

# Prepositions of place, direction, movement

## Introduction



The family is sitting **on** a bench **in** the garden.

Grandpa is **on** the left and mum and dad are **at** the back. Grandma is **in** the middle, **between** the children. The dog is **on** the right.

## Prepositions of place

These prepositions give us information about where something is located. The following tables give some guidelines and examples but note that you may hear some variations depending on sentence structure, context and regional variations.

## In, on, at

Uses	Examples
------	----------

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

<b>at</b>	<b>Some locations that are buildings</b>	<b>at the cinema, the theatre, the pub, a restaurant, work, home, school, university</b>
	<b>Some other locations</b>	<b>at the beach, the lake</b>
	<b>A point on a journey</b>	<b>at a junction, traffic lights, a corner, a bus stop</b>
	<b>An address</b>	<b>at 88 Bingley Road, 10 Downing Street</b>
	<b>Positions</b>	<b>at the back, the front, the top, the bottom, the end</b>

## 'In', 'on' or 'at'?

Sometimes there is more than one possibility depending on the context. For example:

The children are playing **on** the beach. [They are **on** the sand.]  
 The children are **at** the beach. [**on** the sand or **in** the area nearby.]

There's a chemist **on** the corner. [permanent position]  
 Let's meet **at** the corner. [a point on a journey]

It was very hot **in** the theatre/office/museum. [emphasis on 'inside']  
 I was **at** the theatre/office/museum when you called. [general location]

I'll meet you **in** the restaurant. [inside]  
 I'll meet you **at** the restaurant. [inside or outside]









I'm **in** the office. [inside the office]  
 I'm **at** the office. [**at** work generally - **in** an office or the canteen, a meeting room  
 etc.]

He's **in** the water. [swimming]  
 He's **on** the water. [**in** a boat]









I'm sitting **at** my desk. [**on** a chair]  
 My computer is **on** my desk.

The Eurostar stops **at** Ebbsfleet and Ashford and arrives **in** Lille at 9.30. [or '**at** Lille (station)']

## Other prepositions of place

	Uses	Examples
<b>above</b> 	Higher than	Our plane is now <b>above</b> the clouds.  Let's put the shelf <b>on</b> this wall <b>above</b> the TV.
<b>below</b> 	Lower than	When we looked out of the plane, the people <b>below</b> us seemed really small.  She had a cut on her leg, <b>below</b> the knee.
<b>over</b> 	Higher than	Our plane is now <b>over</b> the clouds.  Let's put the shelf <b>on</b> this wall <b>over</b> the TV.
<b>under</b> <b>underneath</b> <b>beneath</b> 	Directly below	The cat's <b>under</b> the table.  The tunnel's <b>beneath</b> the road.  There's a cellar <b>underneath</b> the kitchen.
<b>opposite</b> 	On the other side of something	I sat <b>opposite</b> James at the meeting.  The bank is <b>opposite</b> the station.
<b>across</b> 	On the other side of something	Where is the bank? It's <b>across</b> the road.  She sits <b>across</b> the room (from me.)
<b>inside</b> 	An enclosed space [similar to 'in' but it can emphasise a contrast with 'outside']	I'll meet you <b>inside</b> the hotel because it's raining.  Prices are lower if you sit <b>inside</b> the restaurant rather than on the terrace.
<b>outside</b> 	Not in an enclosed space but near to it	They're waiting for us <b>outside</b> the conference room.  The smoking area is just <b>outside</b> my office.

<p><b>near</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><b>A short distance from</b></p>	<p>"Is the hotel <b>near</b> the station?" "Yes, it's just a 5-minute walk away."  We live <b>near</b> the sea. [up to a few km away]</p>
<p><b>up</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>down</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><b>Along or further along a road, river etc.</b></p>	<p>I live <b>up/down</b> this street. [from the current location]  We're staying in a hotel <b>up/down</b> the beach from here.  <b>Note that</b> in the examples above, 'up' or 'down' can be used with no difference in meaning.</p>
<p><b>next to</b></p> <p><b>beside</b></p> <p><b>alongside</b></p> <p><b>by</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><b>Adjacent to, at the side of [closer than near]</b></p>	<p>We live <b>next to</b> the sea. [a few metres away - we can see it]  Let's put the chair <b>beside</b> the window.  I parked my car <b>alongside</b> yours.  Come and sit <b>by</b> me.</p>
<p><b>behind</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><b>At the back of</b></p>	<p>The car park is <b>behind</b> the shopping centre.</p>
<p><b>in front of</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><b>Just ahead of or close to the front part of something</b></p>	<p>The shopping centre is <b>in front of</b> the car park.  There's a statue <b>in front of</b> the fountain.</p>
<p><b>around</b></p> <p><b>round [mainly UK]</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>1. On every side or in a circular way.</p> <p>2. Just past a corner, after turning it</p> <p>3. 'Near', in this area.</p>	<p>They sat <b>around/round</b> a table.  There are lots of restaurants <b>around/round</b> the square.  Where's the station; is it far? No, it's <b>around/round</b> the next corner.  Is there a station <b>around/round</b> here?</p>

<b>among</b> <b>amongst</b> [mainly UK] 	<b>In a group or surrounded by other people or things</b>	<b>I sat <b>among/amongst</b> some Swedish people at the seminar.</b>  <b>We found an important document <b>among</b> some old files.</b>
<b>between</b> 	<b>Having something on each side</b>	<b>The bank is <b>between</b> a supermarket and a book shop.</b>  <b>My desk is <b>between</b> Harry's and Marie's.</b>
<b>beyond</b>   	<b>On the other side of</b>	<b>The river is <b>beyond</b> those trees.</b>
<b>within</b> 	<b>1. Inside an enclosed space or area</b>  <b>2. Not further than</b>  <b>With both meanings, there is a suggestion of a boundary.</b>	<b>The total number of offices <b>within</b> the building is thirty.</b>  <b>There are several gardens and cafés <b>within</b> the castle grounds.</b>  <b>There are lots of different shops <b>within</b> 2 miles of my house.</b>
<b>from</b> 	<b>A point of origin</b>	<b>He lives <b>in</b> London now but he's <b>from</b> the north of England.</b>
<b>aboard</b> 	<b>On some vehicles</b>	<b>There are 210 passengers <b>aboard</b> this train.</b>  <b>On our holiday, we spent three days <b>aboard</b> a boat.</b>
<b>against</b> 	<b>'next to' and close enough to be in contact</b>	<b>The cupboard is <b>against</b> the wall.</b>  <b>He's allergic to cotton and can't have it <b>against</b> his skin.</b>

## 'Opposite' or 'in front of'?

These are often confused. Sometimes, we can distinguish between them simply by considering the following examples:

There was a man **in front of** me on the bus. [I could see the back of his head.]  
 There was a man **opposite** me at the meeting. [I could see his face.]

However, we use 'in front of' when talking about objects with 'screens':

She spends too much time **in front of** the mirror/tv/computer.

This is because we usually use 'in front of' when there is little or no space between things and 'opposite' when there is a greater distance:



There's one street lamp **in front of** my house and another one **opposite** my house.

## Prepositions of movement

Prepositions of place indicate where something is and others tell us about movement from one place to another.

He's **at** work. [place]  
 He's going **to** work. ✓ [movement]

Some prepositions can perform both functions:

The bank is **across** the road. [place]  
 We walked **across** the road. [movement]

Here are some more examples:

Uses	Examples
<b>onto</b> [also 'on to']	Resulting in being 'on' They got <b>onto</b> the train. We loaded the goods <b>onto</b> the truck.

<b>over</b>	<p>To go higher than To cross something</p>	<p>We flew <b>over</b> the mountain. We went <b>over</b> the river/the road/the bridge.</p>
<b>across</b>	<p>With a verb like 'go' to mean 'to cross'</p>	<p>We went <b>across</b> the river/the road/the bridge. We walked <b>across</b> the square to get to the cathedral.</p>
<b>into</b>	<p>Resulting in being 'in'</p> <p>Resulting in being in direct contact with something</p>	<p>They got <b>into</b> the car. Put the files <b>into</b> that cabinet, please.</p> <p>He wasn't concentrating and he walked <b>into</b> the door.</p>
<b>out of</b>	<p>Resulting in being 'out'</p>	<p>They got <b>out of</b> the car. He threw it <b>out of</b> the window.</p>
<b>inside</b>	<p>Resulting in being in an enclosed space</p>	<p>Go <b>inside</b> the station and wait for me there; I won't be long.</p>
<b>outside</b>	<p>Resulting in being not 'in' but 'near' an enclosed space</p>	<p>He went <b>outside</b> the building to smoke.</p>
<b>through</b>	<p>Moving into one side and out of another</p> <p>Moving around in or from one side to another</p>	<p>You need to go <b>through</b> this door and <b>through</b> two offices to get to the canteen.</p> <p>We walked <b>through</b> the park/forest/market.</p>
<b>up</b>	<p>From a lower to a higher part of something</p> <p>To go further</p>	<p>We walked <b>up</b> the hill and found a nice café.</p> <p>We went <b>up</b> the street/road/river/beach.</p>
<b>down</b>	<p>From a higher to a lower part of something</p> <p>To go further</p>	<p>The children ran <b>down</b> the hill/the stairs.</p> <p>We went <b>down</b> the street/road/river/beach.</p>

<p><b>around</b> <b>round [mostly UK]</b></p>	<p><b>To go to several places in an area</b></p> <p><b>To go in an approximately circular direction</b></p>	<p>He travels <b>around</b> the world with his job.</p> <p>Go <b>round</b> the next corner and you'll see the post office.</p>
<p><b>along</b></p>	<p><b>To move in a constant direction</b></p>	<p>We drove <b>along</b> the motorway for 40 miles.</p> <p>I love walking <b>along</b> the beach at night.</p>
<p><b>past</b></p>	<p><b>To go further than something</b></p>	<p>You need to go <b>past</b> the bank and turn left.</p>
<p><b>from</b></p>	<p><b>Beginning a journey</b></p>	<p>We're coming <b>from</b> Heathrow.</p> <p>I get home <b>from</b> work at 7.00.</p>
<p><b>to</b></p>	<p><b>Reaching a destination</b></p> <p><b>Note that</b> with the verb 'to arrive', we use 'at' or 'in':</p>	<p>They're getting a taxi <b>to</b> the airport and flying <b>to</b> Barcelona.</p> <p>I go <b>to</b> bed at 11.00.</p> <p>We arrived <b>at</b> the party/airport or <b>in</b> London/England etc.</p>
<p><b>towards [UK]</b> <b>toward [US]</b></p>	<p><b>To go in the direction of [might not be destination]</b></p>	<p>Drive <b>towards</b> the town centre and turn left at the next traffic lights.</p>
<p><b>off</b></p>	<p><b>To move down or away from</b></p>	<p>Get your feet <b>off</b> the table.</p> <p>The dog fell <b>off</b> the bed.</p>
<p><b>via</b></p>	<p><b>To travel to on the way to somewhere else</b></p>	<p>They flew to Australia <b>via</b> India.</p>
<p><b>aboard</b></p>	<p><b>To board some vehicles</b></p>	<p>We climbed <b>aboard</b> the boat/plane/helicopter/London Eye.</p>
<p><b>against</b></p>	<p><b>In the opposite direction</b></p>	<p>Driving <b>into</b> London at night is easy because it's <b>against</b> the commuter traffic.</p>

## 'In'/'into' and 'on'/'onto'

We often use 'in' and 'on' instead of 'into' and 'onto' to indicate movement. It can depend on the verb. For example, both can be used with 'get':

We got **on/onto** the train.  
We got **in/into** the car.

With 'put', we are more likely to use 'in' and 'on':

I put my keys **in** my bag/**on** the table.

With 'go', 'walk', 'step' or 'jump', we use 'into' or 'onto':

He went **into** the boardroom 5 minutes ago.  
She stepped **onto** the platform.  
The cat jumped **onto** the table.

Sometimes, they are not interchangeable but have different meanings. For example:

We cycle **in** the village. [We cycle when we are **in** the village.]  
We cycle **into** the village. [We cycle when we go **to** the village **from** another location.]

## '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?

## Expressions for giving directions

We use prepositions of place and movement when giving directions. Here are some

**examples:**

Drive **past** the church and take the first turning **on** the left. Go **along** this road for two miles and stop **at** the traffic lights. Go **over** the bridge and **through** a tunnel. Turn right when you come **to** a big shopping centre. Go **round** the roundabout and take the 3<sup>rd</sup> exit. Drive **towards** the town centre and park **near** the cathedral. Walk **across** the square and you'll find the tourist office **on** the corner **next to** a patisserie. I'll meet you there.

## Other meanings and uses

Some prepositions of place and movement also function as adverbs.

For more information, see **Adverbs of time and place** and if in doubt, check in a good dictionary.

Also see **Prepositions with expressions**.

From:  
<https://tools.e-exercises.com/> - Ressources pour les apprenants

Permanent link:  
[https://tools.e-exercises.com/doku.php?id=en:grammar:prepositions:prepositions\\_of\\_place\\_direction\\_movement&rev=1475142096](https://tools.e-exercises.com/doku.php?id=en:grammar:prepositions:prepositions_of_place_direction_movement&rev=1475142096)

Last update: 2023/02/14 14:21

