PREPOSITIONS
Basic Uses of Prepositions

INTRODUCTION
A preposition shows a relationship between its object and other words in a sentence. The preposition may be in the form of one word (at, by, in, on, etc.) or in the form of a phrase that functions as a unit (in front of, by way of, etc.).

Some of the relationships that prepositions express are place or position, direction, time, manner, and agent.

The book is on the desk. (place or position)
The boy ran toward the house. (direction)
The man arrived at ten o’clock. (time)
He travels by train. (manner)
The book was written by him. (agent)

A preposition + an object forms a phrase. This kind of phrase usually functions as a modifier (adjective or verb).

The report of the meeting was read. (adjective)
We go to class at ten o’clock. (adverb)

PREPOSITIONS of PLACE or POSITION

The following sentences and illustrations show some of the relationships of place or position expressed by various prepositions:

The paper is in/on the desk. He is sitting beside/against her.
Jack is in front of/in back of/behind the car. They walked across the park.
behind/under the bridge.

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77b. Below is a list of some prepositions that indicate relationships of place or position:

1. at  
   Elizabeth is at the store.  
   Is Mary at home?

2. to  
   Elizabeth went to the store.  
   from  
   Mr. MacDonald is from Scotland.

3. in  
   Mr. Brown is sitting in the leather chair in the lobby.  
   on  
   Put a stamp on the envelope.  
   Please sit on the sofa.

4. by  
   The matches are over there by the cigarettes.  
   beside  
   The napkin is placed beside the plate.  
   near  
   They are sitting near the window.  
   against  
   Don’t lean against the stove.

5. over  
   Our apartment is directly over yours.  
   under  
   The box is under the table.  
   beneath  
   The closet is beneath the stairs.  
   underneath  
   Put a pad underneath the rug.  
   on top of  
   The carpenter is on top of the house.

6. behind  
   The chair is behind the desk.  
   in back of  
   John is standing in back of Harry.  
   in front of  
   There is a car parked in front of the house.

7. up  
   I saw Mr. Jones walking up the street.  
   down  
   There is a service station about two miles down the road.

8. across  
   They live across the street from us.  
   Around  
   Let’s take a walk around
IN

a. Idea of enclosure; something or being inside
   The pencil is in the drawer. The teacher is in the classroom.

b. in + city
   Carol lives in Chicago.

c. in + state
   Carbondale is in Illinois.

d. in + country
   I arrived in the United States three weeks ago.

AT

a. at + specific place
   My plane landed at Kennedy Airport. Harry is at Alice’s party.

b. at + addresses with numbers
   He lives at 509 South Wall Street.

ON

a. on + specific street
   I live on Main Street.

b. on + surface
   The book is on the table. Your shoes are on the floor.
   The students are going to meet on campus.

TIME

IN

a. in + month
   He arrived here in February.

b. in + year
   Lincoln was born in 1809.

c. in + part of a day
   I don’t like to get up in the morning.

d. in + season
   It snows in winter.

AT

a. at + specific time
   Grammar class begins at 12:10.
   My classes end at 3:30.
   I eat lunch at noon.
   I go to bed at midnight.

ON

a. on + days of the week
   I sleep late on Saturdays.
   He goes to church on Sunday.
   I hate to go to work on Monday.

b. on + complete date
   He was born on July 19, 1957.