



THE WRITING CENTER

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PREPOSITIONS¹

Prepositions are words that demonstrate temporal, possessive, directional, or spatial relationships between two words in a sentence. This means that they can tell us about the relationship of time, space, movement, or possession between a noun or a pronoun and another word in the sentence.

Time and Location (IN, ON, and AT)

Prepositions can tell the reader about the temporal relationship between a noun or a pronoun and another word in a sentence. Which preposition you choose depends on the unit of time to which you are referring.

AT –used when referring to very specific points in time, such as a specific time of day or a specific location or address.

EX: I will meet Jennifer for coffee at 10:00am.

EX: Robert lives at 755 Drury Ln.

ON –used when referring to a specific point in time, such as a particular day or a segment of a week/month or to particular street.

EX: Every year my family goes to the beach to watch the fireworks on the 4th of July.

EX: Sanja walks her dog on Lexington Ave every morning.

IN –used when referring to a larger unit of time, such as a month, year, or century or a general location.

EX: My sister graduated from law school in 2009.

EX: The BBC is based in England.

TIME AND PLACE: in, on, and at

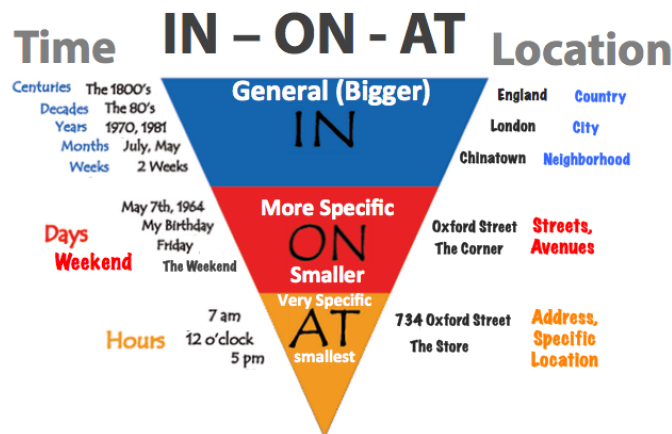


Image courtesy of <http://www.ieltsexamstips.com/2013/09/prepositions-ielts-exam-tips.html>

¹ Adapted in part from <http://www.talkenglish.com/Grammar/prepositions-of-to-for.aspx>



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Location and Movement

Prepositions can tell the reader about where a person or object is as well as it how he/she or it moves in relation to another person or object. Below is an image that depicts some of the most common prepositions that indicate movement and place.



Image courtesy of <http://reallifeglobal.com/preposition-definitions/>

EX: The chicken walked across the road.

EX: The dog jumped onto the couch.

EX: Mira's best friend walked beside her as they strolled through the park.

EX: Based on the ceramic evidence, these remains were attributed to the Oneota, who migrated into an area that was previously occupied by the Mississippian culture.

EX: The New Archaeology was a paradigm shift toward a more scientifically based archaeology.

Of

The preposition of can indicate belonging, a relationship, a connection, a reference, or an amount or number. When used to indicate belonging, it can be used instead of an apostrophe but should not be used with proper nouns (with the exception of geographic locations).

Belonging, relationship, or connection:

EX: She heard the cry of a baby coming from the apartment above.

EX: The State of New York requires all vehicle passengers in the front seat to be at least 14 years old.

EX: The title of your paper should reflect its content.

Reference

EX: I moved to Columbus in the summer of 2009.

EX: I got a discount of 30% on the shoes I purchased last week.

Amount or number

EX: Joey had two slices of pie for dessert.

EX: Amelia earned a score of 2100 on her SAT exam.



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To

The preposition to can indicate movement toward something or someone, a limit or ending point, a relationship, or a time or period of time.

Movement toward something or someone

EX: Sara went to the grocery store on 5th Avenue.

EX: Jeremy returned the book he borrowed to the library.

EX: Make sure you deliver your paper to Dr. Field on Tuesday.

Limit or ending point

EX: The water in the shallow end of the pool was up to Maria's waist.

EX: The cost of a new copy of the textbook for the biology course can be up to \$120.

Relationship

EX: Jackie responded well to the constructive criticism she received on her paper.

EX: Earning good grades is very important to Arya.

EX: The instructor's answer to Tyrion's question prompted a long class discussion.

Time or period of time

EX: The Lannisters arrived at the party at 10 minutes to 6:00 on Friday evening.

EX: Jon works from 10 to 5 every Wednesday.

For

The preposition for can indicate use, time or duration, or an object or recipient of something

Use

EX: Annie bought the required textbook for her class.

EX: Julie was awarded a grant for the research she plans to conduct in Fiji.

Time or duration

EX: Eli worked at the electric company for four years.

EX: That stack of books is the reading I have for the rest of the semester.

Object or recipient of an object, action, perception, etc.

EX: Sarah bought a birthday cake for me.

EX: Run for your life!