

Prepositions of place

English A1

What this topic teaches

Where is your phone? *In* your bag? *On* your desk? *Under* a pile of homework? The little words that answer are **prepositions of place**. Chinese has the same idea with and friends, so the map is familiar – only the word order and the in/on choice are new.

- **in** = inside: *in the box, in my bag, in Beijing*.
- **on** = touching a surface : *on the table, on the wall*.
- **under, behind, next to, between** – the rest of the map.
- Memory hook: *in* is a box, *on* is a floor. If you can put walls around it, it's *in*; if you can only put feet on it, it's *on*.

The big three: in, on, under

Word	The picture	Example
in	inside a container or space	The keys are in my bag.
on	touching the top surface	The book is on the table.
under	below, covered	The cat is under the chair.

- The cat under the chair is not lost. It is judging you, which is different.
- – *The book is **on** the table*. The thing comes first in English; the place follows, the same flip as *there is* in topic 5.

The rest of the map

Word	Meaning	Example
next to	beside	I sit next to the window.
behind	at the back of	The garden is behind the house.
in front of	facing it	The teacher stands in front of the class.
between	with one on each side	The bank is between the shop and the café.
near	close , not touching	The school is near the park.
opposite	across from	The café is opposite the bank.

- $\triangle$ *between* needs two things: *between the shop **and** the café*. One side is not between; it is just standing there.

- *next to* touches (almost); *near* is just close. Your best friend sits *next to* you; your homework sits *near* you, unfinished.

at, in, on for places

Three words, three zoom levels.

- **at** = a point: *at school, at the bus stop, at home*. You are a dot on the map.
- **in** = inside a bigger area: *in Beijing, in the classroom, in the park*.
- **on** = on a surface or line: *on the wall, on the second floor, on the left*.
- Memory hook: *at* is a pin on the map, *in* is a country, *on* is a floor. Zoom out: *at* → *in*. Zoom in on a surface: *on*.
- *at home* has no *the*. *Home* is special: *go home, stay at home*. Home is not a place; it's a feeling with its own grammar.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **The order flips again.** Chinese puts the place phrase before the verb; English puts it after: *shū zài zhuōzi shàng* → *The book is **on the table***. Place last – the same rule as topic 5's *there is*.
- △ **in vs on.** “*The picture is in the wall*” sounds like a horror film. Pictures hang **on** the wall. In the wall is where the pipes live.
- △ **Don't drop the verb.** “*The book on the table*” is a phrase, not a sentence. It needs *is*: *The book **is** on the table*. Topic 1's rule never sleeps.
- △ ***next to*, not “*next with*”.** English prepositions don't mix. Learn each one as a fixed phrase, like a password.

Say it aloud

Describe your classroom without pointing. Your partner draws what you say.

- The clock is on the wall, above ... the board.
- My bag is under the desk, between my feet and a dream.
- The teacher is in front of the class. The homework is in front of me. Only one of them is moving.

Then swap roles. If the drawings match the room, your prepositions work.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *The keys are _____ my bag.* – **in.** Inside the bag: a box, so *in*.
2. *The picture is _____ the wall.* – **on.** Touching the surface; *in the wall* is for pipes and horror films.
3. *The bank is _____ the shop and the café.* – **between.** Two sides make a between.
4. *I study _____ home.* – **at.** *home* is a point, and a feeling with no *the*.
5. *Shū zài zhuōzi shàng.* – **The book is on the table.** Thing first, place last: the order flips.