

# PREPOSITIONS OF TIME

Prepositions of time tell us when something happens.

## **AT**

Definition: A specific time or exact moment.

Examples:

- The class starts at 9 o'clock.
- We eat dinner at 7.

When to use:

Exact clock times, routine points, special time expressions (at night, at noon, at the weekend — British English).

Avoid:

Do not use at with months or years.

Don't confuse with:

in (longer periods), on (dates and days)

## **IN**

Definition: A period of time or a longer duration.

Examples:

- She was born in 2005.
- We go on holiday in summer.

When to use:

Months, years, seasons, long periods, future time (*in two hours*).

Avoid:

Don't use in for exact days or times.

Don't confuse with:

at (exact times), on (specific dates/days)

## **ON**

Definition: A specific day or date.

Examples:

- The meeting is on Monday.
- His birthday is on 14 June.

When to use:

Days, dates, and expressions like *on Christmas Day*, *on my birthday*.

Avoid:

Not used for months or general time periods.

Don't confuse with: in (months/years), at (exact times)

## **BY**

Definition: Not later than a certain time.

Examples:

- Please finish the work by Friday.
- The bus should arrive by 6 p.m.

When to use:

Deadlines — something must be done before or at that time.

Avoid:

Don't use by when you mean "from...until".

Don't confuse with:

until (continues up to a point)

## **BEFORE**

Definition: Earlier than a certain time.

Examples:

- He arrived before 8 o'clock.
- I like to walk before dinner.

When to use:

Anything that happens earlier.

Avoid:

Not used to express a deadline.

Don't confuse with:

by (deadline) or until (continuing time)

## **AFTER**

Definition: Later than a certain time.

Examples:

- We will talk after class.
- She called me after dinner.

When to use:

Something that follows another event.

Avoid:

Don't use it when two activities happen at the same time.

Don't confuse with:

during (at the same time)

## **DURING**

Definition: At some time inside a period.

Examples:

- I fell asleep during the film.
- She learned a lot during the course.

When to use:

When something happens within a longer event.

Avoid:

Not used with exact times (*during 3 pm* ✗).

Don't confuse with:

while (used with clauses, not nouns)

## **UNTIL / TILL**

Definition: Up to a particular time.

Examples:

- The shop is open until 9 p.m.
- I waited till he arrived.

When to use:

Actions or states that continue and then stop.

Avoid:

Don't use for deadlines where something can happen earlier.

Don't confuse with:

by (deadline, may finish earlier)

## **SINCE**

Definition: From a point in the past until now.

Examples:

- She has lived here since 2010.
- We've known each other since school.

When to use:

With perfect tenses (has/have + past participle).

Avoid:

Not used with simple past.

Don't confuse with:

for (length of time, not starting point)

## **FOR**

Definition: A length or duration of time.

Examples:

- He studied for three hours.
- We've lived here for ten years.

When to use:

Periods: minutes, hours, days, years, etc.

Avoid:

Not used to show when something began.

Don't confuse with:

since

## **FROM ... TO**

Definition: Beginning and ending time.

Examples:

- I work from 9 to 5.
- The course runs from June to August.

When to use:

Clear start and finish.

Avoid:

Don't use from without the ending partner.

Don't confuse with:

until (no starting point mentioned)

## **BETWEEN ... AND**

Definition: Time inside two limits.

Examples:

- The shop is open between 9 and 6.
- I usually study between dinner and bedtime.

When to use:

Range of time.

Avoid:

Don't use between alone.

Don't confuse with:

from ... to (similar but not always interchangeable)

## **WITHIN**

Definition: Before a time limit ends.

Examples:

- Please reply within two days.
- The parcel arrived within a week.

When to use:

Deadlines where something happens inside the period.

Avoid:

Casual conversation — sounds formal.

Don't confuse with:

by (deadline but more flexible)

## **AROUND / ABOUT**

(time estimate)

Definition: Approximately that time.

Examples:

- The train leaves around 6.
- We arrived about midnight.

When to use:

Uncertain times.

Avoid:

Formal writing prefers exact times.

Don't confuse with:

at (exact time)

## **OVER**

(time period, informal)

Definition: Throughout a period.

Examples:

- We travelled a lot over the summer.
- She improved over the year.

When to use:

Long informal time periods.

Avoid:

Exact dates/times.

Don't confuse with:

during (often more precise)

## MCQ Practice

**1. The lesson starts \_\_\_\_ 9 o'clock.**

- a. in
- b. at
- c. on
- d. by

**2. My birthday is \_\_\_\_ June.**

- a. at
- b. on
- c. in
- d. during

**3. We usually visit my parents \_\_\_\_ Sundays.**

- a. in
- b. at
- c. during
- d. on

**4. They moved to Manchester \_\_\_\_ 2020.**

- a. in
- b. at
- c. on
- d. before

**5. We have lunch \_\_\_\_ noon.**

- a. in
- b. at
- c. on
- d. by

**6. The meeting is \_\_\_\_ Monday morning.**

- a. in
- b. at
- c. on
- d. by

**7. Many flowers bloom \_\_\_\_ spring.**

- a. on
- b. during
- c. in
- d. at

**8. Please finish the report \_\_\_\_ Friday.**

- a. until
- b. before
- c. by
- d. from

**9. He arrived \_\_\_\_ the movie started.**

- a. after
- b. during
- c. before
- d. by

**10. We left the restaurant \_\_\_\_ dinner.**

- a. by
- b. during
- c. after
- d. at

**11. I fell asleep \_\_\_\_ the film.**

- a. after
- b. during
- c. before
- d. on

**12. The shop stays open \_\_\_\_ 8 p.m.**

- a. until
- b. by
- c. for
- d. since

**13. She has worked here \_\_\_\_ 2015.**

- a. for
- b. since
- c. from
- d. during

**14. He studied English \_\_\_\_ three years.**

- a. since
- b. during
- c. for
- d. within

**15. The course runs \_\_\_\_ September \_\_\_\_ December.**

- a. from / by
- b. from / to
- c. between / for
- d. by / until

**16. The library is open \_\_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_\_ 5.**

- a. between / and
- b. from / and
- c. during / to
- d. since / until

**17. You must reply \_\_\_\_ two days.**

- a. by
- b. within
- c. during
- d. after

**18. I usually study \_\_\_\_ the evening.**

- a. on
- b. at
- c. during
- d. by

**19. We travelled a lot \_\_\_\_ the summer.**

- a. at
- b. during
- c. on
- d. by

**20. He didn't speak \_\_\_\_ the meeting.**

- a. during
- b. for
- c. since
- d. until

**21. She worked \_\_\_\_ 2010 to 2018 in that company.**

- a. during
- b. since
- c. from
- d. within

**22. I waited for the bus \_\_\_\_ twenty minutes, then walked home.**

- a. during
- b. for
- c. since
- d. until

**23. The museum was closed \_\_\_\_ we arrived.**

- a. after
- b. until
- c. before
- d. when

**24. She hasn't phoned me \_\_\_\_ last winter.**

- a. for
- b. since
- c. from
- d. during



- 25. They hope to finish the project \_\_\_\_ the end of the month.**  
a. by  
b. at  
c. on  
d. in
- 26. I'll speak to you \_\_\_\_ I get back from the meeting.**  
a. during  
b. until  
c. after  
d. by
- 27. Many students struggle \_\_\_\_ exam periods.**  
a. at  
b. during  
c. on  
d. by
- 28. The children were excited \_\_\_\_ Christmas Eve.**  
a. at  
b. on  
c. during  
d. in
- 29. The office was quiet \_\_\_\_ lunchtime.**  
a. for  
b. during  
c. by  
d. after
- 30. The law came into effect \_\_\_\_ 1 January 2024.**  
a. at  
b. on  
c. in  
d. from
- 31. The results must be submitted \_\_\_\_ the latest next Thursday.**  
a. at  
b. by  
c. until  
d. during
- 32. Productivity improved steadily \_\_\_\_ the course of the year.**  
a. during  
b. over  
c. by  
d. throughout

**33. The report examines how attitudes changed \_\_\_\_ the 1990s.**

- a. on
- b. during
- c. at
- d. by

**34. \_\_\_\_ recent years, remote work has become more common.**

- a. At
- b. Over
- c. By
- d. From

**35. The contract remains valid \_\_\_\_ further notice.**

- a. by
- b. until
- c. for
- d. during

**36. The policy was revised several times \_\_\_\_ the pandemic.**

- a. during
- b. after
- c. by
- d. from

**37. The application must be completed \_\_\_\_ the specified timeframe; otherwise it will not be considered.**

- a. by
- b. in
- c. within
- d. during