English Prepositions in Context

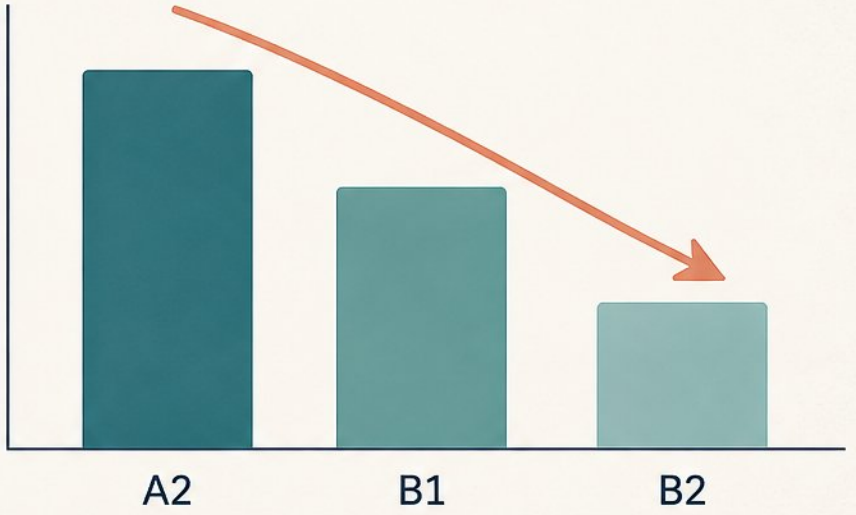
- Why prepositions matter: frequent, but still a top error area at A2–B2
- Roadmap: form and meaning → space → time → fixed chunks → context → diagnosis → practice → assessment
- Three working categories: grammatical, semantic, and dependent (chunk-based)
- You will learn to choose, correct, and produce contextually appropriate prepositions



The Evidence: Why Prepositions Are Hard

- Prepositions rank third among grammatical error types in spoken learner data
- Error rates fall with level: ~14.5 per 100 words at A2, 12.2 at B1, 8.0 at B2
- Accuracy improves but errors persist — over 11% of prepositions still inaccurate
- Most error-prone items are *at*, *in*, *on*, *to*, *for* — the highest-frequency prepositions
- Wrong selection dominates; omission is typical at A2, substitution at B1–B2
- Dependent prepositions add a distinct share — evidence for chunk-based teaching

Preposition Error Rates by Level

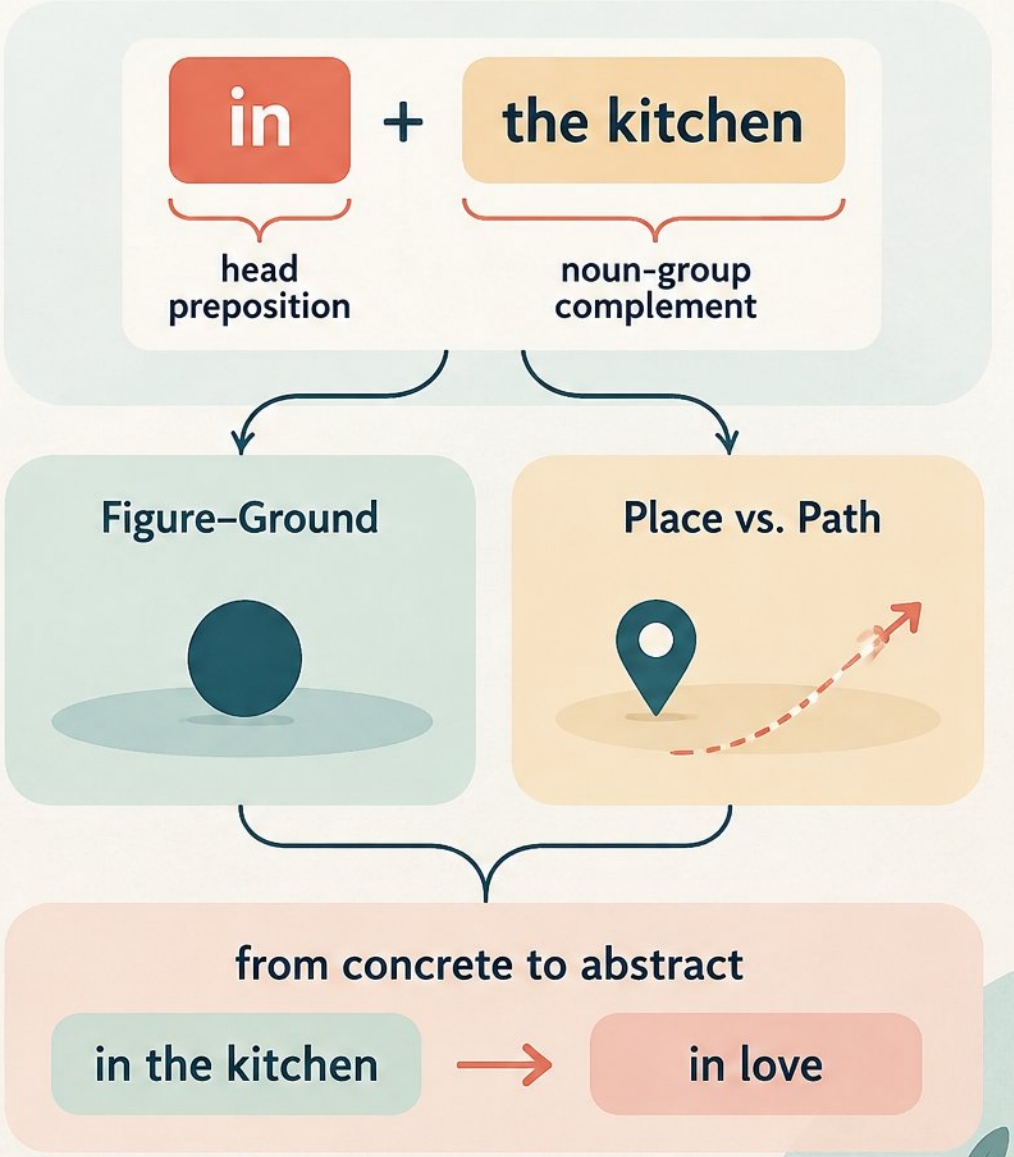


Most error-prone prepositions

at **in** **on** **to** **for**

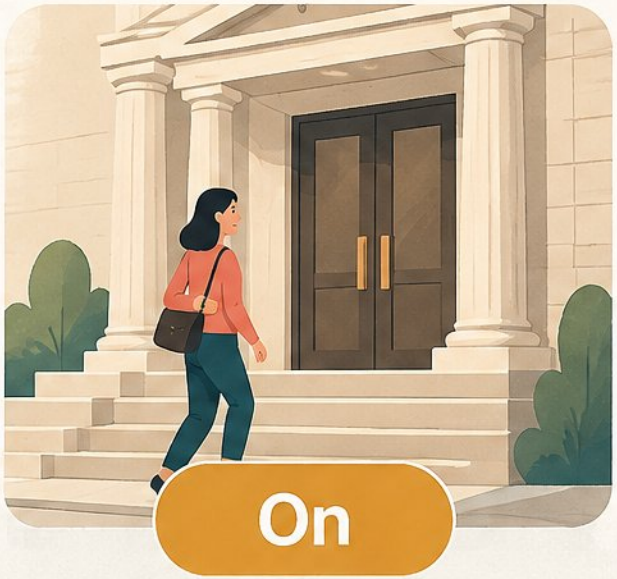
A Working Framework: Form, Meaning, and Function

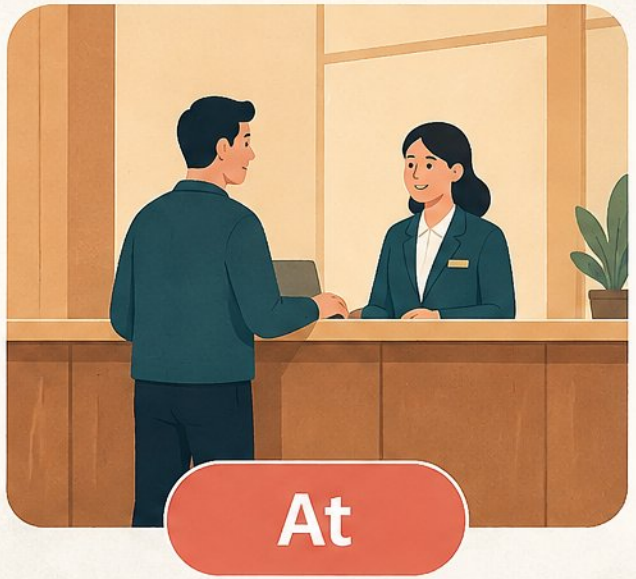
- Structure: head preposition + noun-group complement *(in the kitchen, at work)*
- Figure–Ground and Place vs. Path: core semantic machinery behind most uses
- Spatial sense extends to abstract meaning: *in the kitchen → in love*
- Same preposition, three jobs: grammatical, lexical, dependent *(depend on, in charge of)*
- Core course principle: context, not isolated rules, selects the natural choice



Space and Place: In, On, At and Beyond





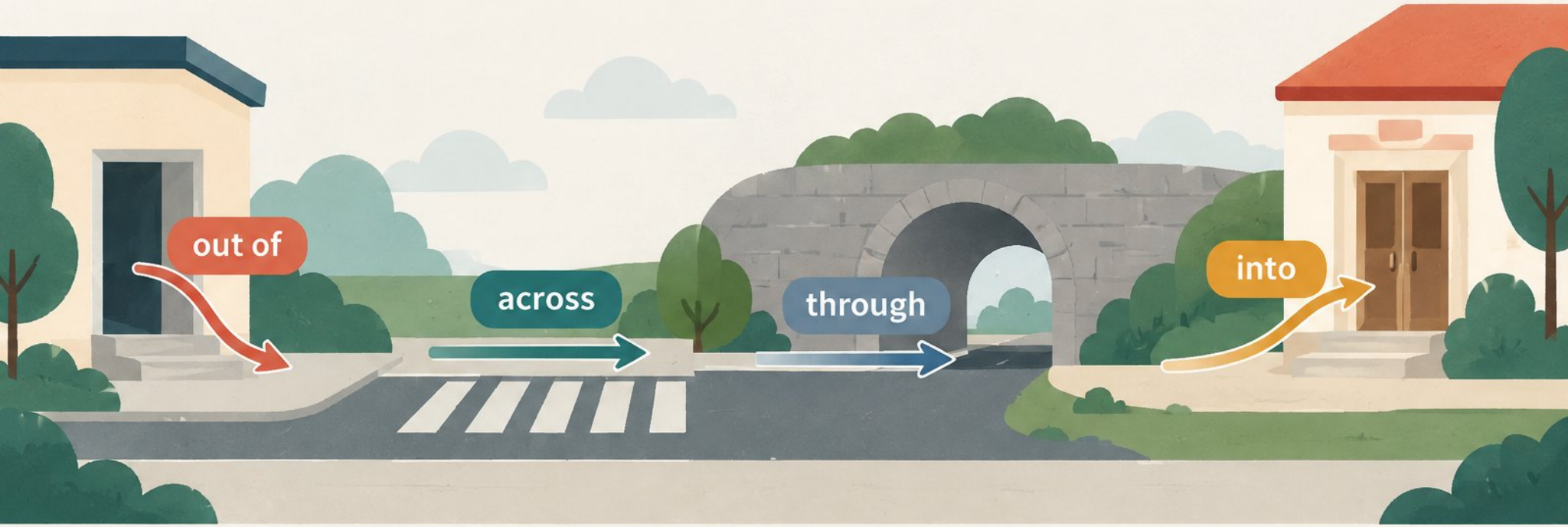


- **In** = containment: in the kitchen, in the box
- **On** = surfaces and lines: on the table, on the street
- **At** = points and institutions: at the door, at the graveyard
- Same noun, different sense: in the bank (inside) vs *at the bank* (location)
- Check: container, surface, or point? Location or institution?

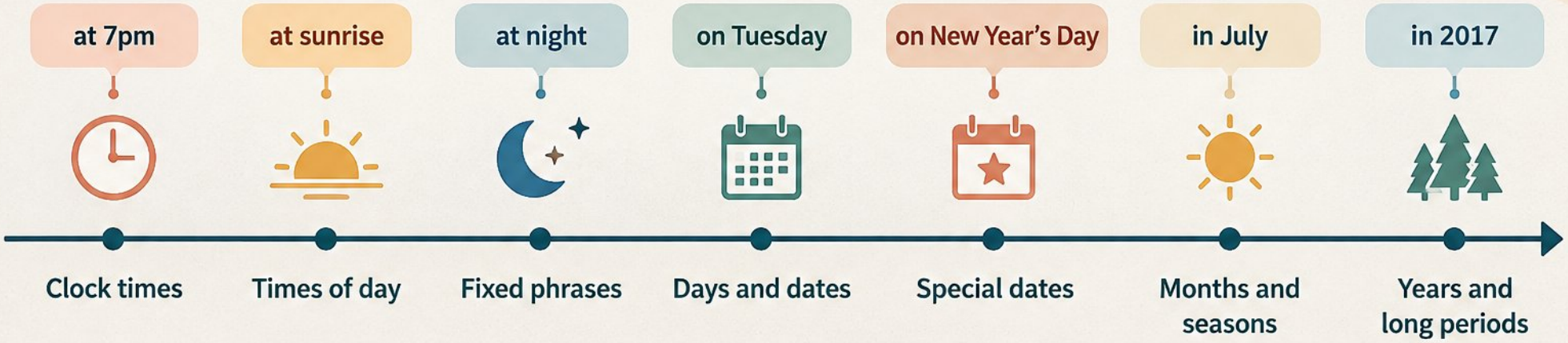


Movement and Direction: Path, Source, and Goal

- **Goal and direction:** to, into, onto — into and onto add Place to Path
- **Source and separation:** from, out of, off
- **Path and route:** across, through, over, under
- **Learners often substitute** in/on for into/onto; check for change of location
- **Same verb, different direction:** walk to / into / out of the room



Time and Duration: Points, Periods, and Deadlines



- **At** for clock times: at 7pm, at sunrise, at midnight
- **On** for days and dates: on Tuesday, on 8 September
- **In** for months, years, seasons, long periods: in July, in 2017
- **For** duration, **by** for deadlines, **since** for starting points
- **Fixed phrases override rules**: at night, on New Year's Day
- **No preposition** with next, last, this, every, all, any
- **Contrasts:** in time vs on time; at the end vs in the end

Dependent Prepositions: Adjective, Verb, and Noun Patterns

Adjective + preposition

interested in, good at, afraid of, responsible for

- She is **interested in** art.
- He is **good at** math.
- I am **afraid of** snakes.
- They are **responsible for** the project.

Verb + preposition

depend on, belong to, apologize for, apply for

- We **depend on** your support.
- This book **belongs to** me.
- I **apologize for** the mistake.
- She will **apply for** the position.

Noun + preposition

reason for, increase in, solution to, access to

- The **reason for** the delay is clear.
- There was an **increase in** demand.
- We need a **solution to** the problem.
- He has **access to** the information.

One word, different meanings

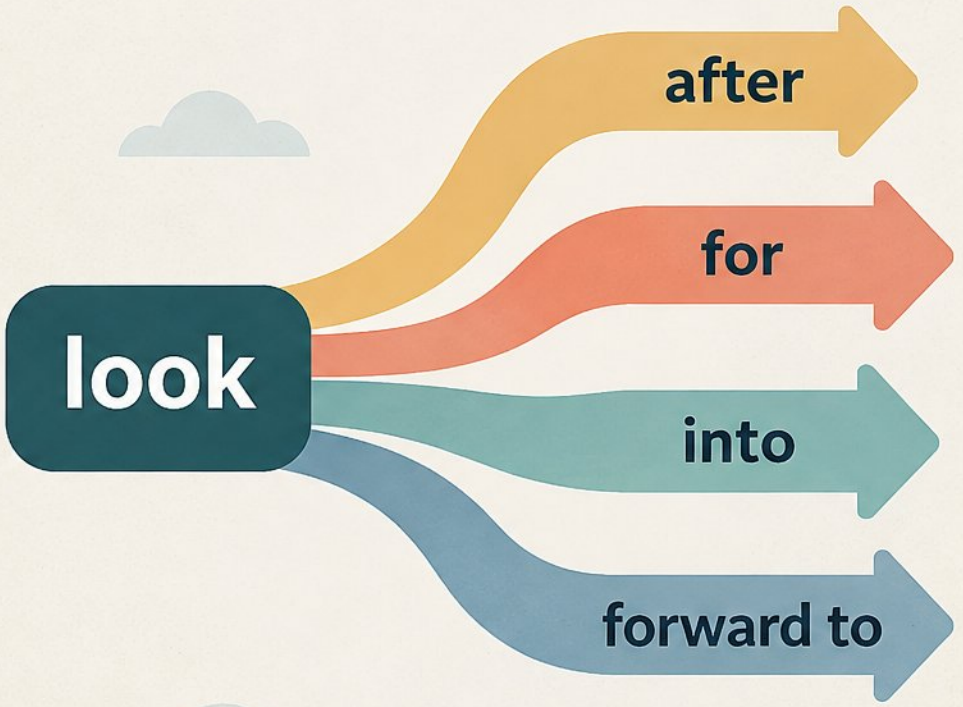
good at (skill), **good for** (benefit), **good to** (kindness)

Learn as chunks

content word + preposition + realistic completion

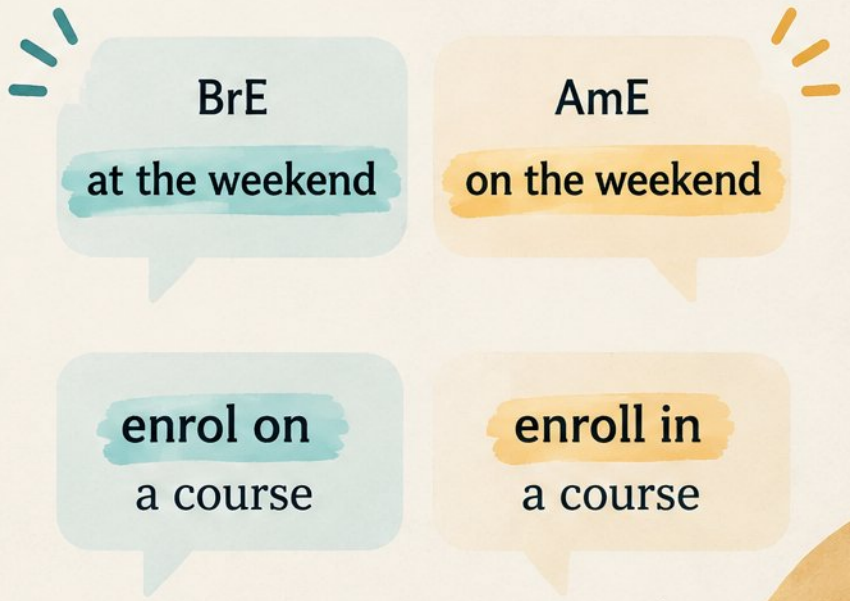
Phrasal Verbs and Idiomatic Prepositional Phrases

- Particle vs. preposition: different syntax, different word order
- Same verb, new meaning: look after, look for, look into, look forward to
- Separable verbs and pronouns: pick it up, not pick up it
- Workplace idioms: in charge of, on behalf of, in accordance with
- Keep these distinct from grammaticalized prepositions and free spatial phrases



Register and Variety: Choosing the Natural Option

- BrE at the weekend / AmE on the weekend; enrol on vs enroll in a course
- Optional variants: different from/to/than; meet vs meet with; write vs write to
- AmE often drops ’on’ before days: She resigned Thursday
- Formal vs informal: in accordance with vs according to; with regard to vs regarding
- Check learner dictionaries and corpora for what naturally co-occurs



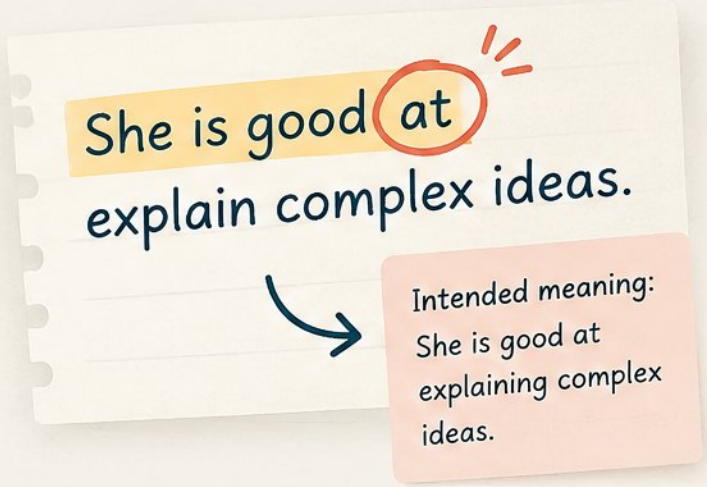


Diagnosing and Correcting Preposition Errors

Error types: wrong selection, addition, omission, wrong dependent preposition

Main causes: L1 influence, rule overgeneralization, cross-variety confusion

Correction routine: fix the preposition, keep the meaning and natural flow



Error log: wrong form | intended meaning | correct chunk | context

Wrong form	Intended meaning	Correct chunk	Context
at	She is good at explaining complex ideas.	good at explaining	She is good at explain complex ideas.

Link the log to spaced revision and later practice tasks



Practice Design: Tasks That Make Prepositions Stick

Meaning grows with practice

Gap Fill

She walked ___ the park.

Train real choice in context

Information-Gap



Use information to exchange meaning

Matching / Reordering



Anchor place, direction, and time

Collocation Hunt & Concordance



Build pattern awareness

- Contextualized gap fills train real choice; isolated drills train quick recognition
- Information-gap, matching, and reordering tasks anchor place, direction, and time
- Collocation hunts and mini concordance investigations build pattern awareness
- Explicit instruction with input enhancement and DDL outperforms pure rule drills
- Adapt task types for classroom teaching, self-study, and course materials

Assessment: Measuring Accuracy, Naturalness, and Context Fit



Receptive tasks:
multiple choice, matching, error identification in context



Productive tasks:
guided writing, information-gap speaking, chunk completion



Rubric:
preposition accuracy, chunk naturalness, context fit



Match targets to level:
A2 ~14.5,
B1 ~12.2,
B2 ~8.0 errors per 100 words



Avoid testing isolated prepositions or penalizing acceptable variety

Implementing This in Your Course: A 4-Week Action Plan

Week 1



map materials to space, time, and chunk framework

Week 2



build a corpus-informed mini lexical bank by level

Week 3



run contextualized and DDL practice with error logs

Week 4



assess formatively and review logs against rubric dimensions



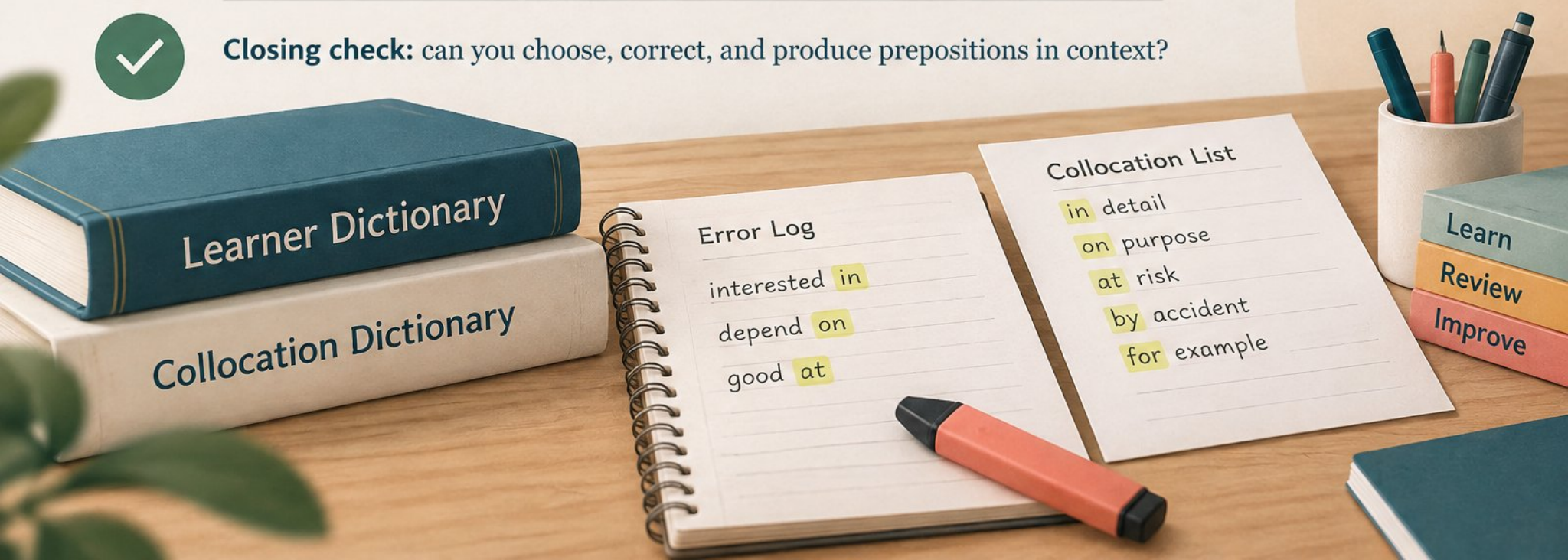
Adapt notes for teachers, self-study learners, and curriculum creators



Review and Next Steps:
Resources, Targets, and a Personal Plan

- **Key takeaways:** context over rules, chunks over isolated prepositions, variety awareness
- **Resource toolkit:** learner dictionaries, corpus tools (e.g., COCA, BNC), collocation dictionaries
- **Personal targets:** three dependent chunks and two fixed time phrases this month
- **Review schedule:** spaced revision of your error log; progress checkpoints
- **Closing check:** can you choose, correct, and produce prepositions in context?

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