

Prepositions



A preposition adds additional, often essential information to a sentence such as location, direction, or time. It can be a single word or a group of words that shows the relationship between elements in a sentence, usually nouns, pronouns, or noun phrases.

This handout explains the function and usage of common prepositions, gives some examples of commonly confused prepositions, and identifies strategies to help you strengthen your understanding of prepositions. It is not meant to be an extensive explanation of all the functions of prepositions.

Location and Direction

Prepositions can be used to show place or position and answer the question, “where?”

Examples: The campsite is *across* the river. (location)
Samantha is waiting *in front of* the library. (location)
She enjoyed walking *through* the park. (direction)

Time

Prepositions can refer to specific aspects of time such as clock time, periods of the day, dates, days of the week, months, and seasons of the year.

Examples: We will meet *after* lunch.
She cried *on* Tuesday.

Other Uses

Prepositions can also be used to indicate or illustrate relationships and build context.

Examples: They were good students *except for* their math skills.
Josh is *about* six feet tall.
He won't go *without* his mom.

Common Prepositions

This chart gives a list of common prepositions, which are organized by their function.

Location	Direction	Time	Other
above	on	after	about
across	opposite	at	as
beyond	out (of)	before	at
by	outside	by	by
between	over	during	except
down	around	for	for
from	through	from	from
in	to	in	like
inside	towards	on	of
near	under	since	with
on	up	until	without

Commonly Confused Prepositions

Some commonly confused prepositions are *at*, *on*, and *in*, especially as they relate to place and time. When using these prepositions in **relation to place**, it is helpful to remember these common uses:

At is used to describe a **specific location**.

Examples: Let's meet *at* Stephanie's house.
We saw them *at* the movies.

On is used for describing a **specific physical location**.

Examples: William lives *on* Clark Street.
The book is *on* the table.

In is used to refer to **towns, cities, countries, etc.**

Examples: He knows a lot of people *in* Provo.
Kathy lives *in* Atlanta.
His family lives *in* Brazil.

When using *at*, *on*, and *in* in **relation to time**, it is helpful to remember the following:

At is used to refer to a **specific time**.

Examples: We will meet them *at* noon.
Dinner is *at* 6:00p.m.

On is used to **name a date or day**.

Examples: She was born *on* October 4th.
They were married *on* Saturday.

In is used for **parts of the day, months, years, and seasons**.

Examples: She likes to read *in* the evening.
We will go *in* June.
It happened *in* 2011.
The snow falls *in* winter.

From and *of* are also commonly confused prepositions.

From is used to indicate **the origin, or starting point of something**.

Examples: Josh is *from* Idaho.
She borrowed the book *from* the library.
Sam went *from* Utah to Montana.

Of is used to indicate **possession or relationship with something**.

Examples: She was the owner *of* the car.
Marissa is the daughter *of* Susan and Michael.

Additional Information

Choosing the correct preposition can be difficult because many preposition uses are idiomatic. To strengthen your understanding of prepositions, you can increase your exposure to the language, memorize common prepositions and their verbs, and use Google or a dictionary to identify common pairings.