

# A ROUGH GUIDE TO PREPOSITIONS

La Salle University Writing Handouts



Most English prepositions have several different functions (for instance, one well-known dictionary lists eighteen main uses of "at") at the same time, different prepositions can have very similar uses (in the morning, on Monday morning, at night). Often the correct preposition cannot be guessed, and one has to learn the expression as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

## CONVEYING TIME

Preposition	Description	Example
At	at a specific time	<i>At</i> 9:00, the bell rang.
On	on a specific day or date	My birthday is <i>on</i> June 4.
In	part of a 24 hour period	I did my homework <i>in</i> the evening.
By	by a specific time or date	My paper is due tomorrow <i>by</i> noon.

## CONVEYING PLACE

Preposition	Description	Example
At	at a place at the edge of something at the corner at a target	Meet me <i>at</i> the restaurant. We were sitting <i>at</i> the bar. The bus stopped <i>at</i> the corner <i>of</i> 6th and Congress. She threw the dart <i>at</i> the bullseye.
On	on a surface on a street on an electric medium	The cat sat <i>on</i> the table. I live <i>on</i> Lamar Boulevard. He appeared <i>on</i> the Conan O'Brien show.
In	in an enclosed space in a geographic location in a print medium	The light is on <i>in</i> the bathroom. It is hot <i>in</i> Texas. The birth announcement was <i>in</i> the paper.
By	by a landmark	The tour goes <i>by</i> the UT tower.
Of	of a material of a kind	The moon is made <i>of</i> cheese. He is one <i>of</i> the faculty members.
From	from a specific place from a place of origin. from a source	I just came <i>from</i> the gym. I am <i>from</i> Dallas, Texas. He quoted <i>from</i> the Bible.
About	about a place about to do something about time	The papers were scattered <i>about</i> the room. I'm <i>about</i> to clean my room. It's <i>about</i> 3:00 in the afternoon.
To	to a place to a degree	I went <i>to</i> court. We'll have to compromise <i>to</i> some degree.

<sup>1</sup>Swan, Michael. *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 436

