

Idiomatic Usage in English

An idiom is a combination of words that seems perfectly natural to the native speaker of a language but seems odd or peculiar to other people (usually because it has a meaning different from the literal meaning of the words).

Idiomatic expressions generally consist of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and phrases that are associated with specific prepositions. If any other preposition is used, then the expression is unidiomatic and, therefore, incorrect. Below is a list of the “Idiomatic Use of Prepositions.” It is impossible to list all of the prepositional combinations, but several of the most troublesome are given below. When in doubt about the appropriate preposition for a particular word or expression, consult a dictionary.

- **a need for**- All babies have a need for constant attention. (a need for, not a need of)
- **abide by**- I promise to abide by your decision.
- **abstain from**- If you do not know anything about the candidates, abstain from voting.
- **accord with**- The two rival companies finally reached accord with each other.
- **according to**- According to my grammar teacher, *whom* is never a subject.
- **accuse of**- Tim has been accused of stealing watermelons.
- **accustomed to**- I am not accustomed to this kind of weather.
- **acquiesce in**- I did not acquiesce in the unjustified suppression of evidence.
- **acquitted of**- The accused man was finally acquitted of the crime.
- **adapted for**- This program is especially adapted for television. (prepared for)
- **adapted to**- I have not adapted to this climate. (become accustomed to)
- **adhere to**- You must adhere to the contract you signed.
- **admit of**- This document admits of conflicting interpretations. (to give the possibility of something)
- **admit to**- He admitted to his part in the robbery. (to confess or tell the truth about)
- **adverse to**- The decision of the court is adverse to our interests.
- **agree on/upon**- The committee members could not agree on a course of action. (to decide on; to have the same opinion about)
- **agree to**- We will agree to your proposal if you will postpone action. (to promise to follow something)
- **agree with**- In all matters of importance, I promise to agree with you. (to have the same opinion about)
- **aim to prove**- I aim to prove that your accusation is unjust.
- **alarmed at**- Beach residents are alarmed at the news of the hurricane’s approach.
- **amazed at or by**- I am amazed at your audacity.
- **amendment to**- The first amendment to the Constitution guarantees the freedom of the press.
- **annoyed at**- The clerk was very annoyed at the customer’s condescending tone. (not annoyed with)
- **answerable to**- You are answerable to your supervisor.
- **apologize for**- You should apologize for starting the erroneous rumor. (apologize for doing something)
- **apologize to**- He apologized to me for that rude remark. (apologize to a person)
- **as far as**- As far as that goes, I’ve never seen him before in my life.
- **angry about**- I was angry about the missing jewels. (angry about, not angry at, a fact or situation)
- **angry with**- I get the impression that you are angry with me. (angry with a person)
- **aspire to**- He is a quiet man who does not aspire to distinction.

- **as regards**- As regards the subject of capital punishment, I am against it.
- **assent to**- Please remember that I did not assent to your proposal.
- **attend to**- We must stop talking and attend to the business at hand.
- **avail oneself of**- One should avail oneself of every opportunity to learn something new.
- **blames him for it**- As witness to the accident, I cannot blame him for it.
- **can't help feeling**- I can't help feeling guilty about not going last night. (NOT can't help but)
- **capable of**- I wonder if Jim is capable of rational thinking.
- **ensorship of**- Does he believe in the censorship of books?
- **charge with**- The police are going to charge him with assault and battery.
- **coincide with**- Mark Twain's death coincided with the appearance of Halley's comet.
- **collide with**- Drive carefully or you might collide with another car.
- **compare to**- use *compare to* for similarities.
- **compare with**- use *compare with* to show differences or similarities.
- **compatible with**- His actions are not compatible with our standards of conduct.
- **comply with**- I shall make every effort to comply with your request.
- **concern about**- I am concerned about your poor eating habits. (to give attention or worry to)
- **concern with**- I am rather concerned with the publication of this book. (to busy oneself; to take interest or part in something)
- **conclude from**- He concluded from her expression that his mother was not happy.
- **concur with**- I concur with you in your estimate of the damage.
- **confer with . . . about**- The supervisor conferred with the committee about the proposal.
- **confide in**- Please feel free to confide in me when you have a problem.
- **confide (something) to**- He did not confide his problem to me.
- **conform to**- The new building must conform to the specifications of the building code.
- **consist of**- His diet consisted of potato chips, pretzels, and soda.
- **consistent with**- My actions were consistent with your recommendations.
- **convince (someone) of**- It is often difficult to convince him of anything.
- **critical of**- She is very critical of my efforts.
- **deficient in**- The food is good, but it is deficient in vitamins.
- **deprive of**- Because of poor grades, Sue will be deprived of all privileges.
- **derived from**- Resin is derived from the pine tree.
- **die of or from**- Many people die from heart attacks, but many others die of old age.
- **differ with**- He differs with me on every issue.
- **different from**- Every person is different from every other person.
- **disappointed in**- I was disappointed in the performance of our glee club.
- **disapprove of**- I disapprove of your choice of words.
- **dissent from**- Frequently one court Justice will dissent from the majority opinion.
- **dissuade from**- I will certainly try to dissuade you from doing something foolish.
- **divest of**- The governor has decided to divest the sheriff of all responsibility.
- **doubt that**- I doubt that he even noticed our absence.
- **eager to**- He was eager to start the trip.
- **engrossed in**- The little boy was engrossed in the monster movie.
- **enter into**- We entered into a lengthy political discussion.
- **emphasis on**- Try to put the emphasis on the positive points.
- **familiar to**- Your face is not familiar to me. (familiar to someone)
- **familiar with**- I am familiar with the campaign issues. (familiar with something)
- **find fault with**- Lately, you seem to find fault with everything I do.
- **free from**- They are never entirely free from doubt and fear.

- **graduated from-** Every one of the ten children graduated from college.
- **identical with-** Try to find a costume identical with mine.
- **ignorant of-** He was arrested because he was ignorant of the law.
- **impervious to-** He is impervious to subtle reminders.
- **importance of-** Don't you understand the importance of being on time?
- **impressed with-** She was not impressed with his efforts to get her attention.
- **in accordance with-** In accordance with your request, I have the book with me.
- **in need of-** He is in need of transportation.
- **in proportion to-** Price increases in proportion to demand.
- **in search of-** The immigrants who came to America in the nineteenth century were in search of a better way of life.
- **inconsistent with-** His latest business deal was inconsistent with his usual code of ethics.
- **independent of-** They decided to proceed, independent of outside help.
- **indifferent to-** Some people seem indifferent to heat, cold, and pain.
- **infer from-** I infer from your remark that you have never been here before.
- **infected with-** Mr. Jones is infected with AIDS.
- **inferior to-** This new car is inferior to last year's model.
- **in search of-** John spent many heartbreaking years in search of success.
- **insist on-** Newspaper editors should insist on accuracy in reporting.
- **interfere with-** Police promised not to interfere with the demonstration.
- **interfere in-** You should not interfere in your neighbor's affairs.
- **jealous of-** That man is jealous of every man who speaks to his wife.
- **kind of-** I have never liked that kind of jelly. (kind of = type of)
- **long for-** Every man longs for some type of recognition in life.
- **married to-** He is married to a millionaire.
- **necessity for-** The necessity for action is clearly understated.
- **object to-** I do not object to your going with us.
- **obliged to (+ verb)-** He felt obliged to say something nice to her.
- **oblivious of-** She was oblivious of everything around her.
- **overcome by-** She was overcome by his statement. (overcome by a fact)
- **overcome with-** She was overcome with joy when her grandchild was born. (overcome with an emotion)
- **part with-** I cannot bear to part with any of my books.
- **partial to-** You seem to be partial to the color blue.
- **participate in-** Freshmen are not permitted to participate in some activities.
- **persevere in-** He was tired, but he continued to persevere in his effort to win.
- **persist in-** If you persist in bothering your sister, she may kick you.
- **pertain to-** Your comment does not pertain to the subject we are discussing.
- **pleased with-** I am pleased with your suggestion.
- **preferable to-** Even a simple game is preferable to inactivity.
- **prevail on-** Perhaps you can prevail on your father to take your friend to the race.
- **prevent someone from-** Try to prevent them from leaving today.
- **prior to-** Prior to leaving for the beach, Cindy gathered her towel and sunscreen. (prior to = before)
- **provide for-** Be sure to provide for all possible emergencies.
- **provide someone with-** He did not provide me with enough money for the trip.
- **reason with . . . on-** Try to reason with your mother on the issue. (reason with someone on an issue)

- **refrain from**- Everyone should refrain from repeating malicious gossip.
- **regardless of**- Regardless of your desire to have your test score immediately, your score will not be ready till tomorrow.
- **rejoice at**- The whole country rejoiced at the news of the prince's marriage.
- **required of**- An oath of allegiance is required of all members.
- **replace with**- We will need to replace these curtains with blinds.
- **responsible to . . . for**- I am responsible to your mother for your safety. (responsible to someone for something)
- **result in**- Tardiness may result in suspension. (a cause results in an effect)
- **result from**- Obesity may result from overeating and lack of exercise. (an effect results from a cause)
- **rich in**- This country is rich in many natural resources.
- **short of**- Just before payday, we are all a little short of cash.
- **secede from**- I hope that no state will ever secede from the Union again.
- **similar to**- Your taste in clothes is similar to mine.
- **speak to . . . about**- I must speak to you about your grades. (speak to someone about something)
- **substitute for**- This class may substitute for your thesis.
- **succeed in**- The prisoner did not succeed in his attempt to escape. (not succeed at)
- **superior to**- A pipe organ is superior to an electronic organ.
- **surprised at**- I am surprised at your sudden interest in chemistry. (not surprised with)
- **take charge of**- You must take charge of your own affairs
- **transfer to/onto**- Transfer your answers onto your answer sheet.
- **threatened with**- His actions have been so obnoxious that he has been threatened with legal action.
- **unmindful of**- The children raced down the beach, unmindful of my warning.
- **wait for**- Let's just sit quietly and wait for developments.
- **wait on**- We left the restaurant because we could not get anyone to wait on us.
- **worthy of**- This paper is worthy of a passing grade.

You live **in America** but **on the land**.

You live **on the farm** but **in the city**.

You live **on earth** but **in the world**.

You may be secretary **to the Dean** or **of the Dean**.

You may go **uptown** or **downtown**.

You may go **out on the town** but never **out on the city**.

You may be **in bed** or **on the couch** but seldom **in the bed** and **never in the couch**.

You may be interested **in music** without an aptitude **for music**.