

Using prepositions to show time and place

The most frequently used prepositions in English are *at*, *by*, *for*, *from*, *in*, *of*, *on*, *to*, and *with*. Each of these prepositions has a variety of uses that must be learned gradually, in context.

Prepositions that indicate time and place can be difficult to master because the differences among them are subtle and idiomatic. The following chart is limited to four troublesome prepositions that show time and place: *at*, *on*, *in*, and *by*.

Not every use is listed in the chart, so don't be surprised to encounter exceptions and idiomatic uses that you must learn one at a time. For example, in English we ride *in* a car but *on* a bus, train, or subway. And when we fly *on* (not *in*) a plane, we are not sitting on top of the plane.

At, on, in, and by to show time and place

Showing time

- AT** at a specific time: *at 7:20*, *at dawn*
- ON** on a specific day or date: *on June 4*
- IN** in a part of a 24-hour period: *in the afternoon*, *in the daytime* [but *at night*]
in a year or month: in 1999, *in July*
in a period of time: finished in three hours
- BY** by a specific time or date: *by 4:15*, *by Christmas*

Showing place

- AT** at a meeting place or location: *at home*, *at the club*
at the edge of something: sitting at the desk
at the corner of something: turning at the intersection
at a target: throwing the snowball at Lucy
- ON** on a surface: *placed on the table*, *hanging on the wall*
on an electronic medium: on television, *on the Internet*
- IN** in an enclosed space: *in the garage*, *in the envelope*
in a geographic location: in San Diego, *in Texas*
in a print medium: in a book, *in a magazine*
- BY** by a landmark: *by the fence*, *by the flagpole*