

À l'avance vs En avance



These two expressions look similar, but they don't mean exactly the same thing. They both relate to the idea of doing something before the expected time, but the nuance is different.

1. À l'avance - Ahead of time / Beforehand (planning, preparation)

Use **à l'avance** when you do something **ahead of time** *on purpose*.

It expresses **planning, preparation, or anticipation**. The idea is that you choose to act early in order to be prepared.

In English, we might say **“in advance / ahead of time / beforehand.”**

Examples:

- Merci de me prévenir **à l'avance**.
- Thank you for letting me know **ahead of time**.

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- J'ai acheté mes billets **à l'avance**.
- I bought my tickets **in advance**.

- Il faut réserver **à l'avance**.
- You have to reserve **ahead of time**.

- Elle prépare toujours ses cours **à l'avance**.
- She always prepares her lessons **beforehand**.

2. En avance - Early (arriving sooner than expected)

Use **en avance** when someone or something is **early** compared to the scheduled or expected time.

It does **not** imply planning. It's simply earlier than necessary. The main idea is that you end up being early (intentionally or not).

Examples:

- Je suis **en avance**.
- I'm **early**.

- Le train est arrivé **en avance**.
- The train arrived **early**.

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- Nous sommes partis trop tôt, alors nous sommes arrivés **en avance**.
- We left too early, so we arrived **ahead of time**.
- Elle est toujours **en avance** aux réunions.
- She's always **early** to meetings.

Comparison Chart

Expression	Meaning	Use
à l'avance	ahead of time beforehand	doing something early on purpose (planning, preparing)
en avance	early	arriving or happening earlier than expected

How to remember them

- **à l'avance** = action planned early = preparation
- **en avance** = arrival is early = timing

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