

Prepositions

Adapted from "First Certificate Language Practice" by Michael Vince

Explanations

Movement

Prepositions used with verbs of motion (*come, go, run, etc.*) show the direction of the movement.

*Jack ran **out** of the room. Sue moved **towards** the door.*

Other examples: *to, into, across, around, along, up, down, past*

Position and place

Prepositions can show position.

*Ted was sitting **next to** Janet. The bank is **opposite** the cinema.*

Other examples: *before, below, beside, in front of, near, on top of, under*
Prepositions can show place.

*I live **in** France. Sue lives **on** an island. John is **at** school.*

See below for problems of use.

Other uses

- Prepositions are also used in time expressions.
- Prepositions cover a wide range of other meanings.

*This book is **about** Napoleon.*

*I can't drink tea **with** / **without** sugar.*

Problems of use

- *To* and *at*

With verbs of motion *to* means *in the direction of*. *At* is not used with verbs of motion. It is used to say where someone or something is.

*We went **to** the cinema. We arrived **at** the cinema.*

- *Next to* and *near*

Next to means *very close, with nothing in between*. It is the same as *beside*. *Near* means *only a short distance from*, which can be a matter of opinion.

*Peter always sits **next to** Mary.*

*I live **near** the sea; it's only ten miles away.*

- *Above* and *over*

Both words mean *in a higher position than*, but *over* suggests closeness or touching.

*There was a plane high **above** them. Put this blanket **over** you.*

There may be little difference in some contexts.

*There was something written **above/over** the door.*

- **In** and **at**: places

In refers to towns, countries and the 'inside' of places.

*She lives **in** Paris. They arrived **in** Peru. He's **in** the kitchen.*

At refers to points with a particular purpose rather than inside.

*She lives **at** home. I'll meet you **at** the bus stop.*

Compare:

*They met **in** the cinema. (inside)*

*They met **at** the cinema. (place)*

- Prepositions at the end of a sentence

Study these common examples:

*Who are you waiting **for**? (question)*

*You are very difficult to live **with**! (infinitive)*

*That's the company that I work **for**. (relative clause)*

Prepositions without an object

Some prepositions can be used without an object.

*Ted was walking **along**, whistling.*

In this example we mean *along the street*, but it is clear from the context or unimportant.

Other prepositions used like this are: *around, along, behind, opposite*

Prepositions with more than one word

Examples: *according to, on behalf of, by means of*

Other examples are included in the Practice section.

Prepositional phrases

There are many fixed phrases containing prepositions.

Examples: *by mistake, on purpose, out of order*

Other examples are included in the Practice section.