
Prepositions That Indicate Location

Location can be thought of as the *area*, *point*, or *surface* of something. Certain prepositions indicate those locations. Here are some of the most commonly used ones:

above	in back of
along	in front of
among	in the middle of
at	near
behind	next to
below	on
beside	over
between	under
in	with

Most of these prepositions make sense in the same sentence, because they all indicate location:

The boy is **at** the table.

The boy is **behind** the table.

The boy is **beside** the table.

The boy is **next to** the table.

The boy is **under** the table.

Besides the verb *to be*, which is frequently used to show location, there are several other verbs that also indicate *where* someone or something is:

to be found	to remain
to be located	to sit
to be situated	to stand
to lie	to stay
to live	

Of course, there are many other such verbs. Those in the preceding list are among the ones used frequently. Look at these examples:

Is Guadalajara located **in** the east or west?
 The center of the earthquake was situated **near** Los Angeles.
 Shells like this can be found **along** the banks of the river.
 John sits **in front of** me.
 The girl was lying **on** a cot and resting.
 A stranger stood **next to** us.
 I have to remain **at** my workbench until noon.
 You can stay **with** me.
 We live **between** two large houses.

As long as you know the meaning of the prepositions, you can use them with relative accuracy. But in English, just like in all other languages, certain prepositions can only be used with certain verbs or phrases. And even if two or more prepositions can be used with the same phrase, there is a change in meaning—even if it's only a slight change.

Let's look at the prepositions *at* and *in*. They are used quite commonly and have a meaning that is easy to understand. In most cases, *at* is used to show that someone or something is positioned next to a horizontal or vertical surface:

at the table	at the door
at the computer	at the window
at the desk	at the blackboard

The preposition *in* indicates that someone or something is located *inside* something:

in the car	in the city
in the house	in the box
in the garden	in the center

These two prepositions, while having very distinct uses in a sentence, are also often used with the same phrases. But when they are, the meanings are different.

Use *at* to show that someone is *at* the location of his or her occupation, preoccupation, or some activity:

at school	at the store	at the hospital
at the movies	at the library	at the factory

With certain phrases, *in* can also be used:

in school	in the store	in the hospital
in the movies	in the library	in the factory

Notice the difference in meaning between the two prepositions:

at school = Someone is on the campus of the school, perhaps inside the building, or perhaps outside the building. This person is probably a student or teacher: “The chemistry teacher was **at school** until 7:00 P.M.”

in school = Someone is inside the school building. This person is probably a student or teacher: “The injured student was **in school** again today.”

Take note of yet another difference of meaning when the definite article *the* is added to the phrase:

at **the** school = Someone is on the campus of the school, perhaps inside the building, or perhaps outside the building. This person is *not necessarily* a student or teacher: “The landscaper was **at the school** to plant some new shrubs.”

in **the** school = Someone is inside the school building. This person is *not necessarily* a student or teacher: “My father was **in the school** for a meeting.”

There are several phrases that omit the definite article *the* when the preposition *at* is involved. Such phrases indicate that someone is *involved in the activity* described in the phrase:

He’s **at work**. = He is working.

They’re **at church**. = They’re attending a religious ceremony.

The children are **at play**. = The children are playing.

She’s **at home**. = She is staying in her house.

Tom’s **at lunch**. = Tom is eating lunch. (also used with *breakfast*, *dinner*, and *supper*)

He’s **at class**. = He is attending a class.

In general, *at* indicates that someone is involved in an activity at a location. *In* says that someone is inside that location:

The students are **at** school. (They are on campus somewhere.)

The students are **in** school. (They are in the building in their classes.)

Father is **at** the hospital. (Father is visiting. Or he may be a doctor or nurse.)

Father is **in** the hospital. (Father is a patient. Or he was outside. Now he’s inside.)

Maria is **at** the factory. (She probably works there.)

Maria is **in** the factory. (She was outside. Now she’s inside.)

Mom is **at** the store. (She is shopping there. Or perhaps she works there.)

Mom is **in** the store. (She was outside. Now she’s inside.)

Be sure to distinguish between the prepositions *among* and *between*. Use *among* to say that you are in the company of more than just two people. Use *between* to say that you are in the company of only two people:

He sat **among** the members of the tribe and told them stories.

My sister sat **between** Jim and me.

Another pair of prepositions is often used to show “by means of what transportation” a person travels. It is common to use the preposition *by* to show the concept of traveling in a conveyance: *I went by car. We travel by plane. They go by train.* But *in* and *on* are also often used to show location on the forms of transportation:

We were **in the car** ready to leave for vacation.
 They're **on a train** somewhere in Oregon.
 What **bus** were you **on**?
 Haven't you ever been **on a plane** before?

exercise**13-1**

Select the preposition that best completes each sentence.

1. A tiny rabbit was hiding **under/with/on** a bush.
2. Please don't sit **at/next to/over** me.
3. We saw several baby birds **at/behind/in** a nest in that tree.
4. There was nothing **below/with/among** the plane but empty space.
5. Father stays **on/above/at** the factory until 5:00 P.M.
6. An angry man stood directly **with/in the middle of/at** us.
7. John stayed **between/beside/among** me the entire time.
8. I saw Maria **in back of/above/among** the many people at the party.
9. There was a huge bug sitting **on/with/at** my bed!
10. I saw a stranger crouching **above/between/at** my car and the truck.

exercise**13-2**

Fill in the blank with any appropriate word or phrase.

1. I saw a jet flying above _____.
2. Someone was hiding under _____.
3. Are you familiar with _____?
4. My sisters both work at _____.
5. The frightened kitten hid in _____.
6. Someone stood behind _____.
7. Who was sitting among _____?
8. There's nothing in front of _____.

9. Gray clouds hovered over _____.
10. Have a seat next to _____.
11. He found his keys on _____.
12. I found a couple seats beside _____.
13. Let's set up our camp near _____.
14. We used to live between _____.
15. A puppy sat lazily in the middle of _____.

exercise**13-3**

Write original sentences with the prepositional phrases given in parentheses. Use the prepositional phrase to show a location.

1. (on the train) _____
2. (at work) _____
3. (behind the dresser) _____
4. (next to her) _____
5. (in the hospital) _____
6. (with Maria) _____
7. (between them) _____
8. (over the mountains) _____
9. (in front of us) _____
10. (under a palm tree) _____

Prepositions That Indicate Movement or Direction

The prepositions in this category do not suggest where someone or something is located. Instead, they describe someone's or something's movement or direction. Below is a list of some commonly used prepositions for this concept:

along	off
at	on
by	onto
from	out of
in	to
into	toward(s)

There are two forms of this preposition: *toward* and *towards*. Both are acceptable.

Certain verbs tell you that a preposition is being used to show location: *to be*, *to be located*, *to sit*, and many more. Certain other verbs tell you that a preposition is being used to show movement or direction. Here are some important ones:

to come	to journey
to drive	to jump
to fall	to return
to fly	to run
to go	to travel
to hurry	to walk

Just like prepositions that show location, a variety of prepositions that show movement or direction can be used in the same sentence. The basic sentence remains the same, but the preposition alters the kind of movement or direction involved. Look at these example sentences:

The women walked **along** the river.
 The women walked **from** the river.
 The women walked **into** the river.
 The women walked **out of** the river.
 The women walked **to** the river.
 The women walked **toward** the river.

You need to be aware of the difference between *to* and *toward*. The preposition *to* says that someone is going in the direction of a place and will arrive there soon:

John is going **to** the park.

The preposition *toward* means that someone is going in the direction of a place but may decide to change direction:

John is going **toward** the park. (But he may decide to turn left and go to the bank instead.)

The prepositions *in* and *on* are used to show location. But they are also used to show movement or direction. Traditionally, only *into* and *onto* are used to show movement or direction, but many people today use *in* and *on* in place of them:

She runs **into** the house. She runs **in** the house.
 He fell **onto** the floor. He fell **on** the floor.

If you consider the phrase *She runs in the house* literally, it means that a girl is inside a house and running. But English speakers know what is meant by this sentence from the context of the conversation where that sentence was used. So in casual speech you will hear both *in* and *into* and *on* and *onto* used interchangeably.

exercise

14-1

Select the preposition that best completes each sentence.

1. The children ran **in/toward/at** the gate.
2. The young couple strolled **along/out of/into** the beach.
3. The ball rolled **off/in/at** the table.
4. Is Thomas already **at/to/in** work?
5. I was hurrying **at/to/in** my desk.
6. Someone came running **into/onto/off** the room.
7. We slowly drove **off/at/by** their house.

8. Ms. Brown came **from/toward/at** England last year.
9. The poor girl fell **out of/onto/by** bed.
10. I dropped the tools **into/from/off** the box.

exercise**14-2**

Fill in the blank with any appropriate word or phrase.

1. The cattle were heading toward _____.
2. Someone came out of _____.
3. Why were you going into _____?
4. My family frequently travels to _____.
5. Do you come from _____?
6. The carpenter fell off _____.
7. The burglar quietly climbed onto _____.
8. Maria wants to come into _____.
9. The men were walking along _____.
10. He came at _____ with a knife.
11. She drove by _____ without stopping.
12. What time did you come home from _____?
13. We're planning on traveling to _____.
14. The cat jumped into _____.
15. The woman moved cautiously toward _____.

exercise**14-3**

Write original sentences with the prepositional phrases given in parentheses. Use the prepositional phrase to show movement or direction.

1. (along the shore) _____
2. (by the school) _____

3. (from the yard) _____
4. (into the living room) _____
5. (onto the shelf) _____
6. (off the bed) _____
7. (out of the garage) _____
8. (to the mountains) _____
9. (toward the wall) _____
10. (into a darkened room) _____

Prepositions That Indicate Time

There are several prepositions that are used in expressions of time:

after	from
at	in
before	on
by	since
during	to
for	until

These prepositions are used with a variety of moments in time and in phrases that answer the question *when*. Some, such as *at*, *on*, *in* and *for*, have a limited use.

The preposition *at* is used primarily to point out an event in time or a time shown on a clock:

at dawn, **at** dusk, **at** daybreak, **at** holiday time, **at** lunchtime, **at** midnight, **at** the end of the day, **at** 4:30 P.M., **at** 11:55 A.M.

The soldiers finally got back **at** dawn.

On is used primarily with days of the week and dates:

on Monday, **on** Tuesday, **on** Wednesday, **on** Thursday, **on** Friday, **on** Saturday, **on** Sunday, **on** June twelfth, **on** the fifteenth of May

We're starting a new project **on** the first of the month.

Use *in* for a nonspecific time of a day, of a month, of a year, or of a season:

in the morning, **in** January, **in** 2001, **in** summer

We like going camping **in** autumn.

Use *for* with a specific event in time:

for Christmas, **for** the holidays, **for** your birthday party, **for** the celebration
I'll be there **for** your baby's christening.

Most other prepositions can be used in many varied expressions of time:

She can be here **by** five o'clock.

I want to speak with you **before** the end of the day.

He works every day **from** dawn **to** dusk.

The drought has continued **since** last June.

We spend a lot of time in Mexico **during** the winter months.

Tom won't come home **until** next year.

Maria went out to dinner **after** work yesterday.

From and *to* are usually used in the same sentence to show a long period of time. *Until* often replaces *to*:

He worked here **from** 1997 **to** 2002.

She'll be in Europe **from** June **until** August.

exercise	15-1
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Select the preposition that best completes each sentence.

1. They left the theater **on/before/until** the end of the film.
2. I should be home **during/for/by** ten o'clock.
3. She only works **from/at/for** nine to three.
4. We always have a picnic **on/in/to** the Fourth of July.
5. Do you always eat lunch **for/since/at** noon?
6. Bill has been sad **for/since/at** his fortieth birthday.
7. Aunt Jane came to town **in/on/for** Carmen's big party.
8. We do a lot of shopping **during/on/by** the holiday season.
9. It's coldest here from December **to/at/on** February.
10. I'm afraid that we'll have to wait **to/until/since** tomorrow.

exercise**15-2**

Fill in the blank with any appropriate word or phrase that expresses time.

1. The children were very noisy during _____.
2. We can expect Jim here for _____.
3. It's very rainy from May to _____.
4. I haven't seen you since _____.
5. Can you stay with me until _____?
6. Tom works hard _____ morning to night.
7. They wanted to leave work before _____.
8. The doctor gave him a checkup after _____.
9. Try to get here by _____.
10. His family usually stays at the lake in _____.
11. The twins were born on _____.
12. Dark shadows covered the ground at _____.
13. They were living in Europe during _____.
14. He's had a job in the city since _____.
15. They want to start the marathon by _____.

exercise**15-3**

Write original sentences with the prepositional phrases given in parentheses.

1. (from noon until midnight) _____
2. (by June) _____
3. (since the end of winter) _____
4. (in spring) _____
5. (on May tenth) _____

6. (after 11:00 P.M.) _____
7. (before next year) _____
8. (during his lifetime) _____
9. (after dark) _____
10. (at sunset) _____

Part II Prepositions

Unit 13 Prepositions That Indicate Location

13-1

1. A tiny rabbit was hiding **under** a bush.
2. Please don't sit **next to** me.
3. We saw several baby birds **in** a nest in that tree.
4. There was nothing **below** the plane but empty space.
5. Father stays **at** the factory until 5:00 P.M.

6. An angry man stood directly **in the middle of** us.
7. John stayed **beside** me the entire time.
8. I saw Maria **among** the many people at the party.
9. There was a huge bug sitting **on** my bed!
10. I saw a stranger crouching **between** my car and the truck.

13-2

Sample Answers:

1. I saw a jet flying above **the Rocky Mountains**.
2. Someone was hiding under **a large bush**.
3. Are you familiar with **the new family down the block**?
4. My sisters both work at **the new mall**.
5. The frightened kitten hid in **an old shoe box**.
6. Someone stood behind **the door and listened**.
7. Who was sitting among **the honored guests at the conference**?
8. There's nothing in front of **the broken-down SUV**.
9. Gray clouds hovered over **the dark forest**.
10. Have a seat next to **my mother-in-law**.
11. He found his keys on **the backseat of the car**.
12. I found a couple seats beside **the manager of the team**.
13. Let's set up our camp near **the bank of the river**.
14. We used to live between **the Miller family and old Mrs. Jones**.
15. A puppy sat lazily in the middle of **the freshly painted floor**.

13-3

Sample Answers:

1. We were on the train for over five hours.
2. I spend much too much time at work.
3. There was a mouse hiding behind the dresser.
4. Please take a seat next to her.
5. The elderly man is in the hospital again.
6. I like dancing with Maria.
7. I stood between them and stopped the fight.
8. An eagle was gliding over the mountains.
9. An angry bear stood up in front of us.
10. Grandfather slept under a palm tree.

Unit 14 Prepositions That Indicate Movement or Direction

14-1

1. The children ran **toward** the gate.
2. The young couple strolled **along** the beach.
3. The ball rolled **off** the table.
4. Is Thomas already **at** work?
5. I was hurrying **to** my desk.
6. Someone came running **into** the room.
7. We slowly drove **by** their house.
8. Ms. Brown came **from** England last year.
9. The poor girl fell **out of** bed.
10. I dropped the tools **into** the box.

14-2

Sample Answers:

1. The cattle were heading toward **a distant watering hole**.
2. Someone came out of **a dark corner of the room**.
3. Why were you going into **my private office**?
4. My family frequently travels to **the countryside of Mexico**.
5. Do you come from **Canada or the United States**?
6. The carpenter fell off **the steep roof**.
7. The burglar quietly climbed onto **the porch and reached for the window**.

8. Maria wants to come into **the dining room for a moment**.
9. The men were walking along **one of the beams of the building**.
10. He came at **his frightened victim** with a knife.
11. She drove by **our house** without stopping.
12. What time did you come home from **the rock concert**?
13. We're planning on traveling to **South America next year**.
14. The cat jumped into **my sister's lap**.
15. The woman moved cautiously toward **the open door**.

14-3

Sample Answers:

1. A little boy wandered along the shore.
2. The retired teacher drove by the school again.
3. She ran from the yard shouting.
4. Michael bolted into the living room and fell on the floor.
5. I threw a magazine onto the shelf.
6. The puppy fell off the bed.
7. The young driver slowly pulled out of the garage.
8. We've never traveled to the mountains.
9. The rabbit hopped toward the wall.
10. She was afraid of going into a darkened room.

Unit 15 Prepositions That Indicate Time

15-1

Sample Answers:

1. They left the theater **before** the end of the film.
2. I should be home **by** ten o'clock.
3. She only works **from** nine to three.
4. We always have a picnic **on** the Fourth of July.
5. Do you always eat lunch **at** noon?
6. Bill has been sad **since** his fortieth birthday.
7. Aunt Jane came to town **for** Carmen's big party.
8. We do a lot of shopping **during** the holiday season.
9. It's coldest here from December **to** February.
10. I'm afraid that we'll have to wait **until** tomorrow.

15-2

Sample Answers:

1. The children were very noisy during **the long meeting**.
2. We can expect Jim here for **your birthday party**.
3. It's very rainy from May to **August**.
4. I haven't seen you since **you were a little girl**.
5. Can you stay with me until **I finish this report**?
6. Tom works hard **from** morning to night.
7. They wanted to leave work before **their shift ended**.
8. The doctor gave him a checkup after **a long illness**.
9. Try to get here by **dusk**.
10. His family usually stays at the lake in **the summer months**.
11. The twins were born on **September fifth**.
12. Dark shadows covered the ground at **daybreak**.
13. They were living in Europe during **their youth**.
14. He's had a job in the city since **he came back from Mexico**.
15. They want to start the marathon by **twelve thirty**.

15-3

Sample Answers:

1. Her shift is from noon until midnight.
2. I hope to graduate by June.
3. We've been planting shrubs since the end of winter.
4. Tom returns home in spring.
5. The parade was on May tenth.
6. Quiet hours begin after 11:00 P.M.
7. I hope to finish the course before next year.
8. He's had many different jobs during his lifetime.
9. Uncle James got home after dark.
10. We usually sit on the porch at sunset.