

Prepositions

Prepositions function within phrases to modify main verbs, nouns, or adjectives. Prepositions express spatial and temporal relationships between parts of a sentence in terms of location, direction, or time. These small words serve to connect when or where something is in relation to another noun that functions as the *object of the preposition*.

1. **Location:** *at, on, in*: Prepositions differ according to the number of dimensions they refer to. We can group them into three classes using concepts from geometry: point, surface, and area/volume.
 - a. Point (*at*): Prepositions in this group indicate that the noun that follows them is treated as a point in relation to which another object is positioned.
 - b. Surface (*on*): Prepositions in this group indicate that the position of an object is defined with respect to a surface on which it rests.
 - c. Area/Volume (*in*): Prepositions in this group indicate that an object lies within the boundaries of an area or within the confines of a volume.
2. **Direction:** *to, on(to), in(to)*: These prepositions express movement toward something. *To, into, and onto* correspond respectively to the prepositions of location *at, in, and on*. Each pair can be defined by the same spatial relations of point, surface, or area/volume.
3. **Time:** Prepositions also express how objects relate in terms of time, whether at a point in time or an extended time.
 - a. *On, at, and in* are each used to express similar relations as their spatial counterparts.
 - b. *Since, by, for, and from-to* are used to express extended time.

Practice

Insert the appropriate preposition (at, on, in, onto, into, since, by, for, from) based on its function in the sentence as expressing location, direction, or time.

1. My car is ___ the house.
2. The house is ___ Bedford County.
3. Jim is waiting ___ the supermarket.
4. Sarah spent the afternoon ___ the fair.
5. We arrived ___ the house ___ the afternoon.
6. The waiter was ___ our table immediately.
7. We have not seen our waiter ___ we arrived.
8. The soccer player leaped ___ the ball.
9. The cat jumped ___ my lap.
10. The tiger jumped ___ the cage.
11. I went ___ the store today.
12. Three players are practicing ___ the field.
13. The water spilled ___ the floor.
14. The crowd spilled ___ the stadium.
15. Seven cows are grazing ___ the meadow.
16. The frost made patterns ___ the windshield.
17. A light appeared ___ the window.

18. The seven cows have been grazing ___ the pasture ___ this afternoon.
19. The cattle will be herded ___ the main pen ___ the whole summer.
20. Three hockey players are ___ the ice.
21. Three baseball players are ___ the dugout.
22. The cowboy rode ___ the setting sun.
23. Three boxers are ___ the ring.
24. The children are drawing with chalk ___ the sidewalk.
25. The play ran ___ September ___ November.

Answers: 1. at 2. in 3. at 4. at 5. at, in 6. at 7. since 8. at 9. onto 10. into 11. to 12. on 13. onto 14. into 15. in 16. on 17. in 18. in, since 19. into, for 20. on 21. in 22. into 23. in 24. on 25. from, to

The Prepositions *For* and *To*

For is a personal and personally limiting preposition and expresses a proprietary relationship.

Also, *for* refers to motive, as in “I speak *for* myself” or temporal duration, as in “I went to England *for* two weeks.”

To is a quantitative, directional preposition and should be used to explain the impersonal connection between objects.

Examples

For: ► “I speak *for* myself.” Here *for* refers to motive and is personally limiting and proprietary. The emphasis is as follows: “I speak on my own behalf; no one else does it for me.”

► “This is my first time *for* a dental visit.” This sentence lays more stress on the personal *motive* for the visit. The preposition stresses the purpose for the visit to the dentist.

To: ► “I sometimes talk *to* myself.” Here, *to* explains the direction of the conversation. In the case of infinitives, “to” serves as part of the verb phrase and is not a preposition. “This is my first time *to visit*.” The sentence lays stress on the *action* of the visit. *To visit* is an infinitive, so *to* is not functioning as a preposition.

Practice

Insert either “to” or “for” to complete the sentences based on the function of the preposition.

1. (Direction) I went ___ the bank to deposit my check.
2. (Personal) I am waiting ___ the ambulance.
3. (Motive) John left ___ France where he hopes to study French culture.
4. (Direction) Thomas is leaving to go ___ England tomorrow.
5. (Motive) The bookstore closed ___ convocation.
6. (Direction) The clerk left to go ___ the chapel.
7. (Motive) The clerk left ___ the chapel.
8. (Direction) Sally wants to go ___ the lake.
9. (Personal) John spoke ___ himself.
10. (Direction) John spoke ___ himself.

Answers: 1. to 2. for 3. for 4. to 5. for 6. to 7. for 8. to 9. for 10. to