

Different uses of about

The preposition about has several uses. It can refer to movement or position in various directions or places.

The children were running about. (= The children were running in various directions.)

Clothes were lying about the room. (= Clothes were lying in various places in the room.)

About can also mean near or nearby.

Is anybody about? (= Is anybody nearby?)

There was no one about to save the boy from drowning.

In connection with

About can mean in connection with.

We talked about his plans.

They told the police about it.

I don't know anything about it.

Roughly

About can be used to make a rough estimate of something.

There were about twenty boys in the class. (It is a rough estimate of the number of students in the class. The actual figure could be slightly higher or lower.)

It is about 3 o'clock. (Not exactly 3 o'clock)

She is about forty years old. (Not exactly forty)

Expressions with about

How about and what about

These expressions are usually used to ask for a person's opinion regarding something.

How about it? (= What is your opinion?)

What about going for a long drive? (= What is your opinion about going for a long drive?)

She is a pretty girl. But what about her character?

While you are about it = while you are doing it

Different uses of about

About and on

About and on can have similar meanings. About can be used to talk about ordinary, general kinds of communication. On is used to talk about something more serious or academic.

Compare:

It is a picture book for children about the castles of Europe.

It is a text book on African history.