

Below, under and beneath

These words have very similar meanings and are often confused. Both below and under can be used to mean 'in a lower position than something'. Although they are both possible in some cases, sometimes we use them in different circumstances.

To talk about something being covered by something else, we use under.

The cat was sleeping under the blanket. (NOT The cat was sleeping below the jacket.)

I felt that he was hiding something under his jacket. (NOT He was hiding something below his jacket.)

The whole village was under water.

Below is mainly used in cases where an object is *not directly under another*.

We could find something below the surface of the water.

Millions of people still live below the poverty line. (Somewhere below that hypothetical line separating the poor from the rich)

Below is also used in measurements where we think of a vertical scale.

This part of the country is below sea level.

Under can also mean 'younger than' or 'less than'.

Children under the age of twelve are not supposed to watch this film.

There are quite a few fixed expressions using the word under. Common examples are: *under construction, under fire, under attack, under arrest, under pressure, under these conditions* etc. Below cannot be used in these expressions.

You are under arrest.

The bridge is still under construction.

Her actions have always been under constant media scrutiny.

Beneath is mainly used in a literal or formal style.

Coral reefs that lie beneath the waters were a beautiful sight.

They sat beneath a huge mango tree.

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As you can see below and under are also possible in these cases.