



Prepositions



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from [English Grammar Today](#).

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>

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<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>

*due to**inside of**outside of*

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)



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.*

See also:

[Prepositional verbs](#)

[Phrasal-prepositional verbs](#)

[Prepositional phrases](#)





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.*

See also:

[Word order and focus](#)

[Ellipsis](#)

Popular searches

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08 ***Present perfect continuous (I have been working)***