

27

Prepositions

223 Summary

Introduction to prepositions • 224

A preposition is a word like *in, to, for, out of*.

Prepositions of place • 225

in the office under my chair across the road

Prepositions of place: more details • 226

Prepositions of time • 227

at six o'clock before dark for three weeks

Prepositions: other meanings • 228

a present for my sister a man with a beard

Idiomatic phrases with prepositions • 229

There are many idiomatic phrases.

for sale in a hurry by mistake

NOTE

There are also many idioms where a preposition comes after a verb, adjective or noun. • 230

wait for a bus afraid of the dark an interest in music

For prepositions in American English, • 306.

224 Introduction to prepositions

- 1 A preposition usually comes before a noun phrase.

into the building at two o'clock without a coat

Some prepositions can also come before an adverb.

until tomorrow through there at once

We can also use some prepositions before a gerund.

We're thinking of moving house.

NOT *We're thinking of to move house.*

We cannot use a preposition before a that-clause.

*We're hoping **for a win**.* / *We're hoping (that) we'll win.*

NOT *We're hoping for that we'll win.*

But we can use a preposition before a wh-clause.

*I'd better make a list **of what** we need.*

NOTE For the difference between the preposition *to* and the to-infinitive, • 132(6).

- 2 The preposition and its object form a prepositional phrase.

Preposition + Noun phrase

Prepositional phrase: *towards* *the setting sun*
 behind *you*

The prepositional phrase functions as an adverbial.

*They walked **towards the setting sun**.*

***On Saturday** there's going to be a disco.*

It sometimes comes after a noun.

*The disco **on Saturday** has been cancelled.*

- 3 We can modify a preposition.

***almost at the end** **right in front of me** **halfway up** the hill*
***all over the** floor **just off the** motorway **directly after** your lesson*

- 4 In some clauses a preposition goes at the end.

Wh-question: *Who did you go to the party **with**?* • 25(3)

Infinitive clause: *I've got a tape for you to listen **to**.* • 117(2)

Passive: *War reporters sometimes get shot **at**.* • 105(3)

Relative clause: *That's the article I told you **about**.* • 273(4)

- 5 Some prepositions can also be adverbs.

Preposition: *I waited for Max **outside** the bank.*

*We haven't seen Julia **since** last summer.*

*There was no lift. We had to walk **up** the stairs.*

Adverb: *Max went into the bank and I waited **outside**.*

*We saw Julia last summer, but we haven't seen her **since**.*

*There was no lift. We had to walk **up**.*

A verb + adverb like *walk up, get in* is a phrasal verb. • 231

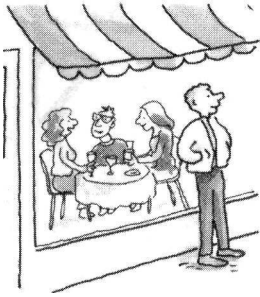
- 6 Some prepositions of time can also be conjunctions. • 250(1)

Preposition: *We must be ready **before** their arrival.*

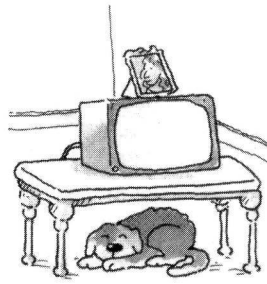
Conjunction: *We must be ready **before** they arrive.*

225 Prepositions of place

1 Basic meanings



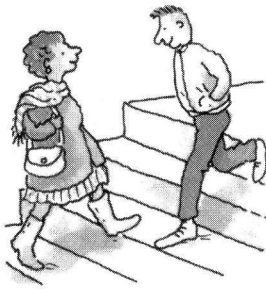
There are some people **in/inside** the cafe.
The man is waiting **outside** the cafe.



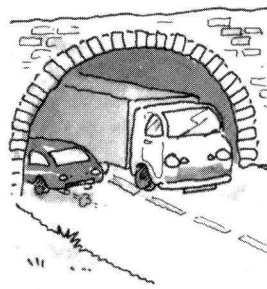
There's a television **on** the table. There's a photo **on top of** the television. There's a dog **under(neath)** the table.



There's a picture **over/above** the door. There's a small table **under/below** the window.



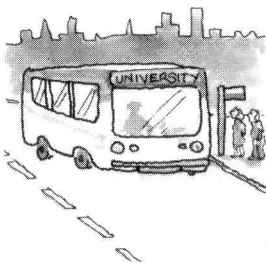
She's going **up** the steps, and he's coming **down** the steps.



The road goes **through** a tunnel. The car is going **in/into** the tunnel. The lorry is coming **out of** the tunnel.



She's taking the food **off** the trolley and putting it **on/onto** the shelves.



The bus is **at** the bus stop. It's going **from** the city centre **to** the university.



The lorry is travelling **away from** York and **towards** Hull.



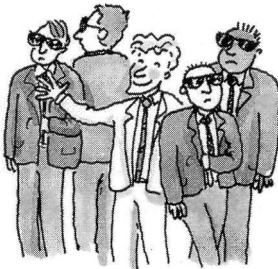
The man is sitting **next to/by/beside** the woman. Their table is **close to/near** the door.



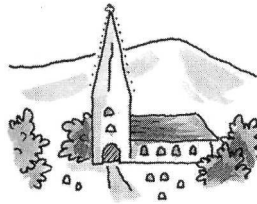
The bus is **in front** of the car. The lorry is **behind** the car. The car is **between** the bus and the lorry.

The woman is walking **along** the pavement **past** the supermarket.

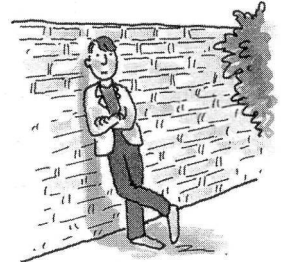
The man is on the pavement **opposite** the bank. The bank is **across** the road.



The President is standing **among** his bodyguards. They are all **round/around** him.



There's a hill **beyond** the church.
(=on the other side of)



The man is leaning **against** the wall.

- a We use *of* only with *on top of*, *out of* and *in front of*. NOT *inside of* NOT *off of* and NOT *behind of*, although *outside of* is possible.
- b Two other prepositions of place are *throughout* and *within*. They are a little formal.
The epidemic spread **throughout** the country/all over the country. (= to all parts of)
Delivery is free **within** a ten-mile radius. (= inside)
- c *Beneath* is rather literary.
From the balloon we could see the town far below/**beneath** us.
- d *Around* and *about* mean 'in different directions' or 'in different places'.
We're going to drive **around/about** the country visiting different places.
There were piles of old magazines lying **around/about** the flat.

2 Position and movement

- a Most prepositions of place say where something is or where it is going.

Position: *There was a barrier **across** the road.*

Movement: *The boy ran **across** the road.*

- b *At* usually expresses position, and *to* expresses movement.

Position: *We were **at** the café.*

Movement: *We went **to** the café.*

- c As a general rule, *in* and *on* express position, and *into* and *onto* express movement.

Position: *We were sitting **in** the café. She stood **on** the balcony.*

Movement: *We went **into** the café. She walked **onto** the balcony.*

NOTE

We sometimes use *in* and *on* for movement, especially in informal English.

*We went **in** the café.*

But sometimes the choice of preposition depends on the meaning.

*We walked **on** the beach (for half an hour).*

*We walked (from the car park) **onto** the beach.*

After *lay*, *place*, *put* and *sit* we do not usually use *into* or *onto*.

*They laid the body **on** a blanket. Tom sat down **in** the armchair.*

3 Other meanings

- a Some prepositions of place can also express time. • 227

*Lots of people work **from** nine o'clock **to** five.*

- b Prepositions of place can also have more abstract meanings.

*I'm really **into** modern jazz. (= interested in)*

*Ian comes **from** Scotland. (= He's Scottish./He lives in Scotland.)*

*The show was **above/beyond** criticism. (= too good to be criticized)*

*We are working **towards** a United States of Europe. (= working to create)*

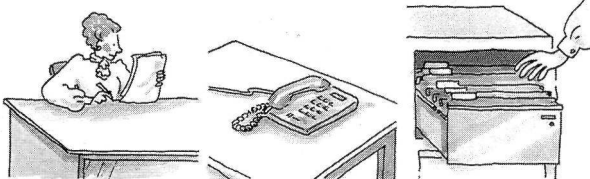
*The party is right **behind** its leader. (= supporting)*

*City are **among** the most successful teams in the country. (= one of)*

For idioms, e.g. *look **into** the matter*, • 233.

226 Prepositions of place: more details

1 *At*, *on* and *in*



She's at her desk. It's on the desk. They're in the drawer.

- a *At* is one-dimensional. We use it when we see something as a point in space.
The car was waiting at the lights.
There's someone at the door.

We also use *at*+ event.

We met at Daphne's party, didn't we?

We use *at*+ building when we are talking about the normal purpose of the building.

The Browns are at the theatre. (= watching a play)

I bought these dishes at the supermarket.

Nicola is fifteen. She's still at school.

We also use *at* for a person's house or flat.

I had a cup of coffee at Angela's (house/flat).

- b *On* is two-dimensional. We use it for a surface.
Don't leave your glass on the floor.
There were lots of pictures on the walls.

We also use *on* for a line.

Paris is on the Seine.

The house is right on the main road, so it's a bit noisy.

NOTE

We also use *on* in this special sense.

I haven't got any money on/ with me at the moment.

- c *In* is three-dimensional. We use it when we see something as all around.
I had five pounds in my pocket.
Who's that man in the green sweater?
There was a man sitting in the waiting room.

Compare *in* and *at* with buildings.

It was cold in the library. (= inside the building)

We were at the library. (= choosing a book)

NOTE

Compare these expressions with *corner*.

There were shelves over the fireplace and a bookcase in the corner.

There's a newsagent's at/on the corner. You turn left there.

- d In general we use *in* for a country or town and *at* for a smaller place.
We finally arrived in Birmingham/at Land's End.

But we can use *at* with a town if we see it as a point on a journey.

You have to change trains at Birmingham.

And we can use *in* for a smaller place if we see it as three-dimensional.

I've lived in the village all my life.

e Look at these phrases.

at 52 Grove Road
at your house
at the station
at home/work/school

at the seaside

at the back/end of
a queue

on 42nd Street (USA)
on the third floor
on the platform

on the page
on the screen
on the island
on the beach/coast
on the right/left
on the back of an
envelope

in Spain/Bristol
in Grove Road

in the lesson
in a book/newspaper
in the photo/picture
in the country

in the middle
in the back/front of
a car
in a queue/line/row

2 Above, over, below and under

a Above and over have similar meanings.

*There was a clock **above/over** the entrance.*

We do not normally use *above* to mean horizontal movement.

*The plane flew low **over** the houses.*

And we do not use *above* for an area or surface.

*Thick black smoke hangs **over** the town.*

*Someone had spread a sheet **over** the body.*

NOTE

a We prefer *over* before a number.

*There are well **over** fifty thousand people in the stadium.*

But we use *above* with a measurement that we think of as vertical, such as temperature.

*Temperatures will rise **above** freezing.*

b In this example *over* has a special meaning.

*The two leaders discussed world affairs **over** lunch. (= while having lunch)*

b We also use *over* for movement to the other side, or position on the other side of a line.

*The horse jumped **over** the wall. Was the ball **over** the goal-line?*

*Somehow we had to get **over/across** the river.*

c Below is the opposite of *above*; *under* is the opposite of *over*.

*We met at the entrance, **below/under** the clock.*

We do not normally use *below* for a horizontal movement or for an area or surface.

*Mike crawled **under** the bed in an attempt to hide.*

*The town lies **under** a thick black cloud of smoke.*

Compare *below/under* with *above/over*. • (2a) Note a

*Temperatures will fall **below** freezing.*

*There are well **under** ten thousand people in the stadium.*

3 Top and bottom

On top of is a preposition.

*There's a monument **on top** of the hill.*

We can also use *top* and *bottom* as nouns in phrases like these.

*There's a monument **at the top** of the hill.*

*The ship sank **to the bottom** of the sea.*

4 Through, across and along



through the gate **across** the road **along** the path

- a *Through* is three-dimensional. You go *through* a tunnel, a doorway, a crowd of people, and so on.

*The water flows **through** the pipe. I looked **through** the telescope.*

- b *Across* is two-dimensional. You go from one side to the other *across* a surface such as a lawn or a playground, or a line such as a river or a frontier.

*You can get **across** the Channel by ferry.*

Sometimes we can use either *through* or *across*, depending on whether we see something as having three or two dimensions.

*We walked **through/across** the field.*

- c We use *along* when we follow a line. You go *along* a path, a road, a passage, a route, and so on. Compare these sentences.

*We cruised **along** the canal for a few miles.*

*We walked **across** the canal by a footbridge.*

5 To, towards and up to

We use *to* for a destination and *towards* for a direction.

*We're going **to** Doncaster. My aunt lives there.*

*We're going **towards** Doncaster now. We must have taken a wrong turning.*

Go/come/walk + up to usually expresses movement to a person.

*A man came **up to** me in the street and asked me for money.*

NOTE

As far as means going a certain distance.

*We usually try to get **as far as** Doncaster before we stop for coffee.*

6 *Near, close and by*

- a *Near, near to and close to* mean 'not far from'.
*Motherwell is **near** Glasgow, NOT **by** Glasgow*
*We live **near (to)** the hospital/ **close to** the hospital.*

NOTE

Near (to) and close to have comparative and superlative forms.

*You live **nearer(to)** the hospital than we do.*

*I was sitting **closest to** the door.*

- b *Near and close* can be adverbs.
*The animals were very tame. They came quite **near/close**.*

Nearby means 'not far away'.

*There's a post office **near here/nearby**.*

The preposition *by* means 'at the side of' or 'very near'.

*We live (right) **by** the hospital. Come and sit **by** me.*

- d *Next to* means 'directly at the side of'.
*We live **next to** the fish and chip shop.*
*At dinner I sat **next to**/beside Mrs Armstrong.*

7 *In front of, before, behind, after and opposite*

- a When we talk about where something is, we prefer *in front of* and *behind* to *before* and *after*.

*There's a statue **in front of** the museum, NOT **before** the museum*

*The police held their riot shields **in front of** them.*

*The car **behind** us ran into the back of us. NOT the car **after** us*

- b *Before* usually means 'earlier in time', and *after* means 'later in time'. But we also use *before* and *after* to talk about what order things come in.

*J comes **before** K. K comes **after** J.*

We also use *after* to talk about someone following or chasing.

*The thief ran across the road with a policeman **after** him.*

- c *Opposite* means 'on the other side from'. Compare *in front of* and *opposite*.

*People were standing **in front of** the theatre waiting to go in.*

*People were standing **opposite** the theatre waiting to cross the road.*

*Gerald was standing **in front of** me in the queue.*

*Gerald was sitting **opposite** me at lunch.*

8 *Between* and *among*

- a We use *between* with a small number of items that we see as separate and individual.
*The ball went **between** the player's legs.*
*Tom lives somewhere in that area **between** the hospital, the university and the by-pass.*
 For expressions such as *a link between*, • 237(2c).
- b *Among* suggests a larger number.
*I was hoping to spot Marcia **among** the crowd.*

227 Prepositions of time

1 *At*, *on* and *in*

We use these prepositions in phrases saying when.

*See you **at** one o'clock. They arrived **on** Friday. We met in 1985.*

- a We use *at* with a particular time such as a clock time or meal time.
***at** halfpast five **at** breakfast (time) **at** that time **at** the moment*

We also use *at* with holiday periods of two or three days.

***at** Christmas **at** Thanksgiving **at** the weekend*

NOTE

a USA: *on the weekend*

b We use *at* with someone's age.

A sporting career can be over at thirty.

- b We use *on* with a single day.
***on** Tuesday **on** 7th August **on** that day **on** Easter Sunday*

NOTE

On can also mean 'immediately after'.

On his arrival, the President held a press conference.

- c We use *in* with longer periods.
in the next few days in the summer holidays in spring
in July in 1992 in the 19th century

We also use *in* with a part of the day.

in the afternoon in the mornings

But we use *on* if we say which day.

***on** Tuesday afternoon **on** Friday mornings **on** the evening of the 12th*

NOTE

An exception is *at night*. Compare these sentences.

*I heard a noise **in** the night. (= in the middle of the night)*

*The windows are shut **at** night. (= when it is night)*

2 Expressions of time without a preposition

- a We do not normally use *at*, *on* or *in* in phrases of time with *last*, *this*, *next*, *every*, *later*, *yesterday* and *tomorrow*.

*I received the letter **last Tuesday**. NOT *on last Tuesday**

*We've been really busy **this week**. NOT *in this week**

*You can take the exam again **next year**. NOT *in the next year**

*The same thing happens **every time**. NOT *at every time**

***A week later** I got a reply. NOT *in a week later**

*I'll see you **tomorrow morning**. NOT *in tomorrow morning**

NOTE

- a We can use other prepositions.

***After** this week I shall need a holiday.*

- b In informal English we can sometimes leave out *on* before a day.

*I'll see you **Monday**.*

- c We do not use a preposition with *these days* (= nowadays).

*It's all done by computers **these days**.*

- A For *the* with *last* and *next*, • 169(8).

- b Sometimes we can use the preposition or leave it out.

*Something else a bit unusual happened (**on**) **that day**.*

*I'd been ill (**in**) **the previous week**.*

*They agreed to meet (**on**) **the following Sunday**.*

3 *In* + length of time

We can use *in* to say how long something takes.

*Columbus crossed the Atlantic **in** seventy days.*

*Surely you can change a wheel **in** fifteen minutes.*

We can also use *in* for a time in the future measured from the present.

*Ella takes her exam **in** three weeks/**in** three weeks' time.*

NOTE

- a Compare these sentences.

*You can walk there **in** half an hour. (= you need half an hour)*

*I'm going out **in** half an hour. (= half an hour from now)*

- b We can also use *within* or *inside* to say how long.

*I'll be back **within/inside** an hour. (= in an hour or less)*

4 *During* and *over*

- a We use *during* with an event (e.g. *the festival*) or a period which is a definite time (e.g. *that week*). It means the whole period.

*Nobody does any work **during** the festival/**during** that week.*

We cannot use *during* + length of time.

*The festival went on **for** a week. NOT *It went on during a week.**

NOTE

When something happens for the whole period, we can use *throughout* or *all through*.

*The population grew rapidly **during/throughout** the 19th century.*

*Jeremy kept staring at Naomi **during/all through** lunch.*

- b We can also use *during* when something happens one or more times in the period.

*The letter arrived **during** the festival.*

*I suddenly felt ill **during** the show.*

*I have to make several trips abroad **during** the next few weeks.*

- c *During* is a preposition; *while* is a conjunction.
*Someone told me the news **during** the tea break.*
Someone told me the news when/while we were having a cup of tea.
- d We can also use *over* for a whole period of time.
***Over** the next few days, Simon and Kay saw a lot of each other.*
***Over** a period of two months there were a hundred sightings of UFOs.*

NOTE

The adverb *over* means 'finished'.
*This programme will soon be **over**.*

5 *For* and *since*

- a We use *for* with a period of time to say how long something continues.
*Rachel plays computer games **for** hours on end. NOT *during* hours • (4)*
*I once stayed at that hotel **for** a week.*
*I just want to sit down **for** five minutes.*

NOTE

We do not normally use *for* before a phrase with *all* or *whole*.
*It rained **all day/the whole** day.*

- b We often use *for* and *since* with the perfect to say how long something has continued or when it started.
*Giles has worked here **for** ten years now.*
*We haven't been to the theatre **for** months.*
*We've been waiting **for** twenty minutes.*
*The Parkers have lived here **since** 1985.*
*I haven't seen you **since** September.*
*We've been waiting **since** twelve o'clock.*

We use *for* + length of time and *since* + time when.

***for** two years **for** a week **for** two days **for** a few minutes*
***since** 1990 **since** last week **since** Monday **since** half past two*

NOTE

- a We can sometimes leave out *for* in informal English.
We've been waiting here twenty minutes.
- b We use *during* for a period which is a definite time. • (4)
***During** the last ten years Giles has been promoted at least three times.*
- c Compare these sentences.
*I've been here (**for**) ten minutes. I'll stay (**for**) ten minutes.*
*I've been here **since** twenty to four. I'll wait **until** four o'clock. • (6)*
*I arrived ten minutes **ago**. I'm leaving **in** ten minutes.*
- c We use the adverb *ago* for a past action at a time measured from the present.
Ago comes after the length of time.
*Giles joined the company ten years **ago**. (= ten years before now)*
*We last went to the theatre months **ago**.*
- d We use the adverb *before* for a past action measured from the more recent past.
*Giles left the company last year. He'd started work there ten years **before**.*
 (= ten years before last year)

6 *Till/until* and *by*

- a We use *till/until* to say when something finishes.
*Jim will be working in Germany **till/until** next April.*
*We sat in the pub **till/until** closing-time.*

NOTE

- a *Till* is more informal.
 b For **from** *now to next April*, • (7b). But NOT *He'll be working there to next April*.
 c We can use *up to* in a positive sentence.
He'll be working there up to next April.
 d *Till/until* does not express place.
*We walked **to** the bridge/as far as the bridge.* NOT *till/until the bridge*
 But it can be a conjunction.
*We walked on **till/until** we got to the bridge.*
- b We can use *not... till/until* when something is later than expected.
*Sue didn't get up **till/until** halfpast ten.*
- c *By* means 'not later than'.
I'm always up by eight o'clock. (= at eight or earlier)
Can you pay me back by Friday? (= on Friday or earlier)
They should have replied to my letter by now.
 Compare *before*.
*Can you pay me back **before** Friday?* (= earlier than Friday)

NOTE For *by the time* as a conjunction, • 250(1).

7 *From* and *between*

- a We use *from* for the time when something starts.
*Tickets will be on sale **from** next Wednesday.*
***From** seven in the morning there's constant traffic noise.*

NOTE

Compare *since* with the perfect.
*Tickets have been on sale **since** last Wednesday.*

- b After the phrase with *from* we can use *to* or *till/until* for the time when something finishes.
*The cricket season lasts **from** April **to** September.*
*The road will be closed **from** Friday evening **till/until** Monday morning.*
 NOTE Americans can use *through*, e.g. **from** *Friday through Monday*. • 306(3)
- c We can use *between* for a period after one time and before another.
*Not many people work **between** Christmas and New Year's Day.*

228 Prepositions: other meanings

- 1 Prepositions can have meanings other than place or time.

*We were talking **about** the weather.*

***According to** the BBC, the strike is over. (= The BBC says ...)*

*Most people are **against** these changes. (= opposing)*

*We can have this pizza **for** tea. **As for** lunch, I'll get a sandwich.*

I'm reading a book by Iris Murdoch.

*You need a pullover, so I'm knitting one **for** you.*

*You'd do anything **for the sake of** peace and quiet. (= in order to have)*

*Are you **for** the plan/**in favour of** the plan? (= supporting)*

*Mrs Peterson is **in charge of** the department. (= head of the department)*

*Can I use a pencil **instead of** a pen?*

*I went to a lecture **on** Einstein.*

***On behalf of** everyone here, I'd like to say thank you.*

*This car does at least fifty miles **to** the gallon.*

*It's up **to** you to make your own decision.*

- 2 *With* has these meanings.

*I went to the party **with** a friend. (= We were together.)*

*Pete is the man **with** long hair. (= He has long hair.)*

*I'll cut the wood **with** my electric saw. • (5)*

*They set to work **with** enthusiasm. (= enthusiastically)*

***With** people watching, I felt embarrassed. (= Because people were watching...)*

Without is the opposite of *with*.

*Who's the man **without** any shoes on?*

*They set to work, but **without** enthusiasm.*

NOTE

We can leave out *any* after *without*.

*Who's the man **without shoes** on?*

But we do not normally leave out *a/an* after *with* or *without*. NOT *I went with friend*.

- 3 *Of* has a number of different meanings.

*the handle **of** the door • 146(3) a tin **of** soup • 144(3)*

*some **of** my friends • 178(1c) our first sight **of** land • 149(3)*

We can also use *of* in the following pattern.

*She's an actress **of** great ability. (= She has great ability.)*

*These souvenirs are **of** no value.*

*He was a man **of** medium build.*

- 4 Some prepositions have the same meaning as a conjunction.

*We decided against a picnic **in view of** the weather.*

(= **because** the weather was bad)

Such prepositions are *as well as*, *in addition to*, *besides*, • 244(3); *in spite of*, *despite*, • 246(4); *as a result of*, *in consequence of*, • 247(2); *because of*, *due to*, *in view of*, *on account of*, • 251(3).

5 We use *with* and *by* to express means.

a We use *with* to talk about an instrument, a thing we use to carry out an action.

*The thieves broke the door down **with** a hammer.*

*Just stir this **with** a wooden spoon, could you?*

By is more abstract. It refers to the means in general rather than to a specific thing.

*I paid **by** credit card. The motor is powered **by** electricity.*

*They broke the door down **by** force.*

We use *by* before a gerund.

*They got in **by** **breaking** down the door.*

NOTE

a Some passive sentences have *by* + agent.

*The door was broken down **by** two men/**with** a hammer.*

b We say *write **in** pen/**in** pencil.*

b We also use *by* + noun for means of transport. We do not use *the*.

*I prefer **to** travel **by** train.*

NOT *travel **by** the train* and NOT *travel **with** the train*

We can say e.g. *by bike, by car/road, by taxi, by bus/coach, by train/tube/rail, by boat/ship/ferry/hovercraft, by sea, by plane/air.*

We do not use *by* to mean a specific bike, car etc.

*I'll go **on** my bike.* NOT *ill go **by** my bike.*

We can say *on my bike, in the/my car, in a taxi, on the bus/train/boat/plane* etc.

On foot means 'walking'.

*I prefer **to** go **on** **foot** **to** walk.* NOT *go **by** foot*

NOTE

Look at these examples expressing movement.

*The passengers got **into/out** of the car/taxi.*

*Nancy got **on/off** her bike/the bus/the train.*

*We went **on board** the ship.*

c We can also use *by* for means of communication, e.g. *by letter/post, by phone, by telegram/telex/fax.*

*I spoke **to** Andy **by** phone/**on** the phone. I sent the information **by** post.*

NOTE *Andy isn't **on** the phone.* = Andy hasn't got a phone.

6 We use *as* to express a role or function.

*Maria has come along **as** our guide.* (She is our guide.)

*I'm having **to** use the sofa **as** my bed.* (It is my bed.)

We can sometimes leave out *the after as*. • 167(5)

We use *like* to express a comparison.

*She slapped his face. The noise was **like** a pistol shot.*

*I think Louise looks a bit **like** Marilyn Monroe.*

Compare *as* and *like*.

*He speaks **as** an expert. He is **after** all a professor.*

*He talks **like** an expert, but really he knows nothing.*

NOTE

a *Like* can also come in front position.

***Like** everyone else, I have **to** pay my taxes.*

b *Unlike* is the opposite of *like*.

*It's **unlike** Fiona **to** be late. She's usually very punctual.*

- 7 We use *except (for)*, *apart from* and *but to* talk about an exception.
*Everyone was there **except (for)/apart from** Nigel, who was ill.*
*I hate fish. I can eat anything **except/but** fish.*

229 Idiomatic phrases with prepositions

- 1 There are very many idiomatic phrases beginning with a preposition. Most of them are without *a/an* or *the*. Here are some examples.

*All the money paid by investors is now **at risk**.*

*Mark always drives **at top speed**.*

*I dialled the wrong number **by mistake**.*

*I'd like to buy this picture if it's **for sale**.*

*Try to see it **from** my **point of view**.*

*You have to pay half the cost of the holiday **in advance**.*

*I can't stop. I'm **in a hurry**.*

*I drive about ten thousand miles a year, **on average**.*

*Did you go there **on holiday** or **on business**?*

*Mr Jones is **on leave** this week. He'll be in the office next Monday.*

*There are so many different computers **on the market**.*

*I saw it **on television**.*

*I heard it **on the radio**.*

*I'm afraid the machine is **out of order**.*

- 2 These pairs are different in meaning.

- a *In time (for/to)* means 'early enough'; but *on time* means 'punctually'.

*We arrived at the hotel **in time** for dinner/to have dinner.*

*The train left **on time** at 11.23.*

NOTE

*We arrived **in good time** for dinner. (= with plenty of time to spare)*

*We arrived **just in time** for dinner. (= with not much time to spare)*

- b *In the end* means 'finally'; but *at the end (of)* means 'when it finishes'.

*There were many arguments, but **in the end**/at last we reached agreement.*

*No one wanted to go home **at the end** of the holiday.*

NOTE

Compare *in the beginning* and *at the beginning*.

***In the beginning**/At first the company struggled to survive, but now it is extremely successful.*

*The students return to Oxford **at the beginning** of the academic year.*

- c *In the way* means 'blocking the way'; but *on the way* means 'on a journey'.

*I couldn't get the car out. Someone had parked right **in the way**.*

*It's a long journey. We'd better stop for a meal **on the way**.*