

USING PREPOSITIONS

What are prepositions?

Prepositions are used to show the **relationship** between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. Words like *of, in, to, for, with, under* and *between* are common examples of prepositions.

Prepositions often describe the **position, time** or **manner** in which something is done. They can be tricky because there aren't many rules to help you decide which preposition to use.

TIP

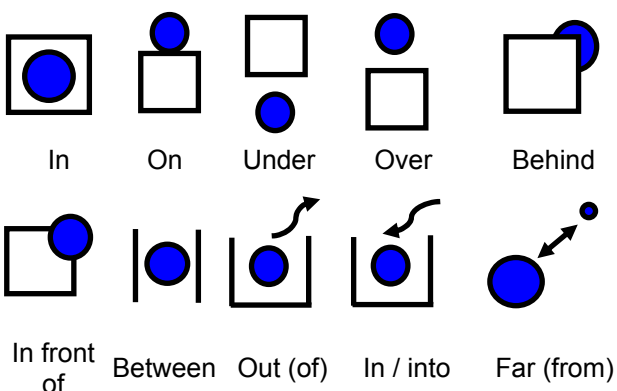
Most of the time, prepositions will come in front of a noun or pronoun, e.g. *I ate lunch **with** my friends; We went **to** the cinema.*

However, at times we can end sentences with a preposition, e.g. *He had no savings **to speak of**; Where did she come **from**?* Placing the preposition before the pronoun often makes the sentence more formal, e.g. ***From** where did he come?*

Prepositions of position

Prepositions can describe the direction, location and space of nouns and pronouns.

Illustration of positional prepositions



Some prepositions (e.g. *above, after, below, down, on top of, over, under, underneath, up*) describe **vertical relationships**, e.g.

- *The plane flew **above** the clouds.*
- *We are going to fly **over** Perth* (this example suggests horizontal movement).
- *They crawled **beneath** the building.*
- ***Under** 50 people attended the seminar* (here under means 'less than').
- *Don't fall **down** the stairs*
- *She jumped **off** the platform.*

TIP

We use 'above' and 'below' to talk about rank or level, e.g. *A Captain is ranked **above** a Lieutenant but **below** a Major.*

Other prepositions (e.g. *against, along, around, beside, on, at, near, next to*) describe **horizontal relationships**, e.g.

- *We are **at** the starting line.*
- *He sidled up **beside** his colleague.*

TIP

We tend to use 'in' with countries, cities and towns (e.g. *I am **in** Perth*), 'on' with streets, roads and islands (e.g. *The car is **on** Smith Street*) and 'at' with addresses and specific locations (e.g. *Meet me **at** the Reid library*).

Finally, some prepositions describe relationships when people or objects are **facing the same way** (e.g. *after, before, behind, in front of*), or **facing each other** (e.g. *opposite, in front of, against*). For example,

- *Kim is **after** Jo in the queue.*
- *Mike is standing **opposite** Mary.*
- *Perth Glory lost **against** Sydney FC.*

Prepositions of time

Prepositions can be used to describe a point in time. The prepositions **at**, **in** and **on** are especially useful for this task.

Use '**at**' for specific times and periods, e.g. **at Easter (time)**; **at twelve o'clock**.

Use '**in**' with parts of days, months or seasons, e.g. **in June**; **in the 20th century**.

Use '**on**' with days and dates, e.g. **on New Year's Day**, **on the third of December**.



Prepositions can also describe the **duration** of time. Words like *between*, *during*, *for*, *from*, *since*, *throughout*, *up to* and *within* are often used in this way. For example,

- *The common lunch hour at UWA is **from** 1pm **to** 2pm on Tuesdays.*
- *The common lunch hour is **between** 1pm and 2pm on Tuesdays.*
- *Many students leave Perth **during** the semester break.*
- *I have been studying at UWA **since** 2012 (a point in time).*
- *I have been studying at UWA **for** three years (a period of time).*

Prepositions of manner

Sometimes prepositions tell us about the way something happens or how something is done. Some examples are the words **by**, **in**, **like**, **on** and **with**. For instance:

- *We couldn't afford to travel **by** airplane.*
- *She held her balance **with** great poise.*
- *Coaches say he runs **like** a gazelle.*

Prepositions of cause and effect

We also use prepositions to express the cause of something, and the effect it has on something else. Some examples include the phrases **because of**, **on account of** and **due to**. For instance,

- ***On account of** the cold weather, we stayed home.*
- *They are late **because of** the bad traffic.*
- *They estimate the Earth's average temperature has risen by 0.5°C since 1880 **due to** greenhouse emissions.*

TIP

Keep a vocabulary notebook to record expressions that include prepositions.

Remember, the more you read in English and the more you listen to English being spoken, the more you will develop a sense for which preposition is the best to use.

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