

The *preposition*

BY

I took her keys
by mistake.



How things are done



How we do things



A PDF study guide

From World English Blog

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The preposition **BY** is often used in English conversation. One of the most common ways to use **BY** is to show how something is done. Learn different ways to use **BY** with some natural examples.

- **How we travel**

*Harrison goes to work **by** bicycle if the weather is nice.*

- **How something is made**

*All the desserts in the restaurant are made **by** hand.*

- **BY mistake – BY accident – BY chance**

*I grabbed my wife's keys **by** mistake this morning.*

- **With the Passive Voice**

*I was bitten **by** a mosquito last night. (was bitten is the passive voice)*

- **BY can mean close to/next to**

*Marcel, get in the picture. Stand over there **by** Henry. (stand next to Henry)*

Keep reading for more natural examples.

BY – How we travel How we pay for something

- My family went to Osaka **by** bullet train.
- Harrison goes to work **by** bicycle if the weather is nice.
- I got in late last night. I missed the last train so I had to come home **by** taxi.

*Note – When we walk we don't say by walk, we say **on** foot.

I went to the mall **on** foot yesterday, it took 45 minutes.



BY – How something is made

- All the desserts in the restaurant are made **by** hand.

*We can also use the adjective handmade to mean – made by a person using their hands rather than by machines

- All the desserts in the restaurant are **handmade**.
- These shirts are made **by** machines so I worry about the quality.



BY – How we pay for something

- Would you like to pay **by** credit card?

*We pay in cash (not **by** cash)

- A: Can you pay **by** credit card?
- B: I'll pay in cash. It's easier.

Would you like to pay by credit card?

I'll pay in cash. It's easier.

*We pay IN cash (not by cash)

BY mistake – BY accident –BY chance

If we do something ON purpose it means that we *meant to do it*. We wanted to do it. We use the preposition BY with the words **mistake**, **accident**, and **chance** if we didn't do something on purpose.

- I grabbed my wife's keys **by** mistake this morning.

*I didn't mean to take her keys. It was a mistake.

- Walter and I met **by** chance at the coffee shop after work. It was great timing, I haven't seen him for a long time. We could catch up.

*I didn't plan to meet Walter.

- Terry entered my email address on this message **by** accident. I wasn't supposed to see it.

*Terry didn't want to send me a copy of the email. It was an accident.



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BY – With the passive Voice

Passive voice uses the verb **to be** (*am, is, are, was, were*) plus the **past participle** form of the verb in the main action. When the Passive voice is used something happens to the subject of our sentence.

We use the preposition **by** if we want to say what caused the thing to happen.

- I'm so itchy. I *was bitten* **by** a mosquito last night. (*was bitten* is the passive voice)
- The academy awards *are watched* **by** people all over the world. (*are watched* is the passive voice)
- The painting *was bought* **by** a private collector in 1911. (*was bought* is the passive voice)

You can check out my awesome blog post on the passive voice here: [Passive Voice](#)



We also use **BY** to mean close to or next to

- Marcel, get in the picture. Stand over there **by** Henry. (stand close to/next to Henry)
- A: Has anyone seen my coffee mug?
B: It's **by** the microwave in the break room.
- Every night I pack my knapsack for the next day and set it **by** the door.



Write a sentence using the preposition BY.

Try using an example from the PDF.

**Do you have your own example that
you can use right now?**

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improve your English listening skills.

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