



## WE 027: Prepositions in English

Hello, listeners of the World of English podcast. There's a new recording. I want to help you kill the time or pass the time, if you need another expression. If you have any extra time on your hands right now and as always I'd love to teach you some English, but I have to admit that the subject that I have chosen for today's meeting may not seem very attractive at first, have to tell you. But quoting Richard Branson *screw it, let's do it*, so yah screw it, I'm going to do it, I'm going to talk about, there we go, prepositions. So, today we'll be talking about prepositions, not the greatest subject you may say, still I do hope that I'll make it easy and pleasant enough for you to follow and so you'll change your mind. Because you know the rule here, that anything that comes, anything that is associated with the language it has to be produced in such a way that is easy to bite. And that is what I'm going to do with prepositions for you right now.

The reason why I decided to talk about prepositions is that many students, many learners complain that they find the issue, they find the subject very difficult to study, very difficult to learn. There is a lot of frustration because there is no immediate association between the preposition, between the Polish language and the English language. Well, I have to agree, to some extent, I do have to agree because there is no immediate translation. Very often there is this preposition that we have in our mind, in the Polish language and we cannot translate word for word because the preposition that we would need in English is completely different. And so today, I'm going to share some advice with you how I would study the subject of prepositions, how I would learn prepositions if I were you, but also I will, I will show you, I will teach you some very specific situations in which a given preposition fits and so, because of this you will not make mistakes. This is my assumption and this is what I would love to do today.

I will start with something that is called or something that I call fixed phrases. You know me, I have repeated that on numerous occasions, so if you study language, you have to study the whole chunks of words, the whole structures. And this is exactly what happens with prepositions. If you have this phrase, if you have



this verb or an adjective and it is followed by a given preposition, you just have to learn it by heart and you just have to learn it as it is. Some of you may say *Oh, this is a very interesting piece of advice, so you're telling us to learn something by heart*. But, believe me, there is a method in it, it really works because many people, the kind of mistake that they make is that they just learn the verb itself, or they just learn the adjective itself and that's it. So, they know the translation and that's it. But there is no preposition after, so when there is this real-life situation and they want to use a given phrase, they want to use a given verb plus a preposition, there is this black hole inside their heads, inside their minds because they don't know the preposition. But if you study from the very beginning, if you learn the fixed expression, the fixed phrase, please trust me, please believe me, it'll be so much easier.

And a couple of examples that I have prepared for you today are as follows, so for instance, there is the *depend on*, a very useful expression, a well-known expression and, frankly speaking, in here the learners do not make many mistakes because it is so well-known and somehow repeated on numerous occasions that they just remember that there's a *depend on* expression. How we use the expression? Well, I guess that's very simple. So, the very popular phrase that many people are familiar with is, like *it depends on the weather*, for instance, right. So, we can talk about our picnic plans, for instance, or our plans of playing basketball or playing football in the open air, so with all, everything, it all depends on the weather, but also the usage of the word *depend on* is a bit different in a way that you can say that *I depend on my friends*, right. So here you talk about the emotions, so there are these people that you depend on, you trust them, you feel comfortable in their presence and you know that you can *count on* them. There you go, there's another fixed expression *count on somebody, depend on somebody, count on somebody*.

Another expression that is here is *responsible for*. Again, very useful, you use it quite often, you use it when you talk about your professional situations, your work situations, so people say what they are responsible for and please remember



that, that has been repeated a couple of times here, that if you have a preposition, what follows is either a noun, so responsible for transport or for the import of goods, for instance, or what follows is the gerund expression, so you are responsible for marketing, for instance, right. So you need the -ing form after the preposition. There is the expression *arrive at* and this is a little bit of a problem because many people would put a different preposition in here. But please, please remember that arrive is followed by *at*, so you arrive *at* an office, you arrive *at* a cinema, you arrive *at* a given place, *at* a restaurant, but you arrive *in* a city and *in* a country.

*Look for*, yeah, we look for things when we lose them, when we can't find them. So, we have to just go and find a given thing, like we can look for our glasses. That happens very often. We can look for our car keys, we can look for our mobile phone; this is the worst thing of all. I know of course that there are some very fine applications that you can, that you can install and there is this application that works for you, so you no longer have to look for things on your own but the application will find these things for you. But many of us know the situation. We have looked for various things on various occasions. And here I put, when it comes to the word *look for*, next to the word *look for* there is an expression *look at* because this is also confused. Sometimes people say *look for* meaning *to search* and they mean, like *look at* because if you look at something or somebody, this is where you direct your eyesight, yes, when you look at something. So, very often I can say when I, when I meet my students, like look at me or look at the screen 'cause, 'cause I'm sharing the screen with you, so look at, at something. So, just to sum up, just to sum up the very first piece of advice in here, please learn fixed phrases, it'll be so much easier for you, it'll be so much easier for your brain because the brain will remember the whole chunk, the brain will remember the whole part like *depend on*, *responsible for*, *arrive at*, *look for* or *look at*.

Another piece of advice and this one I think is very, very useful because it puts everything in order, in a way. So, this advice deals with the following prepositions, so it deals with the preposition *on*, the preposition *in*, and the



preposition *at*. They are confused very, very often and they are this cause of frustration very, very often. But as you listen to the way I categorized them, I do believe it'll be so much easier for you. So, let us start.

When we think about this preposition *on*, we would think about a flat surface, so that's why we use the preposition in the following sentences, for instance, *There is this handbag on my desk*, or *There is a pen on my desk*, or *There is a very beautiful picture on the wall*, or *There is this beautiful rug on the floor*. Mind you, these surfaces are flat, all of them, all of these surfaces are flat.

When we think about the preposition *in*, we would think about these spaces that are closed, so you are inside some given space, you are in a room, right, you are in a hall, you are in the bathroom, you are in the kitchen, you are in the conference room, you are somewhere that is closed, so it has got the four walls and it has got the floor and the ceiling above you.

And all the other spaces, so everything in between, should actually be covered with *at*. Because how would you describe the surface, when you want to say that you're waiting at a bus stop, for instance. So, a bus stop is neither something that is flat nor something that is closed. So, this is a perfect example of the usage of the preposition *at*. So, you are waiting at a bus stop. The same happens when you are late, for instance, because you are waiting at traffic lights and this is what drives you crazy. Another expression in here would be that *I went to a party*, just another little thing here, so when there's the movement, you would use *to*, right. So, you go to a party, you go to work, you go to a cinema, you go to a concert, so there's the movement. There you go, so there's this extra remark in here. But coming back to preposition *at*; if you go to a party, and then you want to talk about the party that you took part in, you would say that you were at a party. *The party was great, I was at a party*. And in here you are not allowed to use *on*; I hear it very often. But then I laugh and I repeat, guys, does it mean that the surface was flat, that for you the surface was flat? I would rather say that it wasn't, right. You were standing, you were sitting, you were talking to people, but it wasn't flat. The same happens with a concert or a disco, yeah. So,



you were at a concert and you were at a disco. Please remember, this categorization, like the three elements, these three elements that I have just presented, they are very, very useful. So please remember, *on* is a flat surface, *in* is a closed surface, so that you are inside, and *at* is actually everything in between.

The preposition *at* is very functional in English, it has got many, many functions, so it is used very often. But for some reason, Polish learners, especially Polish learners, forget about that and I wouldn't know why, because *at* is used on many occasions. And *at*, please remember, *at* is connected with the function of the place. So, that's why there are the four very typical places where we usually find ourselves and these places are as follows: at home, yeah, this is where we spend a lot of our time, this is at home. At school, again, students go to school and spend their time at school. Adults spend most of their time or a lot of their time at work, and there are students also, the older students, because you can have students that go to, for instance, to secondary schools, but there are those students that have already passed their school leaving examinations and they are at university, yeah. So there's at home, at school, at work and at university. Mind you, I hope you will never forget that, you'll stop making these mistakes, because it is actually very, very simple. And there is the golden rule, it's my private rule, but I would say it works. So, I would love you to follow this rule, because the rule says *if you want to use the Polish on*, so we have this expression in Polish translated, translated from Polish into English and there is this preposition *on*, please use *at*. So, the chance that you will make a mistake is actually very slim. Because in most of these cases, you would rather use *at* not *on*. So, every single time you think about *on*, please use *at* and if you do that, I'm sure your English will improve and I'm sure it'll get so much better.

Dear, dear all, there is yet another issue connected with prepositions, namely the phrasal verbs. I know that phrasal verbs are not actually a very typical example of prepositions, meaning that this is a very special usage of a verb, because it is this collection, this pair of words where we have the verb and a preposition but, yeah, there is a preposition. And it is also a very problematic issue, this is what you tell me, this is what I hear very often. You ask me how to



study phrasal verbs, you know me, right. My answer, very often used answer is the context, but yes, this is how it happens, right. This is how children, I'm coming back to them because I'm a huge fan of children, meaning of their way of learning things, the way they acquire their knowledge, the way they grow and develop. So I'm a huge fan of their intelligence and their ability to study the world and to learn what is around them. But once again, that is exactly what they do, this is how they function; there is a context, the context gets repeated and this is how they learn. So, when they see a round object, they know that this is a ball, right. When they see this object with flat board, flat surface, and four legs, they know that this is a table. Because this context gets repeated over and over again, so context is a key thing here. Don't, please don't learn, don't study English in between, so to say. I mean, so that there is Polish and there is English and you try to mix the two languages. Of course, this is how we begin, and of course, there should be translation. But if you can stop translating, right, if you can just focus on one language more, I mean on the English language, it will produce so much better results for you.

Coming back to the phrasal verbs and to the context thing and the reason why I introduced the context here thing again, is that what I would do if I were you, is I would use, I would learn phrasal verbs in pairs of two sentences. What I mean here is that each phrasal verb has got its equivalent in the regular verb. So, my advice is to study, to learn, to try to remember a sentence and I have repeated that, again, that sentences are great, you should study sentences, sometimes even by heart. But in this way, your brain will remember the whole collection of words and this is what we want. Language is this whole collection of words, it is not just one word that is translated from Polish into English, but it is the whole collection of expressions. So, if you learn by heart a given sentence and then if you are in a stressful situation, in this real-life situation, you are supposed to produce an expression in English, you will have that sentence in your mind. All you will have to do is just change the subject or change the object. But the general collection, the collection of words is there. So that's why it is so helpful. So, coming back to phrasal verbs, so there is this sentence with a regular verb and then, please learn



this sentence with a phrasal verb. So, there is the phrasal verb *bring up*, right. So, we bring up children; this is what we do, this is the chore, everyday chore, everyday duty. So, the sentence to remember, the sentence for you would be, we... *It is difficult to bring up children*, and the sentence that you would need to remember with a regular verb would be *It is difficult to raise children*. So we have this pair of, pair of sentences, bring up children and raise children.

Another example here would be *call off* so, if you call something off, it means that it is cancelled, so it will no longer take place. So, the airlines may call off their flights, this is what has happened quite recently or has been happening quite recently. So, *the airlines have cancelled their flight*, and *the airlines have called off their flight*, for instance. If you use the phrasal verb *call off*, very often you would use the phrasal verb *put off* because *call off* it means, like to stop something completely, and it means that something that you wanted to take part in is no longer taking place, but *put off* means that it will happen, it will take place, but at a different moment in time, at a later moment in time. And so *put off* means to postpone. So, we can say that *the meeting has been put off*, in other words, *the meeting has been postponed*.

Another, another pair of words would be *back up* and *support*. I like the word *back* very often because it is used in the incorrect context very often; for you *back* means to *come back*, but *come back* means that you return to a given place only if you went; the verb *come*, because in this particular respect *back* is not a verb, *come* is the verb. But *back* means to support, yeah, so you would use the word *back* but in a completely different context. Remember, *back* wouldn't mean that you're coming back, *back* means that you support, so *back up* means to support. And we all count on this support of our friends and we all count that our friends will back us up; it's a nice feeling knowing that there is, there are these people, family and friends that are by our side, just next to us, supporting us.

The very last expression that I'd like to practise with you a little bit is *eat out*. If you eat out, it means that you leave your home, that you decide not to cook at home and that you just go to a restaurant and eat at a restaurant. Just to



revise, there are these five expressions, so this is bring up which means raise, and call off which means cancel, put off which means postpone, back up that is support and eat out means eat at a restaurant. Easy, easy-peasy you see, it is really that easy. My advice here, just as we are going to finish, my advice would be to look at all these elements of a language, of the English language with hope, meaning that it is not really that difficult. I'm trying to show you and it's been a couple of episodes, guys, and you have known me for a couple of episodes and I have tried in all of these episodes, I have tried to show you that language, that the English language, that's what I'm talking about here, the English language is not that difficult; all you have to do is just look at it from different angles, all you have to do is just find a method, all you have to do is just see how it works and understand how it works, this is the key thing, right. Try to see the relation, try to see the associations, try to build these associations in your mind and if you do that, you will see, I'm sure, I know because that's the feedback. You just suddenly understand, suddenly the language becomes so much easier.

So, guys, please remember what we've been talking about today, please use this knowledge in practice and please listen to me again in the next episode. Thank you so much. Bye, bye.