



English prepositions

Time, place and movement, with an example for every entry
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Learn prepositions in phrases, never as single words. A preposition has almost no meaning of its own — in May, in the kitchen and in a hurry share a word and nothing else — so record the whole phrase.

Start with the size logic: in for the largest container, on for a surface or a single day, at for a precise point. In May, on Monday, at six. In France, on the table, at the station.

The fixed phrases at the end are vocabulary, not grammar. Nothing predicts them; meet them and record them whole.

Prepositions of time

PREPOSITION	WHAT IT MARKS	EXAMPLE
at	A clock time or a precise moment	The train leaves at 6.45.
on	A day or a date	We met on Tuesday, on 3 March.
in	A month, season, year or century	She was born in 1998, in the spring.
in	A part of the day — but not night	I work best in the morning.
at	Night, and the weekend in British English	It is quiet at night. We travel at the weekend.
by	A deadline: no later than	Send it by Friday.
until	A state continuing up to a point	The shop stays open until nine.
from ... to	The start and end of a stretch	The course runs from June to September.
for	How long something lasts	We waited for twenty minutes.
since	When something started and is still true	I have lived here since 2019.
during	Inside a named period — never a number	He phoned during the meeting.
before	Earlier than	Call me before lunch.
after	Later than	We can talk after the interval.
between ... and	Two points with a gap between them	Come between two and four.
within	Not later than the end of a period	You will hear from us within a week.
past / to	Minutes either side of the hour	It is ten past six — no, quarter to seven.
over	Across the whole of a period	The town is busy over the summer.
ago	Backwards from now. It follows the noun instead of leading it	She left ten minutes ago.

Prepositions of place

PREPOSITION	WHAT IT MARKS	EXAMPLE
in	Inside an enclosed space, a town or a country	The keys are in the drawer. She lives in Lisbon.
on	Touching a surface, or on a line	Your book is on the table, on the top shelf.
at	A point, an address or an event	Wait at the entrance. They met at a wedding.
above	Higher than, not touching	A lamp hangs above the desk.
over	Higher than and covering	Put a cloth over the table.
under	Lower than, often covered	The cat is under the bed.

PREPOSITION	WHAT IT MARKS	EXAMPLE
below	Lower than, on a scale or a page	The temperature fell below zero.
behind	At the back of	The car park is behind the station.
in front of	Facing the front of	A taxi stopped in front of the hotel.
between	In the space separating two things	The bank is between the shop and the hotel.
among	Surrounded by three or more	The house stands among the trees.
next to / beside	Immediately at the side of	Sit next to me.
near	Not far from, without touching	They live near the sea.
opposite	Directly facing, across a space	The café is opposite the cinema.
against	Touching and leaning on	He left his bike against the wall.
inside / outside	Within, or beyond, an enclosure	Wait inside; it is raining outside.
around	Surrounding, or roughly in the area of	A fence runs around the field.
on top of	Resting on the highest surface	The box is on top of the wardrobe.

Prepositions of movement

PREPOSITION	THE PATH IT TRACES	EXAMPLE
to	Towards a destination, and arriving	We drove to the coast.
towards	In the direction of — arrival not implied	He walked towards the exit, then stopped.
into	From outside to inside	She ran into the station.
out of	From inside to outside	He climbed out of the car.
onto	Up and on to a surface	The cat jumped onto the roof.
off	Away from a surface	Take your feet off the seat.
across	From one side of a flat space to the other	We swam across the river.
through	In one side and out of the other, enclosed	The train went through the tunnel.
along	Following the length of something	They strolled along the beach.
past	By something and beyond it	Walk past the church and turn left.
over	Above and across	The plane flew over the city.
under	Below and across	The path goes under the bridge.
up / down	Higher, or lower, along a slope	She ran up the stairs and back down again.
around	In a circle, or avoiding something	We walked around the lake.
from	The starting point	The bus goes from the market square.
away from	Increasing distance	The child ran away from the dog.
back to	Returning to where you were	He went back to the office.
as far as	Up to a limit and no further	The road is clear as far as the bridge.

Fixed phrases

No rule predicts these. Learn them as vocabulary.

PREPOSITION	THE PHRASES IT APPEARS IN
at	at last · at once · at first · at least · at the moment · at work · at home · at war · at risk
in	in time · in a hurry · in advance · in charge of · in danger · in the end · in fact · in general · in touch

PREPOSITION	THE PHRASES IT APPEARS IN
on	on time · on purpose · on holiday · on business · on foot · on the phone · on average · on the whole · on sale
by	by mistake · by chance · by heart · by hand · by law · by far · by accident · by now · by the way