

The Problem with Prepositions (script from BBC Radio 4's Word of Mouth)

Michael -

And now WITHOUT any further ado, we arrive AT the contentious issue OF English prepositions UPON which Ian Peacock has disturbingly strident views which are somewhat OFF the wall, OVER the top, and BEYOND the realms of sanity. Frankly, Ian's opinions drive me UP the wall and ROUND the bend. In fact I suspect he may be OUT OF his depth and OUT OF his tree. And possibly OFF his face and OFF his rocker...

Ian -

That is the sort of introduction up with which I will not put. To what do you think you're up? You've no idea through what I've been. Anyway: welcome to...aboard...into this feature on...about...regarding prepositions and issues around them, by means of and as a consequence of which you may feel a little confused.

Under...in the circumstances...I went out-and-about and to-and-fro and hither-and-thither, over-and-above the call of duty and set off erelong, in a good mood and a taxi, sitting abaft, athwart the back-seat, betwixt Scyla and Carybdis, pondering prepositions we no longer use.

Whilst I was amongst the traffic, I reverted BACK to the bees in...within...inside... my bonnet - sentences that comprise OF unnecessary prepositions, UPWARDS OF the number you need, like when you call UP friends about meeting up.

And another thing about prepositions is they can lead to terrible misunderstandings. Be very careful before you announce you've got three secretaries and a tea boy under you at work, or that you're looking forward to having your mother in law for dinner.

And then there's public transport. ON public transport, the announcers always stress prepositions IN their sentences, TO a ridiculous degree, ON the PA systems IN a silly voice, informing us that trains are arriving INTO rather than AT cities, ALONGSIDE platforms. What's the world coming to? Sorry...To what is the world coming? A preposition stranded at the end of a sentence should surely never be put up with.

Gosh. It's almost time to quickly wrap up....up with which quickly to wrap...which brings me to TIME prepositions. Just for the record...the clock does not stand still at ten BEFORE three, nor ten AFTER three. Nor is it logically possible to arrive at 630 FOR 7. I refuse to work Monday THROUGH Friday or to do anything ACROSS the weekend. I suspect we got these expressions off of the Americans.

They're certainly completely different than...from...to... the grammar up with which I was brought.

Perhaps I shouldn't OF written this column. I'm bored of it. I'm getting too used with it. I think I'll lay it to lawn. Over and out.