

What is probability?

Probability is about the chance of something happening. When we talk about how probable something is we say things like 'unlikely', 'probably', 'even chance', 'almost definitely' and '100% certain'. All these are ways of talking about probability.

How can we use numbers to describe probabilities? The first step is the probability scale.

Probability scale

We can put things in order from the most certain to the most impossible. You can do this on the **probability scale**. The probability scale is a line with impossible things at one end and definite things at the other end. Here is an example:



- Winning the lottery is possible, but not very likely. So it goes close to 'impossible' on the scale.
- It will probably snow next winter, but it is not certain. So that goes near to 'certain', but not too close.
- Getting heads when you toss is exactly half way between 'impossible' and 'certain'. Getting tails is equally likely. They both have the same probability.