



AT vs. IN – LIVE LESSON NOTES

We have some set phrases with **in** & **at** that have a specific meaning:

1. Jack is **in the hospital**. *He is a patient there.*
2. Jack is **at the hospital**. *He is visiting there.*
3. The bank robber is **in jail**. *He is incarcerated.*
4. The detective is **at the jail**. *He is visiting there*
5. Jane was **in bed** until noon. *She was sleeping or relaxing.*
6. I was **at work** all night last night. *I was working in my office.*
7. I plan to stay **at home** today (or just I plan to stay **home**). *I won't go out today.*
8. Jenny is **at college**, so her sister has their bedroom to herself. *Jenny is living in her college dormitory.*
9. Jenny is **in college**. *She is a college student.*
10. The cruise includes 6 nights **at sea**. *Traveling on the ocean.*

We also use **at** to talk about events:

- I had a great time **at the concert** last night.
- I met Jack **at the party** last weekend.
- Cathy made a great presentation **at the meeting** yesterday.

We use **at** before a school or company:

- I work **at** Happy English.
- Jack got his MBA **at** Harvard.
- Nick works **at** Google.

We also use **at** to talk about one specific point during a trip.

1. This train will make stops **at** Lincoln Center, Times Square, and SOHO.
2. I stopped off **at** the coffee shop on the way to my office.
3. When I went from NYC to Sao Paulo, I stopped **at** Miami to change planes.

*By the way...we **arrive at** a building....I **arrived in** a city/country, etc.

We **also** use **at** when we talk about a particular point on a street or in a town.

1. His office is **at** the corner of Madison and 40th St.
2. I think Jane lives **at** the end of this block.

But we use it **in** when we talk about the middle of something.

1. My office is **in** the middle of the block.
2. There is a lake **in** the middle of the park.



We use **at** when we talk about an address. An address contains a number and a street name.

1. His office is **at** 475 Madison Avenue.
2. Joe works **at** 500 Broadway.
3. I live **at** 333 Canal Street.

But we use **on** when we talk about a street, but not the address, just the street name itself.

1. His office is **on** Madison Avenue.
2. There are a lot of interesting places **on** Broadway.
3. There used to be many discount shops **on** Canal Street

We used **in** when we talk about a place with the border, like **in** a country, **in** a city, **in** a town, **in** a county, and **in** a neighborhood

1. Vincent lives **in** France.
2. Jeff spent a week **in** London on business.
3. Jeremy lives **in** Brooklyn, but he works **in** Manhattan.
4. Went to a nice restaurant **in** Chinatown.

We also used **in** when we talk about a place with walls or fences **in** a park, **in** a building, **in** a box.

1. It's a nice day. Let's have a picnic **in** the park.
2. Her husband works **in** an Art Deco building.
3. We have a few bottles of wine **in** the refrigerator.

We use both **in** and **on** when we talk about directions (north, east, south, and west), but the grammar is different depending on how those direction words are used. When north, east, south, and west are used as **nouns**, we use **in**:

1. New York is **in** the east and California **in** the west.
2. It's cold **in** the north especially in the winter.
3. People **in** the south like to eat spicy foods.

But when north, east, south, and west are used as **adjectives**, we use **on**:

1. Jeff lives **on** the west side of town.
2. There are many flags **on** the south side of the building.
3. James' office is **on** the upper West side.



We often use both **at** & **in** to talk about position or location. Generally the meaning is the same. Both of these sentences tell us Jack's location:

1. Jack is **at** his office.
2. Jack is **in** his office.

So, when we speak in a general way, we can use either **at** or **in** to describe the location. However, both **at** & **in** have some specific uses and meanings when you need to be less general and more specific.

We use **at** when we talk about a store or a building. **At** gives us the nuance about what usually happens in that store or building. Notice the verb is **not the be verb** but a verb that also describes the usual action in the location

1. I *bought* this shirt on sale **at** the department store. *People usually shop at a department store.*
2. Jack *had* a coffee **at** a nice café on Madison Ave. *People usually have coffee at a café.*
3. Lets *study* **at** the library after class. *People usually study at a library.*

I think that when we don't care about the action, but just want to describe the location using **the be verb** we often use **in**:

1. I was **in** the department store yesterday.
2. Jack is **in** a café on Madison Ave.
3. We have been **in** the library for three hours. Let's go home.