Talking about exceptions

We use **except (for)** to introduce the only thing(s) or person / people that a statement does not include:

○ The price of the holiday includes all meals **except (for)** lunch.
○ Everyone seemed to have been invited **except (for)** Mrs Woodford and me.
○ I had no money to give him **except (for)** the few coins in my pocket.

We use **except**, not **except for**, with **to-infinitives**, and **that-clauses**:

○ I rarely need to go into the city centre **except** *to do* some shopping.
○ They look just like the real thing, **except** *that* they're made of plastic.

We usually use **except** before **prepositions, bare infinitives**, and **that-clauses** including those where the word *that* is left out (see Unit 53). However, informally **except for** is sometimes also used, although this is grammatically incorrect:

○ There is likely to be rain everywhere today **except** *in* Wales.
○ There is nothing more the doctor can do **except** *keep* an eye on him.
○ They look just like the real thing, **except** *(that)* they're made of plastic.

We can use **except for**, but not **except**, with the meaning 'but for' (see **C** below).

We use **except (for)** to mean that something is not included in a particular statement, but we use **besides** to mean 'as well as' or 'in addition to'. Compare:

○ I don't enjoy watching any sports **except (for)** cricket. (= I enjoy only cricket) *and*
○ **Besides** cricket, I enjoy watching football and basketball. (= I enjoy three sports)
○ I haven't read anything by her, **except (for)** one of her short stories. *and*
○ **Besides** her novels and poems, she published a number of short stories.

Apart from can be used with the same meanings as both **except (for)** and **besides**:

○ I don't enjoy watching any sports **apart from** cricket. (= except for)
○ **Apart from** cricket, I enjoy watching football and basketball. (= besides; as well as)

We can use **but** with a similar meaning to **except (for)**, particularly after negative words such as **no, nobody**, and **nothing**:

○ After the operation he could see *nothing* **but / except (for) / apart from** vague shadows.
○ There was *no* way out **but / except / apart from** upwards, towards the light.

But for has a different meaning from **except for**. We use it to say what would or might have happened if the thing introduced by **but for** had not happened:

○ The country would now be self-sufficient in food **but for** the drought last year. (= if there hadn't been the drought …)
○ **But for** the leg injury he suffered last year, he would probably have been picked for the national team by now. (= if he hadn't injured his leg …)

However, some people use **except for** in the same way as **but for**, particularly in informal spoken English:

○ I'd have got there on time **except for** the taxi being late. (*or* … **but for** the taxi being late.)
○ **Except for** the problems with my computer, I would have got the book finished weeks ago. (*or* **But for** the problems with my computer …)

Note that we can use **excepted, apart** or **aside** after mentioning a person or thing to say that they are not included in the statement we make:

○ It has been, *1984* **excepted / apart / aside**, the hottest July for the last 100 years.
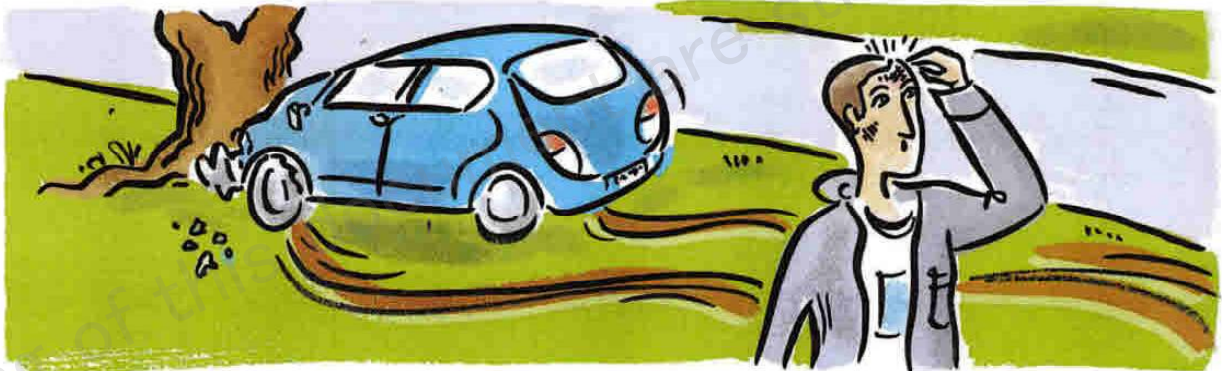
Exercises

91.1 Complete the sentences with **except** or **except for**. Indicate where both are possible. A & C

1 He was dressed very smartly .... that his shoes were dirty.
2 I liked everything in the meal .... the cabbage.
3 I had nothing to do .... sit by the pool and relax.
4 We would have gone walking last week .... the terrible weather.
5 She had no choice .... to wait for the next train.
6 There are very few wolves left in the country .... in the northern forests.
7 All the puddings on the menu cost €6 .... the ice cream, which was €4.
8 I'm in the office all the time .... at lunchtimes.
9 She might have won the race .... hitting the last fence.
10 The plant is found on every continent .... Africa.
11 He gave no excuse for turning up late .... that he was tired.
12 I drove all the way without stopping .... to buy petrol.

91.2 If necessary, correct these sentences with **besides** or **except (for)**. If the sentence is already correct, write ✓. B

1 She had never been out of the country besides a week in Ireland as a child.
2 Besides being small, Denmark is very flat, with villages linked by country roads.
3 The new road will increase traffic in the area except for damaging an area of woodland.
4 Except for his novels, Campbell wrote a number of biographies.
5 There was nothing in the fridge besides a rather mouldy piece of cheese.
6 He was unhurt in the crash except for a bruise on his forehead.

91.3 Match pairs of sentences and rewrite them as single sentences beginning **But for the ...** . C

1 Katerina gave me excellent directions.
2 The bad weather caused interruptions.
3 The charity supplied food and medicines.
4 The trees provided shelter.
5 The EU threatened sanctions.
6 The bank gave me a loan.

a If it hadn't, the building would have been completed by now.
b Without this, human rights would not have improved in the country.
c Otherwise, many more people would have died in the famine.
d If it hadn't, I would not have been able to set up my business.
e ~~Without these, I would have got totally lost.~~
f Otherwise, the wind would have caused even more damage to the house.

1 + e   *But for the excellent directions Katerina gave me, I would have got totally lost.*

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