

PREPOSITIONS

The list below gives the most usual meanings of English prepositions. Each meaning is illustrated by an example.

About: 1. On the subject of: This is a story **about** elephants.
2. Approximately: He is **about** ten years old.

Above: 1. Higher than; over: The plane flew **above** the clouds.
2. Earlier on a page: There is a heading **above** each diagram.

Across: 1. From one side to the other: We walked **across** the field.
2. On the other side of: There is a store **across** the street.

After: 1. Later in time: **after** ten o'clock; **after** lunch
2. Later in a series: Q comes **after** P in the alphabet.
3. In pursuit of: The dog ran **after** the cat.

Against: 1. In opposition to: Theft is **against** the law.
2. Touching; supported by: I leaned my bicycle **against** the wall.

Along: 1. Following the length of: We walked **along** the road.

Among: 1. Within a group: The money was shared **among** three people.

Note: In formal English, **among** is usually used only when referring to more than two persons or things. In contrast, **between** is used when referring to two persons or things.

Around: 1. Circling something: We walked **around** the block.
2. Surrounding: There is a fence **around** the garden.
3. In different parts of: I looked **around** the house for the keys.
4. In the other direction: We turned **around** and went back home.
5. Approximately: He is **around** six feet tall.

At: 1. A specific location: **at** 23 Chestnut Street; **at** the park
2. A point in time: **at** 5 o'clock; **at** Christmas
3. A condition: **at** peace; **at** war; **at** rest
4. An activity: **at** work; **at** school; **at** play
5. Towards: Look **at** someone; wave **at** someone

Note: When referring to a specific location or to a point in time, **at** is usually used. When referring to a certain street or a certain day, **on** is usually used. When referring to a location as an area, or when referring to a unit of time longer than a day, **in** is usually used.

Example: **at** Christmas; **on** Christmas day; **in** the Christmas holidays

Before: 1. Earlier in time: **before** two o'clock; **before** Christmas
2. Earlier in a series: S comes **before** T in the alphabet.

Behind: 1. At the back of: The little girl hid **behind** her mother.
2. Late: I am **behind** in my work.
3. Cause; origin: Who was **behind** that idea?

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Below: 1. Lower than; under: **below** freezing; **below** sea level
2. Later on a page: Footnotes are provided **below** the text.

Beneath: 1. Lower than; below: **beneath** the earth

Beside: 1. Next to; at the side of: I sit **beside** her in class.

Besides: 1. Also; as well as: We study other languages **besides** English.

Note the differing meanings of **beside** and **besides**. **Beside** is usually used with reference to a physical location.

Between: 1. An intermediate location: Toronto lies **between** Montreal and Vancouver.
2. An intermediate time: **between** Christmas and New Year's Day
3. Intermediate in a series: B comes **between** A and C in the alphabet.
4. An intermediate amount: **between** five and ten people
5. Within a group of two: The money was shared **between** two people.

Beyond: 1. Farther than: The mountains lie **beyond** the horizon.
2. Further than; exceeding: That was **beyond** my expectations.

But: 1. Except: I have read all **but** the last chapter.

Note: **But** is used more often as a conjunction than as a preposition.

By: 1. Near: a house **by** the sea
2. Past: He waved as he drove **by** the house.
3. Not later than: Try to finish the work **by** next week.
4. In units of: cheaper **by** the dozen; sold **by** weight
5. Through the means of: travel **by** plane; written **by** him

Note: **By** is often used in combination with verbs in the Passive Voice.

Concerning: 1. Connected with; about: He studies everything **concerning** trees.

Despite: 1. In spite of: We walked downtown **despite** the rain.

Down: 1. To a lower position: The ball rolled **down** the hill.
2. Further along: He lives **down** the street.

During: 1. Throughout a period: She works **during** the day.
2. Sometime within a period: An accident occurred **during** the night.

Except: 1. Not including: I have visited everyone **except** him.

For: 1. Duration of time: We walked **for** two hours.
2. Distance: I walked **for** five kilometers.
3. Purpose: I bought this jacket **for** you.
4. In the direction of: She left **for** New York.
5. In favor of: We are **for** the proposal.
6. Considering: The boy is clever **for** his age.

From: 1. Place of origin: We left **from** Boston; he comes **from** Mexico
2. Start of a period of time: **from** now on; **from** yesterday until today
3. Start of a range: **From** 20 to 30 people were present.

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4. Cause: He suffers **from** nervousness.
5. Source: I first heard the story **from** you.

- In:**
1. Place thought of as an area: **in** London; **in** Europe
 2. Within a location: **in** the room; **in** the building
 3. Large units of time: That happened **in** March, **in** 1992.
 4. Within a certain time: I will return **in** an hour.
 5. A member of: He is **in** the orchestra; **in** the navy
 6. Wearing: the boy **in** the blue shirt
 7. With reference to: lacking **in** ideas; rich **in** oil

Inside: 1. Within: They are **inside** the house.

- Into:**
1. To the inside of: We stepped **into** the room.
 2. Change of condition: The boy changed **into** a man.

- Like:**
1. Resembling: That looks **like** him.
 2. Appearing possible: It looks **like** rain.
 3. Be in a suitable mood for: I feel **like** going swimming.

Minus: 1. Less: Three **minus** two equals one.

Near: 1. Close to: **near** the school; **near** the ocean

- Of:**
1. Location: east **of** here; the middle **of** the road
 2. Possession: a friend **of** mine; the sound **of** music
 3. Part of a group: one **of** us; a member **of** the team
 4. Measurement: a cup **of** milk; two meters **of** snow

- Off:**
1. Not on; away from: Please keep **off** the grass.
 2. At some distance from: There are islands **off** the coast.

- On:**
1. Touching the surface of: **on** the table; **on** the wall
 2. A certain day: That happened **on** Sunday, **on** the 6th of June.
 3. A certain street: **on** South Street
 4. About: a book **on** engineering

Onto: 1. To a position on: The child climbed **onto** the table.

Opposite: 1. Facing: The library is **opposite** the fire station.

- Out of:**
1. To the outside of: She went **out of** the room.
 2. From among: We won two games **out of** three.
 3. Motive: We spoke to them **out of** politeness.
 4. Material: The bridge is made **out of** steel.
 5. Beyond: **out of** control; **out of** danger

- Outside:**
1. On the outer side of: **outside** the house
 2. Beyond the limits of: **outside** my experience

- Over:**
1. Above; higher than: There are cupboards **over** the sink.
 2. Covering: We spread an extra blanket **over** the bed.
 3. Across: I jumped **over** a puddle.

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4. More than: It cost **over** ten dollars; it took **over** an hour
5. During: I saw him several times **over** the past week.
6. By means of: We made plans **over** the telephone.

- Past:** 1. Up to and beyond: I walked **past** the house.
 2. After (in time): It was **past** 2 o'clock; half **past** two
 3. Beyond: **past** belief

Per: 1. For each: 60 kilometers **per** hour; price **per** liter

Plus: 1. With the addition of: Six **plus** four equals ten.

- Since:** 1. From a specific time in the past: I had been waiting **since** two o'clock.
 2. From a past time until now: I have been waiting here **since** noon.

Note: Because of its meaning, the preposition **since** is usually used in combination with a perfect tense. It should be noted that the preposition **for** can also be used with a perfect tense. However, when used with reference to time, **for** is usually followed by a phrase referring to a **period** of time; whereas **since** is usually followed by a phrase referring to a **specific** time.

Example: I have known him **for** six months.

I have known him **since** January.

In the first example, **for** is followed by **six months**, which refers to a period of time. In the second example, **since** is followed by **January**, which refers to a specific time.

- Through:** 1. Across; from end to end of: the main road **through** town
 2. For the whole of a period: I slept **through** the night.
 3. By means of: Skill improves **through** practice.

- Throughout:** 1. In every part of: **throughout** the world
 2. For the whole of a period: **throughout** the winter

Till can be used instead of **until**. However, at the beginning of a sentence, **until** is usually used.

- To:** 1. In the direction of: Turn **to** the right.
 2. Destination: I am going **to** Rome.
 3. Until: from Monday **to** Friday; five minutes **to** ten
 4. Compared with: They prefer hockey **to** soccer.
 5. With indirect object: Please give it **to** me.
 6. As part of infinitive: I like **to** ski; he wants **to** help.
 7. In order to: We went to the store **to** buy soap.

- Toward (or Towards):** 1. In the direction of: We walked **toward** the center of town.
 2. Near; just before (time): It rained **towards** evening.

- Under:** 1. Beneath: **under** the desk; **under** the trees
 2. Less than: **Under** 100 people were present.
 3. In circumstances of: **under** repair; **under** way; **under** discussion

Underneath: 1. Below, under: **underneath** the carpet

Until: 1. Up to a certain time: She will stay **until** Friday; **until** 5 p.m.

Upon: **On** and **upon** have similar meanings. **Upon** may be used in certain expressions, as in **once upon a time**, and following certain verbs, as in to **rely upon** someone.

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Up: 1. To a higher place: We went **up** the stairs.
2. In a higher place: She lives **up** the hill.

Up to: 1. As far as: **up to** now; I have read **up to** page 100.
2. Depending on: The decision is **up to** you.
3. As good as; ready for: His work is **up to** standard.

Versus: 1. Against (sports, legal): The next game is England **versus** Australia.

Via: 1. By way of: He went to Los Angeles **via** San Francisco.

With: 1. Accompanying: He came **with** her; I have my keys **with** me.
2. Having; containing: Here is a book **with** a map of the island.
3. By means of; using: I repaired the shoes **with** glue.
4. Manner: **with** pleasure; **with** ease; **with** difficulty
5. Because of: We were paralyzed **with** fear.

Within: 1. Inside of: **within** twenty minutes; **within** one kilometer

Without: 1. Not having: Do not leave **without** your coat; **without** money

