

LEARN PREPOSITIONS OF TIME & PLACE: IN-ON-AT



The prepositions *in-on-at* often cause confusion for language learners. But don't worry. In this lesson, you'll learn how to use them easily. We'll teach you a few simple tricks to help you understand the differences between them, which will really improve your writing and speaking skills. Read over the information. Then, do the exercises on the following pages.

Please note! This is a very quick and easy summary. We won't cover every case – we just want you to master the most important parts! 😊

PREPOSITION IMAGE TO HELP YOU!

Look at the image with the circle, rectangle and triangle. In general...



- **IN** refers to a big period of time (months, years) or area (city, country...).
- **ON** refers to a smaller period of time (days) or a surface (table, floor...).
- **AT** refers to a very specific time (clock times) or point (the corner of a road, the entrance to a building...).

Now let's look at prepositions of time and place separately.

PREPOSITIONS OF TIME: IN, ON, AT

Here's a very quick and easy-to-remember summary:

- **In:** for months and years: in May, in 2001, in the 1970s...
- **On:** for days: on Monday, on Saturdays, on 8th April, on Christmas Day...
- **At:** for times: at 7 o'clock, at midday, at midnight...

Here's a picture to help you remember these three things:



- The dog went to the mountains **in December**.
- The dog went to the park **on Monday**.
- The dog went to sleep **at 10pm**.

Here are some more examples of the

prepositions of time *in, on, at* with a few more cases.

Preposition of Time: IN

- They bought their new house **in May**. [month]
- She graduated from university **in 2015**. [year]
- That style was popular **in the 1980s**. [decade]
- Great discoveries were made **in the 20th century**. [century]
- We love going to the beach **in the summer**. [season]
- I usually read **in the morning**. [parts of the day]

Preposition of Time: ON

- The meeting is scheduled **on Tuesday**. [specific day]
- We usually go shopping **on Saturdays**. [general day]
- She was born **on 15th July**. [calendar day]
- They went to the beach **on New Year's Day**. [holiday]
- They had a party **on their anniversary**. [special days]

Preposition of Time: AT

- The train arrives **at 7:30am**. [clock time]
- We had dinner **at midnight**. [specific time]
- They met **at lunchtime**. [mealtime]
- People often travel **at Easter**. [holiday name (Easter) without the specific day]
- We're going to the countryside **at the weekend**. [weekend – British English]

NO PREPOSITION!

We don't use a preposition with the 'time' words below:

- **Last:** I went there **last Tuesday**.
- **Next:** I'll see you **next June**.
- **Every:** I go jogging **every day**.



- **Each:** She visits us **each summer**.
- **This:** I saw her **this morning**.
- **That:** He left that **evening**.
- **Yesterday:** I saw her **yesterday**.
- **Today:** I bought it **today**.
- **Tomorrow:** I'll call you **tomorrow**.

IN TIME VERSUS ON TIME!

If you do something *in time*, you do it before the deadline with enough time:

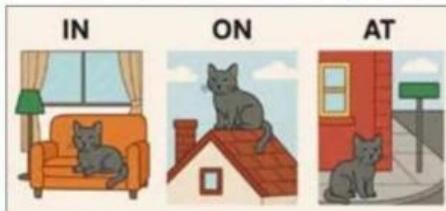
- We submitted the report **in time** for the meeting **at 2pm**. [some time before 2pm]
- They completed all the work **in time**. [before the deadline]

If you do something *on time*, you do it at exactly the right time:

- The train arrived **on time** at 9:00 am. [at exactly 09:00]
- I got to the meeting **on time**. [at the exact correct time]



PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE: IN, ON, AT



Here's a very quick and easy-to-remember summary:

- We use **in** for something in a closed space: in a room, in a country, in a city, in a drawer...
- We use **on** for something on a surface: on the roof, on the wall, on the bed, on the side, on the table...
- And we use **at** to describe a specific place or point: at the entrance, at the top, at the restaurant, at the house...

Here are some more examples of the prepositions of place **in**, **on**, **at** with a few more cases.

Preposition of Place: IN = enclosed space

- The children are playing in the kitchen. [in a room]
- She works in a hospital. [in a building]
- They live in London. [in a city]
- I studied in Canada for two years. [in a country]

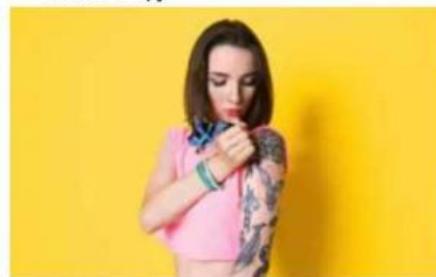


- The keys are in my bag. [in an enclosed space]
- He's sitting in the car, waiting. [in a vehicle]
- The fish are swimming in the sea. [in water]
- She's in the football team. [in a group or organisation]
- She works in the marketing department. [in a department or section]

Preposition of Place: ON = surface

- The book is on the table. [on a horizontal surface]

- There's a painting on the wall. [on a vertical surface]
- Their apartment is on the third floor. [on a level]
- The café is on Main Street. [on a road or street]
- I saw the message on my phone. [on a device screen]
- The movie is playing on the TV. [on a screen]
- She has a tattoo on her arm. [on a part of the body]



- We spent the summer on Mallorca. [on an island]
- That meeting is on the agenda. [on a piece of paper]

IN AND AT

Compare these sentences with in and at:

- The cat is **in** the airport = The cat is inside the airport – in the terminal building for example.
- The cat is **at** the airport = The cat is at the specific area of the airport, either inside or outside it.



Preposition of Place: AT= specific spot

- She lives at 25 Green Street. [specific address]
- The taxi dropped us off at the hotel entrance. [specific place]



- He gave a speech at the conference. [specific event]
- She's at the office until 6pm. [at a workplace]
- He studied at university in London. [at a university]
- There's a guard at the door. [at a specific point]
- Is anyone at home right now? [at a home or residence]
- I bought this at the supermarket. [at a shop]
- The answer is at the top of the page. [at a specific point on a picture, document...]

ON A BUS, PLANE, TRAIN...

If you can stand on the floor of a form of transport, we use the preposition **on**:

- She's **on** a plane to Miami.
- They're **on** the bus.



- He's **on** a train to Brighton.

In these cases, you could also say **in a plane**, **in a bus**, **in a train** because you're also inside an enclosed space. Curiously, we say **on a motorbike**, **on a bike**, etc. because we're sitting on the seat of this form of transport, which is a surface.

On the other hand, we say **in a car** because it's an enclosed space and you aren't standing on the floor.

If you said 'on a car' it would mean you're on the roof.



PREPOSITIONS OF TIME & PLACE: IN-ON-AT EXERCISES!

Do these exercises to check your understanding.



Answers on page 56

PREPOSITIONS OF TIME

Exercise: Prepositions of time

Complete the sentences with the correct prepositions of time: *in, on, at*.

QUICK SUMMARY REMINDER

- **In:** months, years: *in May, in 2001, in the 1970s...*
- **On:** days: *on Monday, on Saturdays, on 8th April, on Christmas Day...*
- **At:** specific times: *at 7 o'clock, at midday, at midnight...*

1. What time did you get up this morning? I got up at about 7am.
2. What time did you leave the house this morning? I left the house at about 8am.
3. When is the next meeting? It's on Monday.
4. When will you see your friends again? I will see them in May.
5. When will you take your driving test? I'll take the test in October.
6. When did your friends arrive? My friends arrived on Tuesday.
7. When will you have the party? We'll have it in April.
8. What day was your birthday this year or last year? It was on Friday.
9. When did you buy the clothes online? I bought them on Sunday.
10. What time did you have the meeting? We had the meeting at 11am.
11. What time did you go to bed last night? I went to bed at about 10pm.
12. When did you visit the dentist? I went there on Thursday morning.



13. When will you do the exam? I will do the exam in June.
14. When will you have your dinner party? We'll have it in December.
15. What time did you leave work yesterday? I left work at 6pm.
16. What time were you born? I was born at 7pm.
17. What day was Christmas Day last year? It was on a Wednesday.
18. What time did you start work today? I started at 9am.
19. When is the next party? It's on Saturday 21st May.
20. When is the conference? The conference is in January, I think.

Questions: Prepositions of time

Answer the questions. Try to use the prepositions of time: *in, on, at*.

QUICK SUMMARY REMINDER

- **In:** months, years: *in May, in 2001, in the 1970s...*
- **On:** days: *on Monday, on Saturdays, on 8th April, on Christmas Day...*
- **At:** specific times: *at 7 o'clock, at midday, at midnight...*

- What time did you go for a walk yesterday? **I went for a walk at 8 in the morning.**
- When did your friends arrive?
- What time did you leave work yesterday?
- When will you see your friends again?
- When will you do the exam?
- When will you talk to your boss?
- When did you pass your driving test?
- What time did you arrive home last night?
- When will you go shopping?
- What time will the party start?
- When is the meeting?
- In which year was the company founded?
- When did you wake up at the weekend?
- When is your birthday?
- When do you usually have lunch?
- When do you usually go shopping?
- What time did the power go out?
- When does the train leave?
- When do you travel most often?
- When did you last visit your hometown?



PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

Exercise: Prepositions of place

Complete the sentences with the correct prepositions of place: *in, on, at*.

QUICK SUMMARY REMINDER: PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

- **In:** something in a closed space: *in a room, in a country, in a city...*
- **On:** something that's on a surface: *on the roof, on the wall...*
- **At:** to describe a specific point: *at the entrance, at the top...*

1. She arrived at the hotel. [the specific location and point]
2. The fish are in the aquarium.
3. He is in his room.
4. The painting is on the wall.
5. The keys are on the table.
6. The books are on the shelf.
7. We had dinner at the restaurant. [the specific location and point]
8. There is milk in the fridge.
9. She is at the bus stop. [the specific location and point]
10. The cup is on the counter. [see the image below]



11. I'm in the doctor's office. [the specific location and point]
12. He is waiting at the entrance. [the specific location and point]
13. The apples are in the basket.
14. The shoes are on the floor.
15. The phone is on the desk.
16. We met at the park. [the specific location and point]
17. I'm in the swimming pool – the water is lovely!
18. She sat on the beach.
19. She is at her friend's house. [the specific location and point]
20. They are at the airport. [the specific location and point]

Questions: Prepositions of place

Answer any of these questions. Try to use prepositions of place *in, on, at* in your answers.

QUICK SUMMARY REMINDER: PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

- **In:** something in a closed space: *in a room, in a country, in a city...*
- **On:** something that's on a surface: *on the roof, on the wall...*
- **At:** to describe a specific point: *at the entrance, at the top...*

- Where did you leave your phone?
*I left it **on** the desk because...*
- Where did you see the exhibition?
- Where did you meet your friend?
- Where did you find the book?
- Where did you see the band (group)?
- Where did you hang the painting?
- Where did you put the money?
- Where did you put your books?
- Where did you hide the jewellery?
- Where did you put the report?
- Where did you see your friend?
- Where did you go for lunch with your friends?
- Where was the restaurant?
- Where were they waiting for you?
- Where did you park your car?
- Where did you put the message?
- Where did you go on holiday last year?
- Where did you lose your passport?
- Where did you meet your partner?
- Where did you find your keys?

