# **What is a Preposition?**

***Preposition*** (noun): a part-of-speech usually coming BEFORE a noun phrase and connecting it to another part of the sentence

A [preposition](https://www.englishclub.com/grammar/prepositions.htm) is one of the nine [parts of speech](https://www.englishclub.com/grammar/parts-of-speech.htm).

The name *preposition* (pre + position) means "place BEFORE". A **preposition** typically comes BEFORE **another word**—usually a noun phrase. It tells us about the relationship between the noun phrase and another part of the sentence. Some very common prepositions are: *in, of, on, for, with, at, by*

Look at these example sentences:

* The book is **on** ***the round table***. (relationship in space)
* We will meet **in** ***November***. (relationship in time)
* I sent the information **by** ***email***. (relationship of method)

Several other relationships are expressed by prepositions. In addition, more metaphorical ideas can be expressed such as: *in love, beyond doubt, under investigation*

If a preposition does not come BEFORE another word, it is still closely linked to another word:

* **Who** did you talk **to**?
* **To** **whom** did you talk?
* I talked **to** **Jane**.

**Prepositions** have no particular form. The majority of prepositions are single words, but some are two- or three-word phrases:

* one-word prepositions (*before, into, on*)
* complex prepositions (*according to, but for, in spite of*)

When we say that a preposition comes before a noun phrase, we include:

* noun phrase (*the tall man*)
* noun (*rice*)
* pronoun (*them*)
* gerund (verb in -ing form: *fishing*)

# **Prepositions of Place: at, in, on**

**In general, we use:**

**at** for a POINT **in** for an ENCLOSED SPACE **on** for a SURFACE

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **at** **POINT** | **in** **ENCLOSED SPACE** | **on** **SURFACE** |
| at the corner | in the garden | on the wall |
| at the bus stop | in London | on the ceiling |
| at the door | in France | on the door |
| at the top of the page | in a box | on the cover |
| at the end of the road | in my pocket | on the floor |
| at the entrance | in my wallet | on the carpet |
| at the crossroads | in a building | on the menu |
| at the front desk | in a car | on a page |

Look at these examples:

* Jane is waiting for you **at** the bus stop.
* My plane stopped **at** Dubai and Hanoi and arrived **in** Bangkok two hours late.
* I have a meeting **in** New York.
* Do you live **in** Japan?
* The author's name is **on** the cover of the book.
* I live **on** the 7th floor **at** 21 Oxford Street **in** London.

Notice the use of the prepositions of place **at**, **in** and **on** in these standard expressions:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **at** | **in** | **on** |
| at home | in a car | on a bus |
| at work | in a taxi | on a train |
| at school | in a helicopter | on a plane |
| at university | in a boat | on a ship |
| at college | in a lift (elevator) | on a bicycle |
| at the top | in the newspaper | on a horse |
| at the bottom | in the sky | on the radio |
| at the side | in a row | on the left, on the right |
| at reception | in London | on the way |

# **Prepositions of Time - at, in, on**

**We use:**

* **at** for a PRECISE TIME
* **in** for MONTHS, YEARS, CENTURIES and LONG PERIODS
* **on** for DAYS and DATES

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **at** **PRECISE TIME** | **in** **MONTHS, YEARS, CENTURIES and LONG PERIODS** | **on** **DAYS and DATES** |
| at 3 o'clock | in May | on Sunday |
| at 10.30am | in summer | on Tuesdays |
| at noon | in the summer | on 6 March |
| at dinnertime | in 1990 | on 25 Dec. 2010 |
| at bedtime | in the 1990s | on Christmas Day |
| at sunrise | in the next century | on Independence Day |
| at sunset | in the Ice Age | on my birthday |
| at the moment | in the past/future | on New Year's Eve |

Look at these examples:

* I have a meeting **at** 9am.
* The shop closes **at** midnight.
* In England, it often snows **in** December.
* There should be a lot of progress **in** the next century.
* Do you work **on** Mondays?
* Where will you be **on** New Year's Day?

Notice the use of the preposition of time **at** in the following standard expressions:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Expression** | **Example** |
| at night | The stars shine **at night**. |
| at the weekend\* | I don't usually work **at the weekend**. |
| at Christmas\*/Easter | I stay with my family **at Christmas**. |
| at the same time | We finished the test **at the same time**. |
| at present | He's not home **at present**. Try later. |

\*Note that in some varieties of English people say "on the weekend" and "on Christmas".

Notice the use of the prepositions of time **in** and **on** in these common expressions:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **in** | **on** |
| in the morning | on Tuesday morning |
| in the mornings | on Saturday mornings |
| in the afternoon(s) | on Sunday afternoon(s) |
| in the evening(s) | on Monday evening(s) |

When we say **last, next, every, this** we do not also use **at, in, on**.

* I went to London **last** June. (***not*** in last June)
* He's coming back **next** Tuesday. (***not*** on next Tuesday)
* I go home **every** Easter. (***not*** at every Easter)
* We'll call you **this** evening. (***not*** in this evening)

# **8 Ways to Use the Preposition “by”**

The word “by” is very common in English. It can be used in lots of different situations and contexts. It is mostly used as a preposition but it can also in fact be used as an adverb. In this article, I explain the common uses of “by” as a preposition.

## **“by” + place**

The meaning is: *beside, at the side of, next to, close to*

* *The house is by a river.*
* *David lives by a train station.*
* *I would love to live in a house by the sea.*

## **“by” + method of transport**

This structure describes *how you travel somewhere*.

by + train car boat plane taxi bus coach

* *David went to Manchester by train.*
* *My parents often go to France by boat.*
* *Our children have never travelled by plane before.*

## **“by” + method of communication**

This structure describes *how you communicate with someone*.

by + telephone post email fax

* *I spoke to her by telephone.*
* *I will send you the invoice by post.*
* *Please confirm the order by email.*

## **“by” + method of payment**

This structure describes *how you pay for something*.

by + credit card cheque

* *We paid for the computer by cheque.*
* *Can I pay by credit card?*
* *The deposit was paid by e-transfer.*

Note that we do not use “by” for cash payments. We use the preposition “in”:

* *David paid in cash for the newspaper.*

It is also possible to omit the preposition completely, particularly in spoken English:

* *David paid cash for the newspaper.*

## **“by” and the passive**

In the passive voice, “by” indicates *WHO is doing the action*.

First, let’s look at a sentence using the active voice:

* *David is cleaning the kitchen.*

In the above sentence, “David” is the person doing the action. When we convert this sentence to the passive voice, we say:

* *The kitchen is being cleaned by David.*

Here are some more examples. These are in the past tense:

* *Sarah wrote the book.* (active)  
  The book was written by Sarah. (passive)
* *Our school organized the concert.* (active)  
  The concert was organized by our school. (passive)

## **“by” + reflexive pronoun**

by + myself yourself himself, herself, itself ourselves yourselves themselves

This structure means to do something alone.

* *I enjoy reading by myself.*
* *Sarah is studying by herself.*
* *My parents often go on holiday by themselves.*

## **“by” + -ING verb**

This structure describes *how to do something*. It gives us more information about how to achieve a particular result.

* *You can turn on the radio by pressing that button.*

question:  
How can I turn on the radio?

answer:  
by pressing the button

The phrase “pressing the button” describes how to do something (how to turn on the radio).

## **“by” + time expression**

The meaning of this structure is: *not later than; before or at a particular time*

We use this structure for deadlines. A deadline is the time before which something must be done.

* *Guests must vacate their hotel rooms by 11 am.*
* *Please send us the payment by tomorrow.*
* *Students must enrol by the end of June.*