

Of the preposition, by the preposition, for the preposition

A preposition describes a relationship between words in a sentence. Many are hard to define in mere words. For instance, when trying to give the meaning of a preposition like "in" or "between" or "on," we usually end up using our hands to show how one thing is situated in relationship to something else.

It isn't any wonder that prepositions create problems for students whose first language is not English. We say we are ***at the hospital*** to visit a friend who is ***in the hospital***. We lie ***in bed*** but ***on the couch***. We watch a film ***at the theater*** but ***on television***. For native speakers, these little words present very few problems, but try to learn another language, any other language, and we quickly discover that prepositions are troublesome wherever we run into them. To address all the potential difficulties with prepositions in idiomatic usage would require volumes. The only way English language learners can begin to master the preposition's intricacies is by practicing and paying close attention to speech and the written word. Keeping a good dictionary close ***at hand***, or ***on hand***, is also a good idea.

Prepositions of TIME: at, on, and in

We use *at* to designate specific times.

The train is due *at 12:15 p.m.*

We use *on* to designate days and dates.

My brother is coming *on Monday*.

We're having a party *on the Fourth of July*.

We use *in* for nonspecific times during a day, a month, a season, or a year.

She likes to jog *in the morning*.

It's too hot *in summer* to run long distances.

He started the job *in 2001*.

He's going to quit *in October*.

Prepositions of PLACE: at, on, and in

We use *at* for specific addresses.

Emily Morris lives *at 1155 Fogarty Avenue* in Key West.

We use *on* to designate names of streets, avenues, etc.

His house is *on Bird Road*.

We use *in* for names of land areas (towns, cities, counties, states, countries, continents).

She lives *in Hialeah*.

Hialeah is *in Miami-Dade County*.

Miami-Dade County is *in Florida*.

Prepositions of *LOCATION*: *in, at, and on*

IN	AT	ON
(the) bed*	Publix**	the bed*
the bedroom	home	the ceiling
the car	the library*	the floor
(the) class*	the office	the horse
the library*	school*	the plane
school*	work	the train

(the) is optional; it may be used or left out – your choice!

* Sometimes different prepositions are suitable for these locations.

** Any proper location name may be used with **at**: Bloomingdale's, Home Depot, Joe's, etc.

Prepositions of *MOVEMENT*: *to* and *No Preposition*

We use **to** for expressing movement toward a place.

They were driving to work together.

She's going to the dentist's office this morning.

Toward and **towards** are also helpful prepositions to express movement.

(These are simply variant spellings of the same word; use whichever sounds better to you.)

We're moving toward the light.

This is a big step towards the project's completion.

We use **No Preposition** with the words *home, downtown, uptown, downstairs, upstairs, inside, outside*. (*Inside* and *outside* may themselves be used as prepositions, or they may be nouns, adjectives or adverbs – but are never used as objects of prepositions.)

Grandma went upstairs.

Alicia went home. (But – she is at home.)

They both went outside.

Prepositions of *TIME*: *for* and *since*

We use **for** when we measure **time** (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years).

He held his breath for seven minutes. (Don't try this at home!)

She's lived there for seven years.

The British and Irish have been quarreling for seven centuries.

We use **since** with a specific date or time.

He's worked here since 1998.

She's been sitting in the waiting room since half past two.