

Prepositions are words that signal information about location, time, or other relationships within a sentence. This guide introduces some common prepositions and directs writers toward strategies they can use to improve their preposition use. While this handout provides general suggestions, writers should always work with their audience or assignment in mind.

## Function of Prepositions

Prepositions indicate and clarify relationships that exist between different parts of a sentence. Prepositions can be used to illustrate location, time, or other relationships.

### *Location*

Prepositions that indicate location tell readers where the action of the sentence is occurring. These prepositions can also tell readers the direction of a person or thing in the sentence.

**Example:** Laura found the book **under** her bed.

**Example:** Malik walked **across** the street.

### *Time*

Prepositions that indicate time tell readers when something occurs. Some of these prepositions establish time in relationship to other events, while others can be used to describe the exact time something occurred.

**Example:** The movie will begin **after** the trailers are over.

**Example:** Lin eats breakfast every day **at** 9:00 AM.

### *Other Relationships*

Prepositions can also indicate a variety of other relationships, including the way an action was performed, the cause of an event, or other more abstract connections.

**Example:** Sam cut the lemon **with** a knife.

**Example:** She made her money **by** selling cars.

## Strategies for Working with Prepositions

Because prepositions are often not governed by specific rules, many writers find them difficult to use. The following tools and resources can be helpful for learning preposition usage.

- **Dictionaries:** Many English-language dictionaries give specific definitions of prepositions and an example of how they are used. Translation dictionaries can also help writers learning English as a second language; however, proper usage does not always translate between languages.
- **Collocation Dictionaries:** These dictionaries provide many examples of usage and show writers how different prepositions are used by other speakers and writers.
- **Search Engines and AI:** Searching for a preposition on the internet can provide resources on how that preposition is used. Additionally, some search engines will correct improper preposition use in search queries. AI can also provide information on preposition use, but writers who use AI should always verify the accuracy of the information they receive from these sources.
- **Listening, Reading, Practice:** The best way to learn preposition usage is by practicing over time. Writers who read often and listen closely to others learn many ways to use prepositions.

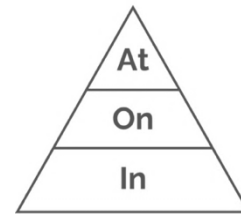
## Common Preposition Mistakes (*At*, *On*, and *In*)

Because prepositions can have multiple and contextual meanings, many writers struggle to use the right preposition. Some of the most commonly confused prepositions are *at*, *on*, and *in*; these prepositions are often used to describe location and time. Each of these words is used in different ways:

**At** is most often used to describe **specific** places and times.

**On** is used before less precise locations and times.

**In** is used before **general** areas and periods of time.



The following chart explains some of the usage for *at*, *on* and *in*.

	Location	Time
<b>At</b>	Used for the name of a place or a street address. <b>Example:</b> He studies <b>at</b> UVU. <b>Example:</b> He lives <b>at</b> 400 Maple Avenue.	Used for times on the clock or other named times. <b>Example:</b> Breakfast is <b>at</b> 9:00 AM. <b>Example:</b> We left <b>at</b> midnight.
<b>On</b>	Used for street names without a specific address. <b>Example:</b> He lives <b>on</b> Maple Avenue. <b>Example:</b> She lives <b>on</b> Claremont Street.	Used for days of the week and dates. <b>Example:</b> The concert is <b>on</b> Tuesday. <b>Example:</b> We start class <b>on</b> January 7 <sup>th</sup> .
<b>In</b>	Used for cities, states, countries, and continents. <b>Example:</b> He lives <b>in</b> Quebec. <b>Example:</b> He is traveling <b>in</b> Asia next year.	Used for months, years, seasons, and times of day. <b>Example:</b> I was born <b>in</b> the fall. <b>Example:</b> We met <b>in</b> the afternoon.

## Other Uses of Prepositions

### *Prepositional Phrases*

When a preposition is followed by a noun or pronoun, together they make up a prepositional phrase. The noun or pronoun is called the object of the prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase is not a complete sentence on its own. It requires a subject and a verb to be complete.

**Example:** **Under** (preposition) the **bed** (object)

### *Prepositions and Verbs*

Verbs describe action and normally wouldn't be the object of a preposition; however, gerunds (or verbs ending with *-ing*) act like nouns and can be used in a prepositional phrase.

**Example:** How would you feel **about** (preposition) **going** (verb) out tonight?

**Example:** Hakim was good **at** (preposition) **playing** (verb) the guitar.

### *Phrasal Verbs*

Some verbs have prepositions attached to them. These verbs are called phrasal verbs and do not always require an object to be complete. Some examples of phrasal verbs include *sit up*, *find out*, and *set aside*.

**Example:** John **sat up** in his chair.

**Example:** Chieko will **find out** who ate her lunch.

**Example:** Margot **set aside** her book while her roommate talked.