

At, in and on: prepositions of place

A We use **at** to talk about a place we think of as a point rather than an area, and about an event where there is a group of people:

- I arrived **at** *New Street Station* at 7.30.
- We were waiting **at** *the far end of the room*.
- We last met **at** *the conference in Italy*.
- There were very few people **at** *Joan's party*.

We use **on** to talk about a position touching a flat surface, or on something we think of as a line such as a road or river:

- Is that a spider **on** *the ceiling*? (Notice we also say 'on the wall/floor')
- She owns a house **on** *the Swan River*.

We use **in** to talk about a position within a larger area, or something within a larger space:

- There's been another big forest fire **in** *California*.
- She looked again **in** *her bag* and, to her relief, there were her keys.

B Also study how **at**, **in**, and **on** are used in these sentences:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● My dream is to play at Wembley Stadium. ● Didn't I see you in/at the pool yesterday? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – seen as a point – either seen as within the pool itself, or as a building which is a point in town
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● He lives in Perth. ● We stopped in/at Milan, Florence and Pisa on our way to Rome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – within the city – we use at when we see the cities as points on a journey, and in when we see them as enclosed areas where we stayed for some time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They were a great success in/at Edinburgh. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – we can use at when we use a place name instead of an institution or event – here, the Edinburgh Festival; in suggests the city
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● He's in Los Angeles on business. ● He's at Manchester studying Linguistics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – staying or living there – a student at Manchester University
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● She works at Marks and Spencer. ● She works in a shoe shop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the name of a particular organisation – the kind of place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I stopped at the shop on the way home. ● I was in the bank when in came Sue. (Notice we say: 'I work on a farm', but 'I work in a factory'.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – we use at to talk about buildings such as the dentist's, the supermarket, the bank, school, etc.; we use in to emphasise that we mean <i>inside</i> the building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I read the paper in the taxi on the way. ● I'll probably go on the bus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – for travel using taxis and cars – for travel using bus, coach, plane, or train; but we use in if we want to emphasise <i>inside</i> the bus, etc.

C We usually use **at** before an address and **in** or **on** before the name of a road:

- They've opened an office **at** 28 Lees Road.
- The church is **in/on** Park Road.

However, we sometimes use **on** instead of **in** when we talk about long streets or roads:

- The town is **on** the Pacific Highway.

We can use **at** instead of **in** when we use a street name to refer to an institution in that street:

- There was an important meeting of ministers **at** Downing Street today.

But notice that we say '**on** Wall Street' to mean the financial institution.

Compare:

- I'll meet you **on** *the corner of the street*.
- and
- The lamp was **in** *the corner of the room*.

104.1 Complete these sentences with **at, on, or in** and the most likely word or phrase. (A)

the pitch parties this booklet the table the main road a dinner
this country his pocket the top end your lawn the Opera House Tunisia

- 1 I bumped into Tim I went to the other evening.
- 2 The film was shot mainly in North Africa.
- 3 He was undoubtedly the best player in the first half.
- 4 Although he has been singing for ages, it will be the first time he has appeared
- 5 They live, so there's a lot of traffic going past.
- 6 It will be the biggest event of its kind ever held
- 7 I know that people like to dress up, but that is ridiculous.
- 8 Bill lived of my street.
- 9 The information is out of date.
- 10 Do you know that there's a rabbit, and it's eating your flowers?
- 11 He put his hand and took out some coins.
- 12 Who's moved my briefcase? I left it

104.2 Complete these sentences with **at, in or on**. If two answers are possible, write them both. (B)

- 1 a He played Wimbledon for the first time this year.
b Quite by chance, we met the tennis stadium last week.
- 2 a He turned up early to make sure he had a seat the plane.
b I saw Judith this morning, but she was her car so I couldn't say hello.
- 3 a We just got the train and headed for Florence.
b We were stuck the plane for hours in Jakarta.
- 4 a We went to wave him off the station.
b It was raining, so he decided to shelter the station before he walked home.
- 5 a She worked a restaurant during the evenings to earn some extra money.
b When she was a student she worked a pizza restaurant at weekends.
- 6 a She won a gold medal Barcelona in 1992.
b I lived Stockholm for three years during the 1970s.
- 7 a Peter's doing a Master's degree Birmingham.
b They're Brighton to do an English language course.

104.3 Complete the sentences with **at, in or on**. (C)

- 1 There has been a serious accident the motorway near Swindon.
- 2 She's just moved from her flat 38 Azalea Drive.
- 3 We broke down the Princes Highway between Melbourne and Adelaide.
- 4 The overnight rise Wall Street was not maintained.
- 5 Talks are to be held Downing Street, chaired by the Prime Minister.
- 6 My uncle owns a hardware shop the corner of High Street and Redland Road.
- 7 I first saw the ring in an antique shop Kensington Road.

