

Prepositions

How can we use these little words correctly?

Prepositions are used in many different ways in English - perhaps that's why a lot of people have problems with them. The explanations are found at the end of this list.

First, they are used with time words:

- **on** Monday
- **in** the 20th century
- **at** night

Second, they are used to show where something or someone is:

- The plate is **on** the table.
- Julie is **in** the garden.
- The picture is **on** the wall.

Third, they are used after some adjectives:

- She is good **at** tennis.
- Scotland is famous **for** whisky
- I'm worried **about** my new job.

Fourth, they are used after some verbs:

- I'm listening **to** music.
- She is waiting **for** her friend.
- He borrows money **from** his sister.

[Click here to learn more about verb + prep.](#)

Fifth, they are used after some nouns:

- She has trouble **with** remembering new vocabulary.

Finally, they are used in certain phrases:

- The bus arrived **in** the end.
 - She arrived just **in** time for the film.
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Prepositions of Time

In, at, on and no preposition with time words:

Prepositions of time - here's a list of the time words that need 'on', 'in', 'at' and some that don't need any preposition. Be careful - many students of English use 'on' with months (it should be 'in'), or put a preposition before 'next' when we don't need one.

- times: **at** 8pm, **at** midnight, **at** 6:30
 - holiday periods: **at** Christmas, **at** Easter
- at**
- **at** night
 - **at** the weekend
 - **at** lunchtime, **at** dinnertime, **at** breakfast time
- on**
- days: **on** Monday, **on** my birthday, **on** Christmas Day
 - days + morning / afternoon / evening / night: **on** Tuesday morning
 - dates: **on** the 20th of June
- in**
- years: **in** 1992, **in** 2006
 - months: **in** December, **in** June
 - decades: **in** the sixties, **in** the 1790s
 - centuries: **in** the 19th century
 - seasons: **in** winter, **in** summer
 - **in** the morning, **in** the afternoon, **in** the evening
- no prep**
- next week, year, month etc
 - last night, year etc
 - this morning, month etc
 - every day, night, years etc
 - today, tomorrow, yesterday

EXERCISE – TIME PREPOSITIONS

Put in the correct preposition (at, in, on, or no preposition):

1. There was a loud noise which woke us up ____ midnight.
2. Do you usually eat chocolate eggs ____ Easter?
3. What are you doing ____ the weekend?
4. ____ last week, I worked until 9pm ____ every night.
5. My father always reads the paper ____ breakfast time.
6. She plays tennis ____ Fridays.
7. The trees here are really beautiful ____ the spring.
8. I'll see you ____ Tuesday afternoon, then.
9. Shakespeare died ____ 1616.
10. She studies ____ every day.
11. John is going to buy the presents ____ today.
12. In my hometown the shops open early ____ the morning.
13. She met her husband ____ 1998.
14. The party is ____ next Saturday.
15. We are meeting ____ Friday morning.
16. I often get sleepy ____ the afternoon.
17. His daughter was born ____ the 24th of August.
18. Mobile phones became popular ____ the nineties.
19. The meeting will take place ____ this afternoon.
20. Luckily the weather was perfect ____ her wedding day

Prepositions of Place

Prepositions of place can be difficult - here's some help about using 'at', 'in' and 'on' when you're talking about where things are.

Basics:

If something is contained inside a box or a wide flat area, we use **'in'**:

in the newspaper

in a house

in a cup

in a drawer

in a bottle

in a bag

in bed

in a car

in London

in England

in a book

in a pub

in a field

in the sea

in my stomach

in a river

If something is on a line or a horizontal or vertical surface, we use **'on'**:

on the table

on the wall

on the floor

on the window

on my face

on a plate

on the page

on the sofa

on a chair

on a bag

on the river

on a t-shirt

on the ceiling

on a bottle

on a bike

on his foot

If something is at a point, (it could be a building) we use '**at**':

at the airport

at the door

at the table

at the bus stop

at the cinema

at at the top

at the bottom

at the pub

at the traffic lights

at the front

at the back

at school

at university

at the window

at the hospital

at the piano

Here are some more common ones that don't really fit:

- on TV
- on the bus
- on a train
- on a plane
- on the radio
- at home
- at work

EXERCISE – PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

1. The wine is _____ the bottle.
2. Pass me the dictionary, it's _____ the bookshelf.
3. Jennifer is _____ work.
4. Berlin is _____ Germany.
5. You have something _____ your face.
6. Turn left _____ the traffic lights.
7. She was listening to classical music _____ the radio.
8. He has a house _____ the river.
9. The answer is _____ the bottom of the page.
10. Julie will be _____ the plane now.
11. There are a lot of magnets _____ the fridge.
12. She lives _____ London.
13. John is _____ a taxi. He's coming.
14. I'll meet you _____ the airport.
15. She stood _____ the window and looked out.
16. The cat is _____ the house somewhere.
17. Why you calling so late? I'm already _____ bed.
18. I waited for Lucy _____ the station.
19. There was a picture of flowers _____ her T-shirt.
20. She has a house _____ Japan.

Adjectives and Prepositions

Some adjectives need a preposition before their object. There doesn't seem to be a logical rule, I'm afraid! We just need to learn them.

Here are some of the most common ones:

- **famous for**
France is famous for its food.
- **proud of**
He is very proud of his new car.
- **interested in**
Julie is very interested in sport.
- **pleased with**
John is very pleased with his new suit.
- **bad at**
They are very bad at maths.
- **good at**
Einstein was very good at physics.
- **married to**
My mother has been married to my father for 20 years.
- **excited about**
I'm very excited about my holiday.
- **different from / to**
Coffee is different from tea.
- **afraid of**
I'm afraid of spiders.

EXERCISE – PREPOSITIONS AFTER ADJECTIVES

Put in the correct preposition:

1. England is famous _____ its rainy weather.
2. I'm very proud _____ my daughter, she worked very hard.
3. He isn't really interested _____ getting married.
4. Luke is very pleased _____ his exam results.
5. Unfortunately, I'm very bad _____ music.
6. I've been married _____ my husband for 10 years.
7. She's very excited _____ the party.
8. Julie is very different _____ her sister.
9. My niece is afraid _____ dogs.
10. A ball gown is similar _____ an evening dress.
11. What is your town famous _____?
12. It's great you got that job - you should be proud _____ yourself.
13. I'm very excited _____ buying a new computer.
14. That bike is similar _____ yours.
15. She is interested _____ jazz.
16. Are you pleased _____ your new house?
17. Lucy is extremely good _____ languages.
18. Who is James married _____?
19. English cheese is very different _____ French cheese.
20. He isn't afraid _____ anything.

Verbs and Prepositions

Some verbs need a preposition before an object or another verb. The preposition is only grammatical, it doesn't change the meaning of the verb.

Here are some of the most common ones:

- **arrive at / in somewhere**
We arrived at the airport.
We arrived in London.
- **belong to somebody**
This book belongs to me.
- **borrow something from somebody**
I borrow a book from my classmate.
- **concentrate on something / doing something**
I concentrated on studying at the weekend.
- **depend on something / somebody**
It depends on the weather.
- **explain something to somebody**
The teacher explained the exercise to the students.
- **listen to something / somebody**
I listen to music.
- **pay somebody for something**
I pay the waiter for the coffee.
- **wait for somebody / something**
Wait for me!
- **worry about somebody / something** Don't worry about a thing!

EXERCISE – VERBS AND PREPOSITIONS

Put in the correct preposition:

1. It's so noisy – I can't concentrate _____ my homework.
2. Don't worry – I'll pay _____ the tickets.
3. The car belongs _____ my father, so I don't think we can use it.
4. I borrowed a pen _____ my classmate.
5. I've been waiting _____ the bus for more than twenty minutes!
6. Julie: "What time shall we eat dinner?"
Gill: "It depends _____ John – we'll eat when he gets home".
7. When we arrived _____ the cinema, the film had already started.
8. Please explain this problem _____ us.
9. She was listening _____ the radio when the doorbell rang.
10. John worries _____ his exam results all the time.
11. My flatmate listens _____ a lot of jazz.
12. David paid _____ the drinks.
13. Who does that house belong _____?
14. Don't worry _____ Gemma, she'll be fine.
15. She borrowed a jumper _____ Julie.
16. Please be quiet – I need to concentrate _____ this book.
17. I want to go to the beach tomorrow but it depends _____ the weather.
18. Who are you waiting _____?
19. When will we arrive _____ Beijing?
20. The policeman explained _____ the children why they should never run across a road.