

14 General form and use; prepositions of place

1 Form

Prepositions are usually one word, but some have two or more words:

one word	at for by with against towards
two words	apart from because of due to out of away from next to
three words	on top of in front of by means of in spite of

They are usually followed by a noun or a pronoun:

Wait for me **at the bus stop**. I've had a terrible day. Let me tell you **about it**.

If we use a verb after a preposition, we use the *-ing* form:

You can lose weight **by eating less and doing more exercise**.

Marilyn got the job **in spite of being late for the interview**.

We can use some prepositions on their own, as adverbs:

Jason hasn't finished his work. He seems to be falling **behind**.

Have you been here **before**?

We can put prepositions at the end of questions and relative clauses:

Who are you looking **at**? This is Becky – she's the girl I used to share a flat **with**.

Wh- questions + prepositions ➤ Unit 62.3 Prepositions in relative clauses ➤ Unit 72.4

For a full list of common prepositions ➤ page 338–9

2 Use

Prepositions show relationships (of place, time, etc.) between the parts of a sentence:

place	That's my bike – the one against the wall.
movement	Go across the bridge and into the station.
time	My grandfather was in hospital during the last days of the war.
means	You can contact us by phone or email.
instrument	Please complete the form with a black pen.
purpose	These little hooks are used for hanging pictures on the wall.

3 Prepositions of place: *in, on, at*

Prepositions of place describe where one person or thing is in relation to another:



Your watch is **in** the drawer. The keys are **in** the car.

(+ town/country) **in** Warsaw/Poland; Paul's **in** Japan on business.

in prison/hospital; **in** the newspaper/a book



Your watch is **on** the table. My office is **on** the third floor.

London is **on** the River Thames.

on the floor/wall/ceiling; **on** the left/right;

on page 20; **on** a train/bus/plane (but **in** a car)

We use *at* to describe the exact or approximate position of something:

It's **at** the end of the car park. The train stops **at** Preston. Can we sit **at** a window table?
at the top/bottom/end of ...; **at** a wedding/concert/meeting; **at** the office/station/airport

We can use *at* or *in* with buildings, but the meaning is different. Compare:

I can't talk. I'm **at** the cinema. (I'm watching / going to watch a film.)

I'm waiting for Karen **in** the cinema. (I'm inside the building.)