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.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>above</td>
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<td>about</td>
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<td>across</td>
<td>opposite</td>
<td>at</td>
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<td>beyond</td>
<td>out (of)</td>
<td>before</td>
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<td>by</td>
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<td>up</td>
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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 6:00 p.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.