

Prepositions of Time

1. Use "at" for specific times.

The movie starts at 7:00.

2. Use "in" with months, seasons, and years.

We got married in December.

Most people prefer to get married in spring or summer, but we chose to get married in winter.

Note: We say "in the morning", "in the afternoon", and "in the evening", but we say "at night" and "by day".

3. Use "on" for days and dates.

I had to work late on Wednesday, so I missed the bus. → day

Diane's friends held a party for her on her birthday. → date

4. Use "since" to say when an activity began, and "for" to say how long it has been going on.

He has been president of the company since 2003.

We have been waiting for twenty minutes.

I have lived here for two years.

Note: The present perfect is often used with "since" and "for" to talk about activities which began in the past and continue in the present.

Prepositions of Place

The following information and rules will help you use prepositions of place and time correctly.

Prepositions of Place (Location/Destination)

Use "on" with lines and surfaces.

Vancouver is on the west coast of Canada. → line

Put the vase on the table. → surface

They were sitting on the grass. → surface

Use "in" with areas that have boundaries and enclosed places.

I was born in England, but I grew up in Canada. → areas that have boundaries
We had a picnic in the park last Saturday. → enclosed place
I think I left my keys in the bedroom. → enclosed place

Use "arrive" + "at" with activities, buildings and general locations.

Everyone arrived at the picnic at the same time. → activity
The tour group will arrive at the Empire State Building at three o'clock. → building
The bus arrived at the station earlier than we expected. → location

Use "arrive" + "in" with countries, states and cities.

Which month did you arrive in Victoria?

Prepositions are not used with the following locations or destinations:

overseas, inside, here, home, upstairs, downtown,
abroad, outside, there, where, downstairs

Some other prepositions of location are: next to, beside, between, in front of, under.

On my desk, the telephone is next to the lamp.
The computer monitor is beside the lamp.
The speaker is between the telephone and the monitor.
The keyboard is in front of the monitor.
The computer is under the desk.

Use "to", "into", and "onto" to show movement.

When our car broke down, we walked to the nearest gas station.
The delivery people carried the new couch into the living room.
The man slipped, and fell onto the couch.

Note: The opposite of "to" is "from" / the opposite of "into" is "out of" / the opposite of "onto" is "off".

Some other prepositions which show movement are:
through, across, up, down, along, past

The train went through a tunnel.

When the forest fire started, the deer swam across the river to safety.

Preposition Combinations

Noun, Verb and Adjective + Preposition Combinations

Prepositions and the rules concerning their usage can be confusing to learners of English as a second language. Basically, prepositions are connecting words that join objects to other parts of sentences. Preposition choice is determined by the noun, verb, adjective or particle which precedes it.

Noun + Preposition Combinations

English has many examples of prepositions coming after nouns. In such cases, the prepositions are often followed by a phrase containing a noun, as in example (a) below. They can also be followed by a noun, as in example (b), or an -ing verb, as in example (c).

- (a) Scientists at the research institute think they are close finding a solution to the problem.
- (b) Everyone was surprised by his lack of concern.
- (c) We need to call an expert at plumbing as soon as possible.

Here are a few more nouns and prepositions which are used together:

the use of	a solution to	influence on	evidence of
the cost of	an increase in	a possibility of	danger of
the price of	a reason for	a supply of	a method of
a lack of	belief in	the cause of	difficulty with

Verb + Preposition Combinations

Many English prepositions also follow verbs. Sometimes they introduce a phrase that contains a noun, as in example (a). They can also introduce a noun, as in example (b), or an -ing verb, as in example (c).

- (a) I don't know how long we can depend on his generosity. He has already done so much for us.
- (b) Many of the town's residents relied on neighbours for help during the flood.
- (c) She believes in helping people who are less fortunate than her.

Here are some other verbs and prepositions that are used together:

I insist on ...	He can deal with ...
This can result in ...	Do you plan on ...
We belong to ...	This could lead to ...
My answer will depend on ...	You can rely on ...
They fight for ...	We fight against

Here are some more adjectives and prepositions that are used together:

proud of identical to different from tired of
related to opposed to satisfied with eager for
based on famous for necessary for excited about

Common Sentence Errors with Prepositions

There are three common types of sentence errors which involve prepositions.

1. Using a preposition which doesn't fit the context of the sentence:

I was amazed from all the improvements. ➡ Wrong!
I was amazed at all the improvements. ➡ Right!

2. Omitting a preposition that belongs in a sentence:

I was amazed all the improvements. ➡ Wrong!
I was amazed at all the improvements. ➡ Right!

3. Adding a preposition which is not needed in the sentence:

I was amazed at that the improvements were done so quickly. ➡ Wrong!
I was amazed that the improvements were done so quickly. ➡ Right!