

Prepositions at the end of questions

CEFR B1 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

Wh- questions often end in a preposition because the question word is the object; formal English moves it to the front.

The rule

Why the preposition stays at the end

- In a wh- question, the question word moves to the front and leaves its preposition behind: "Who did you talk to?"
- The preposition belongs to the verb phrase: talk to someone, wait for someone, look at something.
- Moving only the object copies the preposition to the end: "What are you looking at?"
- This is normal, correct English. Ending a sentence with a preposition is not a mistake.

Common verb + preposition pairs

- wait for, look at, look for, listen to, talk about, think about.
- belong to, depend on, laugh at, ask for, pay for, refer to.
- The preposition is part of the verb, so it must appear: "Who does this belong to?"
- If you drop the preposition, the question changes or breaks: "Who does this belong?" is wrong.

The formal pattern with whom

- Formal English moves the preposition to the front with whom: "With whom did you go?"
- Whom is the object form of who, and it appears after a fronted preposition.
- The formal pattern is common in writing, exams and very polite speech.
- The informal pattern is more common in conversation: "Who did you go with?"

Prepositions in the passive

- A passive sentence can end with a preposition when the verb keeps it: "The doctor was sent for."
- The subject is the receiver of the action; the preposition stays with the verb.
- This pattern is common with send for, look after, deal with and refer to.
- It also appears in questions: "Who was the letter sent to?"

Traps to avoid

- Do not use two prepositions: "Who did you go with to?" is wrong.
- Do not move the preposition and leave a copy at the end: "With whom did you go with?" repeats it.
- Where, when and why usually replace the whole phrase and need no preposition: "Where are you from?" is fine, but "Where do you live?" takes none.

- With where, the preposition can stay at the end: "Where are you from?"

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. Who are you waiting ___?

2. What are you looking ___?

3. Who does this umbrella belong ___?

4. Which hotel did you stay ___?

5. Who did you go to the cinema ___?

6. What are you thinking ___?

7. ___ whom are you waiting?

8. Who was the letter sent ___?

9. The children were looked ___ by their grandmother.

10. Where are you ___?

11. Who did she talk ___ at the party?

12. What did you ask ___?

13. Which bus are you waiting ___?

14. What are you worried ___?

15. What are you listening ___?

16. Who does this car belong ___?

17. ___ whom did you speak?

18. Who did you give the keys ___?

19. Which film are you talking ___?

20. Who was the doctor sent ___?

Answer key

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1. **for** — The verb wait for keeps its preposition at the end of the question.
2. **at** — Look at takes the object at; look for would mean search.
3. **to** — The verb belong to must keep its preposition at the end.
4. **in** — Stay in a hotel keeps the preposition in at the end.
5. **with** — Go with someone leaves with at the end of the question.
6. **about** — Think about keeps about at the end.
7. **For** — The formal pattern moves for to the front before whom.
8. **to** — In the passive, send keeps its preposition to at the end.
9. **after** — Look after keeps its preposition in the passive.
10. **from** — Where replaces the place, and from stays at the end.
11. **to** — Talk to someone keeps to at the end of the question.
12. **for** — Ask for something keeps for at the end.
13. **for** — Wait for is the verb phrase, so for ends the question.
14. **about** — Worried about keeps its preposition about at the end of the question.
15. **to** — Listen to keeps its preposition at the end.
16. **to** — Belong to must keep to after the question word.
17. **To** — Speak to someone moves to the front in the formal pattern with whom.
18. **to** — Give something to someone keeps to at the end.
19. **about** — Talk about keeps about at the end of the question.
20. **for** — Send for a person keeps for at the end in the passive.