

Prepositions of time in English (for, ago, since)

1. FOR

For is used to tell how long an action has been going on. For maybe is followed by a duration like 20 minutes, 2 hours, two weeks, three years, three days, six months, a long time...

- I have lived in Paris **for** three years.

For employed with the present perfect (have been... + v-ing) in front of a time word indicates a length (the action is not over as we speak):

- I have lived in Japan **for** 3 years.
- He has been working **for** two hours.
- I have been waiting at the train station **for** 20 minutes.

Employed with the prétérit, for means that the action is finished:

- He worked in New York **for** six years.
- She worked in Italy **for** one year.
- This book will keep me busy **for** a few days.

Be careful ! No need to use **for** with 'all day', 'all the time' or 'all night': I was there ~~for~~ all day.

During or For ?

During does not indicate a duration: during is used to locate something in a specific period, and answers the question "when?" (when?). During is usually followed by a name (New Years' Eve, Christmas, the holidays, the night...).

- He went to Tokyo **during** the holidays.
- He went to Tokyo **for** three weeks.

On ne dit pas: He went to Tokyo ~~during~~ three weeks.

During is not followed by duration (10 minutes, one month...), unless you put it just before *the first* or *the last*:

- **During** the first months of the year, I lost 10 kilos.
- I haven't been to school **during** the last week.

2. AGO

We use the adverb Ago to say how much time has passed as we speak since an event occurred. It is often at the end of the sentence, and always preceded by a verb in the preterite (or simple past tense).

- I arrived in Tokyo two years **ago**.
- She went to China six years **ago**.

- It happened a very long time **ago**.
- He started French classes not very long **ago**.
- How long **ago** did she start cooking classes?

Ago or before ?

Before is used with the perfect past to count how long ago an event occurred from a specific point in the past:

- We had received their invitation for the wedding three days **before**.

≠

- We received their invitation for the wedding three days **ago**.

Do not confuse Ago with There is/ There are

- It happened two days **ago** ≠ **It happened** ~~there is~~ **two days**.

3. SINCE

Since is used to indicate when an event started (with a starting point). It is used with the present perfect or the past perfect:

- We've been friends **since** high school.
- I haven't seen her **since** Monday.
- I've lived in Paris **since** 2005.
- I've been learning Spanish **since** the beginning of the year.

Since maybe an adverb. We can also say *since then*, which has the same meaning as *since*:

- I broke up with Julia in May and I haven't contacted her **since then**.

Ever reinforces the meaning of *since*, in the sense of 'continuously':

- He's been depressed ever **since** he got divorced.
- We've been friends **ever since** we met in Italy.

Since can also be a synonym of 'because':

- **Since** she is tired, she should stay at home.
- **Since** you ask, I'll tell you what happened.
- Tom couldn't visit Sam **since** she wasn't at home.

4. AGO, FOR or SINCE ?

Here are some examples to remember to understand the difference between ago, since and for:

- I lived in Korea 3 years **ago**.
- I've lived in Korea **for** 3 years.
- I have been living in Korea **since** 2010.