

PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions can feel difficult to learn because they rarely translate directly from other languages. Some prepositions communicate **time, place, or position**, while others complete **standard phrases or idioms**. Some verbs consistently require the same preposition, while for other verbs, it depends on the context. However, by following these guidelines, you can learn how to properly use prepositions!

Tip: In English, prepositions usually come *after* the verb and *before* the object (noun). E.g., "The frog sat **on** the log."

DEFINITIONS & GUIDELINES

1. **Prepositions:** words that indicate how the noun/pronoun is related to the rest of the phrase (e.g., "of," "at," "to," "for," "before," "since," "under," "around," "between," ...)
2. **Prepositional Phrases:** whole phrases consisting of the preposition and the object of the preposition (usually a noun/pronoun, but can also include articles and adjectives).
"beside him" = *beside* [preposition] + *him* [pronoun]
"beside the old couch" = *beside* [preposition] + *the* [article] + *old* [adjective] + *couch* [noun]

RULES FOR ORDERING PREPOSITIONS

1. **Place before time:**
"My grandmother was born in New York in 1922."
"We are going to church this afternoon."
2. **Smaller to larger, or specific to general:**
"I left my diploma in a box in the attic at my parents' house in Texas."
"The party was held at 8 pm, on Tuesday, the 22nd of August, in 2019."

COMMON PREPOSITIONS

TIME AND LOCATION

"AT" (very specific)	"ON" (medium-sized)	"IN" (large locations/times)
<i>Exact time:</i> "at 9 o'clock"	<i>Day of the week:</i> "on Tuesday"	<i>Season:</i> "in the winter"
<i>Type of location:</i> "at church," "at school," "at the store," "at the hospital"	<i>Date:</i> "on May 24," "on the 2 nd of the month"	<i>Month, Year, or Era:</i> "in July," "in 2020," "in the 21 st century"

Named location: "at Kempsville Presbyterian," "at Regent," "at Walmart," "at Sentara"	Street: "on Kempsville Road," "on the corner of Centerville Turnpike"	City, Country, or State: "in Norfolk," "in the USA," "in Virginia"
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POSITION AND DIRECTION

- **Under & Over:** "The cat was under the bed." "I threw the ball over his head." (*position*)
- **Next to/Beside:** "I sat next to my friend in class." "The cup was beside the sink." (*position*)
- **In front of & Behind:** "She walked in front of me." "The book fell behind the chair." (*position*)
- **About & Around:** "The movie is about horses." (*relationship*) "The boy ran about/around the room." (*direction*) "I like to be around you." (*position*)
- **To & From:** "I am going to the store." "I am coming from Kansas to Virginia." (*direction*)
- **Than:** "My high school was bigger than Regent University." (*comparison*)

COMMONLY CONFUSED PREPOSITIONS

- **From vs. Since vs. For** (to indicate time frames):
 "I worked there from 2010 to 2012." (*past*)
 "I worked there for two years." (*past*)
 "I have worked there since 2010." (*ongoing*)
- **Before vs. Ago** (to indicate a past occurrence):
 "I started working on the paper before Tuesday." (*indicates specific time marker for an event*)
 "I started working on the paper two days ago." (*indicates length of time since an event*)
- **In vs. After** (to indicate a future occurrence):
 "I will start working on the paper after Tuesday." (*indicates specific time marker for an event*)
 "I will start working on the paper in two days." (*indicates length of time until an event*)
- **For vs. During** (to indicate time frames)
 "I swam for 30 minutes." (*indicates how long an action lasts*)
 "I swam during my lunch break." (*indicates when an action happens*)

Other Common Prepositional Phrases, Idioms, Multiple-Word Prepositions, and Verbs with their Usual Prepositions:

*Note: Some of these phrases and verbs need different prepositions depending on context

in addition to
 in the case of
 in lieu/place of

in spite of
 on behalf of
 according to

due to
 instead of
 prior to

in the morning	from scratch	come from/to
in the evening	down the road	think about
at night	around the corner	agree with
on the way to	of course	listen to
in the house	sort of/kind of	count on
at home	beside him/herself	wait for
on the plane	enter [<i>no preposition</i>]	hope for
in my car	return to	forget about
up to you	go to	approve of

Example Sentences:

- I will be late to the meeting due to the accident on the highway. I was coming from downtown and should have known the traffic would be heavy in the evening. Of course, I hate sitting in my car instead of meeting with all of you!
- I do not approve of cat-lovers. In spite of how clean cats are at home, they always enter [no preposition] a room like they are the kings or queens of the world!
- Prior to getting on the plane, I left my suitcase around the corner with the baggage agent. He said that I can count on him to handle it with care. I am hoping for the best!
- In addition to eating a healthy breakfast in the morning, you should try to exercise instead of sitting on the couch all day. If you listen to my advice, you will be grateful down the road. After all, your health is up to you!

Prepositions can be challenging to learn, but the more you practice, the easier it will be to identify the correct preposition or prepositional phrase.

* This information comes from the chapter “Key 6: Prepositions,” in *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook*, by Keith S. Folse.

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