

Ask about English
'In' and 'at'



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BBC Learning English – Ask about English

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Anthony Mizzi from Gozo, Malta asks:

Hello this is Anthony, I live in Malta and I have a question about English, which is: which preposition is the correct one in stating one's place of residence? Is it 'in' or 'at'? For example, do I say I live 'in' Victoria Gozo or I live 'at' Victoria Gozo? That's my question. Thank you.

Catherine Walter answers:

Thank you for that question Anthony. The answer to your question is very straightforward, but I'll give you some explanations afterwards. You say I live 'in' Victoria Gozo.

The reason you do this is because of the differences between 'in' and 'at'. We use 'at' for a position at a point. So for example, if there was a train line that ran to Victoria and passed Victoria to other places, you would say to your friend 'Get off the train at Victoria'.

Also, if we're using the name of a building we tend to use 'at'. So we're doing this recording at Bush House in London - 'at'. We also use 'at' where people work or study when the name of the place is given. So I can say 'I have a cousin who works at the Pentagon,' or 'my daughter is studying at the Institute of Education' - 'at'. We also use 'at' for group activities. So you could say 'I was at a concert, a party, a football match.'

The idea we have with 'in' is of a position inside an area or inside a three-dimensional space. So you would say 'in the kitchen, in the woods,' or indeed, 'in Malta'. So you can say 'I live in Victoria' or 'I live in Malta'. I hope that's a help.

Anthony: Very helpful indeed.
