

HUNTER COLLEGE READING/WRITING CENTER

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS
Prepositions: Definition and Usage

A **preposition** may be defined as connecting word showing the relation of a noun or a noun substitute to some other word in the sentence (the squirrel in the tree; the preposition in shows the relationship between the squirrel and the tree.).

Over ninety percent of preposition usage involves these nine prepositions:

with	at	by
to	in	for
from	of	on

Prepositions cause problems because sometimes they can be used interchangeably (He sat on the chair: He sat in the chair), because prepositions are often combined with verbs to create phrasal verbs (to look after someone; to look down on someone), and because a single preposition can be used to express several different ideas (He is tall for his age; I swam for an hour).

The most efficient method of study is to familiarize yourself with prepositions and prepositional phrases through practice and memorization. This is particularly helpful for the bilingual student, who often seems to find preposition usage one of the most difficult parts of the English language.

Uses of Common Prepositions

Prepositions are used to express a number of relationships, including time, location, manner, means, quantity, purpose, and state or condition. The following outline demonstrates the uses of common prepositions.

A. TIME

about:	about noon (approximately)	after:	after the game after lunch after three
at:	at five o'clock at last (finally)	for:	for an hour (duration)
by:	by midnight (no later than)	in:	in the morning in the fall in April in 1987 in six months (at the end of) in time (early enough)
from:	from Monday to Friday	to:	a quarter to three (15 minutes before)
of:	a quarter of three (15 minutes before)		
on:	on Tuesday (day of the week) on May 8 (date) on time (punctual)		
past:	a quarter past three (15 minutes after)		

B. PLACE OR DIRECTION

around:	She walked around the car.	at:	They are at home. We were at the restaurant.
down:	They lived down the hall.		He smiled at her.
from:	We immigrated from Peru in 1991. The restaurant is one mile from here.	in:	He lives in a trailer. We waited in the bus.
of:	We moved south of Montreal	inside:	Put it inside the house.
on:	We sat on the ocean pier.	to:	He went to Prague. Give it to me.
through:	They drove through the tunnel.		
up:	He walked up the stairs.		
with:	He went with me.		

C. MEANS OR AGENT

by:	He was hit by a ball. She came by train. He did it by hard work. It came by special delivery. He got there by swimming.	from:	His success results from careful planning.
		in:	He takes pleasure in it.
		on:	They live on bread and water.
		with:	He chased the mongoose with a stick.

D. MANNER

by:	By doing it yourself, you save time.	in:	He left in confusion. The room was in a turmoil. You can do it in a day.
like:	He looks like a hero.		
on:	I swear it on my word of honor.		
with:	He ate it with a fork.		

E. STATE OR CONDITION

at:	My friend is at work. She is at home.	by:	They are by themselves (alone).
on:	He is on duty (scheduled to work).	in:	He is in a state of confusion.
as:	I see her as a good person.	for:	I mistook you for someone else.

F. QUANTITY OR MEASURE

for:	We drove for twenty miles. We bought it for ten cents.	by:	We bought them by the kilo.
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G. PURPOSE

for:	He bought it for an emergency. She went to the city for sightseeing. He loved her for her thoughtfulness.
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Uses of Prepositions after Certain Verbs

account for
agree on (something)
agree with (someone)
apologize to
apply for
approve of
argue with (someone)
ask for
believe in
belong to
blame (someone) for (something)
blame (something) on (someone)
borrow from
call on (upon)
care for
compliment (someone) on
come from
consent to
consist of
convince (someone) of (something)
decide on (upon)
depend on (upon)
get rid of
hear about
hear from
hear of
insist on (upon)
invite (someone) to
laugh at
listen for
listen to
look at
look for
look forward to
object to
plan on
provide for
provide with
recover from
remind (someone) of
search for
see about
substitute for
talk about
talk of
telephone to
think about
think of
wait for
wait on (meaning serve)

Uses of Prepositions with Certain Adjectives and in Idiomatic Expressions

according to
accustomed to
angry about (something)
angry at (someone)
angry with (someone)
based on
capable of
composed of
content with
dependent on (upon)
different from (than)
disappointed in
due to
followed by
fond of
have respect for
in accordance with
independent of
in regard to
interested in
limited to
married to
proud of
related to
resulting from
similar to
tired of