

## Mastering Prepositions of Place: How to Use In, On, and At Correctly

### Description

Do you ever find yourself pausing before a sentence, wondering whether to say “*in the school*,” “*on the school*,” or “*at school*”?

Prepositions of place—**in**, **on**, and **at**—can be tricky because they often translate differently across languages. However, mastering them is one of the fastest ways to sound like a native English speaker.

Test what you know with our interactive examples, read the simple breakdown below, and never mix them up again!

### ? Quick Look: Let’s See It In Action

Look at these examples to see how we use these three prepositions in everyday English:

- ? Please put the book **on** the shelf. (*On a flat surface*)
- ?? They live **in** Helsinki. (*Inside a city/country*)
- ? You should keep milk **in** the fridge. (*Inside an enclosed space*)
- ? Mette is studying **at** the library. (*At a specific location for an activity*)

### ? The Ultimate Grammar Explanation

We use the prepositions **in**, **on**, and **at** to say exactly where things or people are located. In a sentence, they always go directly **before a noun**.

Think of them like a funnel moving from the biggest, most general spaces down to the most specific points:

Plaintext

---

\            IN (General / Large Areas)            /

---

-----  
ON (Specific / Surfaces)  
-----

AT (Exact Point / Address)

## ? 1. When to Use “IN” (Enclosed Spaces & Areas)

We use **in** to talk about a place that is **inside a larger or three-dimensional space**, such as a container, a room, a city, or a country.

### ? Inside a physical space or container:

- wardrobe The clothes are **in** the wardrobe.
- ?? There's a bookshop **in** the shopping centre.
- ? The children are playing **in** the park.

### ?? Cities, Countries, and Regions:

- ?? My grandmother was born **in** Sweden.
- ?? I used to live **in** New York.

### ?? Other common physical locations using “IN”:

- ? **In** the world
- ? **In** the water / the sea / a river / a lake / a pool
- ?? **In** the mountains / the countryside / a valley / the forest
- ? **In** a car / a taxi (Note: *Smaller, private transport uses “in”*)

## ?? 2. When to Use “ON” (Surfaces, Lines & Public Transport)

We use **on** to talk about a position on top of a **flat surface** or a line.

### ? On a surface:

- ?? The books are **on** the desk.
- ? We live **on** the fifth floor.
- ?? There are pictures **on** the wall.
- ?? My dog likes sleeping **on** the sofa.

### ? Public Transport:

Unlike cars, we use **on** for larger public transportation where you can usually stand up or walk around.

- ? He's **on** the bus now.
- ?? You can't make phone calls **on** a plane.

- ? They go to school **on** the train.

## ?? Lines, Borders, Streets, and Islands:

- ?? London is **on** the River Thames.
- ?? The Pyrenees are **on** the border of Spain and France.
- ?? There's a market **on** James Street.
- ?? I'd love to live **on** the Isle of Wight.

## ? 3. When to Use "AT" (Specific Points & Activities)

We use **at** for **exact positions, specific addresses, or places where a particular activity happens.**

### ?? Common phrases for places of activity:

- ? I'm **at** work.
- ? She's working **at** home today.
- ? The children eat lunch **at** school.
- ? See you **at** the train station!
- ? They're **at** the supermarket.
- ? I met him **at** a party.

### ? Exact addresses and positions:

- ? I live **at** 15 Craig Street. (*Note: "on Craig Street" but "at 15 Craig Street"*)
- ? She's sitting **at** a desk.
- ? He's waiting **at** the entrance.
- ? Please sit **at** the back of the room.

## ? Practice Time: Grammar Test

Test your skills! Choose the correct preposition (**in**, **on**, or **at**) for each sentence below:

1. My keys are \_\_\_\_\_ my pocket.
2. Meet me \_\_\_\_\_ the entrance of the cinema.
3. Look at that beautiful painting \_\_\_\_\_ the wall!
4. We spent our holiday \_\_\_\_\_ the mountains.
5. She arrived \_\_\_\_\_ the airport three hours early.

? Drop your answers in the comments section below and let our team at Advanced English Lab check your work!

### Date

2026/06/17

### Date Created

2026/06/17

### Author

writer

*AdvancedEnglishLab.com*