

Prepositions of place: at, on and in

CEFR A1-A2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

In puts something inside a space, on puts it on a surface, and at marks a point. The same object can take all three, depending on how you see it.

The rule

In: inside a space

- Use in for a container or an enclosed space: in the box, in the fridge, in the garden, in the car.
- Use in for cities, countries and large areas: in London, in Japan, in the north, in the mountains.
- Use in for liquids and lines: in the water, in the mirror, in a queue.
- The space does not need walls: in the sky, in the field, in the sea.

On: on a surface

- Use on for a flat surface: on the table, on the wall, on the floor, on the page.
- Use on for a line or an edge: on the river, on the coast, on the left.
- Use on for public transport and bikes: on the bus, on the train, on a plane, on a bike.
- Use on for streets, floors and islands: on Oxford Street, on the second floor, on a small island.

At: a point or a place of activity

- Use at for a point on a map: at the bus stop, at the corner, at the traffic lights, at the door.
- Use at for places where something happens: at school, at work, at the station, at the party.
- Use at for a person's home or workplace: at Anna's, at the doctor's.
- At does not mean inside. "At the station" means near it or in that place, not necessarily in the building.

Fixed patterns with transport and buildings

- Cars and taxis take in: in a car, in a taxi. Buses, trains and planes take on: on a bus, on a train.
- Buildings seen as activities take at: at school, at university, at church, at home.
- Buildings seen as buildings take in or at: in the school building, at the hospital entrance.
- The bed takes in or on by meaning: in bed (sleeping), on the bed (on top of it).

Other position words

- Under, over, above and below compare heights: under the bridge, over the door, above the clouds.
- Between is for two things; among is for three or more.
- Next to, beside, near and by mean close to something.
- In front of, behind, opposite and across from show facing and distance.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. The milk is ___ the fridge.

2. Your phone is ___ the table.

3. We met ___ the bus stop.

4. She lives ___ Paris.

5. They live ___ a quiet street.

6. I read my book ___ the train.

7. She waited ___ the car while I paid.

8. The children are ___ school now.

9. The cat is sleeping ___ the table.

10. The bank is ___ the cafe and the bookshop.

11. There is a picture ___ the wall.

12. He is ___ home today.

13. The boat sailed ___ the river.

14. There is a fly ___ the ceiling.

15. I will wait for you ___ the corner.

16. She put the flowers ___ the vase.

17. The plane flew ___ the clouds.

18. He sat ___ me during the lesson.

19. We arrived ___ the airport at noon.

20. The cafe is ___ the theatre, on the other side of the road.

Answer key

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1. **in** — The fridge is a space or container, so it takes in.
2. **on** — The table is a surface, so it takes on.
3. **at** — A bus stop is a meeting point on a map, so it takes at.
4. **in** — A city is a large space, so it takes in.
5. **on** — A street is a line, and streets take on.
6. **on** — Trains take on in the fixed transport pattern.
7. **in** — A car is a container, so it takes in.
8. **at** — School as an activity takes at, meaning they are pupils there.
9. **under** — Under describes the position below the table, which matches a sleeping cat.
10. **between** — Between connects exactly two places, so it fits here.
11. **on** — The wall is a surface, so the picture is on it.
12. **at** — At home is the fixed phrase for being at the place where you live.
13. **on** — A river is treated as a line or surface, so boats travel on it.
14. **on** — The ceiling is a surface, and the fly is on it.
15. **at** — A corner works as a point, so it takes at.
16. **in** — A vase is a container, so the flowers go in it.
17. **above** — Above compares height and means higher than the clouds.
18. **next to** — Next to means beside, which describes two people sitting together.
19. **at** — The airport is a point in a journey, so it takes at.
20. **opposite** — Opposite means facing the theatre across the road, so it fits the meaning.