

A

Compare **school** and **the school**:

Ellie is ten years old. Every day she goes **to school**. She's **at school** now. **School** starts at 9 and finishes at 3.

We say a child goes **to school** or is **at school** (as a student). We are not thinking of a specific school. We are thinking of **school** as a general idea – children learning in a classroom.



Today Ellie's mother wants to speak to her daughter's teacher. So she has gone to **the school** to see her. She's **at the school** now.

Ellie's mother is not a student. She is not 'at school', she doesn't 'go to school'. If she wants to see Ellie's teacher, she goes to **the school** (=Ellie's school, a specific building).

B

We use **prison** (or **jail**), **hospital**, **university**, **college** and **church** in a similar way. We do not use **the** when we are thinking of the general idea of these places and what they are used for.

Compare:

- Ken's brother is **in prison** for robbery. (He is a prisoner. We are not thinking of a specific prison.)
- Joe had an accident last week. He was **taken to hospital**. He's still **in hospital** now. (as a patient)
- When I leave school, I plan to go **to university** / **go to college**. (as a student)
- Sally's father goes **to church** every Sunday. (to take part in a religious service)

- Ken went to **the prison** to visit his brother. (He went as a visitor, not as a prisoner.)
- Jane has gone to **the hospital** to visit Joe. She's **at the hospital** now. (as a visitor, not as a patient)
- I went to **the university** to meet Professor Thomas. (as a visitor, not as a student)
- Some workmen went to **the church** to repair the roof. (not for a religious service)

With most other places, you need **the**. For example, **the station**, **the cinema**, (see Units 72C and 73C).

C

We say **go to bed** / **be in bed** etc. (*not the bed*):

- I'm going **to bed** now. Goodnight.
- Do you ever have breakfast **in bed**?
- but  I sat down on **the bed**. (a specific piece of furniture)

**go to work** / **be at work** / **start work** / **finish work** etc. (*not the work*):

- Chris didn't go to **work** yesterday.
- What time do you usually **finish work**?

**go home** / **come home** / **arrive home** / **get home** / **be at home** etc. :

- It's late. Let's go **home**.
- Will you be at **home** tomorrow afternoon?

D

We say **go to sea** / **be at sea** (*without the*) when the meaning is 'go/be on a voyage':

- Keith works on ships. He's **at sea** most of the time.
- but  I'd like to live near **the sea**.
- It can be dangerous to swim in **the sea**.

# Exercises

## 74.1 Complete each sentence using a preposition (to/at/in etc.) + one of these words:

bed    home    ~~hospital~~    hospital    prison    school    university    work

- Two people were injured in the accident and were taken to hospital.
- In Britain, children from the age of five have to go to school.
- Mark didn't go out last night. He stayed at home.
- There is a lot of traffic in the morning when everybody is going to work.
- Kate's mother has just had an operation. She is still in hospital.
- When Sophie leaves school, she wants to study economics at university.
- Ben never gets up before 9 o'clock. It's 8.30 now, so he is still in bed.
- If people commit crimes, they may be sent to prison.

## 74.2 Complete the sentences with **school** or **the school**.

- Why aren't your children at school today? Are they ill?
- When he was younger, Tim hated school.
- There were some parents waiting outside the school to meet their children.
- School usually starts at 8.30 in the morning.
- A: How do your children get to and from school? By bus?  
B: No, they walk. It isn't very far.
- What sort of job does Emily want to do when she leaves school?

## 74.3 Some of these sentences need **the**. Correct them where necessary.

- a 'How old is university?' 'About 200 years.' the university  
b In your country do many people go to university? OK  
c If you want to get a degree, you normally have to study at university.  
d This is a small town, but university is the biggest in the country.
- a My brother has always been healthy. He's never been in hospital.  
b When Ann was ill, I went to hospital to visit her. When I was there, I met Lisa who is a nurse at hospital.  
c A woman was injured in the accident and was taken to hospital.
- a John's mother is a regular churchgoer. She goes to church every Sunday.  
b John himself doesn't go to church.  
c John went to church to take some pictures of the building.
- a Why is she in prison? What did she do?  
b A few days ago firefighters were called to prison to put out a fire.  
c Do you think too many people are sent to prison?

## 74.4 Which is correct?

- How did you get home / get to home after the party? (get home is correct)
- I like to read in bed / in the bed before I go to sleep.
- Shall we meet after work / after the work tomorrow evening?
- I love swimming in sea / in the sea.
- It's nice to travel around, but there's no place like home / like the home!
- Sam likes to go to bed / go to the bed early, and get up early.
- I didn't sleep well in the hotel. Bed / The bed was uncomfortable.
- How long did it take to cross the ocean? How long were you at sea / at the sea?
- What time do you usually start work / the work in the morning?