



Prepositions for English Language Learners

Prepositions show how things relate to each other in location/place, direction/position, or time. Learning to use prepositions can be challenging because there are few reliable rules and many variations and exceptions. You can always check an ESL dictionary or other English language usage guide, but your best bet for mastering prepositions may be just to listen and practice:

- Notice prepositions when you read.
- Listen to how native English speakers use prepositions.
- Write down, practice, and memorize phrases that you use often.

Common Prepositions

Prepositions may be one word or several words long. Here are some common prepositions:

<i>according to</i>	<i>between</i>	<i>during</i>	<i>outside</i>
<i>about</i>	<i>beyond</i>	<i>except</i>	<i>over</i>
<i>above</i>	<i>because of</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>since</i>
<i>across</i>	<i>by way of</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>through</i>
<i>after</i>	<i>in addition to</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>throughout</i>
<i>against</i>	<i>in front of</i>	<i>inside</i>	<i>till</i>
<i>around</i>	<i>in place of</i>	<i>into</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>at</i>	<i>in regard to</i>	<i>like</i>	<i>toward</i>
<i>before</i>	<i>in spite of</i>	<i>near</i>	<i>under</i>
<i>behind</i>	<i>instead of</i>	<i>next to</i>	<i>until</i>
<i>below</i>	<i>on account of</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>up</i>
<i>beneath</i>	<i>out of</i>	<i>off</i>	<i>upon</i>
<i>beside</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>with</i>
<i>besides</i>	<i>down</i>	<i>out</i>	<i>without</i>

Prepositions of Location/Place

Some prepositions indicate *location* or *place*. Use *in* with the names of land areas such as towns, counties, states, countries, and continents. Also use *in* when the meaning is “inside a place.” Use *on* with the name of a particular street. Use *at* with a particular address or a specific place.

I live in Yuba City.
Sylvie is living in Spain.
My mother lives in California.
Japan is in Asia.

I'll be studying in Room 1116.
I will meet you on Main Street.
Meet us at Trader Joe's.
My brother lives at 344 Anderson Avenue.

Prepositions of Direction/Position

Some prepositions show *direction/position*. Two that are sometimes problematic for English language learners are *on* and *in*. Use *on* when you mean “on top of.” Use *in* when you mean “inside.”

Christopher and Riley were jumping on the bed.
The kitten was hiding in the box.

Prepositions of Time

Some prepositions indicate *times* and *seasons*. Use *in* with the name of a month (*in August*), season (*in winter*), or year (*in 2020*). Use *on* for a specific date (*on October 21*) or day of the week (*on Mondays*) and *at* for a specific time of day (*at 5:00*, *at noon*). Use *in* for a nonspecific time of day (*in the morning*). One important exception for time of day is *at night*—we can study *in the morning*, laugh *in the afternoon*, and rest *in the evening*, but we sleep *at night*.

My friend's birthday party is in August.
Andrew likes to snowboard in winter.
Kelly has piano lessons on Mondays.
Our plane leaves for Europe on October 21st.
My instructor has office hours in the afternoon, but he's not here at night.
The board meeting is at 5:00 p.m.

For expresses a duration; *since* expresses a duration from a specific, named date or time period.

Trisdan has been studying Japanese for six months.
Satinder has been a volunteer since last summer.
Professor Harvey has been waiting since 3 p.m.

Nouns and Prepositions

Some nouns must be paired with particular prepositions:

approval of	confusion about	hatred of	need for	reason for
awareness of	desire for	hope for	participation in	respect for
belief in	fondness for	interest in	passion for	success in
concern for	grasp of	love of	preference for	understanding

Adjectives and Prepositions

Some adjectives require particular prepositions:

afraid of	careless about	happy about	married to	sorry for
angry at	familiar with	interested in	nervous about	sure of
aware of	fearless of	jealous of	proud of	tired of
capable of	fond of	made of	similar to	worried about

Verbs and Prepositions

Certain verbs must be used with particular prepositions (also see [Phrasal Verbs](#)):

apologize for	bring up	grow up	make up	think about
ask about	care for	look for	prepare for	trust in
ask for	find out	look forward to	study for	work for
belong to	give up	look up	talk about	worry about

Adapted from: Capital Community College Grammar web site: www.guidetogrammar.org/grammar/index.htm and *Writing Clearly: An Editing Guide* by Janet Lane and Ellen Lange.

Contributed by Shawn Frederking



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