

Difference between below and under

Both below and under can mean 'lower than'.

The knives are in the cupboard under the sink. OR The knives are in the cupboard below the sink.

Below is preferred when one thing is not directly under another.

The sun disappeared below the horizon. (NOT The sun disappeared under the horizon.)

The climbers stopped several hundred meters below the top of the mountain.

Under is preferred when something is covered by what is over it.

He was wearing a blue shirt under his sweater.

The cat is under the bed.

The whole village was under water.

In measurements of temperature and height we use below.

The temperature is five degrees below zero.

Parts of the city are below sea level.

To mean 'less than' or 'younger than' we use under.

There were under ten students in the class. (NOT There were below ten students in the class.)

You can't get a driving license if you are under 18. (NOT You can't get a driving license if you are below 18.)

Notes

There is a similar difference between above and over. Above is used in measurements of temperature and height.

Over is used to express ideas such as 'older than' and 'more than'.

You have to be over 18 to see that film.