

The 2 (school / the school etc.)

A

Compare **school** and **the school**:

Ellie is ten years old. Every day she goes **to school**. She's **at school** now. **School** starts at 9 and finishes at 3.

We say a child goes **to school** or is **at school** (as a student). We are not thinking of a specific school. We are thinking of **school** as a general idea – children learning in a classroom.



Today Ellie's mother wants to speak to her daughter's teacher. So she has gone to **the school** to see her. She's at **the school** now.

Ellie's mother is not a student. She is not 'at school', she doesn't 'go to school'. If she wants to see Ellie's teacher, she goes to **the school** (=Ellie's school, a specific building).

B

We use **prison** (or **jail**), **hospital**, **university**, **college** and **church** in a similar way. We do not use **the** when we are thinking of the general idea of these places and what they are used for.

Compare:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ken's brother is in prison for robbery. (He is a prisoner. We are not thinking of a specific prison.) <input type="checkbox"/> Joe had an accident last week. He was taken to hospital. He's still in hospital now. (as a patient) <input type="checkbox"/> When I leave school, I plan to go to university / go to college. (as a student) <input type="checkbox"/> Sally's father goes to church every Sunday. (to take part in a religious service) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ken went to the prison to visit his brother. (He went as a visitor, not as a prisoner.) <input type="checkbox"/> Jane has gone to the hospital to visit Joe. She's at the hospital now. (as a visitor, not as a patient) <input type="checkbox"/> I went to the university to meet Professor Thomas. (as a visitor, not as a student) <input type="checkbox"/> Some workmen went to the church to repair the roof. (not for a religious service) |
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With most other places, you need **the**. For example, **the station**, **the cinema**, (see Units 72C and 73C).

C

We say **go to bed** / **be in bed** etc. (*not* the bed):

- ☐ I'm going **to bed** now. Goodnight.
- ☐ Do you ever have breakfast **in bed**?

but ☐ I sat down on **the bed**. (a specific piece of furniture)

go to work / **be at work** / **start work** / **finish work** etc. (*not* the work):

- ☐ Chris didn't go to **work** yesterday.
- ☐ What time do you usually finish **work**?

go home / **come home** / **arrive home** / **get home** / **be at home** etc. :

- ☐ It's late. Let's go **home**.
- ☐ Will you be at **home** tomorrow afternoon?

D

We say **go to sea** / **be at sea** (without **the**) when the meaning is 'go/be on a voyage':

- ☐ Keith works on ships. He's **at sea** most of the time.

but ☐ I'd like to live near **the sea**.

- ☐ It can be dangerous to swim in **the sea**.