

Verbs and Prepositions: Interaction & Direction

INTERMEDIATE

Focus: Talk/speak to vs. with, Explain/describe to someone, Directional nuances: Shout to vs. at, Intentional movement: Throw to vs. at, Look for vs. Look after, Take care of vs. Care for/about, Wait for, Apply for, Succeed in, Believe in

In English, the meaning of a verb can change significantly depending on the preposition that follows it. Below are the rules for interactions, directions, and care.

1. Communication: To vs. With

- **Talk/Speak to:** Used when directing information *at* someone (can sound slightly one-sided or formal).
 - *I need to **speak to** the manager.*
- **Talk/Speak with:** Used to emphasize a two-way discussion or conversation.
 - *She is **talking with** her friend.*
- **Explain/Describe TO:** We **never** say "explain someone something." We must use **to**.
 - *Can you **explain** the rule **to** me?* (NOT: ~~explain me the rule~~)
 - *He **described** the situation **to** the police.*

2. Direction & Intent: To vs. At

Prepositions often distinguish between "friendly/functional" actions and "aggressive" actions.

- **Throw to:** You want the person to catch it.
 - *He **threw** the ball **to** his son.*
- **Throw at:** You want to hit the person/object.
 - *He was angry, so he **threw** a rock **at** the wall.*
- **Shout to:** You want someone to hear you across a distance.
 - *I **shouted to** Mark across the street, but he didn't hear me.*
- **Shout at:** You are angry with someone.
 - *Don't **shout at** me! I didn't do anything wrong.*

3. Searching, Caring, and Waiting

- **Look for:** To try to find something (search).
 - *I am **looking for** my keys.*
- **Look after:** To take care of someone/something (temporary or permanent responsibility).
 - *Can you **look after** my dog while I am on holiday?*
- **Take care of:** To handle a responsibility or solve a problem.
 - *Don't worry, I will **take care of** the bill.*
- **Care for/about:** To feel affection or concern.
 - *He doesn't **care about** politics.* (Interest/Concern)
 - *She **cares for** her sick mother.* (Formal: to provide physical care).
- **Wait for:** To stay in a place until someone/something arrives.
 - *We are **waiting for** the bus.*

4. Success and Belief

- **Succeed in:** Usually followed by a gerund (-ing).
 - *Did you **succeed in** fixing the computer?*
- **Apply for:** To make a formal request (usually for a job or permit).
 - *She **applied for** three different jobs.*

Practice: Verbs and Prepositions

Instruction: Complete the sentences using the correct form of the verb in parentheses **AND** the correct preposition. Pay attention to the context (friendly vs. aggressive) and the tense.

- For **Negatives**, use the cue (not/verb).
- For **Questions**, use the cue (subject/verb).

1. The players were happy because they _____ winning the championship. (succeed)
2. Why _____ that man _____ you so loudly earlier? Was he angry? (shout)
3. I can't find my glasses. Can you help me _____ them? (look)
4. She loves her job because she enjoys _____ elderly patients. (care)
5. _____ James _____ the waiter to get the check yet? (shout)
6. Please be careful! Don't _____ the ball _____ the window! (throw)
7. We _____ the visa last month, but we haven't received an answer yet. (apply)
8. The teacher _____ the grammar rules _____ the students right now. (explain)
9. I _____ my boss yesterday about the new project. It was a good discussion. (speak)
10. _____ you _____ ghosts when you were a child? (believe)
11. He _____ his health; he eats junk food every day. (not/care)
12. Can you _____ the baby for an hour while I go to the store? (look)
13. _____ she _____ the bus at the moment? (wait)
14. The customer was very rude; he _____ the napkin _____ the waiter's face. (throw)
15. I _____ the manager. I spoke to the assistant instead. (not/talk)

Answer Key

1. succeeded in
2. did ... shout at (Angry context)
3. look for
4. caring for (or caring about / taking care of)
5. Has ... shouted to (To get attention/check)
6. throw ... at (Intent to hit/break)
7. applied for
8. is explaining ... to
9. spoke with (or spoke to)
10. Did ... believe in
11. doesn't care about
12. look after
13. Is ... waiting for
14. threw ... at
15. didn't talk to (or didn't talk with)