Prepositions of Direction

Prepositions of direction indicate the location of a noun (a person, place, or thing) in relation to another noun. Prepositions precede a noun or a pronoun and often accompany verbs of motion. This handout covers the prepositions to, toward, on, and in when they are used to express movement, direction, or purpose.

To
To can express movement in the direction of a physical place.

- I walked to the Writing Center from my car.
- Tim ran to school because he was late.

To can also express purpose when attached to a verb as an infinitive.

- They stayed after school to complete the assignment.
- I exercise to stay in shape.

Toward
Toward, like to, suggests movement. However, toward indicates movement in the direction of a general area rather than a specific destination. Toward implies that a destination may not have been reached.

- John traveled to Dallas. (John arrived at Dallas.)
- John traveled toward Dallas. (John may have passed Dallas or stopped before he arrived.)

Onto
Onto (on + to) is used to express movement toward the outside of an object.

- The cat jumped onto the table.
- The leaf fell onto the sidewalk.
Into

*Into* (*in* + *to*) indicates movement toward the inside of an object, space, or volume.

- Mary jumped *into* the water.
- Paul got *into* the shower.

In many cases, *on* or *in* can be used without *to*. Adding *to* to the preposition implies action, whereas *on* or *in* by themselves imply position.

- Suzy is *on* the bed. (This sentence simply relates Suzy’s position.)
- Suzy jumped *onto* the bed. (This tells us not only that Suzy is on the bed, but also relates the action she took to get there.)

**Activity**

Complete the following exercises by filling in the correct preposition.

1. I placed the glass ______ on the table.
2. Jim went ______ the library yesterday.
3. Jane jumped ______ the swimming pool.
4. I ran ______ class in order ______ arrive on time.
5. We drove ______ the mountains but stopped before we got there.
6. Maggie, our cat, jumped ______ the table.
7. I study hard ______ do well on tests.
8. He dropped the ice cubes ______ the glass of water.

**Answer Key for Activity**

1. onto
2. to
3. into
4. to/to
5. toward
6. onto
7. to
8. into

**References**

“Prepositions of Direction.” *The OWL at Purdue*. Purdue University Writing Lab. 11 February 2009. Web.