

A **preposition** is a word used to establish relationships between nouns, between nouns and verbs and between different parts of a sentence. Prepositions usually have spatial or temporal meanings (e.g. beneath, between, in front of, before, after, during, etc). Prepositions are invariable, that is, they have one form with the exception of **à** and **de** which contract with the definite articles (**le, la, les**).

Translating prepositions is notoriously tricky. Never assume that French will use the same preposition as English to express a particular meaning. In fact, there are many cases where one language requires a preposition where the other does not. This is particularly problematic with infinitives followed by prepositions. In general, it is best to treat prepositions as vocabulary items requiring memorization.

In the following sentences, these problems are demonstrated by translating the French prepositions literally. Note how awkward the English translation is as a result.

Bette est fâchée **contre** Tammy.

Bette is angry **against** Tammy.
Bette is angry at Tammy.

Tex téléphone **à** Joe-Bob.

Tex telephones **to** Joe-Bob.
Tex telephones Joe-Bob.

Literal translations are also awkward in situations where a preposition is not used in French but is required in English.

Fiona attend le bus.

Fiona waits the bus.
Fiona waits for the bus.

Joe-Bob écoute la radio.

Joe-Bob listens the radio.
Joe-Bob listens to the radio.

