HU

HUNGARIAN LESSON

Hungarian Grammar 2 · Chapter 4 · In, On, At

📍 Where Something Is — Hol?

*The first row of the 3 × 3 grid from Chapter 1 answers **Hol?** (Where?). It has three cases: **-ban / -ben** (in), **-on / -en / -ön** (on) and **-nál / -nél** (at, by). The endings are easy. The hard part is that English in, on, at do not line up with them, so the work in this chapter is choosing the right case for the right kind of place.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Use **-ban / -ben** for the **inside** of an enclosed space, **-on / -en / -ön** for a **surface**, an open area, a vehicle or an event, and **-nál / -nél** for **being at or beside** something, above all at a person's place. For towns, countries and a few other names the choice is partly historic, so learn it with the name.

1. The forms

CASE	BACK	FRONT	FRONT, ROUNDED	AFTER A VOWEL
Inessive (in)	-ban	-ben	-ben	same
Superessive (on)	-on	-en	-ön	-n (a, e lengthen)
Adessive (at, by)	-nál	-nél	-nél	same

STEM	IN	ON	AT, BY
ház (house)	házban	házon	háznál
kert (garden)	kertben	kerten	kertnél
tükör (mirror)	tükörben	tükrön	tükörnél
fa (tree)	fában	fán	fánál

STEM	IN	ON	AT, BY
autó (car)	**autóban**	**autón**	**autónál**
tó (lake)	**tóban** / **tavon** (see below)	**tavon**	**tónál**

The stem changes from Chapter 2 return before the case (*tükr-, tav-*). *Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 5* explains why the plural and case suffixes assimilate in the same way.

2. Which place takes which case

-ban / -ben: enclosed space

KIND OF PLACE	EXAMPLES
Rooms and buildings	**a szobában · az irodában · a boltban · az étteremben · a kórházban · a könyvtárban · az iskolában**
Containers	**a táskában · a dobozban · a szekrényben · a pohárban**
Most foreign cities	**Bécsben · Berlinben · Rómában · Párizsban · Londonban**
Most countries (those in *-ország* and *-ia*)	**Franciaországban · Németországban · Skóciában · Ausztriában**
Cars and taxis	**az autóban · a taxiban**

-on / -en / -ön: surfaces, open areas, vehicles, events

KIND OF PLACE	EXAMPLES
Surfaces	**az asztalon · a falon · a padlón · a polcon**
Open areas and streets	**az utcán · a téren · az úton · a piacon**
Public transport and boats	**a buszon · a vonaton · a villamoson · a hajón · a repülőn**
Islands, hills, lakes	**a szigeten · a hegyen · a Balatonon**

KIND OF PLACE	EXAMPLES
Institutions and events	**az egyetemen · a postán · a pályaudvaron · a repülőtéren · a koncerten · a tanfolyamon**
Some towns and Hungary itself	**Szegeden · Miskolcon · Budapesten · Magyarországon**

> **English does not predict it**
>
> English says *on the bus* and *in the car*, and Hungarian happens to agree (**a buszon**, **az autóban**). But English says *at university* and *at the post office*, where Hungarian uses the surface case (**az egyetemen**, **a postán**), and English says *in the street* where Hungarian says **az utcán**. Learn the pairing as a phrase.

Towns: a historic split

There is no rule that tells you whether a Hungarian town takes *-ban/-ben* or *-on/-en/-ön*; the usage is historic. Foreign towns nearly always take *-ban/-ben*. Learn the Hungarian towns you need with their case:

TAKES -BAN / -BEN	TAKES -ON / -EN / -ÖN / -N
Győrben · Egerben · Debrecenben · Veszprémben · Sopronban	**Budapesten · Szegeden · Miskolcon · Szolnokon · Kecskeméten · Székesfehérváron · Nyíregyházán**

A few Hungarian towns also have their own special form (**Pécsett**), and some people say one case where others say the other. When a town is not in your list, look it up before you commit.

-nál / -nél: at, by, and at someone's place

The adessive means *at* or *by* without going inside or on. Its most important use is for being **at a person's home or with a person**.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
A barátomnál alszom.	I'm staying at my friend's.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Az orvosnál voltam.	I was at the doctor's.
A szüleimnél lakom.	I live with my parents.
A bejáratnál várlak.	I'll wait for you at the entrance.
A pénztárnál fizetek.	I pay at the till.
Péter magasabb nálam.	Peter is taller than me.

The last row shows another job of the adessive: the thing compared with, after a comparative adjective (*than me*).

3. The pronoun forms

These three cases do not add to a personal pronoun directly. Each has its own set of forms, built on a short stem plus the personal endings you know from the possessives.

PERSON	IN	ON	AT, BY
I	**bennem**	**rajtam**	**nálam**
you (sg)	**benned**	**rajtad**	**nálad**
he, she	**benne**	**rajta**	**nála**
we	**bennünk**	**rajtunk**	**nálunk**
you (pl)	**bennetek**	**rajtatok**	**nálatok**
they	**bennük**	**rajtuk**	**náluk**

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Nálam van a kulcs.	I have the key (it is with me).
Nálunk jó az idő.	The weather is good at our place.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Nincs benne semmi.	There is nothing in it.
Mi van rajta?	What is on it?

The question words are **Hol?** (where), **Miben?** (in what), **Min?** (on what), **Kinél?** (at whose place). Two small words need no case at all: **itt** (here), **ott** (there) and **otthon** (at home).

> **Watch out: at home is otthon**
>
> Say **Otthon vagyok** (I'm at home), not *a házban vagyok*, unless you really mean "inside the house". *Itthon* is "at home" from the speaker's point of view, in the home country or at one's own house.

In Use — Használatban

The static cases in short exchanges.

① Where do you live?

A:

Hol laksz?

Where do you live?

B:

Skóciában, egy kis lakásban.

In Scotland, in a small flat.

A:

Én Szegeden születtem, de most Budapesten dolgozom.

I was born in Szeged, but now I work in Budapest.

② Where is the key?

A:

Hol van a kulcs?

Where is the key?

B:

Nálad van! Nézd meg a táskában.

You have it! Look in the bag.

A:

Nincs ott. Az asztalon hagytam.

It isn't there. I left it on the table.

③ Where are you?

A:

Hol vagy?

Where are you?

B:

A pályaudvaron, a bejáratnál. És te?

At the station, by the entrance. And you?

A:

Még a buszon, de a következő megállónál leszállok.

Still on the bus, but I'm getting off at the next stop.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

CASE	USE FOR	EXAMPLE
-ban / -ben	inside rooms, buildings, containers; most countries and foreign cities; cars	**a szobában · Bécsben · az autóban**
-on / -en / -ön / -n	surfaces, streets, transport, islands, institutions, events; some towns	**az asztalon · a buszon · Budapesten**
-nál / -nél	at someone's place; at or by a spot; "than"	**a barátomnál · a bejáratnál**
Pronouns	bennem · rajtam · nálam (and so on)	**Nálam van.**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "In the house": *ház* + the "in" case.

▼ Show answer

házban.

2. "In the garden": *kert* + the "in" case.

▼ Show answer

kertben.

3. "On the table": *asztal* + the "on" case.

▼ Show answer

asztalon.

4. "On the tree": *fa* + the "on" case.

▼ Show answer

fán. After a vowel the ending is *-n*, and the stem vowel lengthens.

5. "In Budapest."

▼ Show answer

Budapesten. Budapest takes the surface case.

6. "In Hungary."

▼ Show answer

Magyarországon. Hungary is the exception among the *-ország* countries.

7. "In France."

▼ Show answer

Franciaországban.

8. "At the doctor's": *az orvos* + the "at" case.

▼ Show answer

az orvosnál.

9. Say "in me" and "at my place".

▼ Show answer

bennem and **nálam**.

10. Fix the sentence: *A vonatban vagyok* (I'm on the train).

▼ Show answer

A vonaton vagyok. Public transport takes the surface case.

Coming up in Chapter 5: Where To? Into, Onto, Toward. The "to" row of the grid: *-ba / -be*, *-ra / -re* and *-hoz / -hez / -höz*, with the same place sorting you learned here.