

The many meanings of **on**

Name _____

Date _____

DIRECTIONS

The word **on** is printed in bold in every sentence below. Read each group and notice how its meaning shifts — and how the sign changes along with it. Then write your own sentences on the blank lines.

1 PLACEMENT (CLASSIFIER)

showing where something sits, using a classifier

- ♦ The vase is **on** the table.
- ♦ Put the coffee **on**.

2 NEAR OR ALONGSIDE

located at the edge of a place

- ♦ We have a house **on** the beach.
- ♦ My parents live **on** the border.

3 A SPECIFIC DATE

naming the day something happens

- ♦ America celebrates its independence **on** July 4th.
- ♦ The meeting is always **on** the 3rd Thursday.

4 FOR THE PURPOSE OF

because of something, or for a stated reason

- ♦ My son is often out of town **on** business.
 - ♦ The man was arrested **on** reasonable suspicion.
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5 KEEP GOING

to continue without stopping

- ♦ He worked **on** quietly.
 - ♦ The angry couple drove **on** in silence.
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6 ONE AFTER ANOTHER

piling up, again and again

- ♦ Your math paper has error **on** error.
 - ♦ My piano playing has mistakes **on** mistakes.
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7 ABOUT OR CONCERNING

on the subject of something

- ♦ Do you have a book **on** astronomy?
 - ♦ The university has courses **on** linguistics.
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8 ONTO (DIRECTIONAL)

landing or falling toward a surface

- ♦ He threw the book **on** the floor.
 - ♦ The tree fell **on** the picnic table.
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9 CARRYING WITH YOU

in your pocket, or on your person

- ♦ I haven't a cent **on** me.
 - ♦ The police thought he had drugs **on** him, but he didn't.
 - ♦ No, I don't have my driver's license **on** me right now.
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10 AT THE MOMENT WHEN

as soon as something happens

- ♦ **On** entering the room, she saw him.
 - ♦ **On** hearing her name, the new Miss America began crying.
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11 EXACTLY AT A TIME

precisely at the stated moment

- ♦ The chimes ring every hour **on** the hour.
 - ♦ Synchronize your watches **on** my mark — now.
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12 HAPPENING NOW

taking place, or scheduled to take place

- ♦ The show is **on**.
 - ♦ There is a party **on** tonight.
 - ♦ The Jerry Lewis telethon is **on** today.
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CHALLENGE

Here is the surprise: in ASL, most of these sentences are signed with no sign for *on* at all. The meaning comes from where you place things in space, or from a directional verb. Choose three groups, write a sentence for each, and be ready to sign it without ever signing *on*.

THINK ABOUT IT

All twelve groups use the same English word, but they do not share the same meaning — and in ASL they do not share the same sign. Choose one of your own sentences from each group and be ready to sign it for the class.