

BASIC PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions show the relationship between different parts of a sentence. Compare the difference in meaning of the sentences below. We are driving in Montreal. We are driving to Montreal. We are driving into Montreal.

We are driving out of Montreal.

We are driving through Montreal.

We are driving around Montreal.

We are driving by Montreal.

IN

IN is used for positions.

Locations

Cities/towns

Provinces/states

Countries

Study these uses of the preposition IN.

The water is in the cup.

We're in the classroom.

Shania lives in Timmins.

Jane is swimming in the lake.

There is a Royal family in Monaco.

Other uses:

The bird is flying in the sky.

The baby is looking in the mirror.

On Saturdays, I like to stay in bed late.

IN is used for times.

Months

Years

Seasons

Times of day

Future time

Study these uses of the preposition IN.

My birthday is in August.

The Olympic Games will be held in Sydney.

We usually take our vacation in the summer.

She never eats in the morning.

I will see you again in a few weeks.

Technology has progressed rapidly in the past 10 years.

IN follows some verbs and adjectives: confide in, participate in, engage in, succeed in, result in, deficient in, etc.

She confided in her boyfriend because she trusted him.

Alain participated in the Montreal Marathon.

He succeeds in everything he tries.

ON

ON is used for position.

Locations

Streets

Study these uses of the preposition ON.

We're sitting on the floor.

My books are on the table.

There is a McDonald's on Prince Street.

Her picture is on page 25 of the Gazette.

There's chocolate on your nose.

She's standing on the corner of the street.

Here are some other uses of ON.

The washroom is down the hall, on the right.

We went fishing on Lake St-Pierre.

ON is used for times.

Dates

Days

Study these uses of ON.

Canada Day is on July 1st.

We have our English class on Wednesday.

Paula arrived on time.

They usually go to the country on the weekend.

ON also follows some verbs and adjectives: base on, depend on, count on, insist on, work on, etc.

The TV movie "The Burning Bed" is based on a true story.

Whether we go on a picnic depends on the weather.

You can always count on your parents for good advice.

AT

Places

Buildings

Events

Addresses

Study these uses of AT.

There's a party at Martin's house.

I saw James at the movies.

The Prime Minister's residence is at 24 Sussex Drive.

She works at Sears.

Turn right at the traffic light.

Let's meet at the restaurant.

AT is used for times.

Hours

Times

Holidays

Noon, midnight, night

Study these uses of AT.

People in Canada usually eat dinner at noon.

We get up at 6 o'clock in the morning.

I like to go out at night.

The phone rang at midnight.

We went to New York at Easter.

AT follows some verbs: glance at, look at, stare at, laugh at, smile at, yell at, etc.

I didn't really study; I only glanced at my notes before the exam.

Look at me when I'm talking to you!

Stop staring at me! It's not polite.

I always laugh at your jokes.

TO

TO follows all verbs of movement. A verb of movement involves changing your position or having a direction.

We come, go, travel (etc.) to a place or event.

I live in Montreal.

I go to Montreal.

Live is not a verb of movement, however, go is a verb of movement and must be followed by to. Some verbs of movement are in the following examples.

I came to school without my books.

Mike ran to the store for milk and bread.

My grandmother flies to Florida every fall.

Andrea has travelled to many foreign countries.

Her best friend moved to Winnipeg.

Let's drive to P.E.I. this summer.

Certain verbs can be followed by either a direct object or an indirect object or both. When the indirect object receives the direct object, TO is sometimes used. Study these uses of TO.

Marge gave the money to the cashier.

Teresa described her house to me.

We plan on giving a present to our friend for his birthday.

You will have to explain your version to the principal.

The following verbs are often used with TO: offer to, pay to, sell to, send to, show to, sing to, take to, tell to, hand to, pass to, bring to, listen to, object to, reply to, respond to, subscribe to, yield to, explain to.

We pay our taxes to the municipality.

I sold my guitar to John.

Why don't you show your drawing to the teacher?

The following adjectives are also often used with TO: inferior to, kind to, similar to, close to, next to.

I sometimes feel inferior to my teammates.

I am really close to my sister.

Rita is sitting next to Sandra.

OF

OF is used to signify units of nouns.

Cups of coffee

Loads of laundry

Pounds of meat

Pieces of furniture

OF is used to show possession.

I didn't read the end of the book.

What's the title of the movie?

OF is used with dates.

It is the 12th of July.

The following verbs and adjectives are often used with OF:

convince of, remind of, warn of, approve of, beware of, consist of, smell of, dream of, speak of, talk of, think of, accuse of, suspect of, afraid of, aware of, certain of, critical of, envious of, fond of, guilty of, jealous of, innocent of, proud of, tired of, in charge of, instead of, on top of, in front of, etc.

Study these examples.

The defendant tried to convince the judge of his innocence.

I must remind you of the consequences.

Beware of the bears when camping in that area.

Regis asked: "Are you certain of your answer?"

The parents were so proud of their son's accomplishment.

FROM

FROM gives the origin or beginning of.

Jean Charest comes from Sherbrooke.

School is from 8 o'clock to 4 o'clock.

The following verbs and adjectives are often used with FROM.

Differ from, come from, escape from, flee from, recover from, retire from, borrow from, buy from, hide from, protect from, rescue from, absent from, far from, etc.

Study these examples.

The new model differs in colour from the old one.

Many prisoners tried to escape from Alcatraz.

Mr. Burns retired from teaching after 35 years.

He tried to hide from me by jumping behind the bush.

FOR/SINCE

FOR is used to express a duration of time. It answers the question How long?

I lived in Toronto for 6 years.

"How long have you known Greg?"

"I've known him for about 11 years."

SINCE is used to say when an action began.

I have worked here since 1986.

He has been studying since 9 o'clock.

Note: With FOR and SINCE the present perfect tenses are often used.

The following verbs and adjectives can take FOR.

Blame for, reprimand for, ask for, call for, hope for, substitute for, look for, pray for, wait for, watch for, wish for, pay for, good for, responsible for, ready for, sorry for, apologise for, etc.

Study these examples.

Mr. Ross blames the weather for his poor golf score.

Should we call for a pizza?

The wedding is tomorrow, let's pray for sunshine.

I would like to apologise for my bad behaviour.

BEFORE

BEFORE indicates what precedes.

Monday is before Tuesday.

I'll call you before I leave.

Before coming to class, I had lunch downtown.

AFTER

AFTER indicates what follows.

Thursday is after Wednesday.

I'll see you after school.

After seeing the price, I changed my mind.

DURING

DURING is used with a noun to say "in what period" or "at what time"

The fire broke out during the night.

During our trip to Calgary, we spent a lot of money.

Many people were employed during the war.

BY

BY is used to introduce a method of transportation or communication.

I came to school by bus.

We got in contact by telephone.

BY means close to.

He lives by the shopping centre.

I like to take my vacation by the sea.

BY means to pass someone or something.

Maria walked by me without seeing me.

We drove by "South of the Border" on the way to Florida.

BY expresses how to do something and is followed by a gerund (-ing form).

"How did you learn to use your new VCR?"

"By reading the instructions."

You can find the number by looking in the phone book.

BY means "no later than"

He'll be here by midnight for sure.

We should leave by 7 o'clock at the latest.

BY is used in some idioms.

By mistake, by chance, by choice, by cheque, by hand.

WITH

WITH means two things are together.

Peter works with Anne.

I like to walk with my dog.

We're going out with the Robinsons tonight.

WITH shows what is needed (a tool or a procedure).

Bob carved the roast with a sharp knife.

I cut the grass with a lawn-mower.

ABOUT

ABOUT expresses an approximation.

“What time is it?”

“Oh, it’s about 3:30, but I’m not sure.”

Carole lives about 10 miles from Bromont.

ABOUT refers to a topic.

Tell me all about your trip to Venice.

I know about your secret love.

Of course, many other prepositions do exist. They are most commonly placed in one of four categories: Prepositions of Time, Prepositions of Place, Prepositions of Direction or Prepositions of Manner. Here is a short list for each category:

Prepositions of Time :

After, around, about, at, before, by, during, for, from, to, in, on, since, until.

Prepositions of Place :

Above, across, after, against, among, around, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, by, in front of, inside, near, outside, over, through, under.

Prepositions of Direction :

By way of, into, out of, forward.

Prepositions of Manner :

By, like, on, with