

Generic Classes of Prepositions

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These are the categories into which the preposition senses of The Preposition Project have been sorted – preliminarily. Each category is described, along with its reasons for existence, possible subdivisions, and possible amalgamations with other categories. They are in alphabetical order.

Activity This category embraces prepositional senses that require the name of some (usually human) activity for complementation. By implication, agents appear somewhere in the sentence in which these are found, occasionally as a point of attachment (especially when the PP follows a copula and is the entire predicate). There are many instances however, especially in complex sentences, where the agent is not so closely related to the activity that appears as the complement of the PP.

Agent This category includes prepositional complements denoting an agent – that is, a doer of some action. All such sentences could, in theory, be rewritten in a way that would make said agent the subject of a sentence, thus eliminating the prepositional construction. I mean “rewrite” in a very broad sense here: not merely rearranging the words present, but expressing the same idea using different words.

Backdrop Prepositional senses in this category are very often couched in disjuncts and subjuncts, i.e., prepositional phrases serving as sentence adverbs or quasi-independent observations, describing circumstances or features that are present as a way of characterizing or coloring how the subject and predicate are interpreted (*in the face of stiff opposition . . .*). Such PPs can also serve as entire predicates, when they describe a situation generally prevailing (*they were at a serious disadvantage*), and some of them can also be postpositive (*dinner by candlelight, a man all at sea*). In all cases the purpose is to associate the presence of a particular condition or fact with some other element of the sentence.

Barrier This is a small category. The complement represents a physical thing that stops action. There is some kinship with **Target**, below, and this category could possibly be absorbed by it; except that the barrier may not be an intentional stopping place or destination, whereas the target is.

Cause This category embraces the many prepositional senses that name the cause for something – sometimes for the POA, but also for other things named in the sentence. The smaller category “Purpose” has been absorbed into this one.

Doubles This is a small category that could possibly be combined with **Tandem**, though not usefully I think because Tandem is already a bit large and unwieldy. Doubles is confined to only two prepositions (*between* and *among*) whose complements, in the

senses included, are always dual or plural, since the prepositions essentially stipulate a relationship embracing two or more things. Typically the POA indicates the nature of the relationship.

Exception This category of prepositional senses includes mostly subjuncts and disjuncts that indicate something constituting an exception or exclusion to what is predicated in the related clause.

Means/Medium This category takes in all prepositional senses where the complement identifies the means by which, or the medium through which, something happens or is done. This category roughly corresponds to a grammatical instrumental case. More granularity could be achieved if the means are separated from the mediums, but it doesn't strike me that this would be terribly useful.

Membership This relatively small category is for senses that establish a relationship of membership between POA and complement, wherein either can be a member of the genus that the other represents; the salient thing is that the preposition (and very often, along with other words in proximity) state that the relationship is one of genus and species.

Party Relatively small, and perhaps provisional category for senses whose complement is a person (though not the main actor, and so not classifiable under **Agent**) and that don't clearly fall into another category (such as, e.g., spatial or temporal). In principal, all SRTypes that begin with *Party* partake of this category; if they are assigned elsewhere it is because their current home to me reflects a more important or useful classification.

Possession A relatively small category for complements representing something that is owned, held, or worn by the complement. All such sentences could, in theory, be written with the complement or POA as subject and some form of the verb *have*. By implication then, some of this category could be absorbed into **Agent**.

Quantity This category holds complements that can be expressed as a number or some other quantity.

Scalar This category holds complements that have reference to a scale.. Most often, they identify a point on a continuum, but I have also included those that establish the existence of a scale, or the top or bottom values on one.

Spatial This is a more traditional category for prepositional senses that establish a spatial relationship between the complement and some other sentence element; sometimes the POA, sometimes the subject or some other object.

Substance The complements identify some uniform substance or thing that constitutes the contents or constituents of the POA.

Tandem This is a large, somewhat problematic, catch-all category, for senses that do not fall easily into some other category and that establish some sort of relationship between the complement and the POA or the complement and another sentence element. Here are placed many prepositional senses which have no *raison d'être* other than the fact that English uses a preposition, and of a particular preposition with the preceding word (usually the POA) to express the idea present. I call the category “tandem” because a relationship is established, via the PP, between two things, as noted above. It’s possible that this category could absorb “Party,” but that would only have the effect of making it bigger and more nebulous. Many different kinds of relationships are denoted by prepositions in this category, but in general I think they have less to do with the preposition in question, and more to do with the POA which accepts only that preposition. The earlier temporary category “Idiom” has been largely absorbed in this one.

Target This smallish category is for senses that identify the object or target of some action. The POAs are usually verbs, though they can also be adjectives when the adjective describes some attitude or feeling that is directed or felt toward a particular person or thing. As you can see, the prepositions included are a rather small set, and include nearly all the senses of *toward*, which is the targeting preposition *par excellence*.

Temporal This is a more traditional category for prepositional senses that establish a temporal relationship between the complement and some other sentence element; sometimes the POA, sometimes the subject or some other object. It could possibly be broken down further into senses that denote a point in time, as opposed to a period or duration.

Topic This rather large category contains many synonymous and related prepositions that establish a topic about which other sentence elements make some statement.

Tributary This category is only for the small group of prepositions in the inventory that are merely orthographic variants of some other preposition and can substitute for any sense of that preposition.

Void This small category is for senses which note a complement designated as missing or not present by other sentence elements.