PROBLEMS WITH PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions can be used in two ways: in a literal way and in an idiomatic way. In the literal use, the preposition means exactly what you expect.

The boy ran *up* the hill.
She went *in* the house.

In the first example, the preposition *up* means that the boy went in the direction *up* rather than *down.* In the second example, the preposition *in* means that she went *into* rather than *out of* the house.

In the idiomatic use, which is what appears most often on the TOEFL test, the preposition appears in an idiomatic expression; that is, its meaning in this expression has nothing to do with the literal meaning.

I call *up* my friend.
He succeeded *in* passing the course.

In the first example, the word *up* has nothing to do with the direction *up. To call up someone* means *to telephone* someone. In the second example, the word *in* has nothing to do with the meaning of *into* or *inside;* it is simply idiomatic that the word *in* is used after the verb *succeed.*

It is impossible to list all potential idiomatic expressions with their prepositions because there are so many expressions that could appear on the TOEFL test. However, in this chapter you can practice recognizing problems with prepositions in TOEFL-type questions. Then, when you are working in written expression questions on the TOEFL test, you should be aware that idiomatic errors with prepositions are common in that section. There are two common types of problems with prepositions that you should expect: (1) incorrect prepositions and (2) omitted prepositions.

SKILL 56: RECOGNIZE INCORRECT PREPOSITIONS

Sometimes an incorrect preposition is given in a sentence in written expression questions on the TOEFL test.

The game was called *on** because of rain.
I knew I could count *in** you to do a good job.

The first example should say that the game was *called off* because of rain. The expression *called off* means *canceled,* and that is the meaning that makes sense in this sentence. *To call on someone* is *to visit someone,* and this meaning does not make sense in this example. In the second example, it is not correct in English to *count in someone.* The correct expression is to *count on someone.*

EXERCISE 56: Each of the following sentences contains at least one preposition. Circle the prepositions. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

C 1. (After) school many students participate (in) sports.

I 2. I know I can rely (in) you to be here (on) time.

____ 3. If you need more light to read, turn on the lamp next to you.

____ 4. Parents always try to bring at their children to be thoughtful.

____ 5. I'll have to consult to my attorney before making a decision.

____ 6. Walt has lost his keys, so he must look for them.

____ 7. I just don't approve at your cheating on the exam.

____ 8. Smoking is forbidden, so you should put out your cigarette.

____ 9. Failure to pass the test will result to the loss of your license.

____ 10. It is unlawful for parolees to associate with known felons.

SKILL 57: RECOGNIZE WHEN PREPOSITIONS HAVE BEEN OMITTED

Sometimes a necessary preposition has been omitted from a sentence in written expression questions on the TOEFL test.

Can you *wait** me after the game?
I *plan** attending the meeting.

The first example is incorrect because it is necessary to say *wait for me.* The second example is incorrect because it is necessary to say *plan on attending.*

EXERCISE 57: Prepositions have been omitted in some of the following sentences. Mark where prepositions have been omitted. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

I 1. If you take this job, it will be necessary to deal V other departments.

C 2. Each child took one cookie from the plate.

____ 3. In the discussion, Rob sided the rest.

____ 4. The board turned his suggestion for the project because it was too costly.

____ 5. He can always depend his friends.

____ 6. While Mrs. Sampson went shopping, a baby-sitter looked the children.

____ 7. I know Steve believes what you told him.

____ 8. Children should beware strangers.