

Common prepositions and example sentences

at / between / on / in / by / from – to / of / over / during

A key point to consider here is whether the preposition is coming after the noun or the verb and also if a specific number or statistic is included. For instance, here are some sentences I recently saw in task 1 reports.

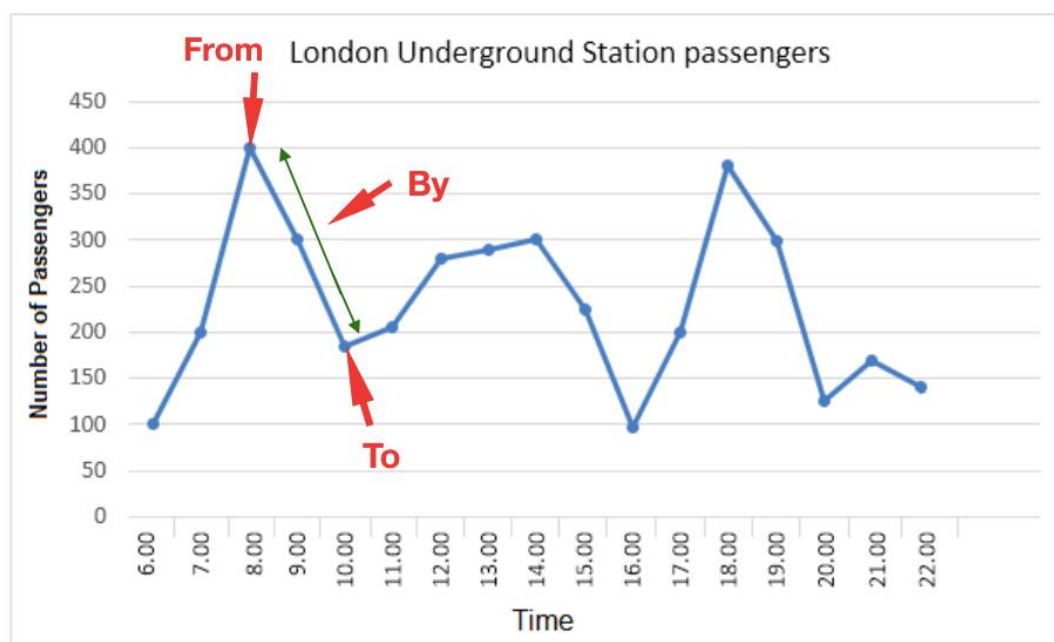
- *Noun* – ‘There was an increase **in** the population after 1998’
- *Noun* – ‘There was a population increase **of** 30% after 1998.’
- *Verb* – ‘The population increased **by** 20,000 after 1998’

In the first sentence above there is no specific statistic, however, in the second sentence above you can see that the preposition is different as it is followed by a specific statistic. In sentence 3 after the verb ‘increased’ you need to use ‘by’.

However, take a look at these 3 sentences below.

- *Verb* – ‘Sales of cars dropped **from** 30,000 units **to** 10,500 units over a 3 year period’
- *Noun* – ‘Car sales saw a decrease **from** 30,000 units **to** 10,500 units **over** a 3 year period’
- *Verb* – ‘Car sales increased **from** 10,000 units **to** 23,000 units **over** a 3 year period’

In these examples, the preposition is the same after a verb or noun. To express either a downward or upward movement from one point to another, you can use **from to**.



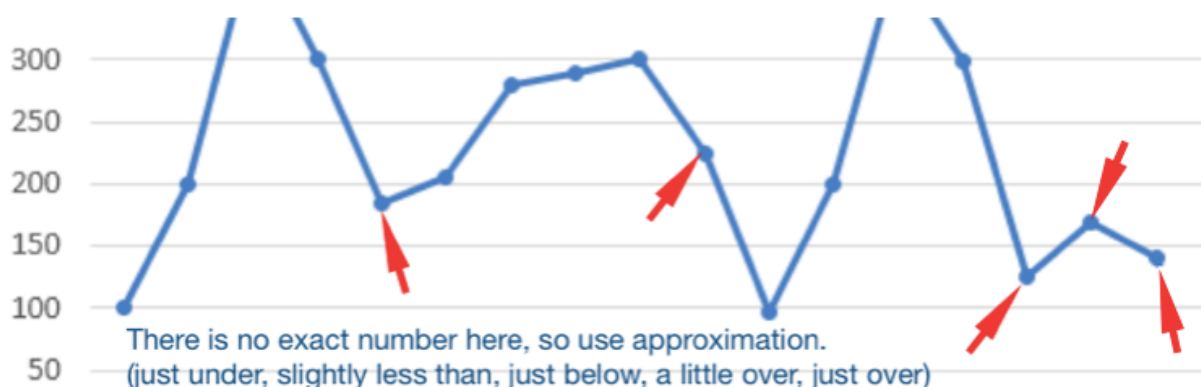
1. The proportion of passengers dropped **from** 400 **to just under** 200.
2. The proportion of passengers dropped **by just over** 200.
3. There was a decrease **in** passengers **from** 400 **to just under** 200

As you can see, the start point is 400 and the end point is just under 200, so use 'from -> to'. However, if you want to report on **the amount of change between the two points** use the preposition 'by' as in sentence number 2.

Sentence number 3 shows a noun 'a decrease' so I can use the preposition 'in' after that.

Using approximation

I also use the language of approximation here '**just under / just over**' because in that part of the chart there is no exact number. In IELTS writing task 1 academic graphs you will need to use approximation if the line doesn't show an exact number.



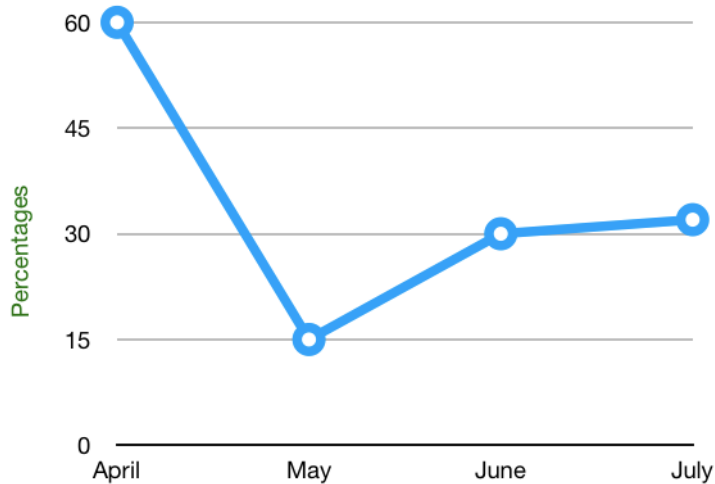
You can use 'just over, just under, slightly more than / less than, a little over, a little under' when describing graphs.

- By 9 pm passenger numbers accounted for a little over 150.
- At 10 pm the proportion of passengers stood **at slightly less than 150**.

By 6 pm the number of passengers stood at just under 400.

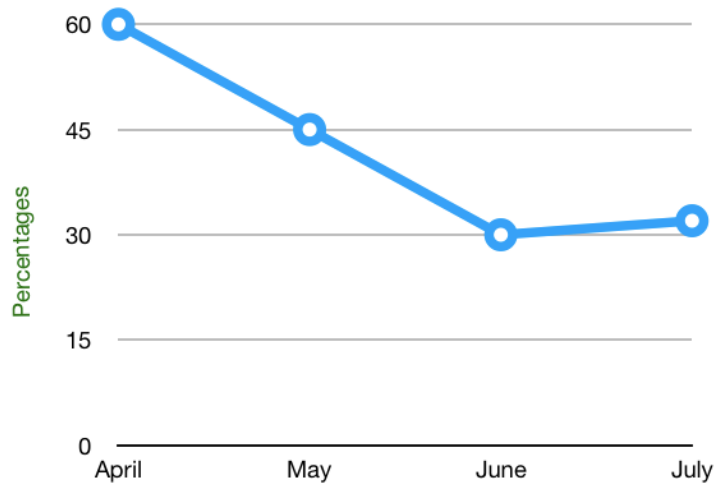
Be careful when using ‘by’ and ‘to’

Take a look at these examples of how to use ‘Decline **by**’ and ‘Decline **to**’ (it’s the same for a rising trend: increase to / Increase by) In the Line graph below to describe the change from April to May and May to June I can write:



From April to May the figure declined **to** 15%.

From May to June the figure increased **to** 30%



From April to May the figure declined **by** 15%

From June to July the figure increased **by** a very small amount.

There is a big difference in the way these prepositions are used. Simple mistakes with **by** and **to** can cost you points.

Prepositions for date / time ranges

Let's take a look at using **in** / **over** / **during** / **between** / **at**. When describing time periods or years or months you need to use '**in**' and '**over**'. See the examples below taken from different types of IELTS task 1 reports.

'In' + months / years 'over / during' + a set time period

- Car production increased **by** 20% **in** 2010
- Sales of iPhones declined **in** January
- Visitor numbers witnessed fluctuations **over** the 5 year period.
- Coal exports declined considerably **over** the two decades.
- Passenger numbers showed a slight increase **during** the whole period

'Between' / 'and' is used for a start and end time

- Car production increased sharply **between** 2010 and 2012.
- The proportion of visitors to the museum saw declines **between** January **and** November.

Using 'begin at' / 'end at' / 'stood at'

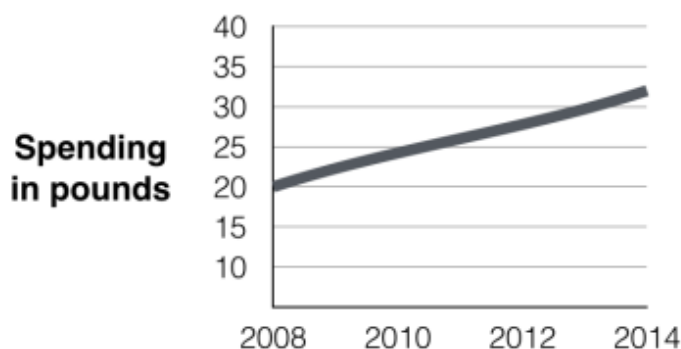
- The proportion of car exports stood **at** 30,000 in 2012.
- Sales figures for electronics ended **at just under** 25% in the last quarter.

In 1990 the figure for nuclear energy used in France began at 50%.

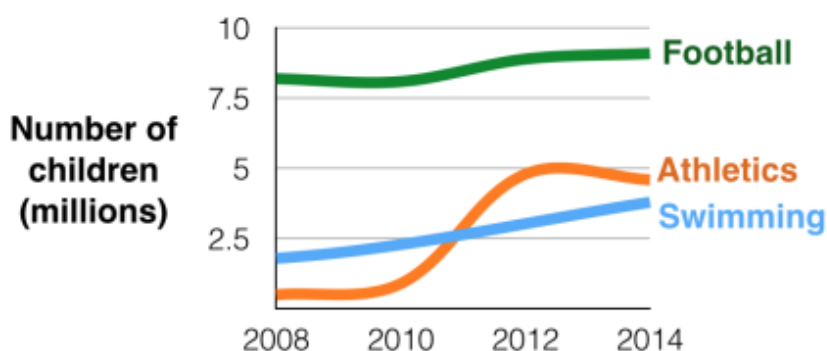
Let's practice

Take a look at the charts below, fill in the blanks then check your answers. Note that these are just sentences for practice purposes only, this is **not** a model answer.

Average monthly spend on children's sports



Participation in three different sports



Use these words below (some can be used more than once)

in / at / between – and / from / to / by / during / of

The monthly expenditure on children's sports saw a rise _____ 20 pounds _____ a little over 30 pounds _____ 2008 _____ 2014.

Figures for participation in athletics started _____ around 1 million children _____ 2008. This remained constant until 2010. However, _____ 2010 _____ 2012 the proportion _____ children taking part in Athletics rose _____ 5 million with a slight dip _____ the end of the period.

The number _____ children taking part in swimming began _____ a little less than 2.5 million _____ 2008 and saw a steady increase ending _____ around 4 million.

The figure for youngsters participating in football stood _____ just over 7.5 million _____ 2008. _____ 2010 _____ 2014 it increased _____ approximately 1 million. All three sports showed increases _____ the whole period.

Show Answers

The monthly expenditure on children's sports saw a rise **from** 20 pounds **to** a little over 30 pounds **between** 2008 **and** 2014.

Figures for participation in athletics started **at** around 1 million children **in** 2008. This remained constant until 2010. However, **between** 2010 **and** 2012 the proportion **of** children taking part in Athletics rose **to** 5 million with a slight dip **by** the end of the period.

The number **of** children taking part in swimming began **at** a little less than 2.5 million **in** 2008 and saw a steady increase ending **at** around 4 million.

The figure for youngsters participating in football stood **at** just over 7.5 million **in** 2008. **From** 2010 **to** 2014 it increased **by** approximately 1 million. All three sports showed increases **during** the whole period.