

Prepositions with Verbs

Definition

Certain verbs require prepositions in order to connect to their sentences' *objects*. These combinations, known as **prepositional verbs**, allow the prepositions to act as necessary links between verbs and **nouns** or **gerunds**. The prepositions used in these combinations are sometimes called **dependent prepositions**.

Here are some of the prepositions most commonly used with verbs:

- **for**
- **to**
- **about**
- **with**
- **of**
- **in**
- **at**
- **on**
- **from**

Usage

Prepositional verbs always take a *direct object* (either a *noun* or *gerund*) after the *preposition* and cannot be separated by it. For example:

- “He **listens to** classical music every night.” (Correct — the prepositional verb is not separated, and the object comes directly after the preposition.)
- “He **listens** classical music every night.” (Incorrect — the verb *listens* requires a preposition to connect to its object, *classical music*.)
- “He **listens** classical music **to** every night.” (Incorrect — *listens* and its preposition *to* cannot be separated by the object, *classical music*.)

Prepositional verbs vs. phrasal verbs

Sometimes, a **phrasal verb** may be mistaken for a prepositional verb. Although both combinations employ *verbs* and *prepositions*, you can differentiate the two grammar structures by looking at the **literal meaning of the verb** and the **word order**.

Literal meaning of the verb

Prepositional verbs use the literal meanings of verbs, whereas phrasal verbs tend to be idiomatic. For example, the meaning of the verb *ask* doesn't change when combined with the preposition *for*; however, it changes dramatically when combined with the preposition *out*:

- “Kelly **asked for** a raise.” (The literal meaning of *to ask* is *to inquire*. Kelly *inquired* about a raise, making it a prepositional verb.)
- “Kelly **asked out** Chad.” (*Ask out* means *to invite someone on a date*, making it an idiomatic phrasal verb.)

Word order

The order of a verb’s *preposition* and its *object* can also help determine whether a verb is prepositional or phrasal. As previously stated, the object of prepositional verbs *always* comes immediately after the **preposition**, which in turn comes immediately after the **verb**. Note that an exception to this rule is when an adverb is used to modify the prepositional verb, in which case it can appear between the verb and the preposition. However, the object must still follow the preposition. For example:

- “Kelly **asked for** a raise.” (correct)
- “Kelly **asked politely for** a raise.” (correct)
- “Kelly **asked** a raise **for**.” (incorrect)

For phrasal verbs, however, *prepositions* and *objects* can often be rearranged without issue:

- “Kelly **asked out** Chad.” (correct)
- “Kelly **asked** Chad **out**.” (also correct)

Examples of common pairings

Because there are no established rules or methods to determine which prepositions accompany which verbs, we have to settle on memorizing some of the most common *verb + preposition* combinations.

The following sections contain numerous examples of commonly used prepositional verbs.

Verb + *for*

The preposition *for* can be used with a number of verbs, often to emphasize purpose or reason. For example:

Verb + for	Example Sentences
apologize for	“Brittany never apologizes for her behavior.”
ask for	“The student asked for a pencil.”
beg for	“The man begged for a second chance.”
care for	“I don’t care for salads.”
fight for	“Many generations of people have fought for freedom.”
hope for	“The family is hoping for a miracle.”
long for	“The man longed for the days of his youth.”
pay for	“Who’s going to pay for these tickets?”

provide for	“Parents are expected to provide for their children.”
search for	“Did you search for the missing piece yet?”
wait for	“I’m waiting for the bus.”
wish for	“Some people wish for nothing but fame.”
work for	“She works for the government.”

Verb + *to*

To is commonly used with verbs and usually refers to direction (literal or metaphorical) or connections between people or things. For example:

Verb + <i>to</i>	Example Sentences
adjust to	“You’ll adjust to your new school in no time.”
admit to	“He admitted to reading her diary.”
belong to	“The wallet belongs to that woman over there.”
travel to	“I am traveling to England tomorrow.”
listen to	“Grace is listening to music in her room.”
go to	“Anthony, please go to the back of the classroom.”
relate to	“I can’t relate to this character at all.”
respond to	“Josh responded to his friend’s email.”
talk to	“He talked to the manager for more than an hour.”
turn to	“ Turn to page 46 for a diagram of the procedure.”

Verb + *about*

Many verbs take the preposition *about* when referring to things, events, or gerunds. For example:

Verb + <i>about</i>	Example Sentences
ask about	“I asked about the company’s job opening.”
care about	“She doesn’t seem to care about going to college.”
complain about	“The boy complained about his early curfew.”
forget about	“I forgot about the wedding reception.”
hear about	“Did you hear about the renovation project?”
joke about	“Kim often jokes about her high-pitched voice.”
know about	“What do you know about physics?”
laugh about	“The friends laughed about their terrible luck.”
learn about	“Michelle is learning about film production.”
talk about	“What are you talking about ?”

think about	“We’ll need to think about hiring some more staff.”
worry about	“So many adults worry about getting older.”
write about	“Dean wrote about his day in his journal.”

Verb + *with*

Verbs using the preposition *with* usually point to connections and relationships between people or things. For example:

Verb + with	Example Sentences
agree with	“I don’t agree with his opinions.”
argue with	“The two argued with each other for several minutes.”
begin with, start with	“Let’s begin with a short quiz.” “I shouldn’t have started with a salad.”
collide with	“It is possible, albeit unlikely, for an asteroid to collide with Earth.”
compare with	“How does the restaurant’s soup compare with Vera’s?”
compete with	“When I run races, I only compete with the clock.”
cope with	“It’s not easy to cope with failure.”
disagree with	“She disagrees with my suggestion.”
interfere with	“Be careful not to interfere with the conference upstairs.”
meet with	“When will you meet with her?”

Verb + *of*

The preposition *of* can be used with a variety of verbs. For example:

Verb + of	Example Sentences
approve of	“Ellen doesn’t approve of her sister’s friends.”
consist of	“Pizza consists of bread, cheese, and tomato sauce.”
dream of	“I dream of visiting Europe.”
hear of	“Have you heard of this new TV show?”
take care of	“Who will take care of your goldfish while you’re away?”
think of	“If you only think of failure, you’ll never take any risks.”

Verb + *in*

The preposition *in* accompanies several verbs and tends to point to involvement or connections between people or things. For example:

Verb + in	Example Sentences
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believe in	“The majority of children believe in Santa Claus.”
engage in	“Maurice likes to engage in political debates.”
invest in	“Now is the time to invest in as many companies as possible.”
live in	“Haley lives in Seattle.”
participate in	“What sports did you participate in as a kid?”
result in	“The hotel’s failure to exterminate the bed bugs resulted in fewer customers.”
specialize in	“English majors can choose to specialize in creative writing or literature.”
succeed in	“Steven succeeded in earning a scholarship.”

Verb + *at*

At is commonly used with verbs to indicate places, skills, and reactions. For example:

Verb + <i>at</i>	Example Sentences
arrive at	“We arrived at the hotel in the morning.”
balk at	“Melissa balked at taking out the garbage.”
excel at	“My five-year-old niece already excels at math and science.”
laugh at	“The boy couldn’t stop laughing at Isabella’s joke.”
look at	“ Look at the whiteboard, please.”
nod at	“She nodded at her coworkers.”
shout at	“He could hear someone shouting at the TV.”
smile at	“My son smiles at me every time I walk through the door.”
stare at	“It’s uncomfortable when people stare at you.”

Verb + *on*

The preposition *on* is used with a number of different verbs. For example:

Verb + <i>on</i>	Example Sentences
agree on	“The committee finally agreed on a solution.”
bet on	“I wouldn’t bet on that happening.”
comment on	“The lawyer briefly commented on the lawsuit.”
concentrate on, focus on	“He’s trying to concentrate on his work.” “I’m too tired to focus on this assignment.”
decide on	“He eventually decided on a career path.”
depend on, rely on	“You can’t depend on him forever.” “Too many students rely on the Internet to conduct research.”

elaborate on	“This paragraph elaborates on the previous one’s claims.”
experiment on	“The company offered assurances that it does not experiment on animals.”
insist on	“She insisted on joining us.”
operate on	“Aspiring surgeons learn how to operate on people.”
plan on	“Do you plan on attending the concert tomorrow?”

Verb + *from*

The preposition *from* is commonly used with verbs to identify a point of origin or a connection or disconnection between people or things. For example:

Verb + from	Example Sentences
benefit from	“Aspiring musicians benefit from getting public exposure for their music.”
come from	“Saya comes from Japan.”
differ from	“How does milk chocolate differ from white chocolate?”
escape from	“The prisoners escaped from their captors.”
recover from	“The girl recovered from her illness.”
refrain from	“Could you please refrain from shouting?”
resign from	“The CEO resigned from her position after 25 years with the company.”
retire from	“He retired from his job last year.”
suffer from	“Many people suffer from social anxiety.”

Verb + other prepositions

Other prepositions can be used to create prepositional verbs. Some of these prepositions are *against*, *into*, and *like*. For example:

- “We **decided against** visiting my aunt.”
- “The car nearly **crashed into** a tree.”
- “I **feel like** going on an adventure.”

Verbs with multiple prepositions

Certain verbs can take multiple prepositions without changing the overall meaning of the sentence. For example, the verb *talk* can use the prepositions *to* and *with* interchangeably:

- “I need to **talk to** the principal.”
- “I need to **talk with** the principal.”

On the other hand, some verbs' meanings do change when a different preposition is introduced. For example, the verb *dream* can mean *to aspire* when it is used with the preposition *of*; however, when it is used with the prepositions *about*, it means *to see images during sleep*. For example:

- “She **dreams of** becoming a pilot.” (aspiration)
- “She often **dreams about** flying.” (image during sleep)

(Reference: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Prepositions-with-Verbs.htm>)