Prepositions of Direction: To, On (to), In (to)

Three prepositions that express movement toward something are to, on(to), and in(to).

1. The basic preposition of a direction is to. To signifies orientation toward a goal. When the goal is physical, such as a destination, to implies movement in the direction of the goal.
   - Example: I am trying to study for my test.

   When the goal is not a physical place, for instance, an action, to marks a verb; it is attached as an infinitive and expresses purpose. The preposition may occur alone or in the phrase in order.
   - Example: The family traveled to Florida to visit family.

2. Verbs of motion, on and in, have a directional meaning and can be used along with onto and into. (See the sections below for some exceptions to this rule.) This is why to is inside parentheses in the title of the handout, showing that it is somewhat optional with the compound prepositions. Thus, the following sentences are roughly synonymous:
   - Examples: The children threw their pennies into the fountain.
   - The cowboy jumped onto the back of the horse.
   - My father climbed up onto the roof to hang the lights.

   Some verbs of motion express the idea that the subject causes itself or some physical object to be situated in a certain place. Of these verbs, some take only on. Others take both on and onto, with the latter being preferred by some speakers.
   - Examples: The bird perched on the branch. (not onto the branch)
   - Her puppy must be kept on a leash. (not onto a leash)
   - He placed the star on the Christmas tree.
   - Sue spread the icing onto the cupcakes.

   Verbs taking only on are rare: set may be another one, and so perhaps is put. Other verbs taking both prepositions are raise, scatter (when it takes a direct object), pour, and add.
   - Example: The concrete was poured onto the street.
   - The pearls scattered onto the floor when the necklace broke.
   - The family decided to add onto the house when they ran out of room.

To the extent that these pairs do differ, the compound preposition conveys the completion of an action, while the simple preposition points to the position of the subject as a result of that action. This distinction helps us understand how directional and locational prepositions are related: they stand in the relationship of cause and effect.

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<th>Completion of an Action</th>
<th>Position of Subject</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jack climbed on the roof.</td>
<td>Jack is on the roof.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We dropped the pennies into the fountain.</td>
<td>The pennies are in the fountain.</td>
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3. Uses of \textit{into}:

With verbs of motion, \textit{into} and \textit{in} are interchangeable except when the preposition is the last word or occurs directly before an adverbial of time, manner, or frequency.

- **Examples:** The students went \textit{into} the classroom.
  The students went \textit{in}. (not into).
  We went \textit{into} the store to buy groceries this morning.
  We went \textit{in} this morning.

In an information question, \textit{into} also can be last word except for an adverbial when its object is questioned by a \textit{wh-} word:

- **Examples:** What kind of mess are you getting yourself \textit{into}?
  What kind of mess are you \textit{in}?

Verbs expressing stationary position take only \textit{on} or \textit{in} with the ordinary meanings of those prepositions. If a verb allows the object of the preposition to be omitted, the construction may have an idiomatic meaning.

- **Examples:** The man sat \textit{on} the bench
  The teacher is \textit{in} the classroom.
  The professor is \textit{in}. (available for meeting)

\textit{In(to)} has two special uses with move. When \textit{move in} is followed by a purpose clause, it has the sense of \textit{approach}. In the following example, \textit{in} is part of the verb, so you cannot use \textit{into}.

- **Examples:** The cat \textit{moved in} to pounce on the mouse.

When \textit{into} is used with move, it functions as an ordinary preposition to convey the idea of moving something from one place to another.

- **Example:** I am going to \textit{move into} my new house today.

4. Uses of \textit{to}:

\textit{To} occurs with several classes of verbs: \textit{verb + to + infinitive}. Verbs in this group express willingness (be willing, consent, refuse), desire (desire, want, wish, ask, request, prefer) intention (intend, plan, prepare), or obligation (be obligated, have, need).

- **Examples:** I refuse \textit{to} play games with someone who cheats.
  While some people enjoy sports, I prefer \textit{to} play the piano.
  The student \textit{prepared to} study abroad for the summer.
  I \textit{need to} go grocery shopping this weekend.

In other cases, \textit{to} is used as an ordinary preposition. Verbs of communication: \textit{listen}, speak (but not \textit{tell}), relate, appeal (in the sense of 'plead,' not 'be attractive'). Verbs of movement: \textit{move, go, transfer, walk, run, swim, ride, drive, fly}, and \textit{travel}.

- **Examples:** I am \textit{listening to} my favorite singer.
  The friends \textit{relate to} each other well.
  I am \textit{traveling to} Florida for vacation.