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Prepositions

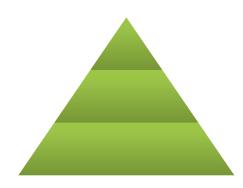
Choosing the right preposition can be challenging for ESL speakers because prepositions do not translate well from one language to another. In addition, much preposition use is not governed by rules. This handout begins with some general rules and explanations, and then it directs you to online resources that can help you identify correct prepositions.

At/on/in for Place and Time

Generally, at is used with "small", on with "medium", and in with "big" places and times.

place	time	
at McDonald's	at 5pm	
on Oak street	on Monday on July 14 th	
in Fairfaxin Virginiain the U.S.	in July in summer in 2018	

more specific



less specific

	Place	Time	
at	name of a place - He works at George Mason University. or address with a number - Mr. Smith lives at 1001 Willow Street	clock times - My class starts at 3:30pm The movie starts at 8 o'clock. + at noon/night/midnight/dusk/dawn	
on	streets, roads, etc., when there is no number - His house is on Willow Street.	days - I have class on Monday(s) and Wednesday(s) The concert is on July 17th.	
in	cities, states, countries, and continents - He lives in San Francisco/ California/ the U.S.A.	months, seasons, and years - School will start in September I was born in 1983 We love to go camping in the fall. + in the morning/afternoon/evening	

Adjective/Noun/Verb + Preposition Combinations

Many adjectives, nouns, and verbs are followed by specific prepositions. No rules govern this use, so these combinations should simply be memorized. The table below illustrates just **a few** examples of such combinations.

Adjective+Prep.	Verb+Prep.	Noun+Prep.	Prep.+Noun
	agree to/with		
	apologize for		
		application for/to	by law
composed of			by mistake
	belong to		for/on sale
different from	count on	demand for	in advance
familiar with	depend on	experience of/with	in charge of
important for/to	disagree about/ with	excuse for	in general
interested in	explain something to	increase in/of	in/on time
known for	look at/for	interest in	on a trip
opposed to	look forward to	lack of	on purpose
related to	pay attention to	need for/of	on vacation
similar to	think about/of	problem with	under pressure
responsible for	work on	request for	with reference to

Information above is adapted from Folse, K. S. (2009). Keys to teaching grammar to English language learners: A practical handbook. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Strategies

If you are unsure of your preposition choice, try one (or several) of the following methods:

- 1) **Dictionary**: using a dictionary can be particularly helpful for identifying prepositions in a combination with an adjective/noun/verb. For example, the search for the verb *approve* in the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/) reveals that this verb is followed by the preposition *of*.
- 2) **Collocation dictionary**: a collocation dictionary (e.g. http://www.ozdic.com/) shows some common words (including prepositions) that follow a particular word.
- 3) **Google**: search a phrase with a preposition in Google. If the search results show many entries containing this exact phrase, your preposition choice is correct. Conversely, if your initial preposition choice is not precise, you will see fewer entries.
- 4) **Corpus**: search a phrase with or without a preposition in a corpus (e.g. https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/). For example, if you want to check if "at the other hand" is correct, you can either enter the whole phrase in the search box and then see that the search yields only five matches in a 560 million-word collection of texts meaning that such phrase is almost never used. Alternatively, you may enter a part of the phrase without the preposition "the other hand" or even "other hand" and notice that the only preposition used is on. Thus, the correct expression is "on the other hand".
- 5) **Netspeak** (http://www.netspeak.org/): enter the phrase you are unsure of in the search box and substitute the preposition with the question mark(?). The tool will show the most common preposition used with the phrase you entered.

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