

Verb + Preposition (1) – at and to

A

Verb + at

look / have a look / take a look / stare / glance AT . . . :

- Why are you looking at me like that?

laugh/smile AT . . . :

- I look awful with this haircut. Everybody will laugh at me.

aim/point (something) AT . . . , shoot/fire (a gun) AT . . . (= in the direction of):

- Don't point that knife at me. It's dangerous.
- We saw someone with a gun shooting at birds, but he didn't hit any.

B

Verb + to

talk/speak TO (somebody) (with is also possible but less common):

- Who was that man you were talking to?
- Can I speak to Jane, please?

listen TO . . . :

- We spent the evening listening to music. (*not* listening music)

invite somebody TO (a party / a wedding, etc.):

- They only invited a few people to their wedding.

C

Some verbs can be followed by at or to, with a difference in meaning. For example:

shout AT somebody (when you are angry):

- She got very angry and started shouting at me.

shout TO somebody (so that they can hear you):

- She shouted to me from the other side of the street.

throw something AT somebody/something (in order to hit them):

- Somebody threw an egg at the politician.

throw something TO somebody (for somebody to catch):

- Julie shouted "Catch!" and threw the keys to me from the window.

D

Explain/describe/apologize

explain something (TO somebody):

- Can you explain this word to me? (*not* explain me this word)

Also: explain (to somebody) that/what/how/why . . . :

- I explained to them what I wanted them to do. (*not* I explained them)

Describe is similar:

- Let me describe to you what I saw.

Note that we say "apologize TO somebody (for . . .)":

- He apologized to me. (*not* He apologized me.)

but: thank somebody (for something), ask somebody (for something):

- He asked me for money. (*not* He asked to me)

Exercises

128.1 Complete the sentences. Choose one of the following verbs in the correct form + the correct preposition:

explain glance invite ~~laugh~~ listen point speak throw throw

1. I look awful with this haircut. Everybody will laugh at me.
2. I don't understand what this means. Can you _____ it _____ me?
3. I _____ my watch to see what time it was.
4. We've been _____ the party, but unfortunately we can't go.
5. Please _____ me! I've got something important to tell you.
6. Don't _____ stones _____ the birds! It's mean.
7. If you don't want to eat that sandwich, _____ it _____ the birds. They'll eat it.
8. Sally and Kevin had an argument, and now they're not _____ each other.
9. Be careful with those scissors! Don't _____ them _____ me!

128.2 Put in to or at.

1. They only invited a few people to their wedding.
2. Look _____ these flowers. Aren't they pretty?
3. Please don't shout _____ me! Try to calm down.
4. I saw Sue as I was riding along the road. I shouted _____ her, but she didn't hear me.
5. Don't listen _____ what he says. He doesn't know what he's talking about.
6. Can I speak _____ you for a moment? There's something I want to ask you.
7. Do you think I could have a look _____ your newspaper, please?
8. I'm a little lonely. I need somebody to talk _____.
9. She was so angry she threw a book _____ me.
10. The woman sitting opposite me on the train kept staring _____ me.

128.3 You ask somebody to explain some things that you don't understand. Write sentences using explain (something) to me or explain to me (how/what . . . , etc.).

1. (I don't understand this word.) Can you explain this word to me?
2. (I don't understand what you mean.) Can you explain to me what you mean?
3. (I don't understand this question.)
Can you explain _____ ?
4. (I don't understand the system.)
Can _____ ?
5. (I don't understand how this machine works.)

6. (I don't understand what your problem is.)

128.4 Put in to where necessary. If the sentence is already complete, leave an empty space (-).

1. I know who she is, but I've never spoken to her.
2. George won't be able to help you, so there's no point in asking _____ him.
3. I like to listen _____ the radio while I'm having breakfast.
4. I apologized _____ Nancy for the misunderstanding.
5. I thanked _____ everybody for all the help they had given me.
6. I explained _____ everybody what they had to do.
7. Mike described _____ me how the accident happened.
8. I'd like to ask _____ you some questions.