Some Vital Prepositions and Their Uses

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<th>Preposition</th>
<th>is used with . . .</th>
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| about       | relating a composition or creative work to its subject or theme: *This movie is about a woman astronaut who survives an accident in outer space. This essay/poem/painting is about forgiveness. This book is about geologic formations of the Pleistocene.*  
|             | the focus of one’s attention and activity: *We tried to go about our business like nothing had happened.*  
|             | actions involving the full extent of an area ("About" is often used in British English where Americans use "around," but they are also combined to avoid word repetition): *I went about making breakfast while the kids stumbled around upstairs. I went about the room tidying pillows and books. I looked about for help. You are free to move about the cabin.*  
|             | approximate figures or estimations: *It’s been about five years since we saw him. I’m about finished with my project.* |
| at          | a finite point, a junction, a specific time, a passive object of an action:  
|             | *at 40.35°N and 150.75°W, at the corner of 5th Avenue and Main Street, at 5:35 p.m., look at the television, “You’re talking at me, not to me!”*  
|             | (idiom exception: *He goes for walks at night. not *at morning, or *at afternoon)* |
| because of  | a noun equivalent, while *because* (no "of") must be followed by a clause:  
|             | *Because of George’s tardiness (noun equiv.), the tour started late. I was grouchy because of a headache (noun equiv).*  
|             | (Compare with *Because* George was tardy (clause), the tour started late. I was grouchy because I had a headache (clause).)* |

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Preposition is used with . . .

by the means of achieving a goal: She goes everywhere by foot.
I found the information by searching the Internet. She will get into Harvard by getting good grades and test scores and by knowing how to charm people.

passing a stationary object: I drove by your house last night.

authorship: This story is by Stephen Fry.

the doer of a passive verb: He is followed by thousands of Twitter members.

for an action performed in the pursuit of a result/goal, or toward the benefit of someone: shop for groceries, study for a test, apply for admission, run for mayor, work for my boss

a thing that exists in order to benefit someone or something: a gift for you

an action with a desired goal or purpose in the mind of the subject:
“I did it for love!” or We did it for all the wrong reasons.
duration: I studied for five hours.

in boundaries, borders, shapes, walls, spans, passengers of cars/trucks/smaller vehicles: in Belgium, in January, in King County, in Bellevue, in a circle, in a car, in a prop plane, in a room,

after a beginning but before an end: in the morning/afternoon/evening, in my memory, in World War II, in the chaos of the riot,

the contents of a communication medium: in the article/essay/movie/episode/email/speech/text/posting . . .

(Compare to into, used for movement from outside a boundary to inside: I went into my room. Or for transformations: He turned into a werewolf.)

most of a determined noun* (singular or plural): He had eaten most of an apple.
I said goodbye to most of my friends. Most of the class did not do the assignment.

* “Determined noun” = determiner + noun, e.g., an apple, my friends, the assignment, his backpack or a noun naming something that can be discussed in parts, such as a place:
I don’t drive in most of Bellevue.

In contrast, most (no “of”) must be followed by a plural undetermined noun. (Compare: Most Americans are ignorant about geography. Most breakfast cereals are loaded with sugar. (correct)
*He ate most apple. *Most apple is eaten already. (*incorrect)
Preposition is used with . . .

of a piece or pieces relating to a larger whole, belonging, attributes:

the fingers of my right hand, a friend of my sister, members of Congress, a member of the faculty, a light shade of green, that tone of voice (In the history of telling time, the fifth hour of the clock became five o’clock)

on something touching a surface: on the road, on my face, on the table, on the (printed) page, on the wall

content broadcast by an electronic medium: on television, on the radio, on the phone, on the Internet (compare to in a book, or in the newspaper)

the topic of communication: a paper on climate change, a movie on the life of Helen Keller, a speech on the dangers of texting while driving

passengers or cargo of large, flat-level vehicles and self-powered vehicles: on a bus, on a train, on an airplane, on a boat, on a motorcycle, on a bicycle, on a skateboard (compare to in a car, in a truck, in a van)

with accompaniment, joining, alliances, affiliation, agreement: My friends went with me. Mix magenta with cyan and you’ll get purple. She is with Seattle City Light. I’m with you on this.

a tool or instrument used to achieve a goal: I built it with my own two hands. He enticed me over with a silken-voiced “How you doin’?”

to an active or willing recipient: I talked to you yesterday. She ran to her daddy’s arms. (Compare I talked at you yesterday, and I yelled at you yesterday.)

a destination: I sent a message to you. I’m going to class. She flew to Istanbul.

connecting a main verb to a second verb, esp. verbs of mental actions that can cause other actions: I want to buy a new car. I hate to bother you. I decided to do some research (in order) to make a better-informed decision.

The verbs make, let, see, and hear are NOT followed by “to” before a bare infinitive verb:

Don’t let the cat go outside; make her stay indoors.

They made me talk to the crowd; it let me know they had confidence in my ability.

I could see you wave from the balcony; I could not, however, hear you yell “Fire!”

Note: Unlike let, allow DOES use to after it: Please allow me to introduce myself.