# A Rough Guide to Prepositions

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.1

## Conveying Time

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

## Conveying Place

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

Swan, Michael. *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 436.