of location, BETWEEN is used to designate the space separating two (or more) objects or ideas. As a preposition of time, BETWEEN designates the period that separates two (or more) points in time. For example:

Orders placed **between** Monday and Friday will be shipped the following Monday.

We are planning to travel during the week, **between** Christmas and New Year.

You can come to the office any time **between** two and five.

Is there any difference **between** the days of the week?

BETWEEN often seems to indicate time when it is really designating physical space:

a) Johnny was walking **between** classes.

b) Johnny was walking **between** classrooms.

The example in (a) shows a true relation of time (Johnny has classes from 7:00 to 10:00 and from 10:30 to 12:00, and he likes to walk during his thirty-minute break). The example in (b) shows a relation with physical space (Johnny was walking in the corridor that separates two classrooms).

As seen in Chapter 3, BETWEEN is also used after IN to form the double preposition IN BETWEEN (or the adjective *in-between*) to designate entire intervals between endpoints of time and events:

I like to talk on the telephone **in between** breaks.

Rest **in between** hours of work regenerates the body and the mind.

## IN THE MIDST OF: in the middle of an event or period of time

Their friends arrived **in the midst of** the meal.

He arrived the following day **in the midst of** the festival.

The president proposed a new budget **in the midst of** the year.

See more examples of IN THE MIDST OF in Chapter 3.

## MIDST: in the middle of or during the specified period of time

Archaic or regional.

There will be a music festival **midst** the month of July.

The original Capitol building burnt down **midst** the era of the Great Depression.

The preposition MIDST is also explored in Chapter 3.

## Approximate Time, Events and Periods of Time

### TOWARD: approaching a specified time or event

Also TOWARDS.

Sometimes TOWARD is used interchangeably with ABOUT and AROUND. However, TOWARD has an incremental sense that makes it more dynamic than ABOUT and AROUND, meaning that an action or event will likely happen anytime before--while approaching the specified time. For example:

I'm going to leave **toward** six o'clock.

Prices start to rise **towards** Christmas.

Now compare the two meanings of TOWARD in the following sentences:

- a) He always gets excited **toward** summer.
- b) He has a cheerful attitude **toward** summer.

The example in (b) has a strong figurative sense. For instance, in (a), he gets excited *as summer approaches*; in (b), he has a cheerful attitude *in relation to* the summer season. See also TOWARD as a preposition of direction in Chapter 1.

## **ABOUT & AROUND: at an approximate time**

Also ROUND.

Most of the time, ABOUT and AROUND can be used interchangeably:

I'll meet you **about** 10 o'clock.

I'll meet you **around** 10 o'clock.

However, in this sense of time, ABOUT seems to be closer to precision than AROUND. For example, you would normally say (a) but would not say (b):

- a) It's **about** 6 o'clock now.
- b) It's **around** 6 o'clock now. ☺

The sentence in (b) is not the best choice because it lacks the stronger proximity attribute of the preposition ABOUT. For instance, when used with the adverb *now*, ABOUT suggests a very close approximation or even the precise time, whereas the proximity conveyed by AROUND could mean "before" or "after" the hour. As an additional illustration, consider these two spatial meanings:

The man is **about** the lake.

The man is **around** the lake.

We know from Chapter 1 that *walking about the lake* means walking without a specific directionality; in this case, however, the only relation to the lake is

the proximity, whereas *walking around the lake* means "encircling" the lake. Thus, in *I'll meet you about 10 o'clock*, I am saying that I will be there at 10 o'clock or at least very close to 10 o'clock, whereas *I'll meet you around 10 o'clock* may mean that I will meet you literally *around* the hour (for more or for less), but never on time.

When I want to convey approximation, I use AROUND instead of ROUND:

She arrived **around** 7 p.m.

### **AROUND & ROUND in the sense of THROUROUGHOUT**

The following examples in (a) and (b) show both ROUND and AROUND used in the sense of "throughout." The example in (c) shows the preposition AROUND designating an approximate period of time. Compare the three sentences:

- a) Some resorts in Switzerland offer skiing **round** the year.
- b) Some resorts in Switzerland offer skiing **around** the year.
- c) We have a period of relatively mild weather **around** January.

In the idiomatic examples below, only AROUND and ROUND are interchangeable:

It's **about time** we went to bed.

Christmas is just **around the corner**.

The stores are open **round the clock**.

### **ROUND ABOUT: at an approximate time or period of time**

This double preposition may be replaced by AROUND.

He arrived at the party **round about** midnight.

He began writing poems **round about** 1960.

### **ON THE POINT OF: getting ready or about to do something**

Also AT THE POINT OF.

- a) She was **on the point of** going to bed when her boyfriend called.
- b) The old man was trembling and seemed to be **on the point of** fainting.

c) The old man was trembling and seemed to be **at the point of** calling his doctor.

Note that the sense of "about to do something" in the examples in (a) and (c) requires the voluntary participation of the agent (*she* and *the old man*), as opposed to the example in (b), where *something* was on the point of happening.

### **NEAR: not far away or a short period of time from**

Also NEAR TO.

Hanukkah falls very **near** Christmas.

We're getting **near to** Ramadan, the month of fasting!

See also Chapter 3 for examples of NEAR as a preposition of location.

### **NIGH: near; toward**

Archaic or regional.

The festival will happen **nigh** Christmas.

The group gathered around the table **nigh** supper-time.

NIGH is also used as a preposition of location.

### **NEXT TO: in very close proximity to**

Being **next to** winter, it was normal to be cold.

The day **next to** their anniversary is also a day for celebration!

See also Chapter 3 for examples of NEXT TO as a preposition of location.

### **CLOSE TO: very near**

It was too **close to** the prom--he knew he couldn't invite anyone else.

As we come **close to** summer, I encourage you to avoid the peak sunlight hours.

Find more about CLOSE TO, NEAR and NEXT TO in Chapter 3.

### **IN THE PROXIMITY OF: approaching the time of**

He always cleans the fireplace **in the proximity of** winter.

People feel less inclined to conclude business **in the proximity of** the holidays.

See also Chapter 3 for examples of IN THE PROXIMITY OF as a preposition of location.

### **IN THE VICINITY OF: in the proximity of**

**In the vicinity of** dinner everybody was hungry.

The new toys will be hitting the stores **in the vicinity of** the holidays.

IN THE VICINITY OF is more often used as a preposition of location.

### **IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF: in the proximity of**

The new toys will be hitting the stores **in the neighborhood of** Christmas.

**In the neighborhood of** dinner time, the children snuck into the kitchen.

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF is very seldom used as a preposition of time. See also Chapter 3 for examples of IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF as a preposition of location.

### **CIRCA: at the approximate date of; about; around**

CIRCA is often used to designate approximate dates, usually years:

She was born **circa** 1729.

The portrait was painted **circa** 1610-1615.

However, the preposition CIRCA is also (although seldom) used to indicate approximate measures. For example:

He owned **circa** 500 acres of land.

CIRCA is often abbreviated to c. or ca.

### **GONE: past; later than; older than**

Originally a past participle verb form, GONE is often used as a preposition, always designating a time or period of time that has already passed:

You are late! We should be there at seven, and it's **gone** eight o'clock now.

She was going to retire at sixty, but she's **gone** seventy and is still working.

It was **gone** midnight when he finished the report.

## Before and After Time, Events and Periods of Time

### PRIOR TO: before; until

**Prior to** 2008, he served as the senior advisor to the president.

Cancellations must be made at least three weeks **prior to** the event.

**Prior to** working as an actress, she was a bartender.

### PREVIOUS TO: before; prior to

She was an engineer **previous to** her career as a singer.

**Previous to** the seventeenth century, astronomers knew little about the universe.

### SUBSEQUENT TO: immediately or later after; following

The tickets started to be sold **subsequent to** the opening of the box offices.

**Subsequent to** our meeting, we were invited to dinner.

### FOLLOWING: after; as a result of

Originally a present participle verb form, FOLLOWING is often used as a preposition:

**Following** the championship, there will be a celebration.

A few hours **following** the landing, the astronaut played golf on the moon!

Profits have declined, **following** the recent financial crisis.

### FOLLOWING used with *the fact that*:

An investigation was carried out, **following the fact that** he was found guilty.

### PENDING: until; while waiting for a future event; unless

Originally a present participle verb form, PENDING is often used as a preposition:

- a) The decision was delayed **pending** his return.
- b) They voted to continue the project, **pending** renegotiation.
- c) The proposal was accepted, **pending** approval by the president.

In (a), the decision was delayed until his return; in (b) they voted to continue the project under the condition that there will be a renegotiation (before they actually continue the project); in (c), the proposal was previously accepted but will not be implemented until (or unless) the president approves it.

Sometimes (though rarely), PENDING is used with *the fact that*:

It's the best I can do now, **pending** *the fact that* I'm still waiting for the result.

### **UPON: on or immediately after an event**

The particle UP that joins ON to form the compound preposition UPON helps indicate an action or event that will occur or be completed soon after the event described by the preposition (i.e., it has a sense of "as soon as"). For example:

They will meet at the port **upon** the arrival of the ship.

When used figuratively, UPON often means "very near" or "about to happen":

Christmas is **upon** us once again.

UPON is also explained as a preposition of location in Chapter 3.

### **IN ADVANCE OF: before; ahead of; prior to**

He served as a tank commander **in advance of** his promotion to major.

The article must reach the publisher six weeks **in advance of** the date of publication.

The equipment must be delivered **in advance of** the season.

The artillery was sent **in advance of** the troop.

You can also see the complex preposition IN ADVANCE OF in Chapter 2.

### **AHEAD OF: awaiting; in advance of; before**

We have a long trip **ahead of** us.

The stores placed orders about one year **ahead of** the season.

Thousands of flights have been canceled **ahead of** a major storm.

The air conditioner will be turned on a few hours **ahead of** the game.

BEFORE and PRIOR TO, in that order, are generally preferred when the preposition is followed by a gerund form:

Please, read the instructions completely **before** beginning the installation.

**Prior to** working as an English teacher, he worked as a clerk.

AHEAD OF is also discussed in Chapter 2.

### **PAST: time after an hour, a period or an event**

PAST designates the amount of time after the hour, a point in time, or an event:

It's 1:25. This means it is twenty-five **past** one.

The project will be concluded a month **past** schedule.

It is a month **past** Christmas and I haven't taken the Christmas tree yet!

It's two hours **past** bedtime--I have to go to sleep now.

Sometimes PAST is used to designate past or future events in similar sentences:

I will go to New York a week **past** Thanksgiving.

I arrived in New York a week **past** Thanksgiving.

However, be careful not to use an illogical construction:

I arrived in New York a week **past** today. ⊗

PAST is also used as a preposition of direction.

### **BEFORE: earlier than; preceding the specified time or event**

We can see BEFORE as a preposition of orientation in Chapter 2. As a temporal preposition, BEFORE is used to show an action or event occurring

first or earlier than the specified time, period of time or event:

She arrived a week **before** the event.

I need to finish my report **before** 6 o'clock.

We dated for two years **before** our marriage.

We got married in 2010. **Before** that, we dated for two years.

**Before** swimming, make sure the swimming pool has been cleaned!

## AFORE or FORE: before

Also 'FORE or ERE. Archaic or regional.

He is an old man **afore** his time.

A long period elapsed **ere** the invention of the automobile.

AFORE is also used as a preposition of orientation (see Chapter 2).

## ON THE HEELS OF: soon after; showing continuation

The new guidelines came **on the heels of** the incident.

The snow storm was **on the heels of** a cold front.

See also AT THE HEELS OF in Chapter 2.

## AFTER: later than; following the specified time or event

We can see AFTER as a preposition of orientation in Chapter 2. As a preposition of time, AFTER is used to help describe an action or event occurring last or later than the specified point in time:

She arrived at ten **after** six.

**After** fame, she became known as J.Lo.

I must not finish my report **after** 6 o'clock.

We dated for two years **after** our first meeting.

We dated for two years. **After** that, we got married!

**After** the desk, make sure you don't forget to clean the table.

Also used when someone has left a place and/or as a consequence of their action:

She is always cleaning **after** the children.

### **FAR FROM & AWAY FROM: distant time**

Used by extension of their spatial senses, these two complex prepositions denote distance in (generally future) time, being FAR FROM more akin to remoteness than AWAY FROM--which is more used to indicate an indefinite distance, often within the realms of the former, unless otherwise stated. For example:

We're still in March, which means that we are **far from** New Years Eve.

I'm just a few weeks **away from** my much deserved vacation.

We are now 90 days **away from** the election.

See FAR FROM and AWAY FROM also in Chapter 3.

### **OUT OF: away from**

OUT OF needs the help of a time frame preceding the preposition in order to function in the temporal world--generally associated with a physical distance:

I live in Westchester, just one hour **out of** New York City.

See OUT OF also in Chapters 1, 3 and 4.

## **Common Expressions of Time**

Following is a list of a few common expressions used with prepositions (and conjunctions) of time. These prepositional expressions can often be replaced by equivalent adverbs (e.g., AFTER THAT = afterwards, AT LAST = finally, AT THE TIME = when, etc.). Some of them, such as AS FAR AS and AS LONG AS, for example, are often accepted as complex prepositions when followed by a noun or by some related words acting as a single noun.

### **AS FAR AS: to the specified extent or limit of time**

You can use AS FAR AS to designate past or future time:

The old man's memory went back **as far as** 1929.

The article provides projections into the future **as far as** 2020.

See also Chapter 3 for examples of AS FAR AS as a spatial preposition.

### **AS LONG AS: for a certain length of time; for no more than**

The fight for liberty lasted **as long as** the war.

You can stay in my house **as long as** you like.

The effects can persist for **as long as** 24 hours.

Also SO LONG AS.

Some accredited tests of English include the conjunction AS LONG AS in the same sense of PROVIDED, PROVIDED THAT or "on condition that." For example:

**As long as** you come up with new ideas, I will continue to support you.

You can borrow my new car **so long as** you return it by 6 p.m.

You can come with us **as long as** you finish your homework.

### **AS SOON AS: at the same point in time (or immediately after)**

Often used interchangeably with SO SOON AS, AS SOON AS denotes equality; no time interval between the events described in affirmative or corresponding sentences, as opposed to SO SOON AS:

**As soon as** I finish, I will call you.

Let me know **as soon as** possible.

### **SO SOON AS: at a different point in time**

SO SOON AS compares different temporal events in negative or adversative sentences:

They did not arrive **so soon as** I expected.

I can't possibly pack all my books **so soon as** tomorrow.

### **AT THE TIME & AT THAT TIME: when & back then**

**At the time** they arrived in the country their ages ranged from 16 to 21 years.

They were all students **at that time**. Now they are all graduated.

### **AT SUCH TIME: when**

This prepositional phrase is often used followed by *as* or sometimes by *when*:

The committee can meet **at such time** as they desire.

We'll make the decision **at such time** when we feel that it is necessary.

**AT SUCH TIME** can be simply reduced to *when*, as in:

The committee can meet *when* they desire.

Also **AT WHICH TIME**:

The exhibition will remain open until 7 p.m., **at which time** the doors will be closed.

### **AT ONE TIME: on one occasion**

**At one time** he met the president.

The "occasion" described may convey a period of time:

**At one time** he was a comedian. Today he is retired.

### **AT THIS POINT IN TIME: now; at present**

**At this point in time**, I am not taking any medications.

Also **AT THAT POINT IN TIME**, in the sense of "from then on," as in:

He was hiding and, **at that point in time**, he trusted no one.

### **AT THE MOMENT: currently; at the present time**

Also **AT PRESENT**.

**AT THE MOMENT** often indicates a temporary event (that is happening now):

It's raining **at the moment**.

**At the moment** I have no job!

### **AT THE TOP OF THE HOUR: at the exact beginning of an hour**

The tours depart daily **at the top of the hour**.

The clock chimes daily **at the top of the hour**.

We'll bring you the latest news **at the top of the hour**.

## **FOR THE TIME BEING: at this time; temporarily**

You can stay in my apartment **for the time being**.

She will work as an intern **for the time being**.

## **BY NIGHT & BY DAY: during the night & during the day**

Used to help describe activities such as traveling, hunting, preying, and so on:

Lions prefer to hunt **by night** and sleep **by day**.

In the early days, airplanes were not equipped to fly **by night**.

They traveled **by day** only, stopping each night at a hotel.

## **BY THEN: sometime before the end of the specified time**

BY THEN is often used to express the sense of "before the expected time," as in:

My girlfriend is coming at 7 tonight. Hopefully, **by then**, dinner will be ready.

My new passport will arrive in two weeks. **By then** my vacation will be over!

I began to write at 25. **By then** I had moved to NYC to pursue a career.

## **BY THE TIME: when; not later than a particular event**

BY THE TIME is often used as "at the time something happens" (also in the sense of "before the expected time"), followed by a pronoun or a proper noun, or sometimes by the connector *that* before the pronoun or the proper noun:

She was very tired **by the time** she finished her work.

**By the time** my new passport arrives my vacation will be over.

**By the time** that John finished reading his book Mary had already finished three!

## **UNTIL THEN: before that time**

I went to the zoo for the first time yesterday. **Until then** I had never seen a giraffe.

We'll be together in a year. **Until then**, we'll be seeing each other on the Internet.

## **ON TIME: at the time arranged; not before; not after**

The game started **on time**.

The boss wants the meeting to start **on time**.

## **IN TIME: before the appointed time; early enough**

Also IN TIME FOR.

They arrived **in time for** the movie.

John arrived at the station **in time** to catch the train.

Mary arrived at the office **in time** to have a cup of coffee before the meeting.

Also IN GOOD TIME (FOR), meaning "with a comfortable margin," as in:

You are an hour from the office. Make sure to leave for the meeting **in good time**.

## **OUT OF TIME: with no more time left**

You must succeed before you are **out of time**.

The country is **out of time** to deal with the crisis.

## **AT THE BEGINNING OF: starting at a particular point in time**

Also IN THE BEGINNING OF.

Today, **at the beginning of** the 21st Century, water is in short supply all over the world.

IN THE BEGINNING OF designates a little longer stretch of time within the specified period of time than AT THE BEGINNING OF, which normally suggests the "very beginning" of an event in time.

**In the beginning of** the year I took a fifteen-day holiday.

## **IN THE BEGINNING: in the early stages of a period or event**

Also AT THE BEGINNING.

We often use IN THE BEGINNING when we wish to imply a future change:

**In the beginning** he did not really say much, but now he always takes a stand.

**At the beginning** we did not get along well. Today we are good friends.

We were just friends **in the beginning**, but later, we got married.

## **AT FIRST: in the beginning**

He lost 1/4 of his money and had \$45 remaining. How much did he have **at first**?

**At first** he was completely confused. Then he realized he wanted to marry her!

## **AT THE END OF: at the point in time when something stops**

Also AT THE END.

She bought cheaper winter clothes **at the end of** the season.

I didn't like the movie **at the end**.

## **IN THE END: finally; eventually; after some time**

The trial was very long, but **in the end** he walked out of the court as a free man.

She tried to fix the car several times, but **in the end** she had to sell it.

## **AT LAST: finally; after waiting for some time**

I was sound asleep when he came home **at last**!

Now that they were together **at last**, they decided to find a house.

## **BEFORE LONG: soon; in short time**

It's very cloudy. It looks as though it will rain **before long**.

**Before long** the rancher had more rabbits than he could handle!

## **FROM THEN ON: from that moment on**

They met each other in 2010, and **from then on** they started dating.

We do not need to specify the time of the first event to use FROM THEN ON:

He asked her out, and **from then on** they started dating.

## **FROM TIME TO TIME: occasionally**

**From time to time** the group meets for lunch.

### **Reading the Story**

#### **Studying and Working**

Jennifer is studying English to get a better job--or perhaps to be noticed by her current employer and get a promotion. She has been very successful **throughout** her young career. Some of her friends are learning English to take the GED test in order to qualify for an American university **in** a year or two.

Jen is very busy **at the moment**. She studies **from** nine **to** five every Saturday and Sunday and works **during** the weekdays (and she often studies **through** the nights!), but, **from time to time**, she goes to the movies **on** the weekends. Her English class starts **at** 7 a.m. three times a week, and she is always **on time** for class. In fact, she tries to arrive **before** class, **in time** for a cup of coffee with her friends.

Her English classroom is very interesting, with people from very different origins. For instance, she has two great friends from the Middle East--David, from Israel, and Ahmed, from Turkey. Last year, **at** Christmas, Jennifer invited them over to her house for dinner. This year, David invited his friends for a special dinner **at** Hanukkah, and Ahmed hosted a dinner **at** Ramadan.

Next month Jen will go **on** vacation and will try to spend most of her mornings on the beach. She told her friends that her plan is to wake up **at** seven **in** the morning, eat breakfast **around** 7:30, then walk to the beach **after** breakfast and come back home **before** lunch, **about** 12 o'clock--and never **over** half **past** twelve. **In** the afternoons she plans to watch a couple of DVD movies from a long list she will take with her. However, she said she will make sure to study English prepositions **in between** movies because her vacation will be over **in** July and she needs to be prepared for her first English tests (I believe Jennifer will have to extend her studies a few weeks **into** the summer!).

Jennifer's boss told her that she needs to speak fluent English **within** two years, tops--if she really wants to get that promotion. Jen deserves it!

## **Practicing the Best Scenario**

Think carefully before answering the ten questions below. First, read all the questions, trying to relate them to the correct prepositions, and only then start from the first one. If you believe that two prepositions are possible, review the chapter and try to use the most appropriate one, but do not repeat a preposition, and make sure to use the prepositions introduced in this chapter only.

- 1) A good breakfast takes me half way \_\_\_\_ the day.
- 2) I'll meet you \_\_\_\_ 6 o'clock, a little more or less, but I'll be there!
- 3) They worked without interruption \_\_\_\_ the night to fix the grass for the game.
- 4) Maria and Miguel traveled with Julica \_\_\_\_ their family vacation.
- 5) Their vacation started \_\_\_\_ Saturday.
- 6) Their vacation lasted \_\_\_\_ Saturday the 11th \_\_\_\_ Sunday the 26th.
- 7) The family traveled \_\_\_\_ two weeks.
- 8) That important congress will be held \_\_\_\_ 2016.
- 9) The president hopes that a peace deal can be achieved \_\_\_\_ the year.
- 10) We arrived at the theater \_\_\_\_ the first act. We missed an important part.

## Chapter 6 : Non-Spatial Prepositions

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive view of non-spatial uses of prepositions (however, I make no claim that I am exhausting the subject). Over two hundred prepositions are exemplified, including two-word and multi-word complex prepositions (a.k.a. phrasal prepositions), idioms and participial prepositions. All phrases have at least one preposition as part of the phrase structure.

Some prepositions (LIKE, WITH REGARD TO, DUE TO, etc.) simply cannot designate time or space; others can be applied in both worlds--these prepositions are also exemplified in this chapter. For figurative non-temporal and non-spatial situations expressed with prepositions of time and space, such as IN, ON, WITH, etc., refer to the first five chapters of the book.

The prepositions are listed under general descriptions of situations, at my own discretion--and not necessarily in a specific logical order. The most idiomatic constructions are indicated in the text.

Complex, phrasal prepositions are used to convey a particular meaning while improving your English. Some complex prepositions have simple equivalents that can be used in most contexts. For example, IN ADDITION TO can often be replaced by BESIDES; WITH REGARD TO is usually interchangeable with REGARDING; RELATING TO can give way to ABOUT; IN THE COURSE OF can be replaced by DURING, etc. However, these changes are not always recommended. On the one hand, too many complex prepositions (and idioms) will make your communication wordy. For example, a sentence that reads:

"I am writing **on behalf of** Mr. Smith **with regard to** your request, **as well as in addition to** our second letter, to inform you that the new position will be created **in the course of** the present month."

could be simplified as follows:

"I am writing **on behalf of** Mr. Smith, **regarding** your request and our second letter, to inform you that the new position will be created **during** the present month."

On the other hand, sometimes complex prepositions are required to make the communication more fluid, expressive, resourceful, or elegant. For instance, "simplifying" the complex preposition in the sentence below could be

disastrous:

Please, contact the HR department **about** matters **relating to** personnel.

Please, contact the HR department **about** matters **about** personnel. ☺

Sometimes, a complex preposition is simply unavoidable:

**According to** the news, it will rain tomorrow.

## Prepositions and the *that*-clauses

Normally, according to standard grammatical descriptions of English, a preposition cannot precede a *that*-clause. For instance, the sentence in (a), below, is ungrammatical; the example in (b) would be a correct alternative:

- a) John was thinking **about that** he will travel to Japan. ☺
- b) John was thinking **about** traveling to Japan.

For most grammarians, the words which precede *that* starting a clause are often categorized as members of a word class other than prepositions. For some grammars, however, the prevailing view is that a *that*-clause complement of a preposition is indeed possible with most participial prepositions and with some complex prepositions as well, though this is viewed as an exception to the rule. In this chapter I do not discuss these issues; however, I have included some examples of participial and complex prepositions followed by *that*-clauses, such as PROVIDED and PROVIDED THAT; CONSIDERING and CONSIDERING THAT; IN THE EVENT OF and (after dropping the preposition OF) IN THE EVENT THAT, and so on. For example:

He should have done better, **considering** *that he is smart*.

According to the rules of traditional prescriptive grammar, the example above is using the "conjunction" *considering* with the noun clause *that he is smart*. However, according to most modern descriptive grammars, the sentence above is using the "participial preposition" CONSIDERING with the noun clause *that he is smart*; the sentence could also be interpreted as:

He should have done better, **considering** *his intelligence*.

In the example above, *his intelligence* is a noun phrase.

The connective *that* preceded by most prepositions is often dropped:

He should have done better, **considering** *he is smart*.

On the other hand, it is generally considered more grammatical to insert the connective *that* when the preposition is followed by a clause that functions as a noun. See additional information in IN ORDER TO.

## Prepositions and the Pronoun That

Many prepositional phrases can end with the anaphoric pronoun *that* indicating a relation to its antecedent; that is, when referring to something that has just been mentioned (as in the example of **before that** in Chapter 5). For example:

They have basketball and football. Do they have any other activities **besides that**?

He was wrongly accused of harassment and, **as a consequence of that**, he lost his job.

Do not confuse the use of the pronoun *that* as explained here with a *that*-clause used as a complement of a preposition. In the examples above, the word *that* (not a *that*-clause) is functioning as the object of the preposition (which you can easily verify by testing each preposition to see if it is working with *that* as its object).

## Other Anaphoric Pronouns

Anaphoric pronouns used with prepositions are not restricted to *that*. For example:

This is **between him** and *his wife*.

The public in the stadium was amazed **by her**.

Today everybody is going to help around the house, **including them**.

Here, you will find a few examples of prepositions followed by anaphoric pronouns as their complements (try to find other examples throughout the first five chapters!).

## Comparisons and Contrasts

## **AS: acting according to the quality or role of**

He works **as** a salesman.

She expressed her opinion **as** a mother and **as** a friend.

Sometimes AS is used interchangeably with LIKE (see next entry).

## **LIKE: similar to; in the same way as; having the same qualities or characteristics of**

Sometimes the prepositions LIKE and AS can be used interchangeably in a similar sentence--but not always. For instance, the two sentences below could be true:

- a) The man works **like** a slave.
- b) The man works **as** a slave.

In (a), he works so hard that we could say, figuratively speaking, that he works the same way a slave does. In (b), the man is in fact a slave. Therefore, be careful; most of the time, LIKE and AS will not really be interchangeable. For instance, consider the following sentence:

The man works **like** a horse.

Again, figuratively speaking, we are saying that the man works hard; it would be very awkward, although not ungrammatical (for instance, the man could be an actor playing a horse for a crowd of kids) to say:

The man works **as** a horse. ☺

The preposition LIKE often suggests comparison (see also SUCH AS):

She loves computers; she is **like** her mother.

## **ANYTHING LIKE, NOTHING LIKE and MORE LIKE**

The preposition LIKE is often used after the word *anything*, in the sense of "similar to something or someone," with (but not restricted to) the conjunction *if* in affirmative sentences or positive situations:

If you are **anything like** your father, your life will be a success!

Has anyone ever seen **anything like** this?

ANYTHING LIKE is also used in negative situations:

Sorry... I don't look **anything like** my dad.

The preposition LIKE is also often used in a positive way after the word *nothing*, in the sense of "not nearly similar to something or someone," to indicate that something is incomparable:

Dinning out is nice, but there is **nothing like** home!

In the example above, eating at home is better than eating anywhere else.

We also use LIKE after *nothing* in a negative sense:

He was **nothing like** the man she believed he was.

In the sentence above, he was not nearly the man she once believed he was.

MORE LIKE is used in the sense of "more accurate compared to what was described" (i.e., nearer to what is being designated by the preposition), or "better the way it is being suggested or described." For example:

I think the true estimate should be **more like** \$10 billion.

They don't need a speech. They need something **more like** a revolution.

## **SUCH AS: for example; of the particular kind or class as designated**

People use SUCH AS and LIKE interchangeably, such as in the sentences below:

In the morning I always eat fruit, **such as** strawberries and oranges.

In the morning I always eat fruit, **like** strawberries and oranges.

Normally, though, the word *like* should be restricted to simile, as in:

The boy runs **like** a rocket.

The girl wants to dress **like** the princess.

LIKE designates a relation of *comparison with exclusion* (in the two examples above, the boy is not a rocket and the girl is not the princess), while SUCH AS shows a relation of *inclusion* (in the example below, the princess

is included in the group of royal members who were in the ceremony):

Members of the royal family, **such as** the princess, were present in the ceremony.

### **UNLIKE: different from; not like or characteristic of**

This dog is **unlike** any other dog I have ever seen.

That law, **unlike** this one, is good for the people.

**Unlike** his brother, he was not very athletic.

### **IN COMMON WITH: in the same way as**

**In common with** the industry around the world, we are going green!

He acted **in common with** the other participants.

### **IN THE NATURE OF: like or similar to; a characteristics of Also OF THE NATURE OF.**

The fee was struck down because it was **in the nature of** a tax.

Is cheating **of the nature of** humans?

### **ON A PAR WITH: equal or equivalent to**

The English team is **on a par with** the Italian team.

His intelligence is **on a par with** his ability.

### **ON A LEVEL WITH: on the same level of**

Some American museums are **on a level with** European museums.

You can also use ON A LEVEL WITH in a literal sense:

You don't need to go up. The entrance door is **on a level with** the ground.

### **OF THE ORDER OF: of approximately; similar to Also ON THE ORDER OF.**

The company expects sales **of the order of** 9000 units this year.

Their house was shaped **on the order of** a medieval church.

## **IN COMPARISON WITH: comparing similar things**

Also BY COMPARISON WITH.

**In comparison with** the previous version, the new curriculum is much better.

How big was the Exxon oil spill **by comparison with** the BP oil spill?

See use of WITH and TO in COMPARED WITH and COMPARED TO.

## **IN COMPARISON TO: comparing different things**

Also BY COMPARISON TO.

**In comparison to** the objects around it, the vase was very heavy.

The amount stated is small **by comparison to** the medical needs of the community.

See use of WITH and TO in COMPARED WITH and COMPARED TO.

## **COMPARED WITH vs. COMPARED TO: resemblance, difference vs. simile**

Both are often used interchangeably. However, the traditional distinction is that we generally use COMPARED WITH when we intend to convey a literal sense of comparison of two similar things in order to discover their likenesses and their differences; we frequently use COMPARED TO in a figurative sense--or to show resemblance between two different things:

Compared **with** English, German is quite difficult.

The company's profit is up compared **with** last year's.

Compared **to** my love, my failures and imperfections are nothing.

An elephant is very strong compared **to** a human.

## **IN PROPORTION TO: when comparing to; on the basis of**

The comparative relation expressed by IN PROPORTION TO refers to the correct or ideal relationship between things, parts, dimensions and magnitudes:

Is there an ideal weight **in proportion to** height?

His feet are too large **in proportion to** his body.

They were rewarded **in proportion to** their dedication.

## THAN: in comparison with

Some grammarians still argue about whether THAN is just a conjunction or a conjunction *and* a preposition. However, most dictionaries accept the two forms. If you use it as a preposition, make sure the word that follows it is in the object form:

John is taller **than** Mary.

An airplane is faster **than** a car.

The speed of a rocket is higher **than** that of a car.

Nevertheless, most writers consider *than* to be only a conjunction, as if part of the clause introduced by *than* had been left out--which would make *than* a conjunction:

John is taller *than Mary (is tall)*.

An airplane is faster *than a car (is fast)*.

The speed of a rocket is higher *than the speed of a car (is high)*.

## IN CONTRAST TO: as opposed to; comparing similar things

Also IN CONTRAST WITH.

IN CONTRAST TO and IN CONTRAST WITH are used interchangeably.

**In contrast to** last winter, this winter season is much colder.

This winter season is much colder **in contrast with** last winter.

The preposition WITH is normally used when following *contrast* as a verb:

Can you contrast socialism **with** capitalism?

## IN CONTRADICTION TO: in opposition to; against

Also IN CONTRADICTION WITH.

They acted **in contradiction to** the opinion of their peers.

This is **in contradiction to** your original proposal!

When using the reflexive pronouns *itself*, *myself*, etc., I use IN CONTRADICTION WITH:

The idea is **in contradiction with** itself.

They live **in contradiction with** themselves.

## IN THE FACE OF: because of; despite; contrasting with

**In the face of** the crises, many economists started expressing their worries.

This idiomatic complex preposition is often used to express a negative situation, in contrast with the preceding or the following clause:

Gulf beach resorts persist **In the face of** the oil spill.

## VERSUS: against; in contrast with; as an alternative to

You cannot use VERSUS to start a sentence because this preposition must come between nouns, generally to contrast them:

Speaking about sports, Argentina **versus** Brazil is always entertaining.

You can put 400 passengers on a plane **versus** 4000 passengers on a ship.

Two old dilemmas: monarchy **versus** republic, and dictatorship **versus** democracy.

VERSUS is often abbreviated as VS. or V.

## VIS-A-VIS: in relation to; as opposed to

What is the effect of stress **vis-a-vis** smoking?

Their school prefers to use books in hardcopy **vis-a-vis** online texts.

You can also use VIS-A-VIS in the spatial sense of "face-to-face with":

The man sat **vis-a-vis** his wife at the restaurant.

## IN IMITATION OF: as a copy of; imitating

They built their house **in imitation of** a castle.

He wrote his greatest play **in imitation of** Shakespeare.

She wrote "HARF," "HARF," "HARF," "HARF!" **in imitation of** the dog sound.

## Condition, Compliance and Association

### CONSIDERING: taking something into consideration

Also CONSIDERING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, CONSIDERING is also used as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including CONSIDERING THAT. CONSIDERING is used interchangeably with GIVEN, often contrasting one clause with another in the same sentence; however, most of the time the clause containing the preposition will have a sense of disadvantage or depreciation:

She did a good job, **considering** the limitations.

**Considering** her advanced age, her voice is still beautiful.

It's snowing heavily. **Considering** that, it would be a good idea to close the roads.

The examples below show CONSIDERING used with a *that*-clause:

**Considering that** the world population is over 6 billion, I wonder if food will be enough.

**Considering that** the house is old, the price paid for it was excellent!

The connective *that* is often omitted:

**Considering** the house is old, the price paid for it was excellent!

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

**Considering the fact that** the house is old, the price paid for it was excellent!

See also GRANTED.

### GIVEN: taking something into consideration; considering

Also GIVEN THAT.

Originally a past participle verb form, GIVEN is also used as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including GIVEN THAT. GIVEN and CONSIDERING are often used interchangeably, though the former is preferred when introducing a (generally positive) clause, or when the rest of the sentence does not contrast with or negate the noun being introduced by the preposition, even when in a negative sense:

**Given** her talent, I am sure she will do great in her new job.

The bank should survive the current crises, **given** its financial strength.

The examples below show GIVEN used with a *that*-clause:

**Given that** prepositions are difficult, you should study hard.

**Given that** he is a trainee, he couldn't assume all the responsibilities in the office.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

**Given** he is a trainee, he couldn't assume all the responsibilities in the office.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

**Given the fact that** he is a trainee, he couldn't assume all the responsibilities.

See also GRANTED.

## PROVIDED: given; on condition that

Also PROVIDING or PROVIDED THAT.

Originally a past participle verb form, PROVIDED is also known as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including PROVIDED THAT and the present participles PROVIDING and PROVIDING THAT. The examples below show PROVIDED used as a preposition before a noun phrase:

**Provided** the economic crisis, it is time for us all to work harder.

The bank should survive the current crisis, **provided** there is economic growth.

The following examples show PROVIDED used with a *that*-clause:

I will go to the beach **provided that** it doesn't rain.

You may enter **provided that** you are quiet.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

You may enter **provided** you are quiet.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

He did a good job, **provided** *the fact that* he is only 10 years of age.

PROVIDED and PROVIDED THAT are often used in "proviso" legal clauses to designate certain conditions or restrictions:

This contract can be automatically renewed, **provided** *that* both parties agree.

Sometimes PROVIDED is used in the sense of "when" or "as long as":

I like winter, **provided** there is snow.

See also GRANTED.

### **AS LONG AS: provided**

Also SO LONG AS.

Some accredited tests of English include the conjunction AS LONG AS in the same sense of PROVIDED or PROVIDED THAT. For example:

**As long as** you come up with new ideas, I will continue to support you.

You can come with us **as long as** you finish your homework.

AS LONG AS is also shown as an expression of time in Chapter 5.

### **ALLOWING FOR: given; considering**

**Allowing for** his advanced age, he will not be a candidate in the next elections.

The airline company will buy the new plane, **allowing for** its new technology.

### **IN TERMS OF: with regard to; in relation to**

Success cannot be measured **in terms of** money.

**In terms of** speed, which do you prefer: an electric car or an ordinary one?

Sometimes IN TERMS OF is used literally when we want to identify a specific term:

FOB means Freight On Board, **in terms of** the shipping industry.

### **ACCORDING TO: as stated or instructed by**

ACCORDING TO is not always interchangeable with IN ACCORDANCE

WITH and PURSUANT TO. ACCORDING TO is used to introduce a noun or noun phrase that shows who said something, using information derived or reported from a particular source, such as the news, someone, a recipe, a plan, etc. For example:

It will rain tomorrow **according to** the news.

**According to** the rules, the player should have been banned from the sport.

**According to** the president, the economy is on the path of a solid recovery.

Comparing ACCORDING TO and IN ACCORDANCE WITH as used below, the example in (a) is correct because the speaker is reporting what the weather forecast said (i.e., the news--or the weather forecast--is the referent), whereas the example in (b) is wrong because the news cannot possibly govern the weather:

- a) It will snow tomorrow **according to** the news.
- b) It will snow tomorrow **in accordance with** the news. ☺

Sometimes ACCORDING TO can also have a sense of "on the basis of," as in:

Workers will be selected **according to** their skills.

### **IN ACCORDANCE WITH: in conformity with; governed by**

Also IN ACCORDANCE TO.

Everyone must act **in accordance with** the rules.

The police officer acted **in accordance with** the law.

Compare the following examples:

- a) **According to** Clause A, we shall pay benefits.
- b) The benefits shall be paid **in accordance with** Clause B.

In (a), Clause A shows *where* exactly in the agreement we find information about the obligation to pay the benefits, whereas in (b), Clause B governs *the way* in which the benefits should be paid.

This preposition is often used interchangeably with PURSUANT TO in legal

contexts.

## IN ACCORD WITH: in harmony or agreement with

He likes to live **in accord with** reality.

I'll vote for him because I'm **in accord with** his ideas.

IN ACCORD WITH is often used interchangeably with IN ACCORDANCE WITH, especially when in the sense of compliance. For example:

The contract is **in accord with** our policy.

## IN CONFORMITY WITH: according to a certain rule

He acted **in conformity with** her wishes.

Certain parts of the agreement are not **in conformity with** the law.

## PURSUANT TO: in conformity with; in accordance with

Also IN PURSUANCE OF.

PURSUANT TO is often used interchangeably with IN ACCORDANCE WITH and IN COMPLIANCE WITH. Mostly used in legal terms--however not exclusively--it helps describe an action, event or situation in (formal) agreement with something:

**Pursuant to** the terms of the agreement, the company will issue new shares.

The federal officials are acting **pursuant to** the president's constitutional authority.

The legislation cannot limit the authority given to him **in pursuance of** the constitution.

## IN COMPLIANCE WITH: in agreement with; in conformity with

IN COMPLIANCE WITH is often interchangeable with PURSUANT TO, except that it is normally used in a broader sense, while PURSUANT TO is more often (but not exclusively) attached to legal contexts:

The building must be **in compliance with** the safety regulations.

Doctors must perform their jobs **in compliance with** the standards of their practice.

## IN OBEDIENCE TO: in accordance with; according to

He acted **in obedience to** his principles.

**In obedience to** the will of the people, I accept the responsible duties of President.

IN OBEDIENCE TO is not always interchangeable with ACCORDING TO.  
For instance, the example in (b) is not possible:

- a) **According to** the weather report, it will rain tomorrow.
- b) **In obedience to** the weather report, it will rain tomorrow. ☺

## IN RELATION TO: in association or connection with; about

She thought of her life **in relation to** its objectives.

We need to adjust our vision **in relation to** nature.

## TOUCHING: about; considering; in relation to

Also TOUCHING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, TOUCHING is also used as a "participial preposition," as in:

The new law **touching** human rights is constitutional.

**Touching** the issue of education, English should be taught in all schools.

Be careful with sentences such as:

He called **touching** the president.

The example above would be better with the preposition ABOUT.

When used with a *that*-clause, this preposition has the sense of "considering that," "about the fact that," or "given that":

I told him not to do it, **touching that** it would be dangerous.

No questions were asked, **touching that** the soldiers died under friendly fire.

**Touching that** digital literacy is fundamental, the school decided to buy tablets.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

No questions were asked **touching the fact that** the soldiers died under friendly fire.

**Touching the fact that** digital literacy is fundamental, the school decided to buy tablets.

## **REGARDING & CONCERNING: about; relating to**

Also REGARDING THAT and CONCERNING THAT.

Originally present participle verb forms, REGARDING and CONCERNING are also used as "participial prepositions" which are synonymous with "with respect to," "with reference to," "in connection with," and "associated with." However, most of the time REGARDING is used interchangeably with CONCERNING in their basic sense of ABOUT or RELATING TO. For example:

Journalists have questions **regarding** the role of the vice-president.

Journalists have questions **concerning** the role of the vice-president.

Nevertheless, I usually distinguish between them by contrasting the sense of "notice" and "observation" of REGARDING with the sense of "connection" and "belongingness" of CONCERNING when I want to express something that somehow *affects, influences, or involves* someone or something else, vis-a-vis something that simply *refers to* or *calls the attention to* something or someone. For example:

There were letters **concerning** the constitution.

There were letters **regarding** the constitution.

There is a stronger sense of connection between the preposition CONCERNING and the noun *constitution* than between REGARDING and *constitution* as used in the second sentence; that is to say, CONCERNING seems to be more "into" ("in the interest of" or "part of") the constitution, whereas REGARDING shows a more distant "about" relation. For instance, if I wanted to use either of these prepositions to begin a text "about" or "with reference to" the constitution, I would say:

**Regarding** the constitution, there were letters ...

Hence, despite their interchangeability, REGARDING and CONCERNING in the two examples below present slightly different meanings:

new information **regarding** the use of electricity

safety measures **concerning** the use of electricity

In the first example, REGARDING tells us that there is new information available *about* the use of electricity; reading the information will not necessarily change the way we consume electricity. In the second example, CONCERNING tells us that safety measures (when implemented) will *change the way* we consume electricity. In other words, the safety measures are not *about* the use of electricity, they are something that will probably *affect* or *involve* the entire community. Compare:

- a) **Regarding** the fire department, I believe they need a new ordinance.
- b) an ordinance **concerning** the fire department

In (a), as a member of the City Council, I am expressing my opinion *about* matters *related to* the Fire Department; in (b), the City Council passed a new municipal regulation that will somehow *affect* the Fire Department's *operations*.

REGARDING and CONCERNING are not always interchangeable with ABOUT:

She likes to talk **about** politics.

She likes to talk **regarding** politics. ☺

She likes to talk **concerning** politics. ☺

When (though not too often) used with *that*-clauses, both REGARDING and CONCERNING have the sense of "given" or "considering," as in:

The bank reached a favorable decision, **concerning** *that* the company was profitable.

Too bad we can't use their name, even **regarding** *that* the firm doesn't exist anymore.

When REGARDING and CONCERNING are used with *the fact that*, both prepositions have the sense of "about":

They issued a protest **concerning** *the fact that* the dictator would run for reelection.

They issued a protest **regarding** *the fact that* the dictator would run for reelection.

Sometimes the connective *that* is omitted:

They asked him about the rumor **regarding** he would be collaborating with his ex-wife.

## SPEAKING OF: regarding

SPEAKING OF is generally used interchangeably with REGARDING to begin a sentence:

**Speaking of** the weather, we spent the whole day at the beach.

**Speaking of** the president, how much influence do you think he had in the decision?

However, it is not rare to find SPEAKING OF used in the middle of a sentence:

He spent the whole day at the beach, **speaking of** the weather.

Participles used as prepositions do not dangle. Nevertheless, some of us may never know if he spent the entire day "speaking about the weather" or if the speaker is using *the weather* as part of an introductory phrase (that does not modify the rest of the sentence). This does not occur in the following example,

The new law was finally signed, **speaking of** the president.

because we know that "the law cannot speak." To avoid such misunderstandings, the best choice would be to start the sentence above with the preposition, as in ***Speaking of the president, the new law was finally signed.***

Despite their interchangeability, I always use SPEAKING OF when the event described as a consequence of the prepositional phrase is "closer" than the event described by REGARDING. For instance, suppose that you sent me a letter two weeks ago requesting some information. Today, I could answer:

**Regarding** your request for information, please call the number below.

SPEAKING OF makes more sense when the event described as a consequence of the prepositional phrase has been recently introduced:

Yesterday we woke up to a beautiful sunrise. The weather was gorgeous and we had breakfast outside. **Speaking of** the weather, John spent the whole day at the beach.

SPEAKING OF is often preferred to REGARDING in spoken or informal discourse.

## **IN REFERENCE TO: about; in relation to; concerning; regarding**

Also WITH REFERENCE TO.

These two complex prepositions are used interchangeably. However, I usually try to distinguish between them by applying IN REFERENCE TO in the middle of the sentence and WITH REFERENCE TO to start a sentence (generally a new paragraph) because the word *in* has a sense of "in connection with" (i.e., we are talking about a more immediate context), whereas *with* is more appropriate to introduce a subject (i.e., a more distant context). Here are two examples:

I am writing **in reference to** your request to work for our company. Please call us.

**With reference to** your request to work for our company, please call us.

Similarly, I would prefer (a) to (b) to start a text:

- a) This is **in reference to** your request to work for our company.
- b) This is **with reference to** your request to work for our company.

In this vein, we can observe, in fact, a very subtle distinction between the two uses. For instance, suppose that you want to mention a list of expressions related to time which are *not* being used as part of your sentence. In this case, I would prefer (b) to (a):

- a) Below is a list of expressions used **in reference to** time.
- b) Below is a list of expressions used **with reference to** time.

Now let us suppose that what you need to mention about time is an integral part of the sentence. In this case, I would choose (c) instead of (d):

- c) The preposition 'before' is also used **in reference to** time.
- d) The preposition 'before' is also used **with reference to** time.

IN REFERENCE TO is also used as RE, mainly in business and legal contexts:

Your letter dated May 1st **re** a position in our department.

However, sometimes we find RE used as a standard preposition. For

example:

The boss demanded an explanation **re** your expenses.

RE is often used to introduce the subject of a letter or document:

**Re** your letter dated May 1st about a position in our department.

RE also appears in strictly legal texts as IN RE:

The United States District Court: **In re** the State vs. Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

One alternative to start a letter without having to resort to complex prepositions such as IN REFERENCE TO or WITH REGARD TO, etc., for example, would be:

Thank you for your letter dated May 1<sup>st</sup> **about** a position in our department.

### **FURTHER TO: in reference to; regarding**

FURTHER TO is often interchangeable with RE or IN/WITH REFERENCE TO:

**Further to** your letter dated May 1st about a position in our department.

Sometimes we find constructions using both FURTHER TO and REGARDING in the same sentence:

**Further to** your letter dated May 1st **regarding** a position in our department.

### **WITH REGARD TO: about; concerning; regarding**

Also IN REGARD TO, AS REGARDS and HAVING REGARD TO.

They wanted to know his position **with regard to** the facts.

The teacher spoke to the students **in regard to** their future.

**As regards** pizzas, Napoli has the best restaurants!

Although it is easier and more practical to simply use ABOUT instead of IN/WITH REGARD TO in a sentence, as in *The teacher spoke to the students about their future*, the use of ABOUT to start a sentence is not always recommended. In addition, I usually distinguish between using IN and

WITH by applying IN in the middle of sentences and WITH to start a sentence or a new paragraph, because the word *in* has a sense of containment (we are already "inside" the subject being explored), whereas *with* is more appropriate to introduce the subject. Again, and as seen earlier in IN/WITH REFERENCE TO, this reflects my personal, practical view. For instance, I would not use IN REGARD TO or ABOUT in the following example:

**With regard to** your request, we have dispatched your order to the new address.

However, in the example below, I would make sure *not* to repeat the word *regard*. That is to say, I would use (a) but would not use (b):

- a) **With regard to** your inquiry **about** the school, we are sending you a letter.
- b) **With regard to** your inquiry **in regard to** the school, we are sending you a letter. ☺

In the example below, I would use CONSIDERING instead of HAVING REGARD TO:

His salary was excessive, **having regard to** his qualification.

Do not confuse the complex preposition WITH REGARD TO with *with regards to*--used to introduce a complimentary close to a letter or as a note or card following a gift. Compare the examples below:

- a) All information **with regard to** your family will be confidential.
- b) With regards to your family I remain, respectfully, Andrew.
- c) Please, accept this gift along with my regards to your family.

in (a), the preposition WITH REGARD TO is referring to the information *about* your family; in (b) I am closing a letter to a long-time friend sending my *respects* (plural noun) to his family; in (c), I sent a gift to my friend's family together with a card also conveying my respects to his family.

## IN THE MATTER OF: as regards

The multi-word complex preposition IN THE MATTER OF is often used interchangeably with AS REGARDS in formal discourse:

That country was far behind the West **in the matter of** industrialization.

Important advances were made during the year **in the matter of** treating diseases.

## **WITH RESPECT TO: regarding; concerning; in relation to**

Also IN RESPECT TO, IN RESPECT OF (chiefly British) or RESPECTING.

He has wrong ideas **with respect to** her feelings.

The patient has a concern **with respect to** his operation.

Nowadays overbooking is a major problem **in respect of** air travel.

The astronomer studied the position of the earth **in respect to** the sun.

RESPECTING is much less frequent than WITH RESPECT TO--but nevertheless still used. For instance, do not confuse the participial preposition RESPECTING with the verb *respecting* in the sentences below (no one is in fact respecting anything; he is just thinking *about* her feelings, and the patient is concerned *about* his operation):

He has wrong ideas **respecting** her feelings.

The patient has a concern **respecting** his operation.

When used with a *that*-clause, RESPECTING has the sense of "given":

I use the terms "motion" and "movement" equally, **respecting** *that* you will understand.

His friends thought highly of him, **respecting** *that* he had survived the rigors of war.

RESPECTING used with *the fact that*:

They thought highly of him, **respecting** *the fact that* he had survived the rigors of war.

## **DEPENDING ON: according to certain condition; pending**

We will go to the beach tomorrow, **depending on** the rain.

**Depending on** her decision, I may be able to go to the party tonight.

Do not confuse DEPENDING ON with the prepositional verb *depend on*, as in *I am depending on you to finish the project; The students still depend on their parents; The country depends on its agriculture*, etc.

## **IN CASE OF: if something happens**

**In case of** emergency, call 911.

You don't need to call **in case of** a delay.

## IN THE CASE OF: regarding; in the instance of; in the matter of

**In the case of** wireless systems, lithium batteries are designed to run for years.

They grounded their children. **In the case of** Mary, they gave her another chance.

IN THE CASE OF is not interchangeable with IN CASE OF. For instance, the sentence below would not be appropriate (compare with IN CASE OF in the previous entry):

**In case of** Mary, they gave her another chance. ☺

## IN THE EVENT OF: if or when something happens

Also IN THE EVENT THAT.

**In the event of** a major earthquake, many neighborhoods will be on their own!

What should we do **in the event of** a tsunami?

IN THE EVENT (without the preposition OF) is often used with a *that*-clause:

**In the event that** a tsunami warning is issued, make sure to go to a higher place.

## ADMITTING: considering; accepting as true

Also ADMITTING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, ADMITTING is also known as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including ADMITTING THAT. Normally, when used as a preposition, ADMITTING designates a negative sense or some kind of contrast. For example:

**Admitting** the excessive inflation, it is obvious that we need to export more.

**Admitting** the drawbacks, all efforts will be made to ensure growth.

ADMITTING used with a *that*-clause:

**Admitting that** there were drawbacks, all efforts will be made to ensure growth.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

**Admitting** there were drawbacks, all efforts will be made to ensure growth.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*:

**Admitting** *the fact that* there were drawbacks, all efforts will be made to ensure growth.

See also GRANTED.

### **JUDGING: considering; assuming**

Also JUDGING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, JUDGING is also known as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including JUDGING THAT:

**Judging** the present situation, it's impossible not to react.

**Judging** the quality of her work, she is ready to be hired now.

JUDGING used with a *that*-clause:

**Judging** *that* the present situation is not favorable, it's impossible not to react.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

**Judging** the present situation is not favorable, it's impossible not to react.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*:

**Judging** *the fact that* the present situation is not favorable, it's impossible not to react.

### **JUDGING BY: the reason why one believes something is true**

Also JUDGING FROM.

**Judging by** his face, the boy was not very pleased with his final grades.

It must have been a big bear, **judging from** its tracks.

**Judging by** my grandfather, I will have a long life!

### **ASSUMING: considering; supposing**

Also ASSUMING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, ASSUMING is also known as a

"participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including ASSUMING THAT. ASSUMING is often used interchangeably with CONSIDERING, contrasting one clause with another in the same sentence. The examples below show ASSUMING used as a preposition before a noun phrase:

**Assuming** the bad road condition, the only solution was to take the train.

**Assuming** the actual budget, it will be impossible for us to travel.

ASSUMING used with a *that*-clause:

**Assuming** *that* they are rich, it will be no problem for them to buy a yacht.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

**Assuming** they are rich, it will be no problem for them to buy a yacht.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

**Assuming** *the fact that* they are rich, it will be no problem for them to buy a yacht.

See also GRANTED.

## SUPPOSING: assuming something as true

Also SUPPOSING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, SUPPOSING is also used as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including SUPPOSING THAT. We often use SUPPOSING to talk about a hypothetical situation. For instance, the examples below show SUPPOSING used as a preposition before a noun phrase:

**Supposing** B as part of A, then A must be larger than B.

Mars is our priority, **supposing** the existence of water on the red planet.

**Supposing** an eight-hour working day, a good many hours remain for other activities.

SUPPOSING used with a *that*-clause:

How many jobs will be offered, **supposing** *that* the new factory is built?

**Supposing** *that* you are wrong, what would be the alternative?

The connective *that* is often omitted:

How many jobs will be offered, **supposing** the new factory is built?

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

**Supposing** *the fact that* you are wrong, what would be the alternative?

See also GRANTED.

## **TAKING: given; considering**

Also TAKING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, TAKING is also (though not often) used as a "participial preposition," as in:

**Taking** these two examples, it's possible to estimate the cost.

The action, **taking** an economic view, shall be moderate.

TAKING used with a *that*-clause:

**Taking** *that* he was a priest, there could be no doubt about his faith.

He made many promises, but (**taking** *that* he was sincere) they may be hard to fulfill.

TAKING used with the fact that:

**Taking** *the fact that* the night had fallen, the starless sky didn't make any sense!

## **PRESUMING: supposing; in the case of**

Also PRESUMING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, PRESUMING is also used as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including PRESUMING THAT. The examples below show PRESUMING used as a preposition before a noun phrase:

A must be larger than B **presuming** B as part of A.

**Presuming** a successful connection, all upgrade functions will be available.

PRESUMING used with a *that*-clause:

**Presuming** that you will accept my offer, you are invited to a meeting tomorrow.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

**Presuming** you will accept my offer, you are invited to a meeting tomorrow.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

**Presuming** *the fact that* he would not leave, I decided to call the police!

See also GRANTED.

### **GRANTED: (if) assumed something as true**

Also GRANTING, GRANTING THAT or GRANTED THAT.

Originally a past participle verb form, GRANTED is also known as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including GRANTED THAT, the present participle GRANTING and GRANTING THAT. The examples below show GRANTED used as a preposition before a noun phrase:

**Granted** her experience, I believe she will do well in the test.

You can collect the vehicle **granted** the proof of ownership.

GRANTED is fairly interchangeable with several (present) participial prepositions otherwise known as "mental verbs." For instance, the sentence:

A must be larger than B, **granted** B as part of A.

could also be expressed as:

A must be larger than B, **assuming** B as part of A.

A must be larger than B, **admitting** B as part of A.

A must be larger than B, **supposing** B as part of A.

A must be larger than B, **presuming** B as part of A.

A must be larger than B, **considering** B as part of A.

In addition, the participial prepositions GIVEN and GRANTED may also suggest a stronger sense of "an existing fact," as in:

**Given** the condition of the car, we might as well take a bus!

**Granted** your urgency, there is no use in waiting anymore.

GRANTED used with a *that*-clause:

I will go to the beach **granted** *that* you are there.

You may enter **granted** *that* the space is large enough.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

You may enter **granted** the space is large enough.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

**Granted** *the fact that* it was a difficult time, learning English was his best idea.

## IN LIGHT OF: considering (new) information about something

Often used interchangeably with IN THE LIGHT OF. However, I normally use this idiomatic complex preposition to designate new information or an event followed by a (generally positive) response:

**In light of** the crisis, the World Bank increased its support for developing countries.

The authorities decided to ban the new drug **in light of** a new study.

## IN THE LIGHT OF: considering (old) information about something

I prefer to use the idiomatic complex preposition IN THE LIGHT OF rather than use IN LIGHT OF when designating a sense of "old" or previously existing information:

The irregularities were interpreted **in the light of** the law.

**In the light of** the constant threats, the government will have to review its policies.

## IN LINE WITH: in accordance with; similar to

Our legislation is **in line with** the international practices.

The new employee is **in line with** the core beliefs of our organization.

Conversely, you can use the similarly idiomatic OUT OF LINE WITH, as in:

Our legislation is **out of line with** the international practices.

The new employee is **out of line with** the core beliefs of our organization.

### **PERTAINING TO: related to; that is part of**

PERTAINING TO does not exactly mean "belong to" (i.e., this complex preposition does not designate possession of concrete objects). For instance, I would not use the sentence in (a); instead, I would use the example in (b):

- a) The red pen pertaining to me. ☺
- b) The red pen that belongs to me.

PERTAINING TO is used mainly to help describe a close relation between ideas, or between abstract concepts and concrete objects, as in the examples below:

The library offers literature **pertaining to** swimming.

The bookstore offers publications **pertaining to** a variety of topics.

The joy and happiness **pertaining to** the marriage relationship.

This page has questions and answers **pertaining to** the first chapter of the book.

### **UP FOR: available for; considered for; considering something; accused of**

The idiomatic UP FOR functions as a versatile complex preposition:

My house is **up for** sale.

The famous old actress is **up for** a comeback this year.

The president is **up for** re-election next year.

The bandit was **up for** robbery.

### **RELATING TO: associated with; regarding; about**

The museum has documents **relating to** the war.

TO and AT are prepositions **relating to** direction.

There are historical documents **relating to** the president.

### **RELATIVE TO: in connection with; regarding; concerning; in**

## **comparison with**

They will give him instructions **relative to** his mission.

The tensions between two countries **relative to** a trade agreement.

**RELATIVE TO** used in the sense of "in comparison with":

She makes a higher income **relative to** her husband.

## **IN ASSOCIATION WITH: together with; connected with; in cooperation with**

Some drugs, **in association with** alcohol, represent a serious risk for the health.

The word *instead* **in association with** the word *of* forms the preposition **INSTEAD OF**.

The video was produced by the Museum of Natural History **in association with** NASA.

## **IN CONJUNCTION WITH: in cooperation with; together with; in harmony with**

Parents worked **in conjunction with** school officials to curb truancy.

The device only functions **in conjunction with** a radio receiver.

Your body should work **in conjunction with** your mind.

Note that being **IN CONJUNCTION WITH** someone or something does not necessarily mean that one or something is *in harmony with* someone or something else. For instance, normally our body works in conjunction with our mind--but, unfortunately, not always in harmony with it.

## **IN CONNECTION WITH: because of association with; with reference to; associated with**

**IN CONNECTION WITH** is often used to express negative situations:

The man was arrested **in connection with** the crime.

However, this complex preposition is not restricted to things or negative situations:

The letter was written in **connection with** the agreement.

The scientist was mentioned **in connection with** Einstein.

The scientist was mentioned **in connection with** his theories.

Adjectives are used **in connection with** nouns and pronouns.

## **MODULO: depending on something**

The use of MODULO as a preposition is borrowed from arithmetic. Despite its mathematical provenance, it does not denote precise senses but rather the sense of "at the best estimate considering something," as in:

I'll arrive at 12, **modulo** rain.

Americans speak English (nowadays **modulo** the region ...).

His mother will let him go to the school trip, **modulo** his grades.

MODULO is often abbreviated to MOD, especially in mathematics.

## **AS FOR: with regards or reference to; concerning**

This idiomatic combination is used to designate someone or something that is somehow affected or influenced by something else when comparing the other clause:

Only twenty two teams will play now; **as for** the others, they will have to wait their turn.

The cat disappeared into the forest; **as for** the dog, she is home and doing fine!

AS FOR is often used interchangeably with AS TO. See also AS FAR AS in Chapter 3.

## **AS TO: as for; with respect to; according to; by**

The idiomatic combination AS TO is often used interchangeably with AS FOR:

The cat disappeared into the forest; **as to** the dog, she is home and doing fine!

However, AS TO is my choice when relating to future events:

The politicians are looking for clues **as to** which party will win the election.

**As to** our future, I believe we should marry!

Used in the sense of ACCORDING TO or BY:

You can classify them **as to** age and gender.

### **PER: according to; in accord with**

**Per** your suggestion I contracted the new secretary.

He stopped riding his motorcycle **per** his mother's request.

PER is also used in the sense of "for each" with rates, units and measurements:

He was stopped by the police after driving at 100 miles **per** hour.

The hotel room is \$80 **per** night **per** person.

### **AS PER: according to; in accord with**

The preposition PER can be combined with AS to form the idiomatic combination AS PER, which is interchangeable with the preposition PER in the senses of ACCORDING TO and IN ACCORD WITH:

The author made the changes **as per** the editor's request.

I contracted the new secretary **as per** your suggestion.

However, AS PER cannot be used in the sense of "for each" with rates, units or measurements. For instance, the sentence below is ungrammatical:

The hotel room is \$80 **as per** night **as per** person. ☺

## **Concession and Defiance of Facts**

### **DESPITE: in spite of; notwithstanding; regardless of; contrary to**

Also DESPITE THAT.

DESPITE and IN SPITE OF are pretty much interchangeable. However, there are those native speakers and authors who distinguish between them (myself included). For instance, I use DESPITE to show a fact or action that *is* contrastingly influenced by the noun or event introduced by the preposition. For example, in the sentences below, *leaving early* and *driving in the right direction* did not help me arrive in time for the game or for the show; *the*

*parents' expectations toward a specific career* did not hinder the children from choosing a different career:

I didn't make it to the game **despite** leaving early.

I wasn't able to arrive before the show started **despite** driving in the right direction.

The children chose another career, **despite** their parent's expectations.

The phrase DESPITE ONESELF is used to indicate that one did not mean to or should not do something, as in the examples below:

He fell in love with the princess **despite himself**.

The undercover agent blew her cover **despite herself**.

Sometimes (though not often) DESPITE is used with a *that*-clause:

**Despite** *that* he was also not feeling well, he gave the sick man his only bed.

He wouldn't lend even a penny to his friends, **despite** *that* he was a wealthy man.

DESPITE is often used with *the fact that*:

**Despite** *the fact that* they can't read music, they can play like no one can!

### **IN SPITE OF: without being affected or prevented by**

We use IN SPITE OF to introduce a fact or action that *is not* influenced by the noun or event introduced by the preposition. For instance, in the sentences below, *the heavy rain* and *driving in the wrong direction* did not influence the result of my intention to go to the game or to watch the show:

I still made it to the game **in spite of** the heavy rain.

I was able to arrive before the show started **in spite of** driving in the wrong direction.

Though perhaps a little wordy, sometimes IN SPITE OF is used with *the fact that*:

**In spite of** *the fact that* he was not prepared, he came first in the competition.

### **IN DESPITE OF: in defiance of**

IN DESPITE OF is considered by most authors as a nonstandard alternative for IN SPITE OF. However, it is not at all rare to find it used in the sense of

defiance--and in this sense, the "obstacle" to be conquered must be very clear:

They made the crossing **in despite of** the rough seas.

**In despite of** the tigers, he will walk alone through the forests of Siberia.

## CONTRARY TO: despite; in defiance of; against

**Contrary to** his wishes, his wife made the will in favor of her mother.

Their children may choose another career, **contrary to** their parent's expectations.

## NOTWITHSTANDING: in spite of; despite; for all

Also NOTWITHSTANDING THAT.

NOTWITHSTANDING as a preposition is used both in academic and everyday contexts, often as a synonym for DESPITE and IN SPITE OF. However, some native speakers and ESL/EFL teachers consider NOTWITHSTANDING a "lighter" version of the two, preferring to use it as an indirect or direct introduction to abstract nouns, as in:

He was fined for driving too fast. **Notwithstanding** that, the police seized his car!

We decided to work together, **notwithstanding** our differences.

Now compare the three examples below:

- a) **In spite of** the thunderstorm, we decided to go further.
- b) **Despite** the good weather, we weren't able to go further.
- c) **Notwithstanding** his recommendation, we decided to go further.

In (a), the speaker chose IN SPITE OF because the thunderstorm was not enough to prevent us from going further. In (b), the speaker used DESPITE because, even with the good weather, we were not capable to go further. In (c), the speaker chose NOTWITHSTANDING as a "lighter" option, because the noun *recommendation* does not represent an apparent threat or obstacle.

NOTWITHSTANDING used with a *that*-clause:

He is still rich, **notwithstanding** *that* he has lost most of his fortune.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

He is still rich, **notwithstanding** he has lost most of his fortune.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*:

He is still rich, **notwithstanding** *the fact that* he has lost most of his fortune.

NOTWITHSTANDING is composed of the words *not* and the present participle *withstanding* (from the verb *withstand*) and thus considered a participial preposition.

### **MAUGRE: in spite of; notwithstanding**

Also MAUGER. Archaic or regional.

**Maugre** the rigors of the season, the king's army received orders to advance.

### **FOR ALL: notwithstanding**

The prepositional phrase FOR ALL is frequently used in place of (and is less formal than) the preposition NOTWITHSTANDING:

**For all** his accomplishments, he is a very humble person.

They have been training hard, but, **for all** their efforts, they are losing the game.

### **REGARDLESS OF: without taking into consideration; in spite of**

He continued drinking, **regardless of** the opposition from his wife.

**Regardless of** your reasons, we can't postpone the event.

### **IRRESPECTIVE OF: regardless of; independent of**

The organization is open to all people **irrespective of** race or religion.

Tourists entering the country must have a visa, **irrespective of** the duration of their visit.

### **IN THE TEETH OF: against; in spite of the difficulties of**

They were sailing their boat **in the teeth of** a bitter wind.

He decided that, **in the teeth of** the recession, he was going forward with his project.

Sometimes IN THE TEETH OF is used in the same sense of AT THE MERCY OF:

He left his money under the mattress **in the teeth of** inflation.

## **AT THE MERCY OF: without protection against**

He left his money under the mattress **at the mercy of** inflation.

The mountain villagers are living **at the mercy of** a dangerous volcano.

AT THE MERCY OF is often used in the sense of an "involuntary" defiance of facts:

The Congo gorillas are **at the mercy of** the guerrillas.

## **PACE: despite the opinion of; with an apology to; contrary to**

I strongly believe, **pace** my colleagues, that we should change our priorities.

Now, **pace** the arguments of the enthusiasts, we shall resume the debate.

For Einstein (**pace** Newton), space and time were not absolute.

The three senses described in the examples above can also be translated into the sense of "with all due respect to" or "with the permission of," as in:

**Pace** the president, I believe the country should go in another direction.

I believe, **pace** the author, that we should change the last part of the story.

## **AT THE EXPENSE OF: causing harm to; to the detriment of; ignoring**

They seek favors from Congress **at the expense of** the taxpayers.

He decided to be a full-time athlete **at the expense of** his social life.

There are those who seek their own advantage **at the expense of** others.

## **Reason, Cause and Consequence**

### **BECAUSE OF: by reason of; as a result of; due to**

The complex preposition BECAUSE OF can be easily distinguished from its counterpart BY VIRTUE OF, as well as from *due to* used as an adjective. BECAUSE OF is frequently used to contribute meaning to the verb that comes before the preposition:

Prices soared **because of** the strong demand.

The new airplanes can resist storms **because of** their excellent project.

In the examples above, the verbs soar and resist were modified by BECAUSE OF; that is, these sentences answer the questions "Why did prices soar?" and "Why can the new airplanes resist storms?"

BECAUSE OF is also often used at the beginning of a sentence:

**Because of** their excellent project the new airplanes can resist storms.

BECAUSE OF can be used when designating positive or negative senses as part of the reason why an action or event occurs. For instance, you could say:

The new planes crashed **because of** their lousy projects.

The new planes are safer **because of** their excellent projects.

Compare BECAUSE OF with BY VIRTUE OF and DUE TO.

### DUE TO: **because of; caused by**

As a preposition, DUE TO is interchangeable with BECAUSE OF:

Prices soared **due to** the strong demand.

He had to retire **due to** his advanced age.

The new planes crashed **due to** their lousy projects.

**Due to** their excellent project the new airplanes can resist storms.

However, some grammarians say that *due to* can only be used as an adjective. Under this assumption, we can distinguish between the adjective *due to* and the preposition BECAUSE OF when we are able to replace *due to* with *caused by*; this usually occurs when a form of the verb *be* (*is, am, was, were* and *are*) is used to help designate an action or event that precedes the preposition. For example:

His pain is *due to* a bad back from too much driving.

The erratic driving was *due to* the man's drinking problem.

On the other hand, the use of *due to* as an adjective in the sense of "caused by" is not possible at the beginning of a sentence (it is possible, however, with the use of DUE TO as a preposition). For example:

a) The delay of my trip was *due to* bad weather.

b) **Due to** bad weather I delayed my trip.

If you test the sentence in (b) by replacing DUE TO with *caused by*, the result will be an illogical construction:

*Caused by* bad weather I delayed my trip. <sup>⊗</sup>

According to most dictionaries--as well as to common usage--DUE TO can be used interchangeably with BECAUSE OF or OWING TO as a perfect complex preposition.

DUE TO is more formal than its "cousin" BECAUSE OF.

### **OWING TO: because of; due to; as a consequence of**

The preposition OWING TO may designate a positive or a negative situation:

Many employees were laid off **owing to** the economic recession.

Many new employees were contracted **owing to** the economic boom.

**Owing to** the economic crisis, production will fall for the first time in many years.

OWING TO is more formal than its "cousin" BECAUSE OF.

### **BY VIRTUE OF: because of (in a positive sense)**

Also IN VIRTUE OF.

BY VIRTUE OF is often used interchangeably with BECAUSE OF:

The new airplanes can resist storms **by virtue of** their excellent project.

My parents are Canadian, but I am a U.S. citizen **by virtue of** being born in the U.S.

However, BY VIRTUE OF is always preferred to BECAUSE OF when designating a positive sense as part of the reason why an action or event occurs. For instance, you could say (a), but it would be awkward to say (b):

The new planes crashed **because of** their lousy projects.

The new planes crashed **by virtue of** their lousy projects. <sup>⊗</sup>

It would be better to use BY VIRTUE OF if the airplane projects were considered successful, as in the example below:

The new planes are safer **by virtue of** their excellent projects.

### **IN CONSIDERATION OF: because of; in return for; in view of**

Normally, IN CONSIDERATION OF is used to give a positive meaning to the clause, as opposed to IN THE FACE OF, which helps describe a negative content in one of the clauses in contrast with the preceding or the following clause:

**In consideration of** your excellent work, I will give you a bonus.

The company received a prize **in consideration of** its excellent service.

### **BY REASON OF: because of; due to**

BY REASON OF is more formal than--and interchangeable with--BECAUSE OF:

The jury found him not guilty **by reason of** insanity.

**By reason of** financial need, the student received a discount.

BY REASON OF is often replaced by DUE TO:

**Due to** financial need, the student received a discount.

### **ON ACCOUNT OF: because of**

ON ACCOUNT OF is often used interchangeably with BECAUSE OF:

The case was dropped **on account of** his bad health.

The case was dropped **because of** his bad health.

Note that we do not have to use ON ACCOUNT OF in a negative sense:

The evenings have been beautiful **on account of** the good weather.

### **AS A CONSEQUENCE OF: as a result of**

Also IN CONSEQUENCE OF.

AS A CONSEQUENCE OF and AS A RESULT OF are often interchangeable:

**As a consequence of** global warming, the ice shelf is on the brink of breaking up.

There will be less consumption **as a consequence of** inflation.

Costs are rising **in consequence of** inflation.

### **AS A RESULT OF: as a consequence of**

Despite being interchangeable with AS A CONSEQUENCE OF and IN CONSEQUENCE OF, the complex preposition AS A RESULT OF is a little less formal than its counterparts:

**As a result of** global warming, the ice shelf is on the brink of breaking up.

There will be less consumption **as a result of** inflation.

### **BY DINT OF: as a result of; because of; by means of**

BY DINT OF is more formal than AS A RESULT OF, BECAUSE OF and BY MEANS OF:

**By dint of** his talents he rose to prominence.

The hotel is a notable place **by dint of** its history.

They got themselves into trouble **by dint of** bad judgment.

### **BASED ON: because of; on the basis of**

BASED ON, as a complex preposition, is often criticized by grammarians, especially when used as a "clause-initial dangling participle." For example, consider (a) and (b):

a) **Based on** a dictionary research, the author wrote a historical essay. ⊗

b) They estimate the value of the property, **based on** appraisal, to be \$30 million!

In (a), most writing and style manuals do not accept BASED ON to start this sentence because it suggests that "the author is based on a dictionary research," which would not make sense (authors cannot be based on something). However, in (b), BASED ON is used as a complex preposition modifying *estimate the value of the property* (and not *value of the property*). Nevertheless, constructions such as (c) are common and normally accepted:

c) **Based on** our research, the study predicts an increase in consumer spending.

In (c), BASED ON is correctly modifying *the study*--the subject of the main

clause.

## **ON THE BASIS OF: based on or justified by something**

Also ON THE BASIS THAT.

It is not uncommon to find ON THE BASIS OF used interchangeably with BASED ON or with the prepositional verb *based on*. Actually, ON THE BASIS OF is often used where BASED ON would be considered a "dangling modifier" (see BASED ON above). Consider the examples below:

They were selected **on the basis of** their abilities.

Their selection was *based on* their abilities.

ON THE BASIS OF is normally used to start a sentence or after the verb *to be*, as a substitute for BASED ON; it is also often used after a noun (e.g., *selection on the basis of their abilities*) or after a verb other than the verb *to be*. The prepositional verb *based on* is generally used after a noun or after a form of the verb *to be*. The three forms below are common constructions:

It was **on the basis of** the new facts that the court was able to decide.

The court's decision was *based on* the new facts.

It was a decision *based on* the new facts.

Used (without the preposition OF) with a *that*-clause:

The prisoner was transferred **on the basis that** he was a disruptive and defiant prisoner.

## **ON THE STRENGTH OF: on the basis of; because of the force of**

Also ON THE STRENGTH THAT.

ON THE STRENGTH OF often justifies facts or actions by means of a concrete event. A sentence with ON THE STRENGTH OF normally tries to introduce a positive context:

You can't stop the war exclusively **on the strength of** a handshake.

He was licensed to practice medicine **on the strength of** a foreign diploma.

ON THE STRENGTH OF is also used to before abstract nouns or noun phrases:

He crossed that dangerous region **on the strength of** his faith.

Used (without the preposition OF) with a *that*-clause:

People vote for their candidates **on the strength that** they agree with their ideas.

### **ON THE GROUNDS OF: on the basis of; because of**

Also ON THE GROUNDS THAT.

ON THE GROUNDS OF is normally used to justify or explain an action:

He was released from prison **on the grounds of** a general amnesty.

A sentence with ON THE GROUNDS OF does not always have a positive meaning:

He asked people not to vote for his opponent **on the grounds of** her religion.

Used (without the preposition OF) with a *that*-clause:

He refused to answer **on the grounds that** his answers would incriminate him.

### **THANKS TO: as a result or the help of; due to; because of**

THANKS TO most often expresses a positive situation:

The company did well this year, **thanks to** the employees.

**Thanks to** a booming economy people have been traveling more.

**Thanks to** the good weather, everyone had a great time at the beach.

However, THANKS TO is also used in a negative (and often sarcastic) context:

We lost the game **thanks to** another own goal!

### **ON THE SCORE OF: because of; on the basis of**

No one could reasonably complain of the car **on the score of** price.

She was executed in the eighteenth century **on the score of** witchcraft.

ON THE SCORE OF is often used when referring to several or different "scores" (i.e., because of different reasons) in the sense of "situations," as in:

He met opposition in many scores: **on the score of** politics, **on the score of** religion ...

## **IN ANSWER TO: as a reaction or reply to**

She ran **in answer to** the doorbell.

He sent a letter of application **in answer to** an advertisement.

## **IN RESPONSE TO: as an answer or reaction to**

She didn't know what to say **in response to** him.

**In response to** your question, please read the attached information.

Fans packed in front of the record store **in response to** her new album.

IN RESPONSE TO is not exactly interchangeable with IN ANSWER TO. For example, the sentences below are grammatically correct but only one of them makes sense:

The dog ran **in answer to** the doorbell. ☺

The dog ran **in response to** the doorbell.

## **IN RETURN FOR: as a response or a reward for something**

**In return for** her kindness they sent her a gift.

He expects to make a lot of money **in return for** his investment.

## **Purpose and Benefit**

### **FOR THE PURPOSE OF: for a specific reason or intention**

I went to Washington **for the purpose of** meeting the president.

The government is reclassifying all properties **for the purpose of** taxation.

### **WITH AN EYE TO: with an objective, hope or intention**

The idiomatic complex preposition WITH AN EYE TO is not exactly interchangeable with WITH ONE EYE ON, but it is pretty much interchangeable with WITH A VIEW TO:

**With an eye to** the future, the company is building cars with nanotechnology.

The airline company bought new small planes **with an eye to** the regional routes.

The girl, **with an eye to** becoming an author, found a job with the local newspaper.

## **WITH ONE EYE ON: giving partial or strategic attention to**

The idiomatic WITH ONE EYE ON is not exactly interchangeable with WITH AN EYE TO:

**With one eye on** China, India moves into Africa.

This year the country did almost everything **with one eye on** the world cup.

## **WITH A VIEW TO: with the intention or hope of**

This idiomatic complex preposition, often used before gerunds, is less definite or "precise" than IN ORDER TO. There is hope or intention that something will happen--but not certainty. WITH A VIEW TO is interchangeable with WITH AN EYE TO:

She is studying medicine **with a view to** becoming a physician.

He always plays the lottery **with a view to** getting rich.

It was constructed **with a view to** durability.

Below, *with a view to* is not to be confused with the phrase WITH A VIEW TO:

The rooms have private balconies, many *with a view to* the park.

## **IN ORDER TO: to; for the purpose of (doing something)**

Also IN ORDER THAT and IN ORDER FOR.

IN ORDER TO, as opposed to WITH A VIEW TO, can almost always be replaced by the simple preposition TO (when not before a negative infinitive), with the verb after the preposition in the infinitive form (*in order + the infinitive clause*). For example:

**In order to** become a physician, she will have to study medicine.

Society must change **in order to** avoid an ecological catastrophe.

IN ORDER TO is also more "instrumental" than WITH A VIEW TO. For instance, according to the examples above, "you have to study medicine if

you want to be a physician," and "if society does not change, there will be an ecological catastrophe."

If used with a negative infinitive, IN ORDER (NOT) TO cannot be replaced by the preposition TO. For instance, the example in (c) below is ungrammatical:

- a) **To** become a physician, she will have to study medicine.
- b) **In order not to** fail the exam, she will have to study harder.
- c) **To not to** fail the exam, she will have to study harder. ☺

IN ORDER (without the preposition TO) used with a *that*-clause has the force of a compound conjunction meaning *so that*. For example:

You may drive my car **in order that** I may drive yours.

For those who like grammar, the sentence above is also known as a "complex sentence" made possible with the intervention of the "complex subordinator" *in order that* (for instance, simple subordinating conjunctions are *because*, *if*, *that*, etc.; complex subordinating conjunctions are *such that*, *even though*, *in order that*, etc.). However, note that, to create a complex sentence, we could use any subordinate conjunction, such as *if*, for example, as in *You can drive my car if I can drive yours*.

IN ORDER THAT is often replaced by IN ORDER FOR, which, ultimately, can be replaced by the simple preposition FOR placed before a noun phrase:

**In order for** the computer to work, you have to turn it on.

What do I need **in order for** me to go to Mexico?

## **IN HOPES OF: with the intention or expectation of; wishing**

The king lived **in hopes of** a son and heir.

Automakers began hiring **in hopes of** a better year.

He traveled to Washington **in hopes of** meeting the president.

The sense of "expecting something" designated by IN HOPES OF seems overwhelmingly more present than the sense of "wishing." For instance, you would probably not travel to Washington simply *wishing* to meet the

president if you were a government official or a celebrity; more likely you would travel *with the expectation* or *with the intention* of meeting the president (if you had a previous appointment!).

### **OUT FOR: ready for; with the intention of; with a disposition for**

The country is **out for** war.

The banks are all **out for** profit.

### **FOR THE SAKE OF: for the benefit of; in the interest of**

The idiomatic FOR THE SAKE OF is normally used in a positive sense:

The new minister was hired **for the sake of** transparency.

**For the sake of** the country, I hope they are elected.

However, sometimes we use FOR THE SAKE OF in the sense of "in the interest of" without necessarily conveying a positive sense:

The injured athlete traveled **for the sake of** money.

I believe they were shouting **for the sake of** shouting!

### **FOR THE BENEFIT OF: in order to be useful to; for the sake of**

FOR THE BENEFIT OF is often used in a positive sense:

The use of plastic will be reduced **for the benefit of** society.

The money is to be used **for the benefit of** public roads.

However, sometimes the "beneficiary" may not deserve the action:

This new law works **for the benefit of** the criminals and against society.

### **FOR THE LOVE OF: for the sake of**

**For the love of** grammar, do not use the wrong preposition!

Please, **for the love of** nature, do not build a bonfire in the National Park.

### **IN THE INTEREST OF: for the benefit of**

Also IN THE INTERESTS OF.

The lawyer is acting **in the interest of** her client.

**In the interest of** the truth, he was asked to show the original documents.

## **IN FAVOR OF: in the interest of; in order to be replaced by**

Also IN FAVOUR OF (British).

The judge ruled **in favor of** the accused.

The king abdicated **in favor of** his young brother.

The actor retired from acting **in favor of** a new career.

## **Opposition, Support and Help**

### **ANTI: opposed to; against**

As a prefix, *anti* is generally used with a hyphen when followed immediately by a noun without an article, as in:

She is *anti*-military.

As a preposition, ANTI does not take the hyphen:

She is **anti** a lot of things.

He is **anti** the construction of the new stadium.

### **PRO: in favor of; for**

PRO is a prefix generally used with a hyphen when followed immediately by a noun without an article, as in:

He is *pro*-military.

As a preposition, PRO does not take the hyphen:

She is **pro** a woman's right to choose.

He is **pro** the construction of the new stadium.

## **COURTESY OF: with the permission of; thanks to the generosity of**

Also BY COURTESY OF.

Images **courtesy of** the National Gallery.

She will be traveling **by courtesy of** her sponsors.

## **IN SUPPORT OF: in favor of; corroborating; for the benefit of; in order to provide assistance for**

They wrote articles **in support of** green energy.

He produced substantial evidence **in support of** his claims.

The band will start a world tour **in support of** their latest album.

The pilots dropped air-to-ground weapons **in support of** the troops.

## **IN AID OF: in support of; in order to provide assistance for**

IN AID OF is often used interchangeably with IN SUPPORT OF.

She wrote an essay **in aid of** religion.

The country has programs **in aid of** the poor.

The country has programs **in support of** the poor.

## **Inclusion, Exclusion and Exception**

### **INCLUDING: inclusive of; also comprising**

Also INCLUDING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, INCLUDING is also a "participial preposition" and is often used interchangeably with COUNTING:

They visited several historical landmarks in London, **including** the London Tower.

They are not happy with the trip, but everybody will have to go, **including** them.

Today everybody is going to help around the house, **including** the children.

However, when dealing with numbers I prefer to use COUNTING (see next entry).

INCLUDING used with a *that*-clause:

The singer made specific demands--**including that** his room be supplied with a piano.

They made revelations about the candidate, **including that** he was mentally unstable.

Sometimes (though very seldom), the connective *that* is omitted:

They made revelations about the candidate, **including** he was mentally unstable.

Also used with *the fact that*, as in:

They made revelations about him, **including the fact that** he was mentally unstable.

## **COUNTING: including; considering**

Also COUNTING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, COUNTING is also used as a "participial preposition" and is often interchangeable with INCLUDING. However, I always use COUNTING when designating numbers, sums, taxes, etc.:

We have five children--**counting** our two dogs!

The airfare was \$182, not **counting** taxes and fees.

Besides the sense of "considering," the preposition COUNTING used with a *that*-clause also has the sense of "believing" or "since," as in:

I told her the secret, **counting that** she would not make use of it against me.

I'm surprised by the quality of his service, **counting that** he doesn't like to work!

Sometimes (though very seldom), the connective *that* is omitted:

I told her the secret, **counting** she would not make use of it against me.

Also used with *the fact that*:

I'm surprised by the quality of his service, **counting the fact that** he doesn't like to work.

COUNTING is often used after *not* and *without* and followed by *the fact that* in the sense of "not taking into account," for contrast and emphasis:

The pizza was very spicy, without **counting the fact that** it was too small.

She is beautiful and intelligent--not **counting the fact that** she is a great friend.

## **FEATURING: with the special participation or inclusion of**

Sometimes the present participle FEATURING plays the role of a preposition:

He made a movie **featuring** my favorite star.

She made a movie **featuring** classical music.

The restaurant has tasty recipes **featuring** yogurt.

## INCLUSIVE OF: including; taking into account

INCLUSIVE OF is the converse of EXCLUSIVE OF:

Our price is \$999 **inclusive of** all taxes.

The book has 300 pages, **inclusive of** a preface and index.

## INVOLVING: pertaining to; including

The company presented the project **involving** the new technology.

The police department is heading an investigation **involving** three suspects.

## COMPLETE WITH: complete by the inclusion of; having something or someone as an additional part

The party was fantastic, **complete with** children and adults.

The house is finished, **complete with** furniture and a dog.

COMPLETE WITH is often used in, but not restricted to, the middle of sentences, occurring also in sentence-initial positions:

**Complete with** furniture, the house will be available in the summer.

## IN ADDITION TO: besides; as well as

IN ADDITION TO is often used interchangeably with BESIDES--but not always. We use BESIDES when designating a sense of exception (compare the next entry):

**In addition to** studying English, he works full time.

He plays basketball **in addition to** football.

No one **in addition to** the driver was injured in the accident. ☺

The last sentence above does not work with IN ADDITION TO because it has a sense of exception. BESIDES would be the appropriate choice.

IN ADDITION TO is often used with the complement *the fact that*, as in:

**In addition to** *the fact that* his salary is low, the rate of promotion in the firm is very slow.

### **BESIDES: in addition to; apart from; except for**

Also BESIDES THAT.

Compare with IN ADDITION TO.

**Besides** studying English, he works full time.

He plays basketball **besides** football.

No one **besides** the driver was injured in the accident.

BESIDES with a *that*-clause has a sense of "in addition to the fact that," as in:

The reason for biking--**besides that** it is good for the health--is the fun!

**Besides that** she is a princess, she is pretty.

Also used with *the fact that*:

**Besides the fact that** she is a princess, she is pretty.

### **AS WELL AS: in addition to**

John, **as well as** the girls, is playing soccer.

**As well as** new shoes, Bill will be wearing a new watch.

Swimming, **as well as** surfing and sailing, is a great sport.

AS WELL AS is often used as a conjunction, meaning "and" or "and in addition":

She is intelligent *as well as* pretty.

Now consider the sentence below:

John runs *as well as* Mary.

The example above may have two interpretations. In the first sense, the word *as* is used to denote that "John is *as* good a runner as Mary"; the second sense is that of "addition," as in "John runs *and* Mary runs too."

## CUM: combined with

CUM is usually written with a hyphen between nouns to help describe a combination of related meanings. For instance, if you have a house that is also your office; if someone is a student and also a friend of the teacher; if two companies have a dual relationship, and so on:

I love my house-**cum**-office.

She is his disciple-**cum**-friend.

Those two companies have competitive-**cum**-cooperative relations.

## PLUS: with the addition of; in addition to

Two **plus** two equals four.

Your salary **plus** benefits is a great pay.

A preposition **plus** a noun is a prepositional phrase.

## LESS: minus

Your total is \$100 **less** the discount of 20%. You will have to pay \$80.

You will receive a full refund **less** the advance payments.

## MINUS: reduced by; without

Four **minus** two equals two.

The floor is **minus** a carpet. We will bring a new carpet soon.

He left the band. It was not a pleasant experience recording the album **minus** him.

## EXCLUDING: not including

Also EXCLUDING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, EXCLUDING is also used as a "participial preposition," as in the examples below:

The members of her team (**excluding** her) were all professionals.

Pet store animals, **excluding** the fish, are being removed from the mall.

Some three thousand soldiers, **excluding** the police personnel, were deployed.

EXCLUDING is not to be confused with EXCEPT; that is, if you want to emphasize an *exception*, make sure to use EXCEPT. For example, the sentence in (a) has a sense of "not including" whereas the example in (b) tells that John was the only one absent from the party:

- a) There were 3000 people on the ship, **excluding** the crew members.
- b) Everyone was at the party **except** John.

EXCLUDING used with a *that*-clause:

**Excluding** *that* the speed control does not work, the car seems really new.

Nothing is known about her, **excluding** *that* she is from an island in the Pacific Ocean.

Sometimes (though very seldom), the connective *that* is omitted:

Nothing is known about her, **excluding** she is from an island in the Pacific Ocean.

Also used with *the fact that*, as in:

**Excluding** *the fact that* the speed control does not work, the car seems really new.

## BATING: **excluding**; **with the exception of**; **except**

Also BATING THAT. Archaic or regional.

Originally a present participle verb form, BATING is also used as a "participial preposition," as in the sentences:

There were 3000 people on the ship, **bating** the crew members.

**Bating** some inevitable effects of age, I am still in good physical form.

BATING used with a *that*-clause:

His watch is as good as mine, **bating** *that* mine was cheaper!

I know nothing about this writer, **bating** *that* she is gaining reputation.

Sometimes the connective *that* is omitted:

His watch is as good as mine, **bating** mine was cheaper!

Also used with *the fact that* in the sense of "except for," as in:

I know nothing about this writer, **bating** *the fact that* she is gaining reputation.

BATING is also used in the sense of "given" or "considering," as in:

She knew she would have to work hard, **bating** she was new in the office.

## **EXCLUSIVE OF: not including; not taking into account**

EXCLUSIVE OF is the converse of INCLUSIVE OF.

The book has 300 pages, **exclusive of** a preface and index.

All rates are per room, per night, double occupancy, **exclusive of** breakfast.

## **EXCEPT: not including; but; other than**

Also EXCEPTED and EXCEPT THAT.

EXCEPT is pretty much interchangeable with EXCEPT FOR--but not always.<sup>9</sup> When used for inclusion/exclusion, both prepositions make sense (see next entry):

I know everyone in the party **except** John.

I know everyone in the party **except for** John.

The office is open every day **except** Sundays.

The office is open every day **except for** Sundays.

EXCEPT used with a *that*-clause:

I would go with you, **except that** I don't have any time.

That was all he knew about her, **except that** she was his boss!

Sometimes the connective *that* is omitted:

I would go with you, **except** I don't have any time.

Occasionally EXCEPTED is used in place of EXCEPT FOR to help describe a past event:

**Excepted** the children everyone went to the nightclub.

Seldom (and redundantly) used with *the fact that*:

His origin is unknown, **excepted** *the fact that* he was a member of the gang.

As a rule, use EXCEPT or EXCEPT FOR (see next entry).

### **EXCEPT FOR: not included; if it were not for**

EXCEPT FOR is frequently used for "partial" inclusion or exclusion:

**Except for** the doors, the house was completely painted.

The bride has all her clothes on, **except for** her shoes.

When used in a conditional sense, EXCEPT FOR is better when starting a sentence:

**Except for** the sergeant, the soldier would be dead.

**Except for** the storm, I could have gone to the beach.

EXCEPT is not possible when used in a conditional sense:

**Except** the sergeant, the soldier would be dead. ⊗

### **EXCEPTING: not including; excluding**

Also EXCEPTING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, EXCEPTING is also known as a "participial preposition" that has the status of a conjunction--including EXCEPTING THAT.

They sold everything they had, **excepting** their car!

**Excepting** the period of monsoons, boating is reasonably safe.

EXCEPTING used with a *that*-clause:

I know nothing about him, **excepting that** he is a great athlete.

Your guitar looks a lot like mine, **excepting that** it has twelve strings.

The connective *that* is often omitted:

Your guitar looks a lot like mine, **excepting** it has twelve strings.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*--resulting in a wordy construction:

You guitar looks a lot like mine, **excepting** the fact that it has twelve strings.

Sometimes EXCEPTING is used in the sense of "unless," as in:

The insect does not shine at night **excepting** if exposed to the sun during the day.

### **WITH THE EXCEPTION OF: except (for); not including; saving**

Also WITH THE EXCEPTION THAT.

Everyone, **with the exception of** John, decided to go.

**With the exception of** Antarctica, Australia is the driest continent.

WITH THE EXCEPTION (without the preposition OF) is often used with a *that*-clause:

I agree with the senator, **with the exception that** I believe we can have the vote today.

She resembles her mother, **with the exception that** she has her father's nose!

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF is seldom (and wordily) used with *the fact that*:

We have no details of his life, **with the exception of the fact that** he married in March.

### **WITH THE EXCLUSION OF: with the exception of; except**

Also WITH THE EXCLUSION THAT.

**With the exclusion of** a small strip of desert, the area is very rich in vegetation.

Rates apply to orders shipped within the U.S., **with the exclusion of** Hawaii and Alaska.

Because of its sense of "exception," WITH THE EXCLUSION OF is not exactly interchangeable with TO THE EXCLUSION OF. For instance, the sentences above would not have the same meaning if used with TO THE EXCLUSION OF.

WITH THE EXCLUSION (without the preposition OF) is seldom used with a *that*-clause:

All images are identical, **with the exclusion that** the colors have been changed.

He says he is a millionaire, **with the exclusion that** he never spent money on anything.

WITH THE EXCLUSION OF is seldom (and wordily) used with *the fact that*:

They are identical, **with the exclusion of** *the fact that* the colors have been changed.

## TO THE EXCLUSION OF: excluding all others

TO THE EXCLUSION OF is used to designate "the intent of excluding" something or someone from something else, and it is not exactly interchangeable with the sense of exception of WITH THE EXCLUSION OF:

She accepted her religion **to the exclusion of** all others.

The matter was passed on to the Commission, **to the exclusion of** the court.

The power shall be transferred to the grandmother, **to the exclusion of** the father.

## BUT: except; not including; other than; save

Also BAR and BUT THAT.

The word *but* is often used as a conjunction:

They went to a pizzeria, *but* they didn't eat any pizza!

However, BUT is also a preposition. For example, consider the two sentences below; in (a), BUT is used as a preposition and in (b) as a conjunction:

- a) They all went to the beach **but** John.
- b) They all went to the beach, *but* John didn't go in the water.

Note that, as a preposition, it was not necessary to use a comma before BUT in (a), while as a coordinating conjunction, in (b), the comma was used to help *but* join two standalone sentences. Compare the examples in (c) and (d) below:

- c) The store is open every day **but** Sunday.
- d) The store is open every day, *but* Sunday is the busiest day of the week.

In (c), the preposition BUT tells us that the store opens every day *except* on Sundays; in (d), the conjunction *but* helps convey the idea that the store *also* opens on Sundays (actually, Sunday is the busiest day!). Note that the

conjunction *but* does not carry the same sense of "exception" as the preposition BUT.

BAR is sometimes (however seldom) used as a synonym for BUT:

The heroes were forgotten by everybody **bar** me.

She is prepared to walk away from their marriage with nothing **bar** her own earnings.

The preposition BUT used with a *that*-clause is rare and often analyzed by grammarians as a "complex conjunction." For example:

He had no fear **but that** he would lose.

I cannot deny **but that** I love her.

The sentences above could be rephrased without BUT as:

He had no fear *that* he would lose.

I cannot deny *that* I love her.

However, sometimes we cannot avoid BUT:

I nothing know **but that** I nothing know.

The sentence above would be ungrammatical if rephrased as:

I nothing know *that* I nothing know. ☺

From *Advanced Lessons in English Grammar: For Use in Higher Grammar Classes*, by William Henry Maxwell, PhD. (1891):

"In the sentence,

The train would have arrived on time, **but** that it met with an accident.

the noun clause *that it met with an accident* is the object of the preposition BUT, and the clause and preposition together form an adverbial modifier of the verb *would have arrived*."

Occasionally we see BUT used with *the fact that* in the sense of *except that*:

They agree on little **but the fact that** they will lose the election!

BUT + *that* is often used before a noun clause in the expression *no doubt but that*:

There is *no doubt but that* the power of women was the cause of many divorces.

The example above could be rephrased without BUT as:

There is *no doubt that* the power of women was the cause of many divorces.

BUT is often used idiomatically after words such as *anything, nothing, nobody, no one, everyone, everybody, anywhere, and all*. The noun or noun phrase that follows the preposition will always indicate the exception:

Don't you watch **anything but** cartoons?

For two days she ate **nothing but** bananas!

He looked in the office and found **nobody but** his secretary.

**Everyone but** the crew was onboard the ship at the time of departure.

A year ago I would have wanted to be **anywhere but** here. But now I'll never leave,

Special tires are used on **all but** a few models for better traction and gas mileage.

### **BUT FOR: if it were not for; except for**

The idiomatic combination BUT FOR used as a preposition has a slightly different meaning from the preposition BUT. For instance, we may use BUT FOR as an alternative conditional clause or in the sense of exception. Consider the following examples:

**But for** your sacrifice, I wouldn't have been able to graduate.

The house was absolutely empty **but for** the cat.

### **EX: without; not included; without extra charges until removed from**

- a) You will receive \$1000 **ex** bonus.
- b) The importation will cost you \$5000 **ex** taxes.
- c) Sales of large quantities will be made **ex** warehouse.

In (a) and (b), you will still receive a bonus and you are still expected to pay the taxes; in (c), sales of large quantities made **ex-warehouse** mean that the

buyer's charges begin from the warehouse exit. Now consider the example below:

- d) The goods will cost you \$7000 **ex** warehouse.

In commercial and trade terms, when goods are *imported ex something (ex dock, ex Port of Importation, ex warehouse, etc.)*, the seller quotes a price which includes the cost of the goods and any other costs necessary to place the goods on dock at the port of importation, in the specified warehouse, etc. The buyer must collect the goods at the port of importation within the free time allowed by the port and by the agreement with the seller before this free time expires. Thus, as an example, the use of EX in sentences (c) and (d) shows two slightly different meanings: in (c), the buyer *will go to the seller's warehouse* to collect the merchandize at a lower price; in (d), the merchandize *will be delivered* to a warehouse for storage at the port of destination.

### **UNLESS: except; without**

UNLESS is a conjunction that is also used as a preposition, as exemplified in the sentences below. However, the use of the preposition EXCEPT or WITHOUT in place of UNLESS normally does the trick:

There is nothing there, **unless** misery.

There is nothing there, **except** misery.

You cannot enter the party **unless** showing your ID.

You cannot enter the party **without** showing your ID.

UNLESS is also used with FOR in the sense of exception:

Avoid repeating words (**unless for** emphasis).

### **SANS: without**

He came **sans** explanation and **sans** news!

**Sans** tolerance no peaceful coexistence is possible.

SANS is not very often used unless context makes it unavoidable.

## **SAVE: except; but**

Also SAVE FOR and SAVE THAT.

The imperative verb SAVE functions as a preposition, meaning EXCEPT or BUT:

Everybody slept **save** her.

I spent all week working **save** Sunday.

**Save for** this species, wolves are very rare in this part of the country.

The prepositions EXCEPT and BUT are often used in place of SAVE, except when you need to use two or more prepositions to express a similar meaning:

I work every day--**except** Friday afternoon--**save** holidays and Sundays.

SAVE used with a *that*-clause:

He was in good spirits, **save that** he looked pale and thin.

Sometimes, the connective *that* is omitted:

He was in good spirits, **save** he looked pale and thin.

SAVE is also used in the sense of the conjunction *since* or *because*:

The man could do nothing, **save** he was weak and frail.

## **SAVING: except; with the exception of; with due respect to**

Also SAVING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, SAVING is also used as "participial preposition." Do not confuse the preposition SAVING in the sentence below with the verb *save*. Here, nobody is *saving* the whales--at least for now:

You can transport all the animals, **saving** the whales.

The example above could be rephrased as:

You can transport all the animals, **with the exception of** the whales.

SAVING used in the sense of "with due respect to":

**Saving** your knowledge, I am sorry to tell you that I don't agree with your point of view.

The sentence above could begin like this:

With due respect to your knowledge, I am sorry to tell you that...

SAVING used with a *that*-clause:

Little is known about this king, **saving** *that* he was a great warrior.

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*, as in:

Little is known about this king, **saving the fact that** he was a great warrior.

Sometimes SAVING is used in the sense of the conjunction *since* or *because*:

She appeared before court and pleaded for her son, **saving** he was a good boy.

## BARRING: excepting; except for; unless; assuming

Also BARRING THAT.

Originally a present participle verb form, BARRING is also used as "participial preposition," as in:

Nobody **barring** the priest knows the secret.

**Barring** rain, we will go to the beach tomorrow.

If you wish to use BARRING, make sure not to confuse its meaning with the sense of "exclusion" instead of the sense of "exception" (i. e., do not confuse the preposition BARRING with the verb *barring*). The same is true for the preposition EXCLUDING. For example, the sentences in (a) and (b), without a comma, may have the sense of "blocking John from entering the party" or "excluding John from participating in the party." If John was simply not at the party, use the example in (c):

- a) Everyone was at the party **barring** John.
- b) Everyone was at the party **excluding** John.
- c) Everyone was at the party **except** John.

Using a comma before the preposition in the examples above would help, but we could also rephrase the examples in (a) and (b) as:

**Barring** John, everyone was at the party.

**Excluding** John, everyone was at the party.

BARRING is also used with a *that*-clause in the sense of "except that" (a), "except for the fact that" (b), "assuming," or "unless something has happened before" (c):

- a) She was so like her mother, **barring** *that* she was taller.
- b) **Barring** *that* his father was an Irishman, he had no ties to the country.
- c) You may drink all the beer, **barring** *that* someone hasn't already drank it!

The connective *that* is often omitted:

You may drink all the beer, **barring** someone hasn't already drank it!

Also used redundantly with *the fact that*:

**Barring the fact that** his father was an Irishman, he had no ties to the country.

As with all old prepositions, BARRING should not be used very often--barring that the context makes it unavoidable!

## BARE OF: lacking or without

Large tracts of land once covered with forests are **bare of** trees.

Now **bare of** shoes and **bare of** socks, the two children stepped into the water.

## ABSENT: without; sans

**Absent** a miracle, our team will lose.

You cannot go forward with the investment **absent** a plan.

You could also use WITHOUT for the examples above.

## IN DEFAULT OF: in the absence of; without

This complex preposition is used mainly--but not exclusively--as a legal term:

**In default of** the eldest son, the eldest daughter will be the monarch.

The dispute will be settled by the court **in default of** agreement between the parties.

## **FOR LACK OF: due to the absence of; for not having**

FOR LACK OF often (but not necessarily always) conveys a negative reason:

The minister was fired **for lack of** transparency.

The dog was named "Dog" **for lack of** a better name.

He talks to a doll to compensate **for lack of** friends.

## **FAILING: if something is not possible; in the absence of**

There is another day available in March, **failng** this appointment.

**Failing** an agreement, the employees will go on strike.

Note that the first example could be rephrased as "there is another day available in March if this appointment is not possible for you," and the second sentence could be rephrased as "in the absence of an agreement, the employees will go on strike." However, in both cases this participial preposition has a sense of failure, as in:

**Failing** the attempt to land, there will be no fuel for a second approach.

## **DEHORS: foreign to; not included; not part of**

DEHORS is chiefly a legal term:

The claim is **dehors** the contract.

Any other obligation is **dehors** the instrument.

The value of a property is normally **dehors** a will.

## **FOREIGN TO: not part of; not known to; dehors**

FOREIGN TO is often--but not always--used in legal terms:

Is Christianity still **foreign to** Japan?

The claim is **foreign to** the contract.

Many prepositions are **foreign to** him.

## **OTHER THAN: besides; except; apart from**

I don't know anything about Mona Lisa **other than** her smile.

**Other than** a new look, the website will offer several exciting new features.

## **SHORT OF:** without; less than; other than; except for; before

Also SHY OF (chiefly British).

A car **short of** wheels will not move.

The diamond ring is nothing **short of** an investment.

While the job was executed well, it was **shy of** perfection.

There was nothing he could do **short of** comforting his friend.

The soldier died in combat just a few days **shy of** his birthday.

## **APART FROM:** with the exception of; besides; in addition to

Also ASIDE FROM (chiefly British).

APART FROM is not always interchangeable with IN ADDITION TO:

Everyone was watching the game, **apart from** the children.

**Apart from** the salary, the job is great!

In both examples above, APART FROM indicates a sense of exception ("they were watching the game, but the children were not"; "the job was great, but the salary was not so great").

APART FROM can often be used interchangeably with IN ADDITION TO or BESIDES:

What games do you play, **apart from** football and basketball?

**Apart from** the salary, workers receive housing allowance and health insurance.

APART FROM is frequently (and wordily) used with the complement *the fact that*, as in:

**Apart from** *the fact that* his salary is low, the rate of promotion in the firm is very slow.

## **Substitution**

### **IN LIEU OF:** in place of; instead of

IN LIEU OF is often interchangeable with IN PLACE OF. In fact, some people believe it is more practical to use IN PLACE OF for all cases. However, I like to distinguish between them by using IN LIEU OF in a non-spatial sense, as in the following examples:

I gave gifts **in lieu of** money.

She opted for fish **in lieu of** eating meat.

### **IN PLACE OF: as a substitute for; instead of; in lieu of**

As seen above, IN PLACE OF is pretty much interchangeable with IN LIEU OF--in fact much more used in all cases. I usually distinguish between them by using IN PLACE OF in sentences that have some kind of spatial appeal, as in (b) and (c):

- a) I prefer this test **in place of** the other.
- b) Pronouns can be used **in place of** nouns.
- c) The local television station uses the network logo **in place of** its own logo.

Nevertheless, the construction below would work well with both prepositions:

**In place of** playing the piano, I now play the guitar.

**In lieu of** playing the piano, I now play the guitar.

However, despite the fact that I prefer to use IN PLACE OF when designating a spatial sense (and that the first sentence below would be grammatically correct with either form), the example would sound odd with IN PLACE OF because the complex preposition is following the noun *place*:

The children will stay in their friend's place **in lieu of** their own house.

The children will stay in their friend's place **in place of** their own house. ☺

### **INSTEAD OF: in place of; in lieu of; as an alternative to**

INSTEAD OF is often interchangeable with IN LIEU OF and IN PLACE OF--but not always. For instance, when IN PLACE OF designates substitution, INSTEAD OF is not an appropriate choice. The example in (a) is interchangeable with IN LIEU OF (but not with IN PLACE OF); the

preposition in (b) is interchangeable with both IN PLACE OF and IN LIEU OF; in (c), INSTEAD OF would be correct (though with a slightly different meaning), but it would not be the best choice in the sense of replacement:

- a) The children will stay in their friend's place **instead of** in their own house.
- b) **Instead of** playing the piano I now play the guitar.
- a) Pronouns can be used **in place of** nouns.

## **IN EXCHANGE FOR: as a compensation or payment for; in order to find a substitute for; against**

The traveler worked a few hours a day **in exchange for** food and accommodation.

The workers left the country **in exchange for** decent jobs.

What shall you give **in exchange for** your soul?

They are selling dollars **in exchange for** euros.

## **VICE: as a substitute for; in place of; instead of**

The first secretary was acting **vice** the mayor.

His salary will remain at PS200.000 per annum (**vice** the original salary of PS120.000).

## **Influence and Impact**

### **IN THE GRIP OF: affected by something; in the midst of a difficult situation**

This complex preposition is very idiomatic in the sense that it does not refer to the literal meaning of the noun *grip*. When I say "very" I want to mean that some complex prepositions are more idiomatic than others, as seen in previous chapters. For instance, I find IN THE GRIP OF more idiomatic than IN THE HEAT OF--which is more idiomatic than IN PLACE OF (which means that the level of idiomacity of each phrase also depends on one's individual interpretation of meaning).

The country is **in the grip of** protests.

Last summer the forests were **in the grip of** a fire.

The president found himself **in the grip of** controversy.

## **IN THE HEAT OF: affected by or at the height of a situation**

IN THE HEAT OF is used when someone acts unexpectedly when affected by something or when influenced by a particular situation. See IN THE GRIP OF above on the "level of idiomacticity" of some complex prepositions.

The mayor resigned **in the heat of** the scandal.

How can one prevent another from acting **in the heat of** the moment?

## **Responsibility and Control**

### **IN CHARGE OF: to have responsibility for**

The secret service is **in charge of** the safety of the president.

The president is **in charge of** the executive branch of the government.

The parents had to travel and left their older daughter **in charge of** the kids.

### **IN CONTROL OF: controlling; in command of; exercising authority over**

To be in control of something or someone does not necessarily mean that one is in command of, or exercising authority over, something or someone. For instance, a pilot may be in control of his aircraft but not necessarily be the captain; on the other hand, a general is normally in command (as well as in control) of his troops.

The company is **in control of** the oil spill.

The president is **in control of** the military.

Not all parents are **in control of** their children.

## **Means, Manner and Instrument**

### **BY THE HANDS OF: by or through the action of**

Also BY THE HAND OF, AT THE HANDS OF, and AT THE HAND OF.

She was cured **by the hands of** her doctors.

Criminals are not punished **by the hands of** the law but **at the hands of** the people.

## **BY FORCE OF: by means of; by dint of**

They removed the corrupt leader **by force of** arms.

I am in possession of the land **by force of** my title of property.

## **IN THE WAY OF: as a form of**

**In the way of** punishment, slaves were often confined in a work-house.

Sometimes IN THE WAY OF is used interchangeably with BY WAY OF:

The judge granted her relief **in the way of** a monthly pension.

However, the use of IN THE WAY OF is not recommended when designating a sense of "route." The example below would be better with the preposition VIA:

Mary went straight to Paris. John traveled **in the way of** London. ⊗

Both VIA and BY WAY OF can also be found in Chapter 4. See VIA also in Chapter 1

## **CARE OF: at the address of or to be delivered by**

CARE OF can be abbreviated to c/o.

I don't know what room he is in, so I sent the package **care of** the hotel.

To Mr. Smith, **c/o** Grand Hotel Tropical Dreams.

## **Homage and Representation**

### **IN HONOR OF: as an expression of respect or celebration for**

Also IN HONOUR OF (British).

This complex preposition may designate live or deceased people and animals. It is often used figuratively to designate objects or ideas:

The building was named **in honor of** my mother.

The president gave a speech **in honor of** the fallen heroes.

The city was decorated with flags **in honor of** the country.

## **IN MEMORY OF: as a tribute to**

This complex preposition is used to designate deceased people and animals. As with IN HONOR OF, it is also used figuratively to designate objects or ideas:

They build a statue **in memory of** democracy.

She wrote a poem **in memory of** her father.

He wrote a poem **in memory of** his dog.

## **IN MEMORIAM: dedicated to the memory of**

This (Latin phrase) preposition is used to designate deceased people. Do not confuse the use of IN MEMORIAM as a preposition with its use as a noun modifier, as in *They sell several types of in memoriam cards at that bookstore.*

When used as a preposition, IN MEMORIAM does not need a second preposition (as in *in memoriam of* or *in memoriam to*), or a comma or colon after the preposition:

**In memoriam** John Doe.

This book was written **in memoriam** Jane Doe.

## **IN DEFERENCE TO: in consideration of; as a homage to**

IN DEFERENCE TO is used to explain the reason for a special concession or homage, or to justify a courteous consideration for someone. It is often (but not always) preferred when designating people, mainly in a positive situation:

His sentence was suspended **in deference to** his age.

He was named John Jr. **in deference to** his father.

I would not use IN DEFERENCE TO in a negative sense, such as in the example below (even though the sentence would be grammatically correct), unless I meant to use it in a metaphorical way, as a joke or as a sarcastic comment:

He went to jail **in deference to** his bad habits.

Sometimes IN DEFERENCE TO indicates a negative event or circumstance,

but the sentence does not express a negative situation:

We gave her a break **in deference to** her bad weekend.

### **ON BEHALF OF: on behalf of; speaking for**

ON BEHALF OF and IN BEHALF OF are often used interchangeably, especially in American English--but there is a slight difference between them. See IN BEHALF OF.

The employees traveled **on behalf of** the company.

**On behalf of** my parents, I thank you for your support to my brother.

Speakers who like to distinguish between the two forms also use ON BEHALF OF meaning "on the part of," or "in place of," as in:

**On behalf of** the government, I apologize for our failures.

He accepted the award **on behalf of** the absent actress.

### **IN BEHALF OF: in the interests of; for the benefit of**

IN BEHALF OF is more often used to indicate purpose or benefit:

The money was used **in behalf of** the campaign.

We raised one million dollars **in behalf of** our cause.

The argument was used **in behalf of** the defendant.

See also ON BEHALF OF.

### **ON THE PART OF: on behalf of; shown or manifested by; from**

The complex preposition ON THE PART OF has two distinct uses. It may designate someone *representing* something or someone else--as in the first example below--or something *required from* or *done by* someone:

The agreement was signed by the minister **on the part of** the president.

We know there is an effort **on the part of** the government to keep its promises.

Publishers usually demand a great degree of proficiency **on the part of** the writers.

They suggested that there was criminal negligence **on the part of** the drunken driver.

## **IN THE NAME OF: by the authority of; on behalf of; for the sake of**

Dioceses are established **in the name of** the pope.

I made the reservation **in the name of** the company.

Murdering innocent people **in the name of** religion is unacceptable.

## **IN THE PERSON OF: as represented physically by**

Occasionally, the multi-word complex preposition IN THE PERSON OF is used to designate things, such as in the examples below:

Their surprise came **in the person** of a new puppy.

Their surprise came **in the person** of a new video.

Most of the time, however, these designations are better after IN THE SHAPE OF (see next entry). The use of IN THE PERSON OF is more adequate to indicate someone or something related to persons, even if fictional or non-existent in the physical world--but who can be physically represented in the real world:

Then, hope appeared **in the person of** an angel.

They found a new leader, **in the person of** the former governor.

## **IN THE SHAPE OF: represented by; by way of**

The following two examples, taken from IN THE PERSON OF above, would be better expressed with IN THE SHAPE OF:

Their surprise came **in the shape** of a new puppy.

Their surprise came **in the shape** of a new video.

In addition, with IN THE SHAPE OF you can have more flexibility in your choice of the (abstract or concrete) nouns that follow the preposition. For example:

Help came **in the shape of** a \$10000 bonus!

The best of the day came **in the shape of** her solo performance.

They introduced the instrumentalist for this month **in the shape of** a very gifted flautist.

Both IN THE PERSON OF and IN THE SHAPE OF are often preceded by the verb *come*.

### **IN TOKEN OF: as a sign or symbol of**

**In token of** his faith he painted a crucifixion.

They all had the same tattoo **in token of** their friendship.

The event described by IN TOKEN OF does not need to express a sense of permanency:

**In token of** their friendship they shook hands and parted.

### **AT THE INSTANCE OF: representing someone; as requested by**

Used chiefly--but not always--as a legal term:

The lawyer spoke **at the instance of** his client.

The journal is published **at the instance of** the school board.

## **Capacities and Quantities**

### **AS MUCH AS: up to (used with uncountable nouns)**

Some tests of English include the idiomatic phrase AS MUCH AS when comparing quantity (e.g., *She eats as much as her brother*) or when indicating a maximum (uncountable) amount, as a synonym of the complex preposition UP TO:

- a) She gained **as much as** 20 kilograms this year!
- b) He drinks **as much as** three bottles of water every day.

In (a), the speaker is referring to her resulted increase in weight--not to the countable plural noun *kilograms*; in (b), the speaker is referring to the mass noun *water*--not to the countable plural noun (bottles one cannot possibly drink a bottle!).

### **AS MANY AS: up to (used with countable nouns)**

Some tests of English include the idiomatic phrase AS MANY AS when comparing quantities (e.g., *They have as many dogs as we do*) or when

indicating a maximum (countable) amount, as a synonym of the complex preposition UP TO:

Some reports said there were **as many as** 132 people on board the plane.

She read **as many as** 30 books this year!

### **TO THE TUNE OF: at the price, cost or measure of**

The mayor made a statue of himself **to the tune of** 1000 pounds sterling!

They are cutting trees down **to the tune of** 100 tons a day!

### **IN EXCESS OF: at or of more than; higher than; more than**

The car was caught traveling **in excess of** 150 mph!

The institution has a staff **in excess of** 1000 people.

Prices should fall because the supply is **in excess of** demand.

The book about prepositions sold **in excess of** a million copies!

### **UPWARD OF: more than**

Also UPWARDS OF.

**Upward of** 1500 migrants arrive at the border every day.

Domestic workers work long hours, often **upwards of** 10 hours per day!

### **INUNDATED WITH: overwhelmed with**

This prepositional verb<sup>10</sup> became a little more popular when President George W. Bush used it figuratively during a television interview on NBC:

The president said we were **inundated with** threats!

INUNDATED WITH is also often used with concrete nouns:

He was **inundated with** emails on his birthday.

The city was **inundated with** tens of thousands of protesters.

### **Need and Search**

### **WANTING: lacking; without; in need of**

This participial preposition does not necessarily indicate that someone or something *wants* someone or something else. WANTING is not to be understood as a literal expression. For instance, the bottle in the example below does not have a lid, but this does not mean that it wants one (however, every author wants a publisher):

a bottle **wanting** a lid

an author **wanting** a publisher

## IN NEED OF: needing something or someone

She was **in need of** a friend.

poor people **in need of** food

earthquake victims **in need of** medical attention

## IN SEARCH OF: looking for; seeking

I came **in search of** the beauty of the country and found it in its people.

The film is the story about an orphan who is **in search of** his parents.

## SEEKING: **in need of; searching for**

Originally a present participle verb form, SEEKING is often used as a preposition:

All the people **seeking** shelter went to the church.

Investors **seeking** advice went to the bankers.

People **seeking** doctors went to the hospital.

## IN PURSUIT OF: **in quest of; in search for**

You can be IN PURSUIT OF one or more persons, things or ideas.

The police are **in pursuit of** the thief.

He never stopped being **in pursuit of** happiness.

The country resorted to blackouts **in pursuit of** energy efficiency.

## Infringement

## **IN VIOLATION OF: in breach of; in transgression of**

One can be IN VIOLATION OF a rule, a principle, a custom, a feeling, and so on (compare with IN CONTRAVENTION OF and with IN BREACH OF):

He acted **in violation of** her trust.

He ignored his only son, **in violation of** the ties of affinity between them.

Millions of people buy, sell and consume drugs **in violation of** the law.

## **IN CONTRAVENTION OF: in violation of; in disobedience of**

IN CONTRAVENTION OF is often interchangeable with IN BREACH OF and IN VIOLATION OF and is used mainly--but not exclusively--as a legal term:

He acted **in contravention of** the terms of the agreement.

They revealed her secrets **in contravention of** her rights.

He acted without the consent of the company and **in contravention of** his orders.

## **IN BREACH OF: in violation of; in transgression of**

IN BREACH OF is often used in legal terms:

The lawyer was **in breach of** confidentiality.

The company was fined for being **in breach of** its contract.

The complex prepositions IN BREACH OF and IN CONTRAVENTION OF are not always interchangeable with the complex preposition IN VIOLATION OF. For instance, I would use the example in (a) but not the examples in (b) or (c):

a) Joining the military was not **in violation of** her faith.

b) Joining the military was not **in breach of** her faith. ☺

c) Joining the military was not **in contravention of** her faith. ☺

## **Penalty and Risk**

## **AT PERIL OF: at the risk or because of the risk or imminent danger of**

People were forced to flee their homes **at peril of** floods.

**At peril of** my life, I decided to cross the enemy lines.

Also IN PERIL OF, in the sense of "in danger of":

You can contribute to save gorillas **in peril of** extinction.

**FOR FEAR OF: because one is afraid of; to avoid the risk of**

Also FOR FEAR THAT.

She doesn't swim in the ocean **for fear of** sharks.

**For fear of** drowning, he decided to learn how to swim!

FOR FEAR (without the preposition OF) used with a *that*-clause:

I hid behind the tree **for fear that** he would see me.

I ran to arrive on time **for fear that** the doors would be closed!

Sometimes (though not too often) the connective *that* is omitted:

I ran to arrive on time **for fear** the doors would be closed!

**ON PAIN OF: subject to the penalty of; under the risk of**

Also UNDER PAIN OF.

The poor woman accused of witchcraft was **on pain of** punishment of 100 lashes.

They had to prove their innocence before the king, **on pain of** losing their heads.

## Miscellaneous Phrases

**QUA: as; in the capacity of**

He was a good soldier, but **qua** leader he was a failure.

The conductor analyses music **qua** music, not music as an entertainment.

**Qua** person he will always be a democrat, but **qua** president, he is a republican!

**BY THE NAME OF: called; known as; as**

He is known **by the name of** "Rambo."

an island **by the name of** Lanka

a sport **by the name of** soccer

## **SHORT FOR: abbreviated to; expressed in a shorter form**

His name is Bill, **short for** William.

The word "exam" is **short for** "examination."

## **IN KEEPING WITH: appropriate for; preserving; in harmony with**

Was his behavior **in keeping with** his position?

**In keeping with** our tradition, we should promote fraternity and brotherhood.

**In keeping with** the season, we will celebrate this month with a harvest festival.

Conversely, OUT OF KEEPING WITH is often used in the opposite sense:

His behavior was **out of keeping with** his position.

## **IN RESTRAINT OF: imposing restrictions to something**

Some governments have laws **in restraint of** liberty.

Every agreement **in restraint of** the marriage of any person other than a minor is void.

## **WORTH: having some or a specified value**

It's not a risk **worth** taking!

The beautiful park is **worth** a visit.

His house is **worth** \$10 million!

Used with the noun *while* to indicate time or effort to be dedicated to something:

She thought it was not **worth** her while to visit the park.

I don't think I'm going; it's not **worth** the while!

## **IN THE PAY OF: to be employed or hired by**

IN THE PAY OF is generally used in a negative sense:

The judge was **in the pay of** the mob.

The spy was **in the pay of** the enemy country.

The use of *in the pay of* below is not to be confused with the preposition **IN THE PAY OF**:

There was a small percentage increase in the pay of privates in the Army.

See also **IN BED WITH** in Chapter 3.

### **IN THE THROES OF: in the middle of something difficult or unpleasant**

They are **in the throes of** a serious crisis.

He was born **in the throes of** the Great Depression.

**IN THE THROES OF** does not necessarily indicate a negative situation:

They are **in the throes of** a negotiation to sell the company.

### **IN WITH: on good or friendly terms with someone**

The president was **in with** the crowd.

They were **in with** Arabs and Israelis!

**IN WITH** does not always indicate a positive situation:

The president is **in with** the lobbyists.

The policeman was **in with** the thieves.

## **Reading the Story**

### **The Best Party Ever**

Last Friday I went to a party. It was my best friend Larry's birthday celebration. An excellent gathering, **complete with** good food, drinks, and beautiful people, "**except for** me," my friends always say jokingly.

My pals call me "Andy" (**short for** Andrew), and every time we meet at Larry's place we have a great time listening to some of his new work. Larry, **as well as** his brother Bill, is a musical producer, and his sound studio is inundated with old tapes and digital demos that are really awesome.

Together, we have a band known **by the name of** *New Versound*.

Presently, the band is **in pursuit of** its dream, **in search of** an opportunity to play on a grand stage for thousands of people. However, and **judging by** the quality of our songs, I am pretty sure we will soon make it--unless we are not able to come up with the money (**to the tune of** several thousand dollars!) **in order to** buy new and more sophisticated equipment.

**With an eye to** performing for a live audience (right now **pending** approval by the local music arena), the band practiced playing at Larry's party and has been very busy rehearsing in his studio on the weekends--**given** that everybody has a full-time job.

The party went on for hours--with lots of good music--and we were all having a great time, **in spite of** the rain that started pouring right before our planned party breakfast at 5 a.m.! However, at this very moment, Larry called our friends to gather around the sound system. **Contrary to** everyone's expectations, he dimmed the lights and started playing the country song "Love of My Life."

No one knew, but that was Larry's sign for me to ask my girlfriend-**cum** greatest pal to dance. Lisa found this situation kind of strange, because we don't usually dance--but she accepted right away. And then, **in the heat of** the moment, I got on one knee, pulled the ring out of my pocket and popped the question, saying: "You are the love of my life. Will you marry me?" She answered "Yes!" and we kissed while everyone cheered and applauded.

Before the party was over, we all danced at the sound of "Mama Mia" "I Gotta Feeling," "Thriller" "Party Rock Anthem," and "Candyman," among other nice ones. My future wife and I couldn't stop having fun--all **thanks to** our fantastic friends who never cease to amuse us with their creativity and energy. I see them **more like** brothers and sisters **than** friends!

However, **despite** the fact that we were still having a good time, **considering** that we were all exhausted, at about 7 a.m. Larry announced the end of the party and everyone had to leave.

This was the best party ever--**courtesy of** my good friend Larry.

## **Practicing the Best Scenario**

Think carefully before answering the ten questions below. First, read all the questions, trying to relate them to the correct prepositions, and only then start

from the first one. If two prepositions are possible, use the most appropriate one, but do not repeat a preposition. I recommend that you review the chapter every time you have a doubt, since many prepositions may convey similar meanings. Make sure to use the prepositions introduced in this chapter only.

- 1) The man is \_\_\_\_ his parole. He may have to go back to prison!
- 2) The actor is \_\_\_\_ his contract because he didn't show up for the shoot.
- 3) \_\_\_\_ fire, call the fire department.
- 4) \_\_\_\_ the latest census, the world population is around 7 billion.
- 5) He did the violent act \_\_\_\_ the moment! Normally he is a calm person.
- 6) \_\_\_\_ reading, she likes to swim!
- 7) \_\_\_\_ paying her salary, they also paid for her travel expenses.
- 8) \_\_\_\_ bringing proof of residency, you cannot apply for the special discount.
- 9) The problem happened \_\_\_\_ electronic malfunction.
- 10) Some high-ranked officers, \_\_\_\_ colonels and generals, will attend the ceremony.

## **Answers to *Practicing the Best Scenario***

### ***Chapter 1***

- 1) TO; ON
- 2) ALONG; AROUND
- 3) ACROSS
- 4) THROUGHOUT
- 5) AT
- 6) INTO
- 7) ONTO; ON
- 8) VIA
- 9) BY; THROUGH
- 10) ABOUT

### ***Chapter 2***

- 1) ABOVE
- 2) IF FRONT OF
- 3) OVER
- 4) BEFORE
- 5) ACROSS
- 6) ACROSS; FROM
- 7) UNDERNEATH
- 8) UNDER
- 9) BENEATH
- 10) BEYOND

### ***Chapter 3***

- 1) IN; ON
- 2) AT
- 3) INSIDE
- 4) ALONGSIDE
- 5) WITH
- 6) BETWEEN
- 7) OUTSIDE
- 8) WITHIN
- 9) NEXT TO
- 10) CLOSE TO; FAR FROM

### ***Chapter 4***

- 1) ON
- 2) ON
- 3) OFF
- 4) IN; OUT OF
- 5) ON TOP OF
- 6) BY; ON
- 7) BY; BY; BY

- 8) BY; BY
- 9) BY; IN
- 10) BY; ON; ON.

## ***Chapter 5***

- 1) INTO
- 2) AROUND
- 3) THROUGHOUT
- 4) DURING
- 5) ON
- 6) FROM; TO
- 7) FOR
- 8) IN
- 9) WITHIN
- 10) AFTER

## ***Chapter 6***

- 1) IN VIOLATION OF
- 2) IN BREACH OF
- 3) IN CASE OF
- 4) ACCORDING TO
- 5) IN THE HEAT OF
- 6) BESIDES
- 7) IN ADDITION TO
- 8) UNLESS
- 9) DUE TO
- 10) SUCH AS

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WORTH

# **PREPOSITIONS**

## **THE ULTIMATE BOOK**

### **MASTERING ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS**

**For International Students**

**THE KEY TO FLUENCY IN ENGLISH CONVERSATION**

**REVISED EDITION**

A guide for developing successful speakers, *Prepositions: The Ultimate Book* proposes a pedagogical approach to the prepositions of the English language. Designed for all levels of students for easy comprehension and quick learning, over 2000 examples of simple and complex (phrasal) prepositions and prepositional idioms help readers understand and create the intended message. By learning how to correctly link words to their specific meanings, students will be able to build fluency and accuracy while working with creativity and autonomy.

Organized by function and subject, with over 400 prepositions and prepositional entries—including more than 100 illustrations—this book helps students identify and use context cues through a variety of examples of real-world situations.

Whether you are in the English classroom or out in the professional world, *Prepositions: The Ultimate Book* is an indispensable and comprehensive reference tool for all international learners seeking to communicate more effectively and naturally in the English language.



<sup>1</sup> The combination of the verb *step* + the particle *in* is also used to form the phrasal verb (and new semantic unit) *step in*, meaning "to intervene."

<sup>2</sup> A term introduced to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) by Larry Selinker in 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Note that neither IN nor ON are true directional prepositions (see *A Word on IN and ON*).

<sup>4</sup> Some speakers say *through the bridge* and *across the tunnel*. However, if you are not a native speaker of English, I suggest that you follow the rationale used here.

<sup>5</sup> We may say **on** *the continent* (as we say **on** *the island*) when we refer to one of the seven land masses of the globe--not as a geopolitical concept--as in *He was educated in Oxford; he also traveled on the Continent, where he became fluent in French and German.*

<sup>6</sup> Note that "AT the top" and "AT the bottom" do not specify an *exact* place (see more about AT in this chapter). "ON the top" and "ON the bottom" are often used, but they could also mean the trimmed edge of the page, outside its functional area.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to these considerations, if a large commercial vehicle is not working or not being used, such as a commercial bus stopped in a garage or at the bus terminal, for example, the choice of "IN the bus" or "ON the bus" will depend on the speaker's perception of the referent at the moment of speech; that is, IN the bus as a location or ON the bus, traveling.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/news/releases/2010/10-106.html>, last accessed on February 28, 2011, and  
[http://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/shuttle/flyout/closeout.html](http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/shuttle/flyout/closeout.html), last accessed on February 28, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Please, do not confuse the words *except*, *excepted* and *excepting* (meaning "exception") with the words *accept*, *accepted* and *accepting* (meaning "acceptance").

<sup>10</sup> This book does not focus on prepositional verbs. For more prepositional verbs, see the Contemporary Edition of *The Correct Preposition: How to Use It - A Complete Alphabetic List*, by Josephine Turck Baker, which was originally published in 1911.

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WITHINSIDE: within; inside

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NEXT DOOR TO: in the adjacent room or building; next to; close to

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TOGETHER WITH: along with; as well as

IN COMPANY WITH: together with

BEHITHER: on this side of

ANENT: alongside; beside; about

FORNENST: alongside; opposite

NIGH: near

FORBY: near; past

IN THE VICINITY OF: near the specified place or region

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF: near; within the range or region of

IN THE PROXIMITY OF: near; at a nearby place; not far from

IN SIGHT OF: at an angle or distance that makes possible the view of;  
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ALOOF FROM: distant from

BETWEEN: in the space separating two (or more) referents

BETWIXT, ATWIXT, and ATWEEN: between

AMONG: mixed with; surrounded by or included in a group

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Reading the Story

Practicing the Best Scenario

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A Word on the “Platform Theory”

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BY: the method or instrument of transportation

BY MEANS OF: via; through; using

BY WAY OF: via; by means of; as a form of

VIA: by means of; through a particular medium

Reading the Story

Practicing the Best Scenario

#### Chapter 5 : Prepositions of Time

Specific Time, Events and Periods of Time

IN, ON, and AT: location in time

Time and the Calendar

The Notion of Interval

INTO: advancing to the next or a later period of time

ONTO: extending an interval of time

ON THE STROKE OF: at the exact time or event

BEGINNING: starting in, on, or at a period or event

AS FROM or AS OF: beginning at the specified time or date

COME: when the specified time is reached; in, on or at

ALONG: within a certain length of a period of time

DURING: within the duration of a period or event

IN THE COURSE OF: during

IN COURSE OF: going through the process of

IN THE PROCESS OF: during; in course of; in the course of  
IN THE ACT OF: in or during the process of  
THROUGHOUT: during the entire period or event specified  
THROUGH: within the specified period of time  
FOR: defining the duration or time of an event  
SINCE: from or between points or events in time  
SEEING: since  
FROM, TO, UNTIL, TILL: periods between endpoints of time  
UNTO: until  
WHILE: until  
ALONG WITH: at the same time as  
TOGETHER WITH: along with  
BY: not later than; before a particular time or event; during  
UP TO: not beyond the specified time  
OVER: throughout; during; until the end of; beyond  
UNDER: younger than; less than; in the process of  
INSIDE: (in) less than the specified period of time  
WITHIN: inside the limits of a period of time  
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Approximate Time, Events and Periods of Time  
TOWARD: approaching a specified time or event  
ABOUT & AROUND: at an approximate time  
ROUND ABOUT: at an approximate time or period of time  
ON THE POINT OF: getting ready or about to do something  
NEAR: not far away or a short period of time from  
NIGH: near; toward  
NEXT TO: in very close proximity to  
CLOSE TO: very near  
IN THE PROXIMITY OF: approaching the time of  
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IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF: in the proximity of  
CIRCA: at the approximate date of; about; around  
GONE: past; later than; older than  
Before and After Time, Events and Periods of Time  
PRIOR TO: before; until

PREVIOUS TO: before; prior to  
SUBSEQUENT TO: immediately or later after; following  
FOLLOWING: after; as a result of  
PENDING: until; while waiting for a future event; unless  
UPON: on or immediately after an event  
IN ADVANCE OF: before; ahead of; prior to  
AHEAD OF: awaiting; in advance of; before  
PAST: time after an hour, a period or an event  
BEFORE: earlier than; preceding the specified time or event  
AFORE or FORE: before  
ON THE HEELS OF: soon after; showing continuation  
AFTER: later than; following the specified time or event  
FAR FROM & AWAY FROM: distant time  
OUT OF: away from

#### Common Expressions of Time

AS FAR AS: to the specified extent or limit of time  
AS LONG AS: for a certain length of time; for no more than  
AS SOON AS: at the same point in time (or immediately after)  
SO SOON AS: at a different point in time  
AT THE TIME & AT THAT TIME: when & back then  
AT SUCH TIME: when  
AT ONE TIME: on one occasion  
AT THIS POINT IN TIME: now; at present  
AT THE MOMENT: currently; at the present time  
AT THE TOP OF THE HOUR: at the exact beginning of an hour  
FOR THE TIME BEING: at this time; temporarily  
BY NIGHT & BY DAY: during the night & during the day  
BY THEN: sometime before the end of the specified time  
BY THE TIME: when; not later than a particular event  
UNTIL THEN: before that time  
ON TIME: at the time arranged; not before; not after  
IN TIME: before the appointed time; early enough  
OUT OF TIME: with no more time left  
AT THE BEGINNING OF: starting at a particular point in time  
IN THE BEGINNING: in the early stages of a period or event  
AT FIRST: in the beginning  
AT THE END OF: at the point in time when something stops

IN THE END: finally; eventually; after some time

AT LAST: finally; after waiting for some time

BEFORE LONG: soon; in short time

FROM THEN ON: from that moment on

FROM TIME TO TIME: occasionally

Reading the Story

Practicing the Best Scenario

## Chapter 6 : Non-Spatial Prepositions

Prepositions and the that-clauses

Prepositions and the Pronoun That

Comparisons and Contrasts

AS: acting according to the quality or role of

LIKE: similar to; in the same way as; having the same qualities or characteristics of

SUCH AS: for example; of the particular kind or class as designated

UNLIKE: different from; not like or characteristic of

IN COMMON WITH: in the same way as

IN THE NATURE OF: like or similar to; a characteristics of

ON A PAR WITH: equal or equivalent to

ON A LEVEL WITH: on the same level of

OF THE ORDER OF: of approximately; similar to

IN COMPARISON WITH: comparing similar things

IN COMPARISON TO: comparing different things

COMPARED WITH vs. COMPARED TO: resemblance, difference vs. simile

IN PROPORTION TO: when comparing to; on the basis of

THAN: in comparison with

IN CONTRAST TO: as opposed to; comparing similar things

IN CONTRADICTION TO: in opposition to; against

IN THE FACE OF: because of; despite; contrasting with

VERSUS: against; in contrast with; as an alternative to

VIS-À-VIS: in relation to; as opposed to

IN IMITATION OF: as a copy of; imitating

Condition, Compliance and Association

CONSIDERING: taking something into consideration

GIVEN: taking something into consideration; considering

PROVIDED: given; on condition that

AS LONG AS: provided

ALLOWING FOR: given; considering

IN TERMS OF: with regard to; in relation to

ACCORDING TO: as stated or instructed by

IN ACCORDANCE WITH: in conformity with; governed by

IN ACCORD WITH: in harmony or agreement with

IN CONFORMITY WITH: according to a certain rule

PURSUANT TO: in conformity with; in accordance with

IN COMPLIANCE WITH: in agreement with; in conformity with

IN OBEDIENCE TO: in accordance with; according to

IN RELATION TO: in association or connection with; about

TOUCHING: about; considering; in relation to

REGARDING & CONCERNING: about; relating to

SPEAKING OF: regarding

IN REFERENCE TO: about; in relation to; concerning; regarding

FURTHER TO: in reference to; regarding

WITH REGARD TO: about; concerning; regarding

IN THE MATTER OF: as regards

WITH RESPECT TO: regarding; concerning; in relation to

DEPENDING ON: according to certain condition; pending

IN CASE OF: if something happens

IN THE CASE OF: regarding; in the instance of; in the matter of

IN THE EVENT OF: if or when something happens

ADMITTING: considering; accepting as true

JUDGING: considering; assuming

JUDGING BY: the reason why one believes something is true

ASSUMING: considering; supposing

SUPPOSING: assuming something as true

TAKING: given; considering

PRESUMING: supposing; in the case of

GRANTED: (if) assumed something as true

IN LIGHT OF: considering (new) information about something

IN THE LIGHT OF: considering (old) information about something

IN LINE WITH: in accordance with; similar to

PERTAINING TO: related to; that is part of

UP FOR: available for; considered for; considering something; accused of

RELATING TO: associated with; regarding; about  
RELATIVE TO: in connection with; regarding; concerning; in comparison with  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH: together with; connected with; in cooperation with  
IN CONJUNCTION WITH: in cooperation with; together with; in harmony with  
IN CONNECTION WITH: because of association with; with reference to; associated with  
MODULO: depending on something  
AS FOR: with regards or reference to; concerning  
AS TO: as for; with respect to; according to; by  
PER: according to; in accord with  
AS PER: according to; in accord with  
Concession and Defiance of Facts  
DESPITE: in spite of; notwithstanding; regardless of; contrary to  
IN SPITE OF: without being affected or prevented by  
IN DESPITE OF: in defiance of  
CONTRARY TO: despite; in defiance of; against  
NOTWITHSTANDING: in spite of; despite; for all  
MAUGRE: in spite of; notwithstanding  
FOR ALL: notwithstanding  
REGARDLESS OF: without taking into consideration; in spite of  
IRRESPECTIVE OF: regardless of; independent of  
IN THE TEETH OF: against; in spite of the difficulties of  
AT THE MERCY OF: without protection against  
PACE: despite the opinion of; with an apology to; contrary to  
AT THE EXPENSE OF: causing harm to; to the detriment of; ignoring  
Reason, Cause and Consequence  
BECAUSE OF: by reason of; as a result of; due to  
DUE TO: because of; caused by  
OWING TO: because of; due to; as a consequence of  
BY VIRTUE OF: because of (in a positive sense)  
IN CONSIDERATION OF: because of; in return for; in view of  
BY REASON OF: because of; due to  
ON ACCOUNT OF: because of  
AS A CONSEQUENCE OF: as a result of

AS A RESULT OF: as a consequence of  
BY DINT OF: as a result of; because of; by means of  
BASED ON: because of; on the basis of  
ON THE BASIS OF: based on or justified by something  
ON THE STRENGTH OF: on the basis of; because of the force of  
ON THE GROUNDS OF: on the basis of; because of  
THANKS TO: as a result or the help of; due to; because of  
ON THE SCORE OF: because of; on the basis of  
IN ANSWER TO: as a reaction or reply to  
IN RESPONSE TO: as an answer or reaction to  
IN RETURN FOR: as a response or a reward for something  
Purpose and Benefit  
FOR THE PURPOSE OF: for a specific reason or intention  
WITH AN EYE TO: with an objective, hope or intention  
WITH ONE EYE ON: giving partial or strategic attention to  
WITH A VIEW TO: with the intention or hope of  
IN ORDER TO: to; for the purpose of (doing something)  
IN HOPES OF: with the intention or expectation of; wishing  
OUT FOR: ready for; with the intention of; with a disposition for  
FOR THE SAKE OF: for the benefit of; in the interest of  
FOR THE BENEFIT OF: in order to be useful to; for the sake of  
FOR THE LOVE OF: for the sake of  
IN THE INTEREST OF: for the benefit of  
IN FAVOR OF: in the interest of; in order to be replaced by  
Opposition, Support and Help  
ANTI: opposed to; against  
PRO: in favor of; for  
COURTESY OF: with the permission of; thanks to the generosity of  
IN SUPPORT OF: in favor of; corroborating; for the benefit of; in order to provide assistance for  
IN AID OF: in support of; in order to provide assistance for  
Inclusion, Exclusion and Exception  
INCLUDING: inclusive of; also comprising  
COUNTING: including; considering  
FEATURING: with the special participation or inclusion of  
INCLUSIVE OF: including; taking into account  
INVOLVING: pertaining to; including

COMPLETE WITH: complete by the inclusion of; having something or someone as an additional part

IN ADDITION TO: besides; as well as

BESIDES: in addition to; apart from; except for

AS WELL AS: in addition to

CUM: combined with

PLUS: with the addition of; in addition to

LESS: minus

MINUS: reduced by; without

EXCLUDING: not including

BATING: excluding; with the exception of; except

EXCLUSIVE OF: not including; not taking into account

EXCEPT: not including; but; other than

EXCEPT FOR: not included; if it were not for

EXCEPTING: not including; excluding

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF: except (for); not including; saving

WITH THE EXCLUSION OF: with the exception of; except

TO THE EXCLUSION OF: excluding all others

BUT: except; not including; other than; save

BUT FOR: if it were not for; except for

EX: without; not included; without extra charges until removed from

UNLESS: except; without

SANS: without

SAVE: except; but

SAVING: except; with the exception of; with due respect to

BARRING: excepting; except for; unless; assuming

BARE OF: lacking or without

ABSENT: without; sans

IN DEFAULT OF: in the absence of; without

FOR LACK OF: due to the absence of; for not having

FAILING: if something is not possible; in the absence of

DEHORS: foreign to; not included; not part of

FOREIGN TO: not part of; not known to; dehors

OTHER THAN: besides; except; apart from

SHORT OF: without; less than; other than; except for; before

APART FROM: with the exception of; besides; in addition to

Substitution

IN LIEU OF: in place of; instead of  
IN PLACE OF: as a substitute for; instead of; in lieu of  
INSTEAD OF: in place of; in lieu of; as an alternative to  
IN EXCHANGE FOR: as a compensation or payment for; in order to find a substitute for; against  
VICE: as a substitute for; in place of; instead of  
Influence and Impact  
IN THE GRIP OF: affected by something; in the midst of a difficult situation  
IN THE HEAT OF: affected by or at the height of a situation  
Responsibility and Control  
IN CHARGE OF: to have responsibility for  
IN CONTROL OF: controlling; in command of; exercising authority over  
Means, Manner and Instrument  
BY THE HANDS OF: by or through the action of  
BY FORCE OF: by means of; by dint of  
IN THE WAY OF: as a form of  
CARE OF: at the address of or to be delivered by  
Homage and Representation  
IN HONOR OF: as an expression of respect or celebration for  
IN MEMORY OF: as a tribute to  
IN MEMORIAM: dedicated to the memory of  
IN DEFERENCE TO: in consideration of; as a homage to  
ON BEHALF OF: on behalf of; speaking for  
IN BEHALF OF: in the interests of; for the benefit of  
ON THE PART OF: on behalf of; shown or manifested by; from  
IN THE NAME OF: by the authority of; on behalf of; for the sake of  
IN THE PERSON OF: as represented physically by  
IN THE SHAPE OF: represented by; by way of  
IN TOKEN OF: as a sign or symbol of  
AT THE INSTANCE OF: representing someone; as requested by  
Capacities and Quantities  
AS MUCH AS: up to (used with uncountable nouns)  
AS MANY AS: up to (used with countable nouns)  
TO THE TUNE OF: at the price, cost or measure of  
IN EXCESS OF: at or of more than; higher than; more than

UPWARD OF: more than

INUNDATED WITH: overwhelmed with  
Need and Search

WANTING: lacking; without; in need of

IN NEED OF: needing something or someone

IN SEARCH OF: looking for; seeking

SEEKING: in need of; searching for

IN PURSUIT OF: in quest of; in search for

Infringement

IN VIOLATION OF: in breach of; in transgression of

IN CONTRAVENTION OF: in violation of; in disobedience of

IN BREACH OF: in violation of; in transgression of

Penalty and Risk

AT PERIL OF: at the risk or because of the risk or imminent danger of

FOR FEAR OF: because one is afraid of; to avoid the risk of

ON PAIN OF: subject to the penalty of; under the risk of

Miscellaneous Phrases

QUA: as; in the capacity of

BY THE NAME OF: called; known as; as

SHORT FOR: abbreviated to; expressed in a shorter form

IN KEEPING WITH: appropriate for; preserving; in harmony with

IN RESTRAINT OF: imposing restrictions to something

WORTH: having some or a specified value

IN THE PAY OF: to be employed or hired by

IN THE THROES OF: in the middle of something difficult or  
unpleasant

IN WITH: on good or friendly terms with someone

Reading the Story

Practicing the Best Scenario

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Bibliography

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