



Prepositions for English Language Learners

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 how prepositions are used when you read.
- Listen to how native English speakers use prepositions and ask them questions.
- Write down, practice, and memorize phrases that you use often.

Common Prepositions

Most prepositions show how things relate to each other in *space*, *time*, or *location*. They may be one word or several words long. Here are some common prepositions:

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

Prepositions of Place

Some prepositions indicate *location* or *place*:

Preposition	Used for...	Example
<i>in</i>	the names of land areas: towns, counties, states, countries, and continents	I live <i>in</i> Yuba City. Sylvie is living <i>in</i> Spain. My mother lives <i>in</i> California.
<i>on</i>	a street	I will meet you <i>on</i> Main Street.
<i>at</i>	an address	My brother lives <i>at</i> 344 Anderson Ave.
<i>in</i>	inside of a place	I will meet you <i>in</i> room 1116.
<i>at</i>	a specific place	Sally will be <i>at</i> school all day.

Prepositions of Position

Some prepositions show *position*:

Preposition	Used for...	Example
<i>on</i>	on top of	Christopher and Riley were jumping <i>on</i> the bed.
<i>in</i>	inside	The kitten was hiding <i>in</i> the box.

Prepositions of Time

Some prepositions indicate *times* and *seasons*:

Preposition	Used for...	Example
<i>in</i>	a month, a season or a year	My friend's birthday party is <i>in</i> August. Andrew likes to throw snowballs <i>in</i> winter.
<i>on</i>	date or day of the week	Kelly has piano lessons <i>on</i> Mondays. Our plane leaves for Europe <i>on</i> October 21 st .
<i>in</i>	nonspecific time of day	We laugh <i>in</i> the morning; we dance <i>in</i> the afternoon, and we rest <i>in</i> the evening (but we sleep <i>at</i> night).
<i>at</i>	specific time of day	The board meeting is <i>at</i> 5:00 p.m.
<i>for</i>	expresses duration	Chelsea held her breath <i>for</i> forty-nine seconds. Kelly has been listening to music <i>for</i> three hours. Trisdan has been studying Japanese <i>for</i> six months.
<i>since</i>	expresses time elapsed from a specific date or time	Cheryl has not been to Texas <i>since</i> last October. Satinder has been a volunteer <i>since</i> last summer. Professor Harvey has been waiting <i>since</i> 3 p.m.

Nouns and Prepositions

Some nouns must be paired with particular prepositions:

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

Adjectives and Prepositions

Some adjectives require particular prepositions:

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

Verbs and Prepositions

Certain verbs must be used with particular prepositions:

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

Adapted from: Capital Community College Grammar web site: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar> and *Writing Clearly: An Editing Guide* by Janet Lane and Ellen Lange

Contributed by Shawn Frederking



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