

Some helpful information  
about prepositions...

Prepositions usually come before nouns or gerunds (-ing form used as a noun)...

PREPOSITIONS

"Before the exam,"  
"Despite being nervous..."

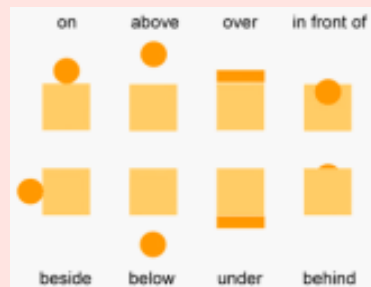


...although a few can come after a noun e.g "three years ago".

NOUN      PREPOSITION

# 150

In all, there are about 150 prepositions in English and they can play a very important role in the language: by expressing spatial and temporal relationships.



However, there are many different problems associated with selecting the correct one, for several reasons. One preposition may have many different meanings at different times (the dictionary has ten meanings listed for "at").

PREPOSITION strong Pronunciation /æt/ weak Pronunciation /ət/ [What are red words?](#)  
[Using the thesaurus](#)

1 used for stating where someone or something is

- a. in a particular place  
*There's a telephone box at the crossroads.  
 I'll meet you at the main entrance.  
 She's staying at the Clarence Hotel.  
 We live at 23 Brookfield Avenue.  
 at someone's (=at their house): I'm babysitting at Sally's tomorrow night.  
 at home: He wants to spend more time at home with his family.  
 at work (=in the place where someone works): Dad should be at work by now.  
 at the doctor's/dentist's/hairdresser's etc: Trevor's at the doctor's - he'll be back soon.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

**Related dictionary definitions**

- at-risk ADJECTIVE
- down-at-heel ADJECTIVE
- man-at-arms NOUN
- serjeant at arms NOUN
- stay-at-home ADJECTIVE

- b. used for saying where you stop on a journey  
*Does this train stop at Newport?  
 The ship called in at Bombay and Singapore.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)
- c. sitting or standing close to something, especially in order to do something  
*Lambert was seated at the piano.  
 She was standing at the window, staring out across the garden.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: local, close, nearby, beside, close. [more](#)
- d. in a particular part of a process, activity, programme, or book  
*At some point in the process things started to go wrong.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

2 used for stating what someone is doing

- a. used for saying that someone is doing something or taking part in an activity somewhere  
*at a party/concert/meeting etc: We were at a party last night when you called.  
 at school/college etc (=studying at an educational institution): Has Karen graduated, or is she still at college?*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)
- b. used for stating what state or situation someone or something is in  
*at rest/with peace etc: The county was at war and life was difficult for everyone.*

3 used for stating when something happens

- a. used for stating the exact time when something happens  
*The match starts at 3 o'clock.  
 There's a train at 11.42.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)
- b. used for saying when a particular situation exists  
*at present/at the moment (=now): Everyone's busy with exams at present.  
 I can't give you any more information at the moment.  
 at the time (=when something happened in the past): Monica was born at the time we were in Edinburgh at the time.  
 at the beginning/start/end of something: It's a style that was popular at the beginning of the century.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: from, into, of, of, of... [more](#)
- c. during a particular period  
*What are you doing at the weekend?  
 My wife's parents came to stay with us at Christmas.  
 at night (=during any night): At night temperatures sometimes fall to 30 degrees below zero.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: during, within, throughout, through [more](#)
- d. when someone is a particular age  
*Mozart was already composing music at the age of five.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

4 used for stating what someone reacts to used for stating what makes someone react in a way

- Audience 200 laugh at his jokes.  
 She was annoyed at being disturbed in the middle of the night.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

5 used for showing prices, temperatures, speeds etc used for showing the level of prices, temperatures, speeds etc

- Tickets are now on sale at €12 each.  
 His Ferrari crashed at 120 miles an hour.  
 The plastic pipes will melt at high temperatures.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

6 in a particular direction used for stating the direction in which you look, point, or aim something

- Armed gangs were shooting at police cars.*

7 trying to hold or hit someone or something used for stating what someone is trying to do

- He grabbed at my sleeve, but I pulled away.  
 She struggled, hitting out at her attackers.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

8 continuing to do something used for showing that you repeat an action many times movements but without doing it completely

- I mumbled to myself, sipping at my coffee.  
 Stop picking at the scab, or it won't heal.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

9 used for stating what someone can do well used for stating the activity or subject that someone is good at

- Brownstein is an expert at cooking.  
 good/bad at something: I've never been very good at sports.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

10 used for giving phone numbers AMERICAN used for stating the phone number which someone can be reached. The British word is on

- You can reach us at 005-3964.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: [more](#)

**PHRASES**

- **at all**  
 used for emphasis when you are saying or asking whether something is even slight after words such as 'any', 'anything', 'anyone', or 'nothing'  
*Has the situation improved at all?  
 You don't have any money at all?  
 He doesn't know anything at all about computers.*
 Synonyms or related words for this meaning of **at**: whatever, whenever, whoever, wherever. [more](#)

- **at someone's/something's best/worst/strongest etc**  
 used for saying that someone or something shows their best/worst etc qualities in a particular situation


Also, different prepositions can be used with very similar meanings

e.g. "In the afternoon", but "on Thursday afternoon."



You may wish to attempt the exercises in Activity 1 by testing the knowledge of their use that you have already acquired. Or, if you prefer, you can refer to some study lists by following the link in the Learning Object to some Preposition Study Lists, then do the exercises to test your memory.

### Choosing the correct preposition



**Introduction**

All learners of English, and many native speakers, sometimes have difficulty in choosing the correct preposition. This is, in part, because there are no real rules that can be followed. In one study, preposition errors represented the largest category, about 29%, of all the grammatical errors by 53 intermediate to advanced non-native speaker students (Bilthener et al., 2005). In addition, in another piece of research, Daigh (1995) analyzed the essays of 250 non-native speaker university students, representing 15 different native languages, and reported that preposition errors were present in 18% of sentences in a sample of text produced by writers from first languages as diverse as Korean, Greek, and Spanish.

However, there are three approaches that can helpfully be adopted by the learner: reading extensively in English, to promote acquisition of the correct forms; consulting a good dictionary, such as [The Macmillan Online Dictionary](#) to discover which prepositions are correct after the adjectives, nouns or verbs you want to use; and memorisation of lists of words with the prepositions that usually follow them.

**Objectives**

- to promote greater written accuracy through correct choice of prepositions
- to encourage memorisation of word lists containing dependent prepositions
- to facilitate memorisation by providing opportunities to test knowledge
- to increase awareness of prepositional phrases and the way they are used
- to provide practice in proof-reading for errors with prepositions

**Activity 1:**

Prepositions usually come before nouns or gerunds (-ing form used as a noun), although a few can come after a noun e.g. "three years ago". In all, there are about 150 prepositions in English and they can play a very important role in the language: by expressing spatial and temporal relationships. However, there are many different problems associated with selecting the correct one, for several reasons. One preposition may have many different meanings at different times (the dictionary has ten meanings listed for "at"). Also, different prepositions can be used with very similar meanings (e.g. "in the afternoon", but "on Thursday afternoon"). You may wish to attempt the exercises in Activity 1 by testing the knowledge of their use that you have already acquired. Or, if you prefer, you can refer to some study lists by following this link [Preposition Study Lists](#) then do the exercises to test your memory.

**Instruction**

Put a tick if the following sentences are correct and put a cross if they are incorrect.

✓ ✗

1. Minority groups are often discriminated at in our society.

### Preposition Study Lists

Prepositions that usually follow them, which it may be helpful for you to memorise. Most of the vocabulary has been selected based on the Academic Word List. For more information about the Academic Word List, and the work of Averil Coxhead in Leeds at the University of Nottingham [Academic Vocabulary](#).

It is possible with the words in the lists, sometimes with a different meaning e.g. "known to somebody" = for sth. to be well understood/understood by/understand by sth., sometimes when combined with a different kind of noun e.g. "by somebody", "to somebody" and "of somebody" = possession, or if a word is followed by a preposition before a noun e.g. "in public" or "in the center", "for a fortnight", or is followed by a prepositional phrase e.g. "as a result of sth." For more comprehensive information, it is necessary to look up the individual word in a good dictionary, such as [The Macmillan Online Dictionary](#).

OF	TO	ON	AGAINST	FROM
an analysis of sth. by sb.	(to be) analogous to sth.	an apology on sth.	to campaign or campaign against sb./sth.	(to be) exempt from sth.
an assessment of sth.	a commitment to sth./sb.	an emphasis on sth.	to discriminate against sb.	(to be) obtained from sb./sth.
a commitment of sth. to sb./sth.	(to be) equalled to sth.	to focus/ focus on sth./sb.	discrimination against sth. by sb.	(to be) quoted from sb./sth.
(to be) evaluated by sb. for sth./sb.	to consist of sth.	(to be) essential to sth.	to offset (sth.) against sth.	an outcry from sth.
(to be) followed by sb./sth.	the fraction of	(to be) fundamental to sth.		
(to be) implemented by sb.	the impact of sth. on sth./sb.	(to be) grateful to sb. for sth.	to impact / an impact on sth./sb. of sth.	
(to be) known by sb.	an implication of sth. for sth./sb.	(to be) identical to sth./sb.	to be imposed on sth./sb. by sb.	
(to be) motivated by sb./sth.	the independence of sb./sth. from sb./sth.	(to be) offered to sth.	to lecture a lecture on sth. by sb.	
			a perspective on sth. of sb.	

After studying the lists,  
try the exercises...

Good luck!