

# Misused forms

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## Using the wrong preposition

*Mistakes are often made by using the wrong preposition after certain words. The following list includes the words which most often give trouble:*

- 1 **Absorbed** (= very much interested) **in**, not *at*.  
*Don't say:* The man was absorbed at his work.

✓ *Say:* The man was **absorbed in** his work.

- 2 **Accuse of**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* She accused the man for stealing.

✓ *Say:* She **accused** the man **of** stealing.

Note: **Charge** takes **with**: *The man was **charged with** murder.*

- 3 **Accustomed to**, not *with*.

*Don't say:* I'm accustomed with hot weather.

✓ *Say:* I'm **accustomed to** hot weather.

Note: Also **used to**: *He is **used to** the heat.*

- 4 **Afraid of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Laura is afraid from the dog.

✓ *Say:* Laura is **afraid of** the dog.

## Part 1

### 5 Aim at, not on or against.

*Don't say:* She aimed on (or against) the target.

✓ *Say:* She **aimed at** the target.

Note: Use the preposition **at** to denote direction: **throw at, shout at, fire at, shoot at**. **Shoot** (without the **at**) means to kill: *He **shot** a bird (= he hit and killed it).*

### 6 Angry with, not against.

*Don't say:* The teacher was angry against him.

✓ *Say:* The teacher was **angry with** him.

Note 1: We get **angry with** a person but **at** a thing. *He was **angry at** the weather* (not: **with** the weather).

Note 2: Also **annoyed with, vexed with, indignant with** a person, but **at** a thing.

### 7 Anxious (= troubled) about, not for.

*Don't say:* They're anxious for his health.

✓ *Say:* They're **anxious about** his health.

Note: **Anxious** meaning **wishing very much** takes **for**. *Parents are **anxious for** their children's success.*

### 8 Arrive at, not to.

*Don't say:* We arrived to the village at night.

✓ *Say:* We **arrived at** the village at night.

Note: Use **arrive in** with countries and large cities. *Mr Smith has **arrived in** London. (or New York, India, etc.)*

### 9 Ashamed of, not from.

*Don't say:* He's now ashamed from his conduct.

✓ *Say:* He's now **ashamed of** his conduct.

Note: It isn't correct to use **ashamed of** meaning **shy**. **Ashamed** means feeling shame or guilt about something. **Shy** means feeling nervous with someone. Instead of saying: *I'm ashamed (or shamed) of my teacher*, say: *I'm **shy of** my teacher.*

## Misused forms

10 **Believe in**, not *to*.

*Don't say:* We believe to God.

✓ *Say:* We **believe in** God.

Note: **To believe in** means to have faith in. **To believe** (without the **in**) means to regard something as true: *I believe everything he says.*

11 **Boast of or about**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* James boasted for his strength.

✓ *Say:* James **boasted of (or about)** his strength.

12 **Careful of, with or about**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* Elke's very careful for her health.

✓ *Say:* Elke's very **careful of/about** her health.

*Or:* You should be more **careful with** your money.

Note: **Take care of:** *He takes care of his money.*

13 **Travel by train**, etc., not *with the train*, etc.

*Don't say:* He travelled with the train yesterday.

✓ *Say:* He **travelled by train** yesterday.

Note: We say: **by train, by boat, by plane, by bike**; also, **by land, by sea, by air, by bus**; **in a bus or on a bus; by car or in a car, by taxi or in a taxi; on horse-back, on a donkey, on a bicycle; on foot.**

14 **Complain about**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* Annette complained for the weather.

✓ *Say:* Annette **complained about** the weather.

Note: When talking about illness we use **complain of**. We say: *She complained of a sore throat.*

15 **Composed of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Our class is composed from thirty students.

✓ *Say:* Our class is **composed of** thirty students.

## Part 1

16 **Confidence in**, not *to*.

*Don't say:* I have great confidence to you.

✓ *Say:* I have great **confidence in** you.

Note: **In confidence:** *Let me tell you something in confidence* (= as a secret)

17 **Conform to**, not *with*.

*Don't say:* We must conform with the rules.

✓ *Say:* We must **conform to** the rules.

Note: **comply** takes **with**. *We'll comply with your request.*

18 **Congratulate on**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* I congratulate you for your success.

✓ *Say:* I **congratulate you on** your success.

19 **Consist of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* A year consists from twelve months.

✓ *Say:* A year **consists of** twelve months.

Note: Take great care never to use **consist** in the passive form.

20 **Covered with**, not *by*.

*Don't say:* The mountains are covered by snow.

✓ *Say:* The mountains are **covered with/in** snow.

21 **Cure of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* The man was cured from his illness.

✓ *Say:* The man was **cured of** his illness.

Note: The noun **cure** takes **for**: *There is no cure for that disease.*

22 **Depend on** or **upon**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* It depends from her.

✓ *Say:* It **depends on** (or **upon**) her.

Note: **Rely on** or **upon**. *I can't rely on (or upon) him.*

## Misused forms

23 **Deprive of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Nelson Mandela was deprived from his freedom.

✓ *Say:* Nelson Mandela was **deprived of** his freedom.

24 **Die of an illness**, not *from an illness*.

*Don't say:* Many people have died from malaria.

✓ *Say:* Many people have **died of** malaria.

Note: People **die of** illness, **of** hunger, **of** thirst, **of** or **from** wounds; **from** overwork; **by** violence, **by** the sword, **by** pestilence; **in** battle; **for** their country, **for** a cause; **through** neglect; **on** the scaffold; **at** the stake.

25 **Different from**, not *than*.

*Don't say:* My book is different than yours.

✓ *Say:* My book is **different from** yours.

26 **Disappointed by, about or at**, not *from*.

(a) *by/at/about:*

*Don't say:* Phillipa was disappointed from the low mark she got in the test.

✓ *Say:* Phillipa was **disappointed by/about/at** the low mark she got in the test.

(b) *with/in:*

*Don't say:* Jane was disappointed from her son.

✓ *Say:* Jane was **disappointed with/in** her son.

Note: Before a person we use **with** or **in**, before a thing we use **at**, **about** or **by** and before a gerund we use **at**: *Keith is very disappointed at not winning the prize.* We use **that** (optional before a new clause): *I was disappointed (that) I didn't get an invitation.*

27 **Divide into parts**, not *in parts*.

*Don't say:* I divided the cake in four parts.

✓ *Say:* I **divided** the cake **into** four parts.

Note: A thing may be divided **in half** or **in two**: *Paul divided the apple in half (or in two).*

## Part 1

28 **No doubt (n) of or about, not for.**

*Don't say:* I've no doubt for his ability.

✓ *Say:* I've **no doubt of (or about)** his ability.

Note: **Doubtful of:** I am **doubtful of** his ability to pass.

29 **Dressed in, not with.**

*Don't say:* The woman was dressed with black.

✓ *Say:* The woman was **dressed in** black.

Note: *The woman was in black* is also correct.

30 **Exception to, not of.**

*Don't say:* This is an exception of the rule.

✓ *Say:* This is an **exception to** the rule.

Note: We say **with the exception of:** *She liked all her subjects with the exception of physics.*

31 **Exchange for, not by.**

*Don't say:* He exchanged his collection of matchboxes by some foreign stamps.

✓ *Say:* He **exchanged** his collection of matchboxes **for** some foreign stamps.

Note: **In exchange for:** *He gave them his old car in exchange for a new one.*

32 **Fail in, not from.**

*Don't say:* Steven failed from maths last year.

✓ *Say:* Steven **failed in** maths last year.

33 **Full of, not with or from.**

*Don't say:* The jar was full with (or from) oil.

✓ *Say:* The jar was **full of** oil.

Note: **Fill takes with:** Jane **filled** the glass **with** water.

## Misused forms

34 **Get rid of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* I'll be glad to get rid from him.

✓ *Say:* I'll be glad to **get rid of** him.

35 **Glad about**, not *from* or *with*.

*Don't say:* Francis was glad from (or with) receiving your letter.

✓ *Say:* Francis was **glad about** receiving your letter.

36 **Good at**, not *in*.

*Don't say:* My sister's good in maths.

✓ *Say:* My sister's **good at** maths.

Note 1: **Bad at, clever at, quick at, slow at**, etc. However, **weak in:** *He's weak in grammar.*

Note 2: *He's good in class* means that his conduct is good.

37 **Guard against**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* You must guard from bad habits.

✓ *Say:* You must **guard against** bad habits.

38 **Guilty of**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* He was found guilty for murder.

✓ *Say:* He was found **guilty of** murder

39 **Independent of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Clare's independent from her parents.

✓ *Say:* Clare's **independent of** her parents.

Note: We say **dependent on:** *A child is dependent on its parents.*

40 **Indifferent to**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* They're indifferent for politics.

✓ *Say:* They're **indifferent to** politics.

## Part 1

41 **Insist on**, not *to*.

*Don't say:* He always insisted *to* his opinion.

✓ *Say:* He always **insisted on** his opinion.

Note: **Persist** takes in *He persisted in his silly ideas*

42 **Interested in**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* She's not interested *for* her work.

✓ *Say:* She's not **interested in** her work.

Note: Also **take an interest in** *She takes a great interest in music.*

43 **Jealous of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He's very jealous *from* his brother.

✓ *Say:* He's very **jealous of** his brother.

44 **Leave for a place**, not *to a place*.

*Don't say:* They're leaving *to* England soon.

✓ *Say:* They're **leaving for** England soon.

45 **Live on**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He lives *from* his brother's money.

✓ *Say:* He **lives on** his brother's money.

Note: **Feed on:** *Some birds feed on insects*

46 **Look at**, not *to*.

*Don't say:* Look *to* this beautiful picture.

✓ *Say:* **Look at** this beautiful picture.

Note: Also **gaze at**, **stare at**, etc. But: **look after** (= take care of); **look for** (= try to find); **look over** (= examine); **look into** (= examine closely); **look on** or **upon** (= consider); **look down on** (= have a low opinion of), **look up to** (= respect); **look out for** (= expect); **look forward to** (= expect with pleasure), **look to** (= rely on).

## Misused forms

47 **Married to**, not *with*.

*Don't say:* Angela was married with a rich man.

✓ *Say:* Angela was **married to** a rich man.

Note: Also **engaged to**: Sally was **engaged to** Peter for a year before they got married.

48 **Opposite to**, not *from*

*Don't say:* Their house is opposite from ours.

✓ *Say:* Their house is **opposite to** ours.

Note: **Opposite ours** is also correct

49 **Pass by a place**, not *from a place*.

*Don't say:* Will you pass from the post-office?

✓ *Say:* Will you **pass by** the post-office?

Note: Also **pass the post-office** is correct.

50 **Play for a team**, not *with a team*.

*Don't say:* He plays regularly with that team.

✓ *Say:* He **plays regularly for** that team.

51 **Pleased with**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* The teacher is pleased from me.

✓ *Say:* The teacher is **pleased with** me.

Note: We say **pleased at** or **pleased with** if an abstract noun or a clause follows: *They were **pleased at** (or **with**) what he said; They were **pleased at** (or **with**) her results.*

52 **Popular with**, not *among*.

*Don't say:* John's popular among his friends.

✓ *Say:* John's **popular with** his friends.

53 **Prefer to**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* I prefer a blue pen from a red one.

✓ *Say:* I **prefer a blue pen to** a red one.

Note: Also **preferable to**: *This car is **preferable to** my old one.*

## Part 1

54 **Preside at** or **over**, not *in*.

*Don't say:* Who **presided** in the last meeting?

✓ *Say:* Who **presided at** (or **over**) the last meeting?

55 **Proud of**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* He's very proud **for** his promotion.

✓ *Say:* He's very **proud of** his promotion.

Note: We say **take (a) pride in**: A craftsman **takes a pride in** his work

56 **Rejoice at** or **in**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* We rejoiced **for** her success.

✓ *Say:* We **rejoiced at** (or **in**) her success.

57 **Related to**, not *with*.

*Don't say:* Are you related **with** Simon in any way?

✓ *Say:* Are you **related to** Simon in any way?

Note: Also **relation to**: *Is he any relation to you?*

58 **Repent of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He repented **from** his crime.

✓ *Say:* He **repented of** his crime.

Note: **Repentance** takes **for**: He feels **repentance for** his sin.

59 **Satisfied with**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Are you satisfied **from** your marks?

✓ *Say:* Are you **satisfied with** your marks?

Note: Also **content with**, **delighted with**, **unhappy with**, **happy with**, **displeased with**, **dissatisfied with**, **disgusted with**.

60 **Similar to**, not *with*.

*Don't say:* Your house is similar **with** mine.

✓ *Say:* Your house is **similar to** mine.

## Misused forms

- 61 **Sit at a desk** etc., not *on a desk* etc.

*Don't say:* The bank manager was sitting on his desk.

- ✓ *Say:* The bank manager was **sitting at** his desk.

Note. Also **sit at a table**. But **on a chair, on a bench, on a sofa**, etc.; **in an arm-chair, in a tree** or **up a tree**. A bird sometimes **perches** (= sits) on a tree

- 62 **Spend on**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* I spend a lot of time for my computer.

- ✓ *Say:* I **spend** a lot of time **on** my computer.

- 63 **Succeed in**, not *at*.

*Don't say:* I hope he'll succeed at his work.

- ✓ *Say:* I hope he'll **succeed in** his work.

Note. A person **succeeds to** a property, a title, or an office: *Queen Elizabeth II succeeded to the throne in 1952*. Also one person can **succeed** another.

- 64 **Superior to**, not *from* or *than*.

*Don't say:* This is superior from (or than) that.

- ✓ *Say:* This is **superior to** that.

Note: Also **inferior to, junior to, senior to, subsequent to, prior to**.

- 65 **Sure of**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* I'm quite sure for her honesty.

- ✓ *Say:* I'm quite **sure of** her honesty.

Note: Also **certain of**. *I am quite certain of it*.

- 66 **Surprised at** or **by**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* Harold was surprised for the loud bang.

- ✓ *Say:* Harold was **surprised at/by** the loud bang.

Note: Also **astonished at/by, amazed at/by, alarmed at/by, puzzled at/by, shocked at/by**.

Have another look at ...

## Prepositions after certain words

Note carefully the prepositions used after the following words:

accuse <i>of</i>	guilty <i>of</i>
accustomed <i>to</i>	independent <i>of</i>
afraid <i>of</i>	indifferent <i>to</i>
aim <i>at</i>	insist <i>on</i>
angry <i>with, at</i>	interested <i>in</i>
arrive <i>at, in</i>	jealous <i>of</i>
ashamed <i>of</i>	look <i>at</i>
believe <i>in</i>	married <i>to</i>
boast <i>of</i>	no doubt <i>of or about</i>
careful <i>of, with, about</i>	pleased <i>with</i>
complain <i>about</i>	prefer <i>to</i>
composed <i>of</i>	proud <i>of</i>
conform <i>to</i>	related <i>to</i>
congratulate <i>on</i>	repent <i>of</i>
consist <i>of</i>	satisfied <i>with</i>
cure <i>of</i>	similar <i>to</i>
depend <i>on</i>	succeed <i>in</i>
deprive <i>of</i>	superior <i>to</i>
die <i>of</i>	sure <i>of</i>
different <i>from</i>	surprised <i>at, by</i>
dressed <i>in</i>	suspect <i>of</i>
fail <i>in</i>	tired <i>of</i>
full <i>of</i>	translate <i>into</i>
good <i>at</i>	warn <i>of, about</i>
guard <i>against</i>	

## Misused forms

67 **Suspect of**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* I suspect Kate for stealing the pen.

✓ *Say:* I **suspect** Kate **of** stealing the pen.

Note: Also **suspicious of**: *Dogs are suspicious of strangers.*

68 **Take by**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Robert took his brother from the hand.

✓ *Say:* Robert **took** his brother **by** the hand.

Note: Also: **hold by**, **catch by**, **seize by**, **snatch by**, **grasp by**.

69 **Tie to**, not *on*.

*Don't say:* The girl tied the string on the kite.

✓ *Say:* The girl **tied** the string **to** the kite.

Note: Also **bind to**: *The prisoner was bound to the stake.*

70 **Tired of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* The boys are tired from eating boiled eggs.

✓ *Say:* The boys are **tired of** eating boiled eggs.

71 **Translate into**, not *to*.

*Don't say:* Translate this passage to English.

✓ *Say:* **Translate** this passage **into** English.

72 **Tremble with cold**, etc., not *from cold*, etc.

*Don't say:* The man was trembling from cold.

✓ *Say:* The man was **trembling with** cold.

Note: Also **shake with** and **shiver with**: *The thief was shaking with fear.*

73 **Warn (a person) of danger**, not *about danger*.

*Don't say:* They were warned about the danger.

✓ *Say:* They were **warned of** the danger.

Note 1: Use **warn about** for specific things: *They warned us about the bumps in the road.*

## Part 1

Note 2: We **warn** a person against a fault: *His teacher **warned** him **against** breaking the rules.*

74 **Write in ink**, not *with ink*.

*Don't say: I've written the letter with ink.*

✓ *Say: I've **written** the letter **in ink**.*

Note: We use **in** when we are referring to the final work: *The drawing was done **in** charcoal. Dara writes her letters **in** green ink.* When we are referring to the instrument used we use **with**: *The children are learning to write **with** a pen. Helen prefers to paint **with** a thin brush.*

(See Exercises 73–76 on pages 168–170)