

Prepositions

Prepositions: uses

We commonly use prepositions to show a relationship in space or time or a logical relationship between two or more people, places or things. Prepositions are most commonly followed by a noun phrase or pronoun (underlined):

*The last time I saw him he was walking **down** the road.*

*I'll meet you in the cafe **opposite** the cinema.*

*It was difficult to sleep **during** the flight.*

*It was the worst storm **since** the 1980s.*

*Give that **to** me.*

There are over 100 prepositions in English. The most common single-word prepositions are:

<i>about</i>	<i>beside</i>	<i>near</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>above</i>	<i>between</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>towards</i>

<i>across</i>	<i>beyond</i>	<i>off</i>	<i>under</i>
<i>after</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>underneath</i>
<i>against</i>	<i>despite</i>	<i>onto</i>	<i>unlike</i>
<i>along</i>	<i>down</i>	<i>opposite</i>	<i>until</i>
<i>among</i>	<i>during</i>	<i>out</i>	<i>up</i>
<i>around</i>	<i>except</i>	<i>outside</i>	<i>upon</i>
<i>as</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>via</i>
<i>at</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>past</i>	<i>with</i>

<i>before</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>round</i>	<i>within</i>
<i>behind</i>	<i>inside</i>	<i>since</i>	<i>without</i>
<i>below</i>	<i>into</i>	<i>than</i>	
<i>beneath</i>	<i>like</i>	<i>through</i>	

Although most prepositions are single words, some pairs and groups of words operate like single prepositions:

*They were unable to attend **because of** the bad weather in Ireland.*

*Jack'll be playing in the team **in place of** me.*

***In addition to** getting a large fine, both brothers were put in prison for three months.*

*I always get nervous when I have to speak **in front of** an audience.*

*We estimate that there'll be **up to** 10,000 people at the concert.*

The most common prepositions that consist of groups of words are:

<i>ahead of</i>	<i>except for</i>	<i>instead of</i>	<i>owing to</i>
<i>apart from</i>	<i>in addition to</i>	<i>near to</i>	<i>such as</i>
<i>as for</i>	<i>in front of</i>	<i>on account of</i>	<i>thanks to</i>
<i>as well as</i>	<i>in place of</i>	<i>on top of</i>	<i>up to</i>
<i>because of</i>	<i>in spite of</i>	<i>out of</i>	
<i>due to</i>	<i>inside of</i>	<i>outside of</i>	

Prepositions or conjunctions?

Some words which are prepositions also function as conjunctions. When we use a preposition that is followed by a clause, it is functioning as a conjunction; when we use a preposition that is followed by a noun phrase, it stays as a preposition. Among the most common are *after*, *as*, *before*, *since*, *until*:

After *I'd met him last night, I texted his sister at once.* (conjunction)

***After** the meeting last night, I texted his sister at once.* (preposition)

*We'll just have to wait **until** they decide what to do.* (conjunction)

*Okay, we'll wait here **until** six o'clock.* (preposition)

Prepositions or adverbs?

Several words which are prepositions also belong to the word class of adverbs. These include: *about, across, around, before, beyond, in, inside, near, opposite, outside, past, round, through, under, up, within*:

*There were lots of people waiting for a taxi **outside** the club.* (preposition)

A: *Where's your cat?*

B: *She's **outside**.* (adverb)

*The gallery is **opposite** the Natural History Museum.* (preposition)

A: *Can you tell me where the bus station is?*

B: *It's over there, just **opposite**.* (adverb)

Prepositions and abstract meanings

Common prepositions that show relationships of space often have abstract as well as concrete meanings.

Compare

*That map you need is **behind** the filing cabinet. (basic spatial sense or position)*

*Everyone is **behind** the government. (*behind* = gives support)*

***Beyond** the hotel were beautiful mountains. (basic spatial sense or position)*

*Learning Chinese in a year was **beyond** them all. (*beyond* = too difficult for)*

Some common prepositions such as *at*, *in* and *on* can have abstract meanings:

*I think you will both need to discuss the problem **in** private.*

*All three singers were dressed **in** black.*

*You now have the next day **at** leisure and can do whatever you wish.*

*Our dog stays **on** guard all night, even when he's sleeping!*

Prepositions and adjectives

We commonly use prepositions after adjectives. Here are the most common adjective + preposition patterns.

adjectives	preposition	

<i>aware, full</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>They weren't aware of the time.</i>
<i>different, separate</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>Is French very different from Spanish?</i>
<i>due, similar</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>This picture is similar to the one in our living room.</i>
<i>familiar, wrong</i>	<i>with</i>	<i>What's wrong with Isabelle?</i>
<i>good, surprised*</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>We were really surprised at the price of food in restaurants on our holiday.</i>
<i>interested</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>Lots of people are interested in Grand Prix racing but I'm not.</i>

<i>responsible, good</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>Exercise is good for everyone.</i>
<i>worried, excited</i>	<i>about</i>	<i>We're really excited about our trip to Argentina.</i>

*We can also say *surprised **by***

Prepositions and nouns

Many nouns have particular prepositions which normally follow them:

*There's been a large **increase in** the price of petrol.*

*Does anyone know the **cause of** the fire?*

See also:

- [Nouns and prepositions](#)
- [Nouns](#)

Prepositions and verbs

Many verbs go together with prepositions to make prepositional verbs. These always have an object:

*I just couldn't **do without** my phone.*

Robert **accused** her **of** stealing his idea.

Phrasal-prepositional verbs contain a verb, an adverb particle and a preposition (underlined). We cannot separate the particle and the preposition:

The taxi is due any minute. Can you **listen out** for it?

I can't **put up** with this noise any longer.

Prepositions: position and stranding

Traditional grammatical rules say that we should not have a preposition at the end of a clause or sentence. However, we sometimes do separate a preposition from the words which follow it (its complement). This is called preposition stranding, and it is common in informal styles:

She was someone **to whom** he could talk. (formal)

She was someone **who** he could talk **to**. (informal)

Which room are they having breakfast **in**? (informal)

In which room are they having breakfast? (formal)

If we leave out words that are clear from the context (ellipsis), we can use *wh*-questions with a *wh*-word + stranded preposition:

A: The office is moving next year.

B: Really, where **to**?

A: *I'm going to buy some flowers online.*

B: *Who **for**?*

A: *My mother.*