

Prepositions & Expressions with 'By': Transport, Payment, & Agency

INTERMEDIATE

Focus: by mistake, on purpose, transport (by/in/on), payment, and passive agents

This worksheet focuses on the versatile preposition **by** and its specific uses in transport, payment methods, passive voice, and idiomatic expressions. It also covers important contrasts with **on**, **in**, and **with**.

1. Transport: 'By' vs. 'In'/'On'

A. General Transport (No Articles)

We use **by** + noun when talking about general ways of traveling. Do **not** use *a*, *an*, or *the*.

- We went **by car**. (Not: *by the car*)
- They traveled **by train / by bus / by plane / by boat**.

B. Specific Transport (With Articles)

If there is a determiner (*a*, *an*, *the*, *my*), we cannot use *by*. We must use **in** or **on**.

- **In** (small vehicles you sit inside): **in** a car, **in** a taxi.
- **On** (large vehicles you can walk on or straddle): **on** a bus, **on** a train, **on** a plane, **on** a bike.

C. Exception

- We always say **on foot** (walking). *I came on foot*.

2. Payment & Communication

- **Payment:** We say **by credit card** or **by cheque**.
 - *Exception:* We say **in cash**.
- **Communication:** We contact people **by email**, **by phone**, or **by post**.
- **Manual Work:** If something is made manually, it is made **by hand**.

3. Idiomatic Expressions

- **by mistake / by accident:** You did not intend to do it.
 - *I took your umbrella **by mistake**.*
- **by chance:** It happened coincidentally; it was not planned.
 - *We met **by chance** in the supermarket.*
- **on purpose:** You intended to do it. (Note: We use **on**, not *by*).
 - *He broke the window **on purpose**.*

4. Passive Voice & Proximity

- **Agent (Who):** Use **by** to show the person or force doing the action.
 - *Harry Potter was written **by** J.K. Rowling.*
- **Instrument (What):** Use **with** to show the tool used to do the action.
 - *The bread was cut **with** a knife. (Not: *by a knife*)*
- **Proximity (Place):** **By** can mean "next to" or "near."
 - *She is standing **by** the door.*

Practice: Fill in the Blanks

Instructions: Complete the sentences using the correct preposition (**by, on, in, with**) or the correct **idiomatic expression** based on the context cues in brackets.

Part A: Transport & Communication

1. My father usually goes to work _____ train because it is faster than driving.
2. _____ (you/come) here _____ foot, or did you take the bus?
3. She didn't arrive _____ a taxi; she drove her own car.
4. They prefer to travel _____ plane when going on holiday.
5. I sat _____ the bus for an hour because the traffic was terrible.
6. Please send me the details _____ email so I can read them later.
7. Can we pay _____ credit card, or do you only accept cash?

Part B: Idioms, Passive Voice & Agency

8. I'm so sorry! I deleted your file _____ (accidentally).
9. That beautiful painting was created _____ (agent) a famous artist.
10. He didn't break the vase by accident; he did it _____ (intentionally)!
11. The door was locked _____ (instrument) a rusty old key.
12. _____ (you/meet) him _____ (coincidentally), or did you plan it?
13. This scarf wasn't made by a machine; it was knitted _____ hand.
14. Is there a chair _____ (near) the window where I can sit?
15. "Hamlet" was not written _____ Charles Dickens; it was written _____ Shakespeare.

Answer Key

1. **by**
2. **Did you come ... on**
3. **in**
4. **by**
5. **on**
6. **by**
7. **by**
8. **by mistake (or by accident)**
9. **by**
10. **on purpose**
11. **with**
12. **Did you meet ... by chance**
13. **by**
14. **by**
15. **by ... by**