

At, in and on: prepositions of place

A

We use **at** to talk about a place we think of as a point rather than an area, and about an event where there is a group of people:

- I arrived **at** *New Street Station* at 7.30.
- We were waiting **at** *the far end of the room*.
- We last met **at** *the conference in Italy*.
- There were very few people **at** *Joan's party*.

We use **on** to talk about a position touching a flat surface, or on something we think of as a line such as a road or river:

- Is that a spider **on** *the ceiling*? (Notice we also say 'on the wall/floor')
- She owns a house **on** *the Swan River*.

We use **in** to talk about a position within a larger area, or something within a larger space:

- There's been another big forest fire **in** *California*.
- She looked again **in** *her bag* and, to her relief, there were her keys.

B

Also study how **at**, **in**, and **on** are used in these sentences:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My dream is to play at Wembley Stadium. • Didn't I see you in/at the pool yesterday? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – seen as a point – either seen as within the pool itself, or as a building which is a point in town
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He lives in Perth. • We stopped in/at Milan, Florence and Pisa on our way to Rome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – within the city – we use at when we see the cities as points on a journey, and in when we see them as enclosed areas where we stayed for some time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were a great success in/at Edinburgh. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – we can use at when we use a place name instead of an institution or event – here, the Edinburgh Festival; in suggests the city
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He's in Los Angeles on business. • He's at Manchester studying Linguistics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – staying or living there – a student at Manchester University
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She works at Marks and Spencer. • She works in a shoe shop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the name of a particular organisation – the kind of place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I stopped at the shop on the way home. • I was in the bank when in came Sue. (Notice we say: 'I work on a farm', but 'I work in a factory'.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – we use at to talk about buildings such as the dentist's, the supermarket, the bank, school, etc.; we use in to emphasise that we mean <i>inside</i> the building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I read the paper in the taxi on the way. • I'll probably go on the bus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – for travel using taxis and cars – for travel using bus, coach, plane, or train; but we use in if we want to emphasise <i>inside</i> the bus, etc.

C

• We usually use **at** before an address and **in** or **on** before the name of a road:

- They've opened an office **at** 28 Lees Road.
- The church is **in/on** Park Road.

However, we sometimes use **on** instead of **in** when we talk about long streets or roads:

- The town is **on** the Pacific Highway.

We can use **at** instead of **in** when we use a street name to refer to an institution in that street:

- There was an important meeting of ministers **at** Downing Street today.

But notice that we say 'on Wall Street' to mean the financial institution.

Compare:

- I'll meet you **on** *the corner of the street*. and • The lamp was **in** *the corner of the room*.

EXERCISES

104.1 Complete these sentences with *at, on, or in* and the most likely word or phrase. (A)

the pitch parties this booklet the table the main road a dinner
this country his pocket the top end your lawn the Opera House Tunisia

- 1 I bumped into Tim I went to the other evening.
- 2 The film was shot mainly in North Africa.
- 3 He was undoubtedly the best player in the first half.
- 4 Although he has been singing for ages, it will be the first time he has appeared
- 5 They live, so there's a lot of traffic going past.
- 6 It will be the biggest event of its kind ever held
- 7 I know that people like to dress up, but that is ridiculous.
- 8 Bill lived of my street.
- 9 The information is out of date.
- 10 Do you know that there's a rabbit, and it's eating your flowers?
- 11 He put his hand and took out some coins.
- 12 Who's moved my briefcase? I left it

104.2 Complete these sentences with *at, in* or *on*. If two answers are possible, write them both. (B)

- 1 a He played Wimbledon for the first time this year.
b Quite by chance, we met the tennis stadium last week.
- 2 a He turned up early to make sure he had a seat the plane.
b I saw Judith this morning, but she was her car so I couldn't say hello.
- 3 a We just got the train and headed for Florence.
b We were stuck the plane for hours in Jakarta.
- 4 a We went to wave him off the station.
b It was raining, so he decided to shelter the station before he walked home.
- 5 a She worked a restaurant during the evenings to earn some extra money.
b When she was a student she worked a pizza restaurant at weekends.
- 6 a She won a gold medal Barcelona in 1992.
b I lived Stockholm for three years during the 1970s.
- 7 a Peter's doing a Master's degree Birmingham.
b They're Brighton to do an English language course.

104.3 Complete the sentences with *at, in* or *on*. (C)

- 1 There has been a serious accident the motorway near Swindon.
- 2 She's just moved from her flat 38 Azalea Drive.
- 3 We broke down the Princes Highway between Melbourne and Adelaide.
- 4 The overnight rise Wall Street was not maintained.
- 5 Talks are to be held Downing Street, chaired by the Prime Minister.
- 6 My uncle owns a hardware shop the corner of High Street and Redland Road.
- 7 I first saw the ring in an antique shop Kensington Road.



Across, along, over and through; above, over, below and under

Across, over, along, through

We can use across or over to talk about a position on the other side of, or getting to the other side of a bridge, road, border, river, etc.:

- The truck came towards them **across/over the bridge**.
- Mike lives in the house **across/over the road** from ours.
- Once she was **across/over the border**, she knew she would be safe.

We use over rather than across when we talk about reaching the other side of something that is high, or higher than it is wide:

- He hurt his leg as he jumped **over the wall**.
- The railway goes **through** a tunnel rather than **over the top of the mountain**.

When we are talking about something we think of as a flat surface, or an area such as a country or sea, we use across rather than over:

- He suddenly saw Sue **across the room**.
- The programme was broadcast **across Australia**.
- The figures moved rapidly **across the screen**.

Notice that we can say all over but not usually all across. Instead, we prefer right across:

- The disease has now spread **all over** the world. (*or ...right across the world.*)

When we talk about following a line of some kind (a path, a road, a river, a beach, a canal, etc.), we use along.

- I'd seen them walking **along** the road past my window several times before.
- They walked **along** the footpath until they came to a small bridge.

We use through to emphasise that we are talking about movement in a three dimensional space, with things all around, rather than a two dimensional space, a flat surface or area:

- He pushed his way **through** the crowd of people to get to her.
- He enjoyed the peace and quiet as he walked **through** the forest.

Through often suggests movement from one side or end of the space to the other. Compare:

- She walked **through** the forest to get to her grandmother's house. *and*
- She spent a lot of her free time walking **in** the forest.

Above, over; below, under

We can use either above or over when we say that one thing is at a higher level than another:

- Above/Over the door was a sign saying, 'Mind your head'.
- She had painted thick, dark eyebrows **above/over** each eye.

However, we use above, not over, when one thing is not directly over the other. Compare:

- The castle sat in the mountains **above** the town. *and*
- The passengers couldn't see the sun, as it was right **over** the plane. (= directly overhead)

We use over, not above, when we say that something covers something else and is in contact with it, and also when we are talking about horizontal movement:

- A grey mist hung **over** the fields.
- I saw the helicopter fly out **over** the water, near the fishing boat.

Below is the opposite of above; under is the opposite of over. The differences in the uses of below and under are similar to those between above and over (see above):

- It's hard to believe that there is a railway line **below/under** the building.
- Her head was **below** the level of the counter and the shop assistant didn't notice her.
- I was so hot, I stood **under** a cold shower for ten minutes.
- She hid the presents **under** a blanket. (the presents and the blanket are in contact)

EXERCISES

105.1 Complete the sentences with *across* or *over*. If both are possible, write *across/over*. (A)

- 1 They cycled America from the Pacific to the Atlantic.
- 2 On the other side of the river, the bridge, is the richer side of town.
- 3 The children next door are a real nuisance. Their football is always coming the fence and damaging the flowers in my garden.
- 4 After the children's party, sweets and cakes were scattered all the kitchen floor.
- 5 The dog ran away from me and disappeared the hill.
- 6 I saw the children wandering slowly the road.
- 7 Pedro was so short, he couldn't see the steering wheel.
- 8 He lives just the border, in Switzerland.
- 9 Martha drew a line the map and said, 'I'll visit all the houses to the north of here.'

105.2 Underline the correct or most appropriate word(s) in each sentence. (A)

- 1 The thieves broke the window and climbed *across/over/along/through* it.
- 2 He was the first man to row single-handed *across/over/along/through* the Atlantic.
- 3 She only had time to dress and run a comb *across/over/along/through* her hair before the taxi arrived.
- 4 There was so much traffic, I was fortunate to get *across/over/along/through* the road without being knocked over.
- 5 There were sunbeds and sunshades *across/over/along/through* the entire length of the beach.
- 6 She made her way up the hill *across/over/along/through* a narrow path.
- 7 He leapt *across/over/along/through* the wall and made his escape.
- 8 The mist was so thick, it was like walking *across/over/along/through* a cloud.

105.3 Correct the prepositions (*above*, *over*, *below*, *under*) if necessary, or put a ✓. (B)

- 1 She put her hands above her eyes and began to cry.
- 2 Below the screen is a small microphone that picks up the computer-user's voice.
- 3 They left their key below a mat by the front door.
- 4 There was a crack in the wall over the window.
- 5 He pulled his hat above his ears and went out into the cold.
- 6 She just swept the dust under the carpet.
- 7 The path runs high over the river and the view is wonderful.
- 8 She looked out of the window. Twenty feet under her, in the garden, was a fox.
- 9 He was unhurt apart from a small cut above his eye.

105.4 A number of common idioms include the prepositions *over* and *under*. Do you know what these mean?

- 1 He's *over the hill*. He ought to make way for a younger man.
- 2 Don't try to *pull the wool over my eyes*. I know what you really want.
- 3 I'm feeling a bit *under the weather* at the moment, but I'm sure I'll be okay tomorrow.
- 4 The children were *getting under my feet*, so I sent them outside to play.
- 5 She's won first prize. She's *over the moon*!



Between, among; by, beside, etc.

Between, among

Study how **between** and **among** are used as prepositions of *place* in these sentences:

- She held the diamond **between** her thumb and forefinger.
- Zimbabwe is situated **between** Zambia to the north, Mozambique to the east, Botswana to the west, and South Africa to the south.
- He stood **among** all his friends in the room and felt very happy.
- She eventually found her passport **among** the clothes in her drawer.

We use **between** with two or more people or things that we see as individual or separate. We use **among** when we see the people or things as part of a group or mass. You can't say that you are **among** two people or things. **Amongst** is sometimes used instead of **among**, but is a more literary word.

Between and **among** are not only used as prepositions of *place*. To talk about something done to by a group or groups of things or people, we can use either **between** or **among**:

- The money is to be divided **between/among** the towns in the area.
- The prize will be shared **between/among** the first six finishers in the race.

However, when we specify the individual members of the group using singular nouns we use **between** rather than **among**:

- The treaty was signed **between** Great Britain and France.
- There was a disagreement **between** Neil, John and Margaret.

We also use **between**, not **among**, when we talk about comparisons and relationships (e.g. a difference **between**, a connection **between**..., a friendship **between**..., a link **between**...):

- What are the differences **between** rugby league, rugby union and American football?
- They are wrong to claim that there is a connection **between** unemployment and crime.

We use **among**, not **between**, when we mean 'occurring in', 'one/some of' or 'out of':

- The disease has now broken out **among** the hill tribes. (= 'occurring in')
- They are **among** the best hockey players in the world. (= 'some of')
- **Among** the capital cities of South America, Quito is the second highest. (= 'out of')

Notice how we use the expression **among other things** (not 'between other things'):

- **Among other things**, I enjoy painting and gardening.
- I later found out that he had been a carpenter and a dustman, **among other things**.

By, beside, close to, near (to), next (to)

These all mean 'not far away'. We can often use either **near (to)** or **close to**:

- The plant often grows **close to / near (to)** the banks of rivers.
- We live **close to / near (to)** the city centre.

We use **beside**, **by**, or **next to** to say that one thing or person is at the side of another:

- Colin sat **beside / by / next to** her with his legs crossed.
- I pushed the button **beside / by / next to** the door, but there was no answer.

We can also use **next** as an adjective to say that something follows another thing in a series. When we mean that one thing is closer than any other thing of the same kind, we use **nearest**, not **next**.

Compare:

- When Jim arrived, I left the kitchen and went into the **next** room. (not ...nearest room.) *and*
- When the storm started, I ran to the **nearest** house for shelter. (not ...next...)

When we are talking about towns and cities we can use **near**, but not **by**:

- I first met Steve when he was working on a beach **near** Adelaide.
- They live in a pretty cottage **near** Bergerac in France.

EXERCISES

106.1 Underline the correct answer. (A)

- The boy walked into the room *between/among* his mother and father.
- During that period, the Atlantic Ocean was a narrow lake *between/among* what is now Africa and North America.
- There was no-one from Japan *between/among* the many tourists on the coach.
- British makes were noticeably absent *between/among* the cars in the car park.
- The male penguin incubates the egg *between/among* its feet.
- I had a pain *between/among* my eyes.
- She looked *between/among* all the coats on the rack until she found her own.
- I took my seat *between/among* Toni and Ingrid.

106.2 Complete these sentences with *between* or *among* and the most likely phrase from the ones below. If you can use either *between* or *among*, write *between/among*. (B)

the successful applicants Poland ~~four of them~~ the many winners
the members of the choir the President butter young men the North

- They only had one bottle of water to share *between/among four of them*.
- My brother was for the new jobs in the company.
- There are particularly high rates of suicide on the island.
- There was general agreement that they should sing one more song.
- Since the meeting in Warsaw, relations, Hungary and Germany have steadily improved.
- There is little difference and the challengers to his leadership.
- You could be of the lottery this week.
- The ever-widening economic gap and the South must be dealt with now.
- I have difficulty distinguishing and margarine.

106.3 Susan has just spent a month travelling around Europe with a friend. Here are some extracts from a letter in which she describes some of her experiences. Where necessary, suggest corrections, or put a ✓. (B & C)

... (1) We went to a concert performed at the Palace of Versailles by Paris...
 (2) Quite by chance, we bumped into Uncle Sam nearby the Eiffel Tower. ...
 (3) I left my suitcase beside the reception desk at the hotel, but when I got back it had gone. ... (4) When I smelt gas in the hotel room, I just pushed open the next window. ... (5) We got off the bus outside the train hall, but in fact we needed to get off at the nearest stop, and had to walk a bit further on. ... (6) We stayed in a hotel close to Rome Airport. ... (7) In Rome we saw, between other things, the Colosseum and the Trevi Fountain. ...
 (8) We hired bicycles and parked them by the police station, where we hoped they would be safe. ... (9) There's a lot of expansion going on in the country, including a huge new exhibition centre being built by the capital. ...

At, in and on: prepositions of time

We use **at** with points of time or periods of time that we think of as points. We use **at**:

- with exact points of time:
 - at midday at midnight at 3 o'clock at 8.15
- with short holiday periods, such as Christmas, Easter, the weekend, etc.:
 - I'll see you at *Easter*. • We often go walking at *the weekend*.
(In US and Australian English, 'on the weekend' is used, and this is now heard in informal British English, too.)
- with other short periods that we think of as points, such as the end of January, the beginning of the year, etc.:
 - I get paid at *the end of the month*.
- with mealtimes, such as breakfast, lunch, dinner, etc.:
 - That morning at *breakfast*, my brother told us he was getting married.
- with night when we mean 'when it is night' or 'each night':
 - People can't go out on the streets at *night* any more, it's so dangerous.

But notice that we use **in** with **the middle of...**, and that when we talk about a particular night we use **in the night**:

 - It's Ann's birthday some time in *the middle of May*, I think.
 - I felt very restless in *the night* and had to take a sleeping tablet.
- in the phrase **at the moment** (= now); but notice that we say **in a moment** (= in a short period of time):
 - John's in Korea at *the moment*. • I'll be with you in *a moment*.

We use **in**:

- when we talk about longer periods of time such as seasons (e.g. *the spring*), months, years, decades (e.g. *the 1990's* (*or the 1990s*)), centuries (e.g. *the 16th century*), and other periods such as *the week before Easter*, *the hours before the exam*, etc.:
 - In *the winter* you can only use the road with a four-wheel drive vehicle.
 - In *the days* that followed her operation, she spent a lot of time in bed.
- when we talk about how long it will be before something happens:
 - In *a few minutes* we will be arriving at Delhi Airport. (or, more formally, 'Within...')
- when we say how long something takes:
 - He learnt how to program the computer in *just a matter of weeks*. (= a few weeks)
- with parts of the day, such as *the morning*, *the evening*, etc. (see A for 'night'):
 - Temperatures today should reach 25°C in *the afternoon*.

(We can often use **during** instead of **in** when we talk about periods of time. See Unit 108.)

We use **on** when we talk about a particular day, date, or part of a particular day:

- We're meeting again on *Friday*. • It's her birthday on *the 21st*.
- I get paid on *the last day of the month*. • We went to a party on *Easter Sunday*.
- I've got a meeting on Monday morning.

We rarely use **at**, **in** or **on** before the words **all**, **any**, **each**, **every**, **last**, **next**, **one**, **some**, **this**, or **that** when these are followed by a time expression. Compare:

- I'll do it in the morning. *and* • He hasn't been here all morning. (*not ...in all morning*.)
 - I'll see you again on Friday. *and* • I'm going to Oslo next Friday. (*not ...on next Friday*.)
- We don't use **at**, **in** or **on** before (the day after) tomorrow and (the day before) yesterday:
- The weather was beautiful yesterday. (*not ...on yesterday*.)

We prefer **What time...?** rather than **At what time...?** except in very formal English.

EXERCISES

107.1 *If necessary, correct these sentences with at, in or on, or put a ✓. (A, B & C)*

- 1 She's going home to Australia on Christmas.
- 2 The exhibition opens in Berlin at the end of May.
- 3 Northern Sweden is beautiful, but I wouldn't go at the middle of January.
- 4 If she gets really feverish at the night, give her two of these tablets.
- 5 The baby is due to be born on Christmas Eve.
- 6 By then it was about three in the morning and I felt very tired.
- 7 He would always arrive around ten in night carrying his suitcase and a bunch of flowers.
- 8 The survivors were eventually found in the morning of Friday, 21st January.

107.2 *Complete these sentences with at, in or on and the most likely of these words and phrases. (A, B & C)*

the week before Christmas midnight ~~lunch~~ the 4th July half an hour
a moment

- 1 I was talking so much at lunch that my food went cold.
- 2 It shouldn't take long to repair your watch. Come back and I'll have it ready for you.
- 3 I was very busy at work and I ended up buying all my presents
- 4 It's a holiday in the USA
- 5 She put her head on the pillow, closed her eyes and was fast asleep.
- 6 The children were still running around the streets, when they should have been in bed.

107.3 *Put at, in, on or - if no preposition is needed. (A, B, C & D)*

- 1 A: 'What are you doing Easter?'
B: 'We haven't decided yet.'
- 2 It's traditional here to celebrate the first day of spring.
- 3 A woman sitting next to me dinner spilt her drink all over me.
- 4 Chan took power in a military coup the beginning of the decade.
- 5 She held the world record for seven years the 1970s.
- 6 his arrival in Thailand, Mr Surat fell ill and spent the next five weeks in hospital.
- 7 I was woken up the middle of the night by a helicopter going overhead.
- 8 I had to get up the night to close the window.
- 9 We meet every Saturday afternoon to go shopping.
- 10 He had to leave a quarter to six this morning to catch the train.
- 11 I'm afraid she's left now, but you'll be able to see her the day after tomorrow.
- 12 Don't worry, the exam will be over a couple of hours.
- 13 These pink roses have a beautiful smell which becomes stronger the evening.
- 14 The programme was shown on television one afternoon last week.
- 15 He painted the whole house only three days.
- 16 We all met Easter Day and went for a long walk across the hills.
- 17 I generally get my salary the fifth of the month.
- 18 Until I changed my job, I used to lie awake night worrying about work.

during, for, in, over, and throughout; by and until

A During, for, in, over, throughout

We use **during** or **in** to talk about something that happens within a particular period of time:

- The population of the city has actually fallen **during** the last decade. (or ...in the last...)
- She didn't take a holiday **during** her four years as head of the company. (or ...in her four years...)
- **During** the time that I was in Paris, I only once saw the River Seine. (or **In** the time...)

We use **during** rather than **in** when we talk about something that happens within the same time as another event or activity rather than over a particular period of time:

- Mrs Newton came into our classroom **during** a maths test.
- The President made the speech **during** a visit to Madrid.

We also prefer **during** when we emphasise that something continues for *the whole* of a particular period of time:

- No-one was allowed to leave the ship **during** (the whole of) its time in port.

We can also use **throughout** to express a similar meaning:

- We had enough firewood to keep us warm **during** (the whole of) the winter. (or...warm throughout the winter.)

We can use **over** or **during** when we talk about an event or activity that goes on for a length of time within a *period of time*, either for some of that period or for the whole of it:

- Weather conditions have been improving **over/during** the past few days.
- I fell, banged my head, and can't remember anything about what happened **over/during** the next hour or so.

However, if we talk about an event or activity having little duration that happens within a period of time, we prefer **during**:

- She sneezed **during** the performance. (not ...over the performance.)
- **During** a pause in the conversation, she left the room. (not Over a pause...)

We use **for** to say *how long* something continues, and **during** to say *when* something takes place:

- You can only come in **for** a few minutes. (not ...during...)
- I felt ill **for** a couple of days, but was fine after that. (not ...during...)
- About ten of us were taken ill **during** a party we were at in York. (not ...for a party...)
- You will get plenty of practical experience **during** the training period. (not ...for the training period...)

D By, until

We use by when we say that something will happen or be achieved either before a particular time or at that time at the latest.	We use until when we say that something will continue up to a particular time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We have to be at the stadium by 2.30. (That's when the competition starts.)• She learned German by the age of 16. (She could speak it fluently when she reached that age.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We have to be at the stadium until 2.30. (We can't leave before that time.)• She learned German until the age of 16. (Then she stopped learning it.)

In negative sentences, **until** means 'not before':

- You mustn't open your presents **until** your birthday.

In informal English we can use **till** instead of **until**.

EXERCISES

108.1 Underline the correct word(s). In some sentences, both words are possible. (A, B & C)

- 1 I wasn't late once *during/in* my first year at school.
- 2 She got very badly sunburnt *during/over* her holiday in Spain.
- 3 You mustn't look directly at the sun *during/in* the eclipse.
- 4 *During/Over* the next two days I made several trips to the library.
- 5 The castle was built *during/over* the fourteenth century.
- 6 Mrs Peterson made a number of major changes *during/in* her time as principal of the school.
- 7 They sat and rested *during/for* a while and then continued on their way.
- 8 Dr Brown won't be available *during/over* the coming months.
- 9 Because she had to go back to work, she could only stay *during/for* two weeks.
- 10 She is going to need a lot of support *during/over* the next few months.
- 11 He slept *during/in* the whole of the second half of the performance.
- 12 *During/For* a moment I didn't know whether he was being serious.
- 13 I visited most of the main museums and art galleries *during/for* my stay in Italy.
- 14 She suffered a number of serious injuries *during/in* her career as a professional tennis player.
- 15 He listened to the lecture *during/for* a few minutes more and then left the room quietly.
- 16 I seem to get lots of colds, particularly *during/for* the winter.
- 17 We should be at home *during/over* the weekend. Come and see us.

108.2 Choose by or until to complete these sentences. (D)

- 1 a I've given myself the end of September to finish the book.
b The publishers have told me I have to finish the book the end of September.
- 2 a three o'clock I was exhausted, but the party was still going on.
b The party went on after three o'clock.
- 3 a You have to hand in your projects October.
b Students have October to hand in their projects.
- 4 a The exhibition is open June 6th, when it moves on to New York.
b June 6th, when the exhibition moves on to New York, some half a million people will have visited it.
- 5 a You have to bring my car back the end of the month.
b You can borrow my car the end of the month.
- 6 a I waited 9 o'clock, and then I went home.
b 9 o'clock everybody had gone home.

108.3 At the beginning of each year some people make New Year resolutions – we make a promise to ourselves that we will or won't do something. Complete these sentences to make resolutions for yourself for next year. (D)

I'll go on a diet until the end of the year.

- 1 by the end of the year.
- 2 until the end of January.
- 3 by the end of January.

Except (for), besides, apart from and but for

We use **except** or **except for** to introduce the only thing (or things) or person (or people) that the main part of the sentence does not include:

- I had no money to give him **except (for)** the few coins in my pocket.
- The price of the holiday includes all meals **except (for)** lunch.
- Everyone seemed to have been invited **except (for)** Mrs Woodford and me.

However, we use **except for** rather than **except to** show that a general statement made in the main part of the sentence is not completely true:

- The car was undamaged in the accident, **except for** a broken headlight.
- The room was completely dark **except for** light coming under the door.
- **Except for** the weather, the holiday couldn't have been better.

We use **except**, not **except for**, before prepositions, to-infinitives, bare infinitives, and *that*-clauses (although the word *that* may be left out (see Unit 70)):

- There is likely to be rain everywhere today **except in** Scotland.
- I rarely need to go into the city centre **except to do** some shopping.
- There is nothing more the doctor can do **except keep** an eye on him.
- They look just like the real thing, **except (that)** they are made of plastic.



Compare **except (for)** and **besides** in these sentences:

- I don't enjoy watching any sports **except (for)** cricket. (= I enjoy only cricket)
- **Besides** cricket, I enjoy watching football and basketball. (= I enjoy three sports)
- I haven't read anything written by her, **except (for)** one of her short stories.
- **Besides** her novels and poems, she published a number of short stories.

We use **except (for)** to mean 'with the exception of', but we use **besides** to mean 'as well as' or 'in addition to'.

We can use **apart from** instead of **except (for)** and **besides**:

- I don't enjoy watching any sports **apart from** cricket. (= except for)
- **Apart from** cricket, I enjoy watching football and basketball. (= besides; as well as)

We can use **but** with a similar meaning to **except (for)**, particularly after negative words such as *no*, *nobody*, and *nothing*:

- Immediately after the operation he could see **nothing but / except (for) / apart from** vague shadows.
- There was **no way out but / except / apart from** upwards, towards the light.

But for has a different meaning from **except for**. When we use **but for** we introduce a negative idea, saying what *might* have happened if other things had not happened:

- The country would now be self-sufficient in food **but for** the drought last year. (= if it hadn't been for the drought...)
- **But for** his broken leg he would probably have been picked for the national team by now. (= if it hadn't been for his broken leg...)

However, some people use **except for** in the same way as **but for**, particularly in spoken English. In formal writing it is better to use **but for** to introduce a negative idea and **except for** to introduce an exception.

EXERCISES

109.1 Complete the sentences with *except*, *except for*, or *except (for)* if both are possible. (A)

- All the countries signed the agreement Spain.
- He seemed to have hair everywhere – on the top of his head.
- I didn't stop working all morning, to make a cup of coffee at around 11.00.
- I don't know what more we can do to help encourage him to do his best in the exam.
- The room was empty a chair in one corner.
- I was never very good at any sports at school badminton.
- This plant is similar to the one in our garden, that the leaves are bigger.
- We didn't speak any language at home English.
- The conference went according to plan the confusion over what time dinner started on the last day.
- We rarely go to the theatre around Christmas when we take the children.

109.2 Where necessary, correct these sentences with *besides* or *except (for)*. If the sentence is already correct, put a ✓. (B)

- If people in the area were really concerned about the noise your children make, others except your neighbours would have complained.
- Except for the occasional word in English I didn't understand anything of the Japanese film.
- It is the best-selling brand of chocolate in all European countries besides Denmark and Greece.
- Except for his three cars, he owns two motorbikes and a small lorry.
- In all medical operations, besides emergencies, the patient needs to give his or her consent.
- Besides sugar and carbohydrates, you ought to avoid eating too much meat.

109.3 Match the sentences and rewrite them as single sentences beginning *But for the...* (C)

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 The teachers were very enthusiastic about the school play. | a If they hadn't he would never have become a writer. |
| 2 His family encouraged him greatly. | b If they hadn't, most people in the country would have starved to death. |
| 3 The two reporters had tremendous energy. | c Without this, the story would probably not have come to light. |
| 4 British people living abroad gave the party financial support. | d Without this, it would never have been performed. |
| 5 Governments around the world gave millions of dollars' worth of aid. | e Otherwise the party would not have been able to mount such a successful election campaign. |

Example: 1 + (d) But for the enthusiasm of the teachers, the school play would never have been performed.



About and on; by and with

A About and on

We can use **about** and **on** to mean 'concerning' or 'on the subject of'.

We use **about**, not **on** after the *verbs* argue, complain, find out, joke, know, protest, quarrel, read, teach (someone), tell (someone), worry; ask, enquire/inquire, learn, think (see also Unit 111); agree, hear, laugh (see also Unit 112); care, wonder (see also Unit 113); and after the *nouns* argument, chat, fuss, joke, letter, misunderstanding, quarrel:

- I didn't find out **about** Sara's illness until my brother telephoned me.
- Misunderstanding **about** the cause of malaria is common.

We use **on**, not **about**, after the *verbs* comment, concentrate, focus, insist, reflect (= think):

- I found it difficult to **concentrate on** my homework with the football **on** TV.
- They insisted **on** seeing my passport, even though I was nowhere near the border.

After some other verbs and nouns we can use either **about** or **on**. These include the *verbs* advise, agree, decide, disagree, lecture, speak, speculate, talk, write, and the *nouns* advice, agreement, book/article/paper, consultation, decision, idea, information, lecture, opinion, question:

- The press is starting to **speculate about/on** whether the minister can survive this time.
- There is little **agreement about/on** what caused the building to collapse.

When we refer to formal or academic speech or writing, after the verbs and nouns in B we can use either **about** or **on**. However, we prefer **about** when we refer to more informal speech or writing. Compare:

- She **spoke on** the recent advances in teaching reading. (this suggests a formal speech such as a lecture; *or ...spoke about...*) *and*
- Jim and Anita seemed surprised when I **spoke about** buying their car. (this suggests an informal conversation; *not '...spoke on...'*)
- We've been asked to study a **book on** the history of Norway. (*or ...a book about...*) *and*
- It's a **book about** three men and their dog on a boating holiday. (*not ...a book on...*)

D By and with

We can use **by** and **with** to talk about how something is done. We use **by** (followed by a noun or -ing) when we talk about what action we take to do something; we use **with** (followed by a noun) when we talk about what we use to do something:

- He only avoided the children **by braking hard** and swerving to the right.
- She succeeded **by sheer willpower**.
- I didn't have a bottle opener, so I had to open it **with a screwdriver**.
- I told him that he couldn't hope to catch a big fish **with a small rod** like that.

We use **by** in certain common phrases:

- I turned the computer off **by mistake** and lost all my work.

Other phrases like this include **by accident**; **by phone**; **by bus/car, etc.**; **by air/road/rail/land/sea**; **by cheque / credit card**; **by degrees/stages**; **by heart**; **by force**; **by hand**; **by post/fax/e-mail (or E-mail)**.

However, if there is a determiner before the noun (e.g. *a(n), the, this, that, my, her*) or if the noun is plural, we use a preposition *other than* **by**. For example:

- I ordered it **on the phone**.
- I learnt about it **in an email** from my boss.
- She turned up **in her** new car.
- I never travel **in buses**.

EXERCISES

110.1 Choose an appropriate word + on or about to complete each sentence. (A & B)

argument asked chat comment focused inquire insist
knew letters reflect taught ~~worry~~

- 1 Many students will now be starting to worry about their exam results.
- 2 We had an cleaning the house and she hasn't spoken to me since.
- 3 The time off work gave me the opportunity to what I wanted to do next.
- 4 I him what he plans to do after he leaves school.
- 5 Much of the election debate has two issues, health and education.
- 6 She me a lot computer programming.
- 7 Over the last two weeks we've received hundreds of the proposed new road.
- 8 I'm phoning to tickets for tonight's concert.
- 9 Over a cup of coffee we had a long her plans for the garden.
- 10 The newspapers are today reporting that you are going to resign. Perhaps you would like to that, Mr Green.
- 11 The first I the accident was when the police arrived.
- 12 I paying for my share of the meal.

110.2 Complete these sentences with about or about/on if both words are possible. (C)

- 1 a Professor Miles is speaking optical fibre technology at 4.30 in the large lecture theatre.
- b I've never heard him speak what happened to him that night.
- 2 a There were a number of books architecture on her shelves.
- b I've been reading a book giant bees that take over the world.
- 3 a She's got some fairly firm ideas what she does and doesn't like.
- b Fry's book has influenced the development of ideas music teaching.
- 4 a Some people don't like to talk their illnesses.
- b Michael gave a talk global warming at the conference in Vienna.
- 5 a Researchers in Spain have put forward an idea the cause of the infection.
- b Have you got any idea what to get her for Christmas?

110.3 If necessary, suggest appropriate corrections for these sentences, or put a ✓. (D)

- 1 I finally killed the fly by a rolled-up newspaper.
- 2 You can make the drink taste better with adding sugar.
- 3 The report is urgent, so could you send it to me by fax.
- 4 Can I pay by my credit card?
- 5 He could only reach the window with standing on a ladder.
- 6 The parcel is so big it would cost a fortune to send it with air.
- 7 She managed to complete the report before the deadline by working every evening and at weekends.
- 8 I think she's coming by the train.
- 9 To escape, I had to break a window with a chair.
- 10 He got the nail out of his shoe by a key.
- 11 I spoke to her by the phone.

