



TEMPORAL, SPATIAL & DIRECTIONAL PREPOSITIONS

Definition

In English, prepositions are words that identify roles and relationships within a sentence. Prepositions are used to communicate temporal, spatial, or directional relationships, and they can be concrete or abstract. Using the correct preposition in English is key to describing relationships accurately.

Temporal Prepositions

Prepositions that describe **points** in time are **at**, **in** and **on**.

On is used to determine days, **at** is used to express time of day, and **in** is used with parts of the day that are not defined by specific times, with months and years, and with the seasons.

For example:

We finished the research **at** 5 pm.

We finished the research **on** June 5.

We finished the research **in** the morning.

Prepositions that express **lengths** of time are: **since**, **for**, **by**, **from**, and **during**.

For example:

We have been doing this research **since** the start of the semester.

We have been doing this research **for** three months.

We plan to finish this research **by** June 5.

We planned to research from fall **to** spring.

We will complete this research **during** the spring semester.



Spatial Prepositions

Spatial prepositions include **at**, **in**, and **on**; these prepositions relate directly to the point that is being described.

At can be used to describe a vicinity, **on** describes a surface and **in** describes an area that is restricted to boundaries.

For example:

We did our research **at** the library.

We did our research **on** campus.

We did our research **in** the lab.

Abstract uses of these prepositions can also be used and the same rules should apply.

For example:

This is groundbreaking research **in** the engineering field.

Locational prepositions can also express proximity; prepositions that determine proximity include **over**, **under**, **between**, **near**, **around**, **within**, and **above**. They can also be abstract.

For example:

This research happens **under** the supervision of an advisor.

We found the answers **between** two data points.

The data is **within** the range that we expected.

Our office is **near** the lab, but not next to it.



Directional Prepositions

Directional prepositions express the movement of a noun. These include **to**, **through**, **from** and **toward**.

To is used to express approaching something, and it can be abstract—a person having something done “to” them is still directional.

For example,

I am going **to** the lab.

We gave the results **to** our advisor.

Through describes movement between two points that is linear.

For example:

We had to get **through** the literature review before we began our methodology.

From is used to express the concept of starting at a specified point.

For example:

We had to start **from** these findings in order to get our best results.

Toward is also an approach like “to” but can be temporal as it means the noun has not reached a specified point yet.

For example:

We are working **toward** a better research method but have not achieved it yet.