Prepositions of place: in, on, at, next to

Introduction



The laptop is on the desk. The cup is next to the laptop. The flowers are in a vase.

Definition

We use the prepositions 'in', 'on', 'at' and 'next to' to for location and position.

Uses

	Uses	Examples
in	An enclosed space	in a box, a bag, a room, a cupboard, a cup
	Towns, cities, states, countries, continents etc.	in Birmingham, Kent, California, Japan, Asia
	Other large areas	in the countryside, a neighbourhood, a district, a park, a car park, a garden, the world
	Roads	in a street, a road, an avenue, the High Street, Bingley Road [UK]
	Pictures and documents	in a picture, a photo, a painting, a report, an email, a contract, a newspaper, a magazine,a book, a film
	Some (smaller) forms of transport	in a car, a taxi, a helicopter, an open boat
on	A surface - horizontal or vertical	on the table, the wall, a shelf, a screen, a plate, a face, a head, page 2, the front cover of the book, the menu
	Transport and travel	on a bus, train, a boat, a ship, a flight, a trip, a journey, a picnic, a bike ride, a break, holiday
	Some locations	on the left, the right, the side, the coast, the beach, the 2nd floor on an island, a farm, a college campus on a road/street/avenue etc. [mainly US] on a motorway, the High Street, Oxford Street [i.e. main roads]

	Uses	Examples
on (the) top of	At the highest point of something tall or high	on top of a cupboard, wardrobe, a hill, a mountain
at	Some locations that are buildings	at the cinema, the theatre, the pub, a restaurant, work, home, school, university
	Some other locations	at the beach, the lake
	A point on a journey	at a junction, traffic lights, a corner, a bus stop
	An address	at 88 Bingley Road, 10 Downing Street
	Positions	at the back, the front, the top, the bottom, the end

Examples



They're in an office.



She's in London.



She's at the reception desk.



They're at work.



Emily is on the sofa.



The pictures are on the wall.



The red wine is next to the white wine.



Sue's next to Jim.

'In' and 'out'

As adverbs, these can be used alone to mean 'here' or 'not here':

- **“Can I speak to Jack, please?”**
- **“Sorry, he's not in today. Can I take a message?” [not at work]**

- **I'm the only person at home today. Everyone else is out. [not at home]**
- **We're going* out later, maybe to the cinema; we're not sure yet.**
- **I didn't hear you come in last night; what time was it?**



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