Prepositions are words that show relationships between nouns and other words or ideas, usually in time or space.

Some languages show these relationships with post-particles and others conjugate verbs to indicate direction. The prepositional system in English developed over centuries, and not very consistently. There is sometimes a logical reason why one preposition is used over another, but a new speaker of English will usually find it easier to memorize the exceptions and develop an intuition for recognizing the correct one.

Time

- **On** is used with days
  - I will meet you on Saturday.
- **At** is used with noon, night, midnight, and specific times of day
  - I usually go to sleep at midnight.
  - We are eating dinner at 6 p.m.
- **In** is used with other times of day, months, years, and seasons
  - Tina likes to take a nap in the afternoon.
  - I am going to visit Acapulco in May.
  - Las Vegas is very hot in the summer.
- Common prepositions of extended time include since, for, by, from, to, until, during, before, and after.
  - We have been here since noon.
  - That means we’ve been waiting for an hour. We expected you to be here by 12:30 p.m.
  - Weren’t we supposed to meet from noon until 2 p.m.? Or was it from noon to 1 p.m.?
  - We expected to see you during those hours, not before noon and not after 2 p.m.

Place

- **In** or **inside** are used for containment.
  - We are sitting in the room.
- **Outside** is used for exclusion beyond limits.
  - We live outside of the city.
• *On* is used for the surface.
  o I set the pizza *on* the table.
• *At* is used for the general area.
  o Sharon will meet us *at* the university.
• *Over* and *above* are used for higher positions.
  o The plane flew *over* the mountains.
• *Below*, *beneath*, *under*, and *underneath* are used for lower locations.
  o Please place the rug *beneath* the chair.
• *Near*, *by*, *next to*, and *close to* are used for proximity.
  o The coffee shop is *near* campus.
• *In front of* is used when the object is on the near or front side.
  o The car is parked *in front of* the store.
• *Behind* is used when the object is on the far side.
  o The garbage cans are *behind* the store.

**Direction**

• *To* is used for movement toward a goal, as a place or as an action.
  o We are driving *to* California. (the goal is California)
  o We are working *to* pass the test. (the goal is passing the test)
• *Toward* is used in a similar manner as *to*. *To* generally refers to a specific location, *toward* to a general direction.
  o We are driving *toward* Los Angeles but not *to* Los Angeles.

**Difficult Prepositions**

Remember that time uses many different prepositions in English.

• We will meet *at* 5 pm *on* the first Sunday *in* June. I was born *in* 1978.

**Exact time:** *at*………. **Days & dates:** *on*. ………. **Months & years:** *in*.

Students should also be aware of some strange prepositional expressions used in **slang**.
• I am so *into* that movie star! (fascinated with)
• I am *on to* you! (I understand your trick or secret)
• She was *at* him constantly to do it. (nagging or aggressively asking)
• I am *over* her. (I no longer miss her)
• We came *across* a problem (We met a problem by accident)
• I am *on top* of it. (I am in control of it)