

How to use the preposition by in english grammar

We use the preposition **by** to talk about a means or method used to do something:

- I did it by mistake.
- Contact me by email.
- I want to pay by cheque.

⚠ It is said to be pay cash or pay in cash (and not by cash)

We also use **by** to tell by which means of transport someone travels:

- He always goes to work by bus.
- She likes to travel by plane.

We can also use *by bike, by ship, by train, by road, by air, by rail...*

⚠ We say *on foot* and not *by foot*.

By is used to make sentences on the passive:

- He was killed by an elephant.
- They were invited by Paul.
- She was bitten by a dog.
- The car was fixed by the mechanic.
- This house was built by my father.

By allows you to talk about an action with a goal (with a verb + ing):

- You can stay healthy by drinking a lot of water.
- By pressing this button, you turn off the computer.

To talk about the author of a work:

- I'm reading a book by Stephen King.
- It's a film by James Cameron.
- That's a nice song by Bruno Mars.

To describe a person:

- He's an engineer by trade.
- By nature, she's very nervous.

To express a difference, a deviation:

- She won by five points.
- The bullet missed me by inches.

To indicate the times of day:

- We travelled by night and rested by day.

By is sometimes used to indicate proximity:

- The bank is by the bakery.
- There's a good restaurant by the lake.
- My parents live by the sea.
- She was standing by me.

By indicates a time limit:

- My son must be in bed by 10 o'clock.
- I'll be there by nine.
- The letter must be sent by September 15.

By indicates a conformity with something:

- He must play by the rules.
- The elephant is an animal protected by law.
- By my watch it's 9 o'clock.
- By my calculations, it's too late.

By is used in calculation, measurement and quantity expressions:

- Divide/ multiply 10 by 2.
- My bed is 2 metres by 4.
- This fabric is sold by the meter.
- She's selling cakes by the thousands.
- The company decided to cut prices by 50%.

To give his opinion:

- If that's okay by you, I'd like to leave now.
- That's fine by me.

To say 'next to another thing':

- The two girls were sitting side by side on a bench.

To say that we did something on our own:

- The dog opened the door by itself.
- I stayed at home by myself.

By the way:

- By the way, are you coming tonight?

We use by to express the frequency:

- The babysitter is usually paid by the hour.
- Climate change is deteriorating by the day.

To indicate a gradual process:

- He ate all the cakes one by one.
- House prices are climbing day by day.
- The instruction manual details the process step by step.