

# **Longman Elements of English Series**

## **Prepositions**

**by R.A. Close**

LONGMAN ELEMENTS OF ENGLISH SERIES

# PREPOSITIONS

R. A. Close

*Illustrations by*  
Tom Bailey



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## **PREPOSITIONS**

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

This series of short practical surveys of points of grammar and structure that are special problems for all foreign students of English has two main purposes. Firstly it provides the teacher with a set of compact but comprehensive guides to those topics. He can use them for reference and find in them copious illustrations and ready-made practical work.

Secondly these small books are a valuable source of drills and exercises for students. The teacher can use them in class for revising or reinforcing his own work at any stage of the topic he is teaching. Each book is graded within its own framework, illustrating and practising its subject from the initial presentation of it through to a level of English required by GCE O-Level or the Cambridge Syndicate examinations.

Obviously some topics (such as Contracted Forms) can start at a more elementary level than others (such as the Passive); and yet others (such as Prepositions) can present problems suitable for almost any stage of learning.

The list of topics already available will give a good idea of the general scope of this series. The books are written by experienced teachers and established writers, and the general editor is W. Stannard Allen.

Other topics already available are: *Indirect Speech*; *The Passive*; *Contracted Forms*; *Helping Verbs* and *Possessives*.



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The English prepositions need special attention. They are little words like *to*, *in*, *out of*, *as far as*, which normally stand before, or “govern” a noun, pronoun, or verb-form ending in -ing, as in the following examples:

Go *to* the door. Stay *in* your place.

Walk *with* me *as far as* the main road.

Practise the prepositions *by* using them *in* context.

The English prepositions should first be *seen* and *felt* as precise expressions of position or of movement in a certain direction; in other words, as expressions of relationships in space. They can be *seen* and *felt* in this way through illustrations which the student can see or make himself, or through actions that he can watch or perform. They should then be studied as expressions of relationships in time; then as relationships of a more abstract kind. Studied in this way, they will be found to have clear meaning and to fit into some kind of system.

At the same time, and especially with the more abstract relationships, the student must learn to know which prepositions are usually associated with what verbs, nouns and adjectives: he must therefore take note of how prepositions are used in context and must imitate the same kind of usage himself.

Many of the English prepositions can also be used as adverbial particles, which indicate the direction or manner in which an action is performed, without “governing” another word in the way that a preposition does. Thus *in* and *off* are used as adverbial particles in the example:

Please come *in* and take your coat *off*.

This little book is concerned only with prepositions in the narrower sense – not with adverbial particles. It concentrates on the commoner prepositions over which mistakes are most often made and which most need practice.

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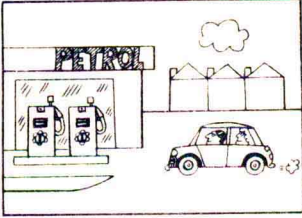


# RELATIONSHIPS IN SPACE

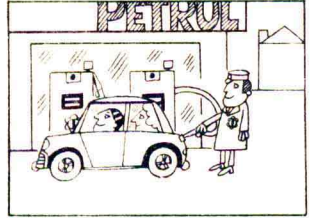
→ GO TO —ONTO—INTO

(Stop) STOP AT —ON —IN

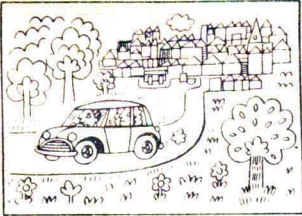
← GO FROM —OFF —OUT OF



Our car is going  
TO a garage.



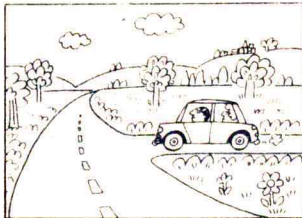
Now it has stopped  
AT the garage.



We are driving away  
FROM the town.



We are well away  
FROM the town now.



We are turning  
ONTO a main road.



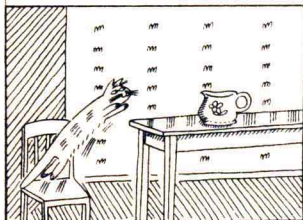
Now, we're  
ON it, all right.



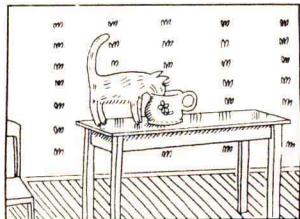
We're going to turn  
OFF it now.



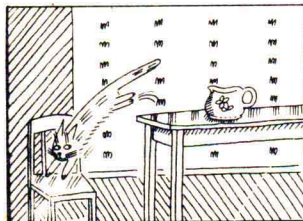
That car's  
OFF it already.



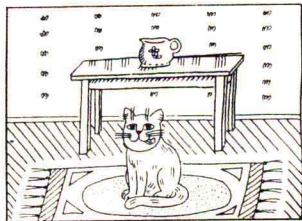
This cat is jumping  
ONTO a table.



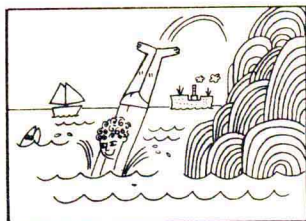
Here it is.  
ON the table.



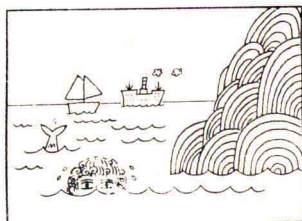
The same cat, jumping  
OFF the table.



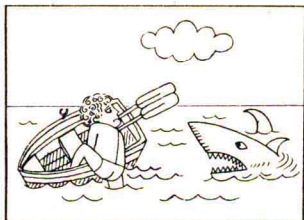
It's  
OFF the table now.



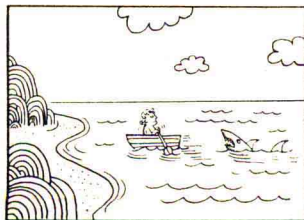
This boy is diving  
INTO the sea.



Where is he?  
IN the sea.



Why is he getting  
OUT OF the water?



I think he'll stay  
OUT OF it now.



Anxious mother looking  
OUT OF the window.

- a) One of the chief functions of the prepositions is to indicate where one thing is, or in what direction it is moving, in relation to another. What is the one thing and the other thing in each of the examples above?
- b) We can imagine the "one thing" being in *motion*, approaching or leaving the other thing; or occupying a *position* in relation to it. We can imagine the "other thing" either as a *point* (or place that we do not think of as having dimensions), or as something having *one* dimension (*a line*, a way, a path, a road, an edge), or *two* dimensions (*a surface*, a floor, a wall, a ceiling, a roof, the top of a table), or *three* dimensions (*a space*, a room, a drawer, a cupboard, a building, a volume of water). Notice how these different ideas are expressed by different prepositions:

	Point	Line or Surface	Space
Motion approaching	to	onto	into
Position, after approaching	at	on	in
Motion, leaving	away from	off	out of
Position, after leaving	away from	off	out of

- c) *Away from* emphasises the idea of leaving. When that emphasis is not necessary, omit *away* as in the examples:

We are on the way from X to Y.

Where do you come from? I come from Mars.

- d) *Onto* emphasises the idea of approaching a surface (sometimes with effort) and then being supported by it.

*Into* emphasises the idea of penetrating a space.

When such emphasis is not necessary, simply say *on* or *in*, even for motion, as in the examples:

Get on the bus. Don't put your feet on my chair.

Get in the car. Put your money in the bank.

But use *into* only, in metaphors like *run into difficulties*, *get into trouble*, *fall into bad habits*.

- e) The preposition we use often depends on the picture the "other thing" forms in our minds. Notice the difference between

*on a desk* – on the surface of the top; and

*in a desk* – in the space enclosed by the top, back and sides

*on a chair* – on the surface of the seat; and

*in a chair* – in the space enclosed by seat, back and arms

*on a line* – we are on a line when it is under us; and

*in a line* or *in a row* – occupying one or more of a series of spaces

*on the way* – I am on my way to X when I am on the road going there; and

*in the way* – You are in my way when you are in the space

I want to occupy

*on the side* – on a line or surface to right or left; and

*at the side* – at a point on the side (For *beside* see page 13)

*at the front*, *at the back* – at a point on the front (or back) line or surface;

*on the front*, *on the back* – on the front (or back) line or surface;

*in the front*, *in the back* – in the front (or back) part (For *in front of*, *behind* see page 17)

*at the beginning*, *at the start* – at the first point;

*at the end*, *at the finish* – at the last point;

*in the middle* – in the space half-way between

We go to a place when we approach it, but

into a place when we enter it.



*at a place* – at that spot; at that small inhabited place, such as a village or town; or even a big city when it seems, on a long journey, to be only a point on the map.

*in a place* – in that geographical area, which may be a continent, country, region, big city; or even a small village if we see it as a space, such as the space we are living in.

- f) Certain verbs express motion from place to place (e.g. *go*) and are used with prepositions expressing motion. Other verbs (e.g. *stay*, *stop*) are used with prepositions of position. Some verbs can suggest either motion or position, e.g.

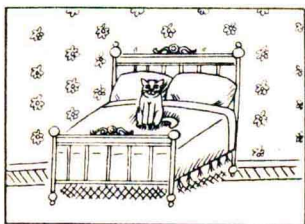
*jump onto the table* – motion onto the table from somewhere else; but

*jump on the table* – either the same idea without emphasis (see d), or action performed while the actor is on the table all the time.

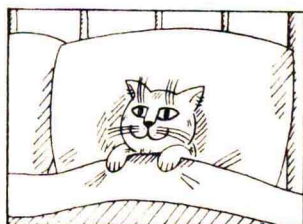
*get to, into, or out of, bed* and

*get bread at the baker's, in the village*

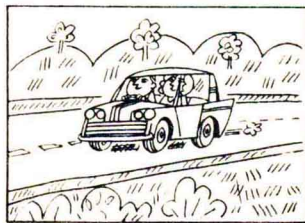
*Note:* The sun rises *in the east* and sets *in the west*. At mid-day it is *in the south* in the northern hemisphere and *in the north* in the southern hemisphere.



Cat on a bed



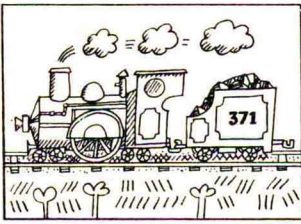
Cat in a bed



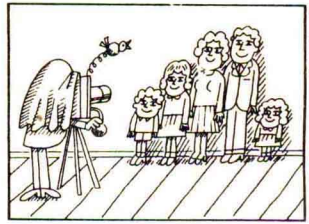
We're on the way home



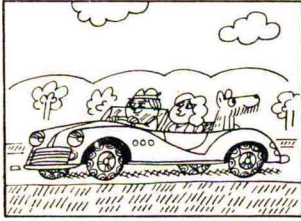
There's a cow in the way



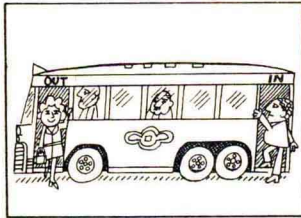
Train on a railway line



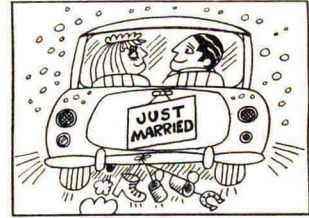
Standing in a line



Two people in the front of a car. Dog in the back.



Entrance at the back  
Exit at the front



Notice on the back

### *Verbs of Motion*

go, come, walk, run,  
rise, climb, fall, sink,  
give, send, step (as in step  
onto a chair)  
get (as in get to one's des-  
tination)

### *Verbs of Position*

stop, stay, keep, stand, sit,  
live, work, play,  
(and many other verbs that do  
not express the idea of move-  
ment from place to place)

- g) With *speak, talk, listen, tell, show*, we are concerned with the direction of the action and say

*Speak to him. Don't talk to her. Listen to me.*

*Tell that to someone else. Show your ticket to the inspector.*

h) With *arrive, aim, shoot, smile, laugh*, we are more concerned with the final position, destination or target. We therefore *arrive at* a point, *arrive on* a railway platform, *arrive in* a big city or a country. We *aim at* or *shoot at* a target. We *get at* an object when we manage to reach it, and *jump at* an opportunity. We *smile at, laugh at* something or somebody. Don't *shout at* me!

i) Notice the difference between  
*throw the ball at Bob* – so as to hit him; and  
*throw the ball to Anne* – in her direction, so that it reaches her.

And now between

Don't *point at people*, as if you were aiming at them; and

A compass needle *points to the north*: it points in that direction, or indicates where the north is.

*Other examples:*

Never *point* a gun *at* someone (as if you were going to shoot him), even if it is not loaded.

In Turkey, you see tall minarets *pointing to* the sky.

That's our house, over there: I'm *pointing* straight at it.

Where is the blackboard? *Point to* it, i.e. just show me you know what "blackboard" means, or where the blackboard is.

*Learn:*

1 When we go to our house, we *go home*. We stay *at home*.

2 When we are tired, we *go to bed*. When we are ill, we *stay in bed*.  
When we get up, we *get out of bed*.

3 Children *go to school*. They *stay at school* for at least six to twelve years. In cold climates, they *stay in school* – in the building – all day.

4 Sailors *go to sea*. When they are far away from land, they are *at sea*. A ship sails *on the sea*, and fish swim *in the sea*.

5 When we write, we put words *on paper*. They are there *on record, in writing*.

6 This book is *in English*. The words in this book are *in print*.



## Exercise 1

*Draw simple pictures to illustrate*

- |                                       |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 a clock on the wall.                | 6 a house at the top of the hill    |
| 2 a picture in a frame.               | 7 a castle on the top of a hill.    |
| 3 a tree at the side of a house.      | 8 a car at the bottom of a hill.    |
| 4 a notice on the side of a building. | 9 a coat on the back of a chair.    |
| 5 a cave in the side of a hill.       | 10 a garden at the back of a house. |

*Then illustrate a boy*

- |                                 |                                |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 11 walking to a boat.           | 16 swimming away from a shark. |
| 12 stepping into it.            | 17 climbing onto a rock,       |
| 13 standing at the front of it, | 18 pointing to the shark,      |
| 14 jumping off the edge,        | 19 getting off the rock,       |
| 15 jumping in the water.        | 20 walking away from the sea.  |

## Exercise 2

*Make up 20 sensible sentences by combining a phrase from column 1, a preposition from column 2, and a word or phrase from column 3.*

We are going	to, at	a tree
We are getting	from	the market
We have arrived	away from	London
The plane is coming	on, in	Switzerland
We get fruit	onto	the island of Egg
My family lives	into	a big black cloud
I was born	off, out of	a place called X

### Exercise 3

Make up 30 sensible sentences from the following:

Someone is speaking Listen carefully I want to look Will you please get There is a spider I have a pain Look at that bruise Don't throw your book I saw your photograph Put that piece of paper Wise men keep I'm not laughing Don't stand Take your hands You mustn't point	to at from away from on in onto into off out of	the ceiling other people your pockets the ground my office you the door my foot the newspaper that picture the window big crowds rubbish heap the President your arm
--	--	--

### Exercise 4

Fill each gap with *to* or *from*:

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 The prisoner escaped – the hills.  | 5 My father has retired – bed. |
| 2 He escaped – prison.               | 6 He has retired – business.   |
| 3 The police rescued him – the river | 7 He learnt English – books.   |
| 4 They saved him – drowning.         | 8 Then he taught it – me.      |

Fill each gap with *onto* or *into* whenever possible; otherwise with *on* or *in*:

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 9 We're getting – Paris.          | 14 Don't take everything – the taxi.      |
| 10 We're arriving – Rome.         | 15 Help me lift this suitcase – the seat. |
| 11 Who is waiting – the platform? | 16 You're sitting – my hat.               |
| 12 Who is coming – the platform?  | 17 We're driving – the city.              |
| 13 Take a seat – the taxi.        | 18 Are we staying – the city tonight?     |

In which of the last ten sentences could we use *off*, and in which could we use *out of*?