

# The Complete Book of Prepositions

## What is a preposition?

A preposition is a word that links a noun (or pronoun) to other words in a sentence and shows the relationship between them. In the sentence “The man sat in the chair”, the preposition **in** shows the relationship of the man to the chair.

The most common type of relationships shown by prepositions are temporal (related to time), spatial (related to position), and direction or movement (telling how or where something moves). Prepositions can also show relationships to manner, means or agents, states or conditions, quantities or measures, and purposes.

Prepositions can be confusing. One source of confusions is that some prepositions can be used interchangeably. For example:

He sat **on** the chair.



He sat **in** the chair.



Both of these sentences can mean the exactly same thing. On the other hand, there may be slight differences in meaning, depending on the type of chair being sat in. If it is a chair without arms, like the stool in the first picture, the preposition **on** is commonly used. If the chair has arms, the preposition **in** is most commonly used, as in the second sentence.

Confusion is also created because a single preposition can be used to show different relationships. In one sentence it may be a preposition of time, in another sentence it may be a preposition of position, and in another sentence it may be a preposition of direction or movement. Look at these examples.

The game was **on** Saturday. (preposition of time)

The pharmacy is **on** Lincoln Avenue. (preposition of position)

That book is **on** psychology. (preposition that's tells the subject of)

The house is **on** fire. (preposition that indicates a condition or state)

Another cause of confusion with preposition is that they are often combined with verbs to form phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs are idiomatic expressions, and the combining of the verb and preposition makes new verbs whose meaning is often not obvious from the dictionary definitions of the individual words. For example:

I have to **look after** my baby sister. (meaning to care for)

She just can't **put up with** it anymore. (meaning to tolerate)

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A final source of confusions arises with different usage between native speakers of English. For example Americans would say 'I never work **on** the weekends', but the British would say 'I never work **at** the weekend'.

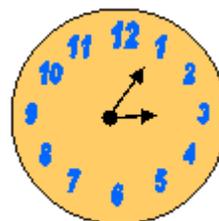
Because of these points of confusion with the use of prepositions the best way to master their usage is through practice and memorization.

**The most common prepositions for position, time and movement are listed below with example sentences that demonstrate their use.**

## Preposition used with specific times of the day

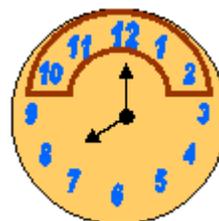
**At:** use to tell specific or exact times such as noon, night, midnight, and the time of day:

The bus left **at** 3:05 p.m.  
(The bus left at precisely 3:05, no sooner or no later)  
My plane leaves **at** noon.



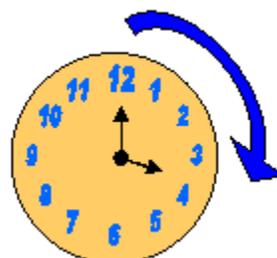
**About** and **Around:** use to tell an approximate time, not a precise time

I will be at the library **about** 8:00.  
(I am arrive a few minutes before or a few minutes after 8:00)  
We arrived at the party **around** 6:00.



**After:** use to tell that an event occurs at a later time

I will be there **after** 4:00.  
(I will not arrive before or precisely at 4:00 but sometime after 4:00- could be 5 minutes or could be 30 minutes)  
Perry went to dinner **after** the game.



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<p><b>Underneath:</b> use to tell that one object is lower or covered by another (same as under)</p>	
<p>The bowl is <b>underneath</b> the sink. There is a lot of dust <b>underneath</b> the carpet.</p>	

<p><b>Across from:</b> use to tell that someone or something is on the other side of someone or something else (same as opposite)</p>	
<p>Billy sits <b>across from</b> Lynn in class. The library is <b>across from</b> the park.</p>	

<p><b>Opposite:</b> use to tell that someone or something is on the other side of someone or something else (same as across from)</p>	
<p>The park is <b>opposite</b> the hotel. My friend sits <b>opposite</b> me in math class.</p>	

<p><b>Across:</b> use to tell that someone or something moves from one side to the other or is on the other side of something else</p>	
<p>The team walked <b>across</b> the field. There is a drug store <b>across</b> the street.</p>	

<p><b>Ahead of:</b> use to tell that someone or something is directly ahead of another (same as in front of, opposite of behind)</p>	
<p>Larry is <b>ahead</b> of Matt in the queue. Mary is <b>ahead</b> of Jenny in the race.</p>	

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Truth often lies **beneath** a layer of lies.

**Besides:** use to mean also or as well as

I study other subjects **besides** math.

**Besides** English, I can speak Russian and Chinese.

**Between:** use to tell that something is Intermediate in a series or amount

B comes **between** A and C in the alphabet.

A new TV can cost **between** \$500 and \$600.

**Between:** use to tell about options among choices

I can't decide **between** the red or yellow dress.

The couple is having trouble choosing **between** Hawaii and Florida for vacation.

**Beyond:** use to tell that something exceeds what is expected or believed

It is **beyond** belief that they could have done that.

The movie was **beyond** my expectations.

**But:** use to tell of an exception

I finish all of my homework **but** the math.

I like all sweets **but** chocolate.

**Note:** **But** is used more often as a conjunction than as a preposition.

**By:** use to tell the means of something

We travel from New York to Chicago **by** train.

The book was written **by** Stephen King.

**By:** use to tell something by units

Many grains are sold **by** weight.

Many things are cheaper **by** the dozen.

**Concerning:** use to mean about or connected with something else

I talked to him **concerning** his behavior.

He reads everything there is **concerning** polar bears.

**Despite:** use to mean in spite of

We played a round of golf **despite** the hot humid weather.

Despite not preparing, the speak he gave was captivating.

**Except:** use to tell that something is not included in something else

I answered all the questions **except** one.

Everyone in my family has been to Disneyland **except** me.

**For:** us to tell agreement for something

I'm all **for** women's right.

The committee voted **for** the controversial hiring policy.