

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