

# Use of PREPOSITIONS

## **PREPOSITIONS GUIDELINE 1, WORD GROUPS:**

The first guideline is to use prepositions with certain word groups. These preposition word groups will be:

1. Verb Word Groups,
2. Adjective Word Groups
3. Other Word Groups, including adverbs and expressions.

## **PREPOSITIONS GUIDELINE 2, SITUATIONS:**

The second guideline is to think of prepositions with regard to:

1. Time
2. Place
3. Movement.

Let's look at these two guidelines:

### **1. PREPOSITIONS WITH WORD GROUPS**

#### **1. VERB – PREPOSITION WORD GROUPS**

When a verb is followed by a sentence, it is usually accompanied by a specific preposition that is always used with that verb. This is generally a **phrasal verb** and you should remember phrasal verbs as a word group: verb + preposition.

Here are some examples of phrasal verbs or verb+prepositions word groups, that may be used in IELTS:

- **PHRASAL VERBS WITH FOR** – *Account for, answer for, care for, come for, look for, pay for, send for and settle for.*
- **PHRASAL VERBS WITH FROM** – *Come from, hear from, keep from, protect from, recover from, suffer from.*
- **PHRASAL VERBS WITH IN** – *Believe in, fit in, give in, work in, specialise in, succeed in.*
- **PHRASAL VERBS WITH OF** – *Approve of, die of, dispose of, smell of, think of.*
- **PHRASAL VERBS WITH ON** – *Agree on, based on, build on, concentrate on, decide on, pass on, rely on.*
- **PHRASAL VERBS WITH TO** – *Agree to, answer to, apologise to, get to, go to, introduce to, refer to, reply/respond to, talk to.* (Don't confuse phrasal verbs with to with those verbs that are followed by a to-infinitive.)
- **PHRASAL VERBS WITH WITH** – *Agree with, argue with, break with, come with, deal with, go with, live with, meet with.*

## 2. ADJECTIVE – PREPOSITION WORD GROUPS

Adjectives are used to describe nouns; people, places or things. Adjectives are commonly grouped with a preposition to connect the two nouns/pronouns in a sentence. Here are some common adjective + preposition word groups:

- **ADJECTIVES WITH ABOUT** – *angry about, anxious about, enthusiastic about, excited about, serious about.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH AT** – *amazed at, angry at, bad at, disappointed at, good at, shocked at, skilled at, successful at, surprised at.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH BY** – *amazed by, delighted by, fascinated by, impressed by, inspired by, shocked by, surprised by.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH OF** – *afraid of, ashamed of, aware of, find of, full of, proud of.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH FOR** – *eligible for, excellent for, famous for, known for, prepared for, respect for, responsible for, ready for, suitable for.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH FROM** – *Absent from, different from, free from, made from, protected from.*

- **ADJECTIVES WITH IN** – *experienced in, interested in, involved in, skilled in, successful in.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH OF** – *afraid of, aware of, conscious of, jealous of, proud of, typical of.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH TO** – *accustomed to, addicted to, committed to, dedicated to, opposed to, similar to.*
- **ADJECTIVES WITH WITH** – *angry with, annoyed with, associated with, confronted with, disappointed with, familiar with, pleased with.*

### 3. PREPOSITIONS WITH OTHER WORD GROUPS

- **WORD GROUPS WITH AS** – *as long as, as soon as, such as, as well as, in so far as, just as.*
- **WORD GROUPS WITH FOR** – *as for, except for.*
- **WORD GROUPS WITH FROM** – *apart from.*
- **WORD GROUPS WITH OF** – *ahead of, because of, in front of, in place of, in spite of, in terms of, inside of, instead of, on account of, on the basis of, on top of, out of, outside of.*
- **WORD GROUPS WITH TO** – *due to, in addition to, near to, thanks to, owing to, so as to, up to.*

### 2. PREPOSITIONS WITH SITUATIONS

The second guideline is to use prepositions in sentences with fixed meanings when describing *times* or *places* or *movement*.

For example, when talking about the time of day or the year, we always use the preposition *in*. When talking about a place where someone is attending something, we will always use the preposition *at*.

Here are some of the most common examples which would be useful for IELTS:

## PREPOSITIONS WITH TIME

- **At** – used for a point in time and also for night and weekend. Used for age. *At 5 o'clock, at night, at the weekend. At the age of 80 years old.*
- **By** – used to describe up to a certain time at the latest. *I will be finished by 8pm.*
- **For** – a period of time. *I worked there for five years.*
- **In** – used for months, seasons, years and periods of the days except for night. *In March, in spring, in 2010, in the afternoon.*
- **Since** – From a past time up to the present time. *Since 8 am.*
- **To** – telling the time and giving the beginning and end of a period. *20 to 1, from January to April.*

## PREPOSITIONS WITH PLACE

- **At** – describing a general place where somebody or something is doing something. *At the theatre (watching a play), at the park (playing), at school (studying), at work (working).*
- **In** – describing a specific place where somebody or something is. *In the kitchen, in the car, in Valencia.*
- **Off** – descending from public transport. *Get off the train, off the bus.*
- **On** – describing public transport, on a surface, appearing on TV or radio. *On the bus, on the Earth, on the ground and on TV.*

## PREPOSITIONS WITH MOVEMENT

- **By** – a rise or a fall of something. Travelling other than on foot. *Prices rose by 10%, inflation fell by 5%. Travel by car, by train, by plane.*
- **From** – Describing where something came or arrived from. *It came from outer space, a gift from my brother. I'm from London.*
- **Onto** – movement to the top of somewhere. *Climb onto the roof.*
- **Over** – movement to cover something often above something else. *A coat over your shoulders, go over the bridge, a roof over our heads.*
- **To** – direction of travel. *We're going to Spain. They went to a party.*

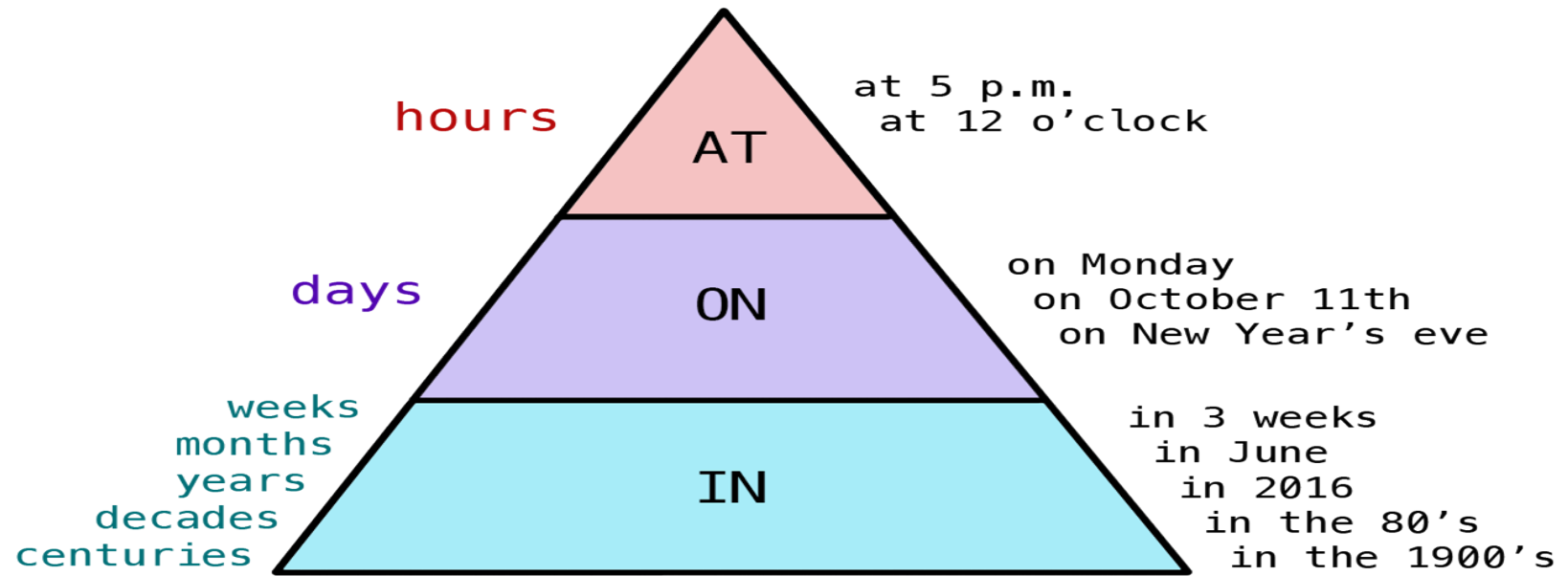
A **preposition** is a word that shows the relationship between a word in the sentence and the word that is the object of the preposition. Examples:

- *I will arrive **on** Monday.*
- *She'll be here **between** 13:00 and 14:00.*

**Prepositions** can be divided into **three** groups: prepositions of **time**, **place** and **other** prepositions.

**1. Prepositions of time:** *on, in, at, since, from, ago, before* etc.

This diagram explains how to use prepositions *on*, *in*, *at* for describing time:

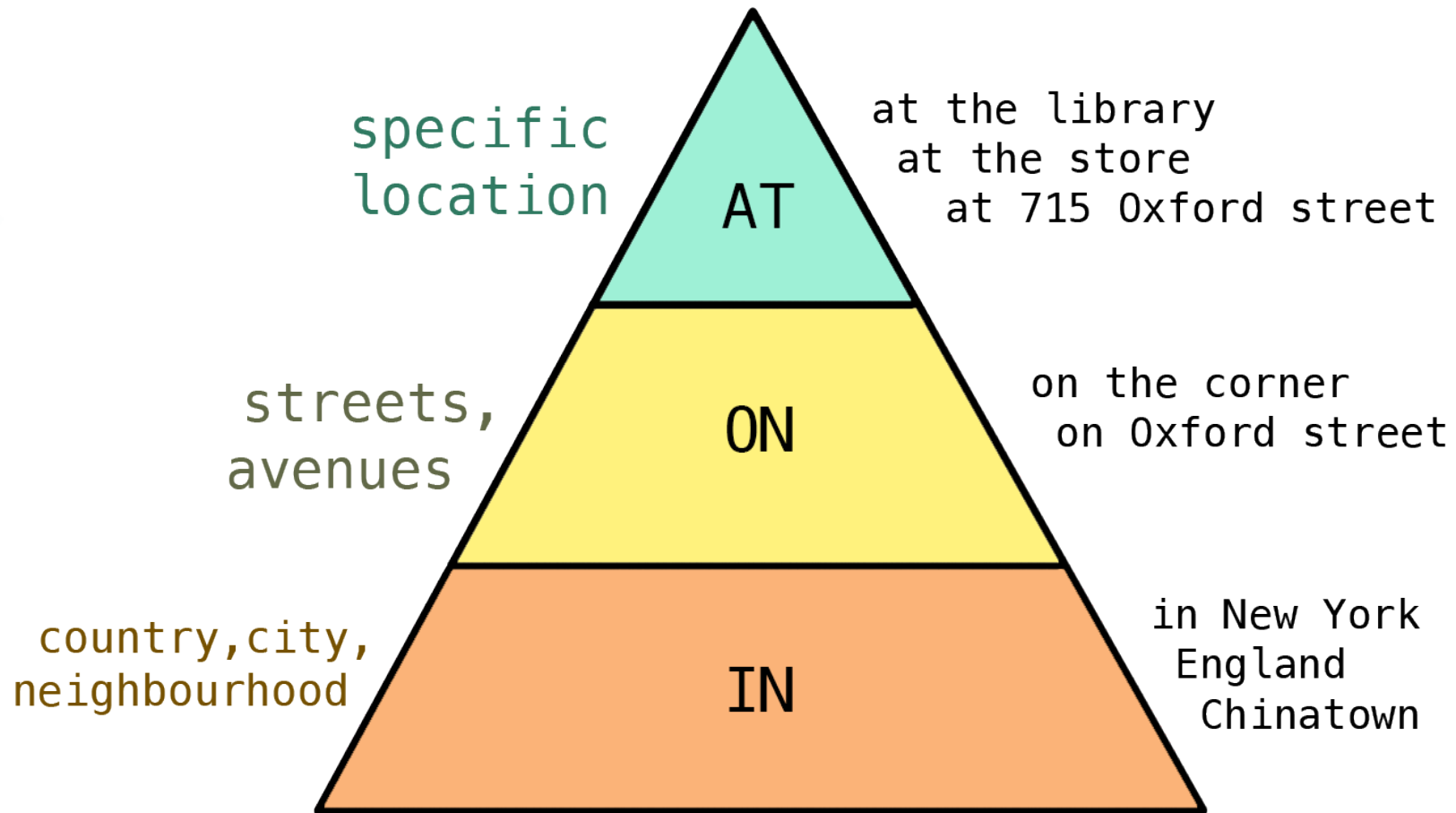


Examples:

- This shop works **since** 1970s.
- I've been working here **for** 5 years.
- We'll meet **on** April 7th.

## 2. Prepositions of place: *in, at, on, beside, under, below, above* etc.

This diagram explains how to use prepositions *on, in, at* for describing locations:



This diagram explains how to use prepositions of place:



Examples:

- Your bag is **in** the living room.
- Meet me **at** the bus station.



### 3. Other prepositions: *by, about, off, with, without, as, for, per* etc.

Examples:

- We were talking **about** him.
- We travelled **by** car.
- This car's speed is 180 kilometers **per** hour!
- I took **off** my coat.
- John can't live **without** Susan - he loves her!
- I don't want to dinner **as** I have just eaten a lunch.
- Jack wanted to learn English. He started studying hard **for** that purpose.

You should keep in mind that a lot of prepositions do not have strict rules of usage. The only guaranteed way to learn them is to use the dictionary or the Internet when you're in doubt.

## Grammar Explanation: Prepositions

Prepositions are a common cause of confusion for learners, often because each preposition has a number of different uses. This unit looks at the uses of a range of prepositions, and the difficulties they can present.

### Introduction

#### Basic Information

A preposition describes the relationship between two or more things. It can link nouns, verbs or adjectives before the preposition with a noun or pronoun after it:

- *Now, let's move on to item six **on** the agenda.*
- *Be careful. The hem of your dress is dragging **along** the floor*
- *John's got an appraisal tomorrow. He's really anxious **about** it.*

Prepositions can be one word only, eg. *of*, *throughout*, or more words, e.g. *because of*:

- *We got fewer dollars this week because of the drop in the exchange rate.*

## Prepositions and Adverbs

There is no difference in form between prepositions and many adverbs, but there is a difference in use: a preposition has an object but an adverb does not. Compare:

- *Did you ever travel **before the war**, Dad?* (preposition)
- *I have a strange feeling that I've been here **before**.* (adverb)

We can modify prepositions with adverbs (the adverbs in the example are in bold):

- *The pub is **almost** at the end of the street, just before the traffic lights.*

## Meaning and Use

### Position

Vertical Relationships			
above	after	below	beneath
down	on	on top of	over
under	underneath	up	

*Above* and *over* have similar meanings, as do *below* and *under*. We usually use *above* or *below*:

- *The refuge is in the hills above the town.*
- *The temperature was below freezing last night.*

But we use *over* or *under* in the following cases:

When one thing covers another:

- *The clouds hung low over the hills.*
- *He disappeared under the water.*

When horizontal movement is suggested: *Are we going to fly over the Alps?*

With prices, ages, speeds, distances, and quantities, where we mean more than or fewer. less than:

**X** *The conference was very badly attended: below two hundred people came.*

✓ *The conference was very badly attended: under two hundred people came.*

We use *above* or *below* to talk about 'level' or 'rank':

- *Is the position of Managing Editor above or below that of Editorial Director?*

It is also possible to use *after* in this sense:

- *His opinion is second only after the Managing Director's.*

Note the use of *up* and *down*:

- *John lives a few houses further up/down the hill from us.*

We generally use *beneath* in idiomatic phrases:

- *Your behavior towards my new husband was really beneath contempt!*

Horizontal Relationships			
against	along	alongside	around
at	beside	between	by
in	near	next to	on
on the left/ right of			

We use *at* with a point in space, e.g. *at the bus stop, at 8 Baker Street*;

We use *on* with a surface or a line, e.g. *on the table, on the river, on Oxford Street*;

We use *in* with something that surrounds, e.g. *in the wood*.

We use different prepositions depending on how we see a place. Compare:

- *The group will meet at 7.30 at the sports center.* (= either inside or outside)
- *The group will meet at 7.30 in the sports center.* (= inside)

**Note:** Also: *at the corner of the street* (= a point) *but in the corner of the room* (= inside).

We usually use *in* with countries, cities or towns.

We use *on* with streets, roads, avenues, etc.,

We use *at* with the names of squares if we think of the 'address', and *in* if we think of the square as 'surrounding' us:

**X** *The film premiere this year will take place on Leicester Square at London.*

✓ *The film premiere this year will take place at Leicester Square in London.*

- *The trees in Leicester Square don't look very healthy.*

We use *at* when we refer to gatherings of people: at a party, at a conference.

We use *beside* and *alongside* to express proximity along a line:

- *Warehouses were built beside /alongside the motorway.*

Facing Relationships			
across	after	before	behind
facing	in front of	opposite	over

We use *in front of* or *behind* to describe the spatial relationship of two things, one after the other on a line and facing the same way:

- *A is in front of B, B is behind A.*

*In front of* and *behind* can also be used for metaphorical, not literal, position:

- *Christopher is really behind his brother in terms of academic development.*

*Before* and *after* can refer to position in some contexts:

- *Karen's nephew appears before I in front of the magistrates this afternoon.*
- *You 'll be called first as my name is after yours on the list.*

*Opposite*, *facing*, *across* and *over* have the meaning of on the other side of but with *across* and *over* we have to state on the other side of what, e.g. a road, a river:

- *I'll meet you in the café opposite I facing the theatre.* (= on the other side of the road)
- *I'll meet you in the café across/over the road from the theatre.*

**Note:** The difference between *opposite* / *facing* and *in front of* is that the items on the 'line' are not facing in the same direction, as in the diagram above, but are facing each other:

- *A is facing/ opposite B. A and B are facing /opposite each other.*

## **Movement and Direction**

Vertical Movement		
down (to)	off	on
onto	over	up (to)

We use these prepositions for movement up or down:

- *Keep to the right as you go down the stairs.*
- *Look at Johnny's knee – he's just fallen off his bike.*

We *get on* or *off* a bus, plane, train, boat and bike but *into* and *out of* a car.

We can use *over* for a movement up and then down an obstacle:

- *The burglar leaped over the garden fence as he ran away from us.*

Passing Movement			
across	along	down	over
past	through	up	

We use *along* for movement In a line, eg. along a *river/ road*:

- *You can spend a pleasant afternoon strolling along the canals in Amsterdam.*

We also often use up and down with roads and rivers (meaning 'along'):

- *Go up the road to the corner, and the cinema is on the left.*

We use *across* for movement from one side to the other of something on a 'surface', e.g. *across the river/ road/field*. We use *through* for movement inside something, e.g. *through a room/ tunnel*:

- *You walk across the playing field to the wood then you go through the wood ...*

*Over* is similar to *across* (one side to the other) but it incorporates the idea of *above*:

- *Are we going to fly over the Alps on the way to Italy?*

We use *past* for a movement from one side to the other of something, next to it:

- *I was startled by a huge bird that flew past my window this afternoon.*

Movement in One Direction			
around	at	away from	down
down to	from	into	onto
out of	to	towards	up
up to			

We can use both *to* and *at* after certain verbs, e.g. throw, shout. *To* suggests that the recipient of the action is willing but *at* that he/she is not willing:

- *Can you throw that book to me, please ?* (I am willing.)
- *Don't throw stones at the cat!* (The cat is unwilling.)

We can use *up to* or *towards* when we approach someone or something, but we use only *up to* if we actually reach the person/thing:

**X** *Do you think I can go towards him and ask for his autograph?*

✓ *Do you think I can go up to him and ask for his autograph?*

✓ *The scientist moved quietly towards the group of grazing animals.*

We can use *up (to)* and *down (to)* for movement north or south within a country:

- *We've just come down to Canberra from Darwin.*

We can express a circular movement with *(a)round*:

- *We drove (a)round the roundabout three times before we took the correct exit.*

We can also use the prepositions of movement in a less literal way:



- *A system of charges has been introduced into the Health Service.*

## Time

Point in Time		
at	in	on

We use *at* with times, special periods (e.g. celebrations) and in some phrases: *at five to seven, at Christmas, at night, at the weekend* (US English *on the weekend*)

We use *in* with parts of the day, months, seasons, years, centuries, etc.: *in the evening, in December, in 1999, in the winter, in the twentieth century*

We use *on* with days and dates, including special days: *on Thursday, on (the morning of) the 31st of October, on Christmas Day*

We sometimes omit the preposition if we use *about* or *around*, to be less specific:

- *Let's meet at the station (at) about six; there's a train at ten past.*
- *We can supply the materials (on) around Thursday next week.*

In US English and informal British English, we can also omit *on* before days:

- *Great news! The travel agent can get us on a flight that leaves **Wednesday***

We do not use the prepositions **at**, **on** or **in** immediately before adverbs or adverbial phrases such as *today, tomorrow, last / this/ next week*:

**X** *The new soap opera on BBC2 is starting on tomorrow.*

✓ *The new soap opera on BBC2 is starting tomorrow.*

Before or After			
After	Before	By	Past

We can use *after* or *past* to mean 'later than':

- *There's no point in going to the party now; it's after / past eleven o'clock.*

We use *before* to mean 'before a time', and we use *by* to mean 'before or at a time':

- *Applications must be submitted before 30th November.* (= on the 29th or earlier)
- *Applications must be submitted by 30th November.* (= on the 30th or earlier)

**Note:** The adverbial phrases *in time* (with time to spare) and *on time* (at the right time, often fixed) have different meanings:

- *The wedding car arrived on time but the bride wasn't ready.* (= time to spare)
- *I want to arrive right on time at the church. It's not done for the bride to arrive before the groom.*  
(= not early or late)

Duration			
as from/ of	between	during	for
from.. till/ until/ up to	in	inside	since
through (out)	until/ till	up to	within

We can use a number of different prepositions to talk about duration:

- *As of next Monday, we will have to suspend flexible working arrangements until further notice.*
- *The long flowing style – of hair and clothes – was fashionable during/ through(out) much of the seventies.*

- *This volcano hasn't erupted since 1935.*
- *The motorway widening was successfully completed within/in/inside four months.*

British English uses *from ... to* to express the start and endpoints of a period of time, but US English uses *through*:

- *I'll be staying at the Hilton from Friday to Monday.*
- *I'll be staying at the Hilton Friday through Monday.*

### Other Meanings

Reason			
because of	due to	for	from
out of	owing to	through	

- *The 10.00 service to Bath has been canceled due to /owing to staff shortage.*
- *Huge numbers of people in the Third World die from starvation every day.*
- *Many parents sacrifice their own material wealth out of the desire to give their children everything.*
- *The fire started through careless disposal of a cigarette end.*

Means		
by	by means of	in
via	with	

We use *by* or *with* to introduce an instrument:

- *Negotiations were held by phone between the client and his solicitor.*
- *The victim was killed by a bullet to the head/ with a sawn-off shotgun.*

We also use *by* for the agent (or originator) of something:

- *It's a painting **by** Van Gogh. He completed it during his stay in Arles.*

Note the difference between *by* and *of* here:

- *It's a painting **of** Van Gogh. It's actually not a very good likeness of him.*

We use *in* when we refer to the means we use to achieve something:

- *Complete the form **in** pencil. He prefers to paint **in** watercolor.*

Purpose	
for	towards

- *I want an opener that can be used for opening bottles of beer as well as wine.*
- *We're saving all of this extra income towards a round-the-world trip next year.*

Comparison			
against	as	besides	between
contrary to	than	(un) like	

We use *against*, *beside* and *contrary to* to make a contrast:

- *Look at this year's sales figures against last year's; they're so much better.*
- *Besides her sister, Laura was positively plain.*
- *The Davis Cup final was won by the French team, contrary to expectations.*

We use *between* to differentiate (usually the difference between):

- *You won't be able to tell the difference between butter and this spread.*

We can use *like* to make a comparison, but we use *as* to express a role:

- *She behaves like a director, but she's really only a secretary.*
- *Speaking as a director of the company, I believe we should sell the shares.*

Inclusion and Exclusion			
among	as well as	besides	between
beyond	inside	instead of	out of
outside	under	within	without

We usually use *between* with only two objects and *among* with more than two:

- *For women, the distinction between work and leisure is less clear-cut.*
- *The terminals are among the biggest single development sites in Europe.*

Note the uses of the following prepositions which have the meaning of exclusion:

- *Are there any issues remaining besides that of the roof repairs?*
- *I'm afraid that changes to the curriculum are beyond I outside I out of our control.*

Exception	
apart from	barring
but for	except (for)
save	

- *Everyone is invited to the conference dinner, except (for)/apart from/save those who have bought 'day' tickets only.*

*Except* and *except for* can both be used after phrases containing determiners such as *all*, *every*, *no*:

- *Julian did very well in all his exams except (for) geography.*
- *Except for one question on calculus, Julian got all the maths questions right.*

However, when the prepositional phrase contradicts the main idea of the sentence, we use *except for*:

- *Trulli emerged from the wreckage of the car uninjured except for a broken thumb.*

We use *but for* to mean 'if not for':

- *The house would have been destroyed but for the quick thinking of the firefighters.*

Contrast		
Despite	for all	in spite of

*Despite/In spite of/ For all his grand ways, he was really no better off than the rest of us.*

Material			
from	of	out of	with

We use different prepositions when we describe the material from which something is made (*made (out) of, made from, made with*)

We use *of* when the original material is still visible:

- *a dress made of silk*
- *a jacket made of leather*
- *a table of the finest mahogany*

We use *from* when the original material has been transformed:

- *ice cream made from strawberries*
- *toilet rolls made from recycled paper*

We use *with* when we refer to a filling or an ingredient:

- *vine leaves stuffed with rice*
- *rice pudding made with cream*

We use *of* in metaphorical phrases:

- *a man of iron*
- *a heart of gold*

Benefit: *for/ for the sake of/ on behalf of*

- *On behalf of our shareholders, I'd like to thank all of you who voted in favor of the merger.*
- *I think we should move to the country for the sake of the children.*

Reporting: *according to*

We do not use *according to* to report our own feelings or opinions:

**X** *Holograms aren't a real art form, according to me.*

✓ *According to many art critics, holograms aren't a real art form.*

✓ *Holograms aren't a real art form, in my opinion.*

## Prepositional Phrases

### Form

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition and the word(s) that follow it. The most common words that follow prepositions are nouns and pronouns:

- *sleep **on** the floor*
- *comparisons **between** Clinton and Kennedy*
- *it's **for** you*

We can also use -ing forms, adverbs or wh- clauses after prepositions:

- ***As well as** helping us to move into the house, John bought us a great present.*
- *Please don't interfere in any way **with** what I have written in the introduction.*



A prepositional phrase can include a determiner before the noun or -ing form:

- *The head teacher doesn't approve **of** his arrangement with a local band.*

We can't use a *that*-clause after a preposition:

**X** *The government managed to pass the bill through Parliament, despite that it had a low majority.*

✓ *The government managed to pass the bill through Parliament, despite its low majority/despite having a low majority/despite the fact that it had a low majority.*

Nor can we use an infinitive phrase, except with the prepositions *except*, *but* and *save*: *Please come straight home – don't stop except to phone us.*

### **Stranded Preposition**

A 'stranded preposition' is a preposition on its own at the end of a clause or sentence. English commonly uses stranded prepositions in:

- Questions: *Who are you coming to the party with?*
- Relative clauses: *I've been offered the job in London that I applied for!*
- The passive: *What is your coat made from?*
- Infinitive clauses: *That man is impossible to work with!*

We sometimes keep the preposition and object together in formal language:

- *We have been unable to offer you the position for which you applied.*

**Note:** We do not precede the relative pronoun *that* with a preposition:

**X** *We have been unable to offer you the position for that you applied.*