At, by – Difference & usage with examples

The prepositions 'at' and 'by' are some of the most commonly used ones across the English literature. Sometimes, these words are often interchanged in sentences that convey the same meaning. Hence, it is inevitable that you will get confused on which to use where. For example, take a look at the sentences below:

1. The tourist office is located at Andheri Plaza.
2. The tourist office is located by Andheri Plaza.

Both the sentences mean the same thing, but there are subtle differences. To understand them, let's study 'at' and 'by' in detail. You will only learnEnglish fluently if you manage to get the concepts right in detail.

1. At

'At' is a preposition used in English grammar. It is used to exactly denote a place, time or activity. For example:

a. "I will be there at 1.00 pm'
b. 'There is a party at the beach house.'
c. 'There were hundreds of people at the game.'
d. 'Please send a mail at This email address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it..'

2. By

'By' is also a preposition that is used in English grammar. It is primarily used to vaguely identify a location and time. It is also used to denote specific purpose of an activity. For example:

a. The post office is by the fish market.
b. The flowers were delivered by a mailman.
c. He finally broke the record by pure effort.
d. The branch office was closed by the parent company.
e. You can pass the test by preparing well for it.

Difference:

Though both the words may be used interchangeably in many situations, their basic differences are as follows:

1. At:

a. Specific

At is used when the location or time is very specifically denoted.

b. Tangible.

At only denotes those things that are tangible and can be felt or seen.

2. By:

a. Vague

By is used to refer to vague locations or time.

b. Intangible.

It is used to refer intangible objects.

In the above main example of tourist office, 'at' Andheri Plaza means the tourist office is at the exact location of Andheri Plaza. 'By' Andheri Plaza means the tourist office is in a nearby location of the plaza.
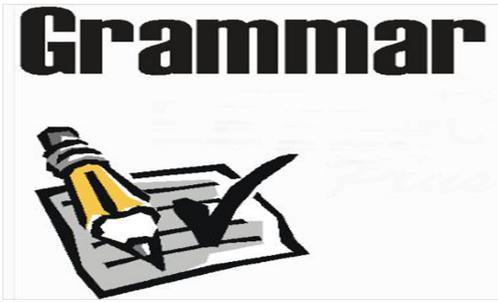
Examples:

A. at

1. The train will arrive at 1.25 pm
2. The prime minister lives at 10 Janpath.
3. You will find the shop at the end of the street.
4. I will be waiting at the bus stop.
5. Don't just stand at the door.
6. You will find the information at the bottom of the page.

B. by

1. I was attracted by her acting.
2. You will find him by the tea shop.
3. I will probably come by train.
4. It should be done only by him.
5. The notes were given by her.

The above examples show the correct usage of 'at' and 'by' in English grammar. Further improve your grammatical knowledge with the help of an online English trainer.

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