

Prepositions of Time- Pairwork Guessing Game with useful phrases for telephoning, meetings and emails

*Choose one of the sections below and read out one example sentence with the word in **bold** missing. Your partner can guess just once what the missing word is. If they are wrong, read out another example from the same section with the same missing word. Continue until they guess the right word, with only one guess per hint. Your partner must guess exactly the word there, even if other words are correct in the gap(s). If you run out of sentences before your partner guesses the answer, please make up your own example sentences with the same missing word until your partner is correct.*

When your partner guesses correctly, read out the ones they got wrong with the missing word in to help them remember, then switch roles and guess the missing word from your partner's sentences.

Ask about any sentences you don't understand, other words which you think could also go in the gaps, meanings of and differences between the prepositions, etc.

Swap worksheets with your partner and play the same game, making sure you start with the most difficult sections and most difficult examples (as they have seen those sentences before).

Prepositions of Time- Pairwork Guessing Game

Student A

Useful phrases for doing the activity

"I'm sorry, can you say that again (a little more slowly)?"

"Sorry, did you say.... or...?"

"Can you repeat the first part/ middle part/ last part?"

"I guess the missing word is..."

"I'm not sure. Can you give me another hint/ another example?"

"That's right. Well done. It's your turn to read one out"

"I think that is also correct, but that's not the word I've got here. Another one from the same section is..."

"That's close, but not quite what I've got here. Here's one more with the same missing word..."

"No, that's not possible because... I'll give you another example..."

"Sorry, you're only allowed to guess once per hint. I'll read out another one"

after

- Are you available the day **after** tomorrow?
- My meeting finishes at five p.m, so we can go out for a drink **after** that, if you like.
- Do you have to go straight back to your office **after** this (meeting)?
- We forecast that income will creep up next year and accelerate the year **after** next.
- If you can't make it next week, how about the week **after** next?
- Can you give me a hand with the presentation the day **after** tomorrow?

at

- If you have any further questions, please feel free to phone again **at** any time.
- What are you working on **at** the moment?
- So, you must tell me more about that later, but I have another meeting **at** midday, so we should probably get started, if that is okay.
- Unfortunately I will be travelling to Libya **at** just that time. How about later in the week?
- I really like your office. It looks lively around here. Is there much to do **at** night?

by

- Could you let me know **by** close of business on Friday?
- I'll make sure I'm at the airport **by** the time you arrive, so I'll meet you in arrivals.
- Well, I'd love to chat more, but we have to leave this room **by** eleven thirty (at the latest), so let's get down to business, shall we?
- I'm afraid I haven't made much progress, but I should finish **by** the end of next week.
- As you can see from this line graph, we expect to double our market share **by** (the end of) 2025.

in

- I'm sorry but I'm busy all morning. Do you have any time **in** the afternoon?
- We're considering having a press conference **in** three days' time. Can you come?
- I hope we have the chance to do business again **in** the near future.

- We had a few blips **in** the recent past, but demand has stabilised recently.
- Anyway, I have another meeting **in** 10 minutes, so we'll have to stop there, if that's okay.
- Anyway, I'm phoning about the meeting **in** April.

on

- See you **on** Monday.
- I'm afraid the office is closed **on** Independence Day. How about the day after that?
- Are you free to meet **on** Friday afternoon?
- Everything will be closed **on** Christmas Day, so make sure you buy food by Xmas Eve.
- The AGM will be **on** the thirteenth of January, so can you get the PowerPoint ready before that?
- Thanks for coming all this way **on** such a cold day.
- I'd like to meet **on** Monday the nineteenth of April, if that is convenient with you.
- I'm writing about our meeting **on** Monday.

until

- I recommend the restaurant on the second floor of your hotel. It's very reasonable and it's open **until** eleven p.m. every day.
- Anyway, we only have this room **until** two, so shall we make a start, if you don't mind?
- I don't think we can finish it but I'll continue working on it **until** the thirty first.

within

- We expect sales to fully bounce back **within** the next quarter.
- Sorry for the delay. I'll do it as soon as I can, and definitely **within** two days.

(nothing)

- I'm sorry, I'm busy – tomorrow. How about the day after tomorrow?
- I finished it – this morning. Do you have another project for me?
- That's fine. Speak to you – later, then.
- Do you fancy coming to our Xmas party – tonight?
- Are you doing anything – tonight?
- That a pity. We'll definitely let you know sooner – next time.
- Thank you for your email – yesterday.
- We don't seem to be getting anywhere. Let's sleep on this and try again – next Monday.
- Okay, I'll pass your message onto him. I'm sure he will get back to you – soon.
- No, that's okay, thanks. I'll just call again – later. Thanks for your help.

Prepositions of Time- Pairwork Guessing Game Student B

Useful phrases for doing the activity

"I'm sorry, can you say that again (a little more slowly)?"

"Sorry, did you say.... or...?"

"Can you repeat the first part/ middle part/ last part?"

"I guess the missing word is..."

"I'm not sure. Can you give me another hint/ another example?"

"That's right. Well done. It's your turn to read one out"

"I think that is also correct, but that's not the word I've got here. Another one from the same section is..."

"That's close, but not quite what I've got here. Here's one more with the same missing word..."

"No, that's not possible because... I'll give you another example..."

"Sorry, you're only allowed to guess once per hint. I'll read out another one"

ago

- It's a lovely area. I was last here ten years **ago**, but it hasn't really changed.
- I'm sorry, he left the office just a few minutes **ago**. Do you have his mobile number?
- Sales plateaued a few years **ago**, but have stayed quite stable since then, with no big dips.
- Thank you very much for your email two days **ago**.
- Harry? It's Alex. Graham introduced us two weeks **ago**.

at

- I'm afraid she's in a meeting **at** the moment. Would you like to leave a message?
- My plane lands **at** a quarter to six in the morning, so can we meet an hour after that?
- That's fine, but my next meeting starts **at** a quarter past three, so I'll need to finish before then.
- We'll discuss that **at** the end of the quarter, then I'll let you know what we decide.
- I'll be happy to answer any questions **at** the end of the presentation.

before

- Did you see the (big/ Man U and Man City) match the day **before** yesterday?
- I don't know if you remember me, but we met here the year **before** last.
- How are you getting on with the project you were given the month **before** last?
- We still have five minutes left, so is there any other business **before** we bring the meeting to a close?
- That sounds perfect, but I just need to check with my boss **before** I can sign.

for

- Can I borrow your dictionary **for** a few minutes?
- I'm going to York **for** a few days, so can we meet at the end of next week?
- Actually, we've known each other **for** years. It's great to see you again, Jules.

- I'm here in Osaka **for** the next four days. Is there anything I should do while I'm here?
- I'm only here **for** three days. What sightseeing spots do you most recommend?

in

- I'll check with my boss and get back to you **in** the next two days.
- Okay, see you **in** a few minutes, then.
- I'm just about to get on the train, so can you call again **in** about an hour when I get off?
- I'll send you an update **in** April, probably on the 15th.
- We're planning to launch the new product **in** winter 2021, and we predict that income will rocket straightaway.
- My firm was founded in Birmingham **in** 1789 but it only grew slowly for the first century.

since

- There was a little dip in profits two years ago, but profits have recovered **since** then.
- Long time no see! I've haven't seen you **since** the last trade fair. How have you been?
- Long time no see. How have you been **since** we last met?
- I am sorry it has been so long **since** my last email.

yet

- I'm afraid I haven't finished the report **yet**. Can we extend the time limit by two days?
- Have they delivered the raw materials **yet**?

(nothing)

- Would you like to join us for dinner – this evening?
- Do you have many more meetings – today?
- I look forward to meeting you – next week.
- I met your colleague Joao Fern – last year. Does he still work in your department?
- Are you doing anything special – this weekend?
- Have you been busy – this week?
- Great. You won't regret it. I'll email you a map – later (today).
- Thanks for your email – this morning.
- I'm sorry but she's out of the office. She should be back – this afternoon.
- Speak to you – this evening, then.

Definitions of prepositions of time grammar presentation

Match the prepositions of time (and no preposition) above to these meanings. Some prepositions have more than one meaning here so can go in more than one place, and not all the prepositions above are used. Ones next to each other with “-” between them have opposite meanings.

a point in time, e.g. “_____ half past two in the afternoon”, “_____ the moment” or “_____ the end”

at some time within a longer period of time, e.g. “_____ the 20th century”, “_____ 1997”, “_____ spring” or “_____ March”

a day and/ or date, e.g. “_____ Christmas Day”, “_____ Monday the seventeenth of July”, “_____ July fourth” or “_____ Tuesday”

with “this”, “last” and “next” and similar expressions, e.g. “_____ this week”, “_____ last month”, “_____ tonight”, “_____ the day before yesterday” or “_____ tomorrow”

before now, so always past, e.g. “two days _____” meaning “the day before yesterday” – after now, so always future, e.g. “_____ two days” meaning “the day after tomorrow”

before another time (not now), so past or future both possible, e.g. “two days _____ (that)” – after another time (not now), so past or future both possible, e.g. “two days _____” or “two days _____ (that)”

a deadline, with the point in time which you should finish before, e.g. “Can you find out and let me know _____ five p.m. on Friday (at the latest), because....?”

a deadline, with the length of time that you should finish before, e.g. “I’m sorry, I haven’t finished yet, but I should be able to finish _____ two weeks (maximum)”

from a point in time until now, e.g. “I’ve been working here _____ 2007”

a length of time, e.g. “I’ve been working here _____ twelve years”, “I’ll be staying in New York _____ two days”.

Test each other on the prepositions of time above:

- Read out the definition and a blanked example for your partner to complete
- Read out just a blanked example for your partner to complete
- Read out completed blanked examples and see if your partner can make a suitable explanation of the meaning and/ or use of that preposition of time
- Read out the explanation and help your partner make as many suitable examples as possible

Brainstorming stage

First of all without looking above, write as many suitable phrases as you can in each gap below. Many phrases not below as also possible.

Starting emails**Starting conversations/ Meeting people (again)****Small talk****Ending the small talk and getting down to business (looking at the meeting agenda, giving the reason for the call, etc)****Dealing with phone calls for other people****Talking about trends/ changes (forecasts, etc)****Giving advice/ Recommendations**

Requests/ Asking for help

Offers/ Giving help

Talking about progress (checking progress, promising future progress, etc)

Making arrangements (fixing meetings, making and replying to invitations, etc)

Ending phone calls

Ending meetings

Mentioning future contact

Suggested answers by function

Starting emails

- Thank you for your email – yesterday.
- I'm writing about our meeting **on** Monday.
- Thank you very much for your email two days **ago**.
- I am sorry it has been so long **since** my last email.
- Thanks for your email – this morning.

Starting conversations/ Meeting people (again)

- I don't know if you remember me, but we met here the year **before** last.
- Harry? It's Alex. Graham introduced us two weeks **ago**.
- Actually, we've known each other **for** years. It's great to see you again, Jules.

Small talk

- What are you working on **at** the moment?
- I really like your office. It looks lively around here. Is there much to do **at** night?
- Do you have to go straight back to your office **after** this (meeting)?
- Did you see the (big/ Man U and Man City) match the day **before** yesterday?
- Long time no see! I've haven't seen you **since** the last trade fair. How have you been?
- Long time no see. How have you been **since** we last met?
- Do you have many more meetings – today?
- Are you doing anything special – this weekend?
- I met your colleague Joao Fern – last year. Does he still work in your department?
- It's a lovely area. I was last here ten years **ago**, but it hasn't really changed.
- Have you been busy – this week?

Ending the small talk and getting down to business (looking at the meeting agenda, giving the reason for the call, etc)

- So, you must tell me more about that later, but I have another meeting **at** midday, so we should probably get started, if that is okay.
- Well, I'd love to chat more, but we have to leave this room **by** eleven thirty (at the latest), so let's get down to business, shall we?
- Anyway, we only have this room **until** two, so shall we make a start, if you don't mind?
- Anyway, I'm phoning about the meeting **in** April.

Dealing with phone calls for other people

- I'm sorry, he left the office just a few minutes **ago**. Do you have his mobile number?
- I'm afraid she's in a meeting **at** the moment. Would you like to leave a message?
- I'm sorry but she's out of the office. She should be back – this afternoon.

Talking about trends/ changes (forecasts, etc)

- We forecast that income will creep up next year and accelerate the year **after** next.
- If you can't make it next week, how about the week **after** next?
- We had a few blips **in** the recent past, but demand has stabilised recently.
- We expect sales to fully bounce back **within** the next quarter.
- Sales plateaued a few years **ago**, but have stayed quite stable since then, with no big

dips.

- We're planning to launch the new product **in** winter 2021, and we predict that income will rocket straightaway.
- My firm was founded in Birmingham **in** 1789 but it only grew slowly for the first century.
- There was a little dip in profits two years ago, but profits have recovered **since** then.

Giving advice/ Recommendations

- Everything will be closed **on** Christmas Day, so make sure you buy food by Xmas Eve.
- Thanks for coming all this way **on** such a cold day.
- I'd like to meet **on** Monday the nineteenth of April, if that is convenient with you.
- I recommend the restaurant on the second floor of your hotel. It's very reasonable and it's open **until** eleven p.m. every day.
- I'm here in Osaka **for** the next four days. Is there anything I should do while I'm here?
- I'm only here **for** three days. What sightseeing spots do you most recommend?

Requests/ Asking for help

- Can you give me a hand with the presentation the day **after** tomorrow?
- Could you let me know **by** close of business on Friday?
- The AGM will be **on** the thirteenth of January, so can you get the PowerPoint ready before that?
- Can I borrow your dictionary **for** a few minutes?

Offers/ Giving help

- If you have any further questions, please feel free to phone again **at** any time.
- We'll discuss that **at** the end of the quarter, then I'll let you know what we decide.
- I'll be happy to answer any questions **at** the end of the presentation.

Talking about progress (checking progress, promising future progress, etc)

- I'm afraid I haven't made much progress, but I should finish **by** the end of next week.
- As you can see from this line graph, we expect to double our market share **by** (the end of) 2025.
- I don't think we can finish it but I'll continue working on it **until** the thirty first.
- Sorry for the delay. I'll do it as soon as I can, and definitely **within** two days.
- I finished it – this morning. Do you have another project for me?
- How are you getting on with the project you were given the month **before** last?
- I'm afraid I haven't finished the report **yet**. Can we extend the time limit by two days?
- Have they delivered the raw materials **yet**?

Making arrangements (fixing meetings, making and replying to invitations, etc)

- Are you available the day **after** tomorrow?
- My meeting finishes at five p.m, so we can go out for a drink **after** that, if you like.
- Unfortunately I will be travelling to Libya **at** just that time. How about later in the week?
- I'll make sure I'm at the airport **by** the time you arrive, so I'll meet you in arrivals.
- I'm sorry but I'm busy all morning. Do you have any time **in** the afternoon?
- We're considering having a press conference **in** three days' time. Can you come?
- I'm afraid the office is closed **on** Independence Day. How about the day after that?

- Are you free to meet **on** Friday afternoon?
- I'm sorry, I'm busy – tomorrow. How about the day after tomorrow?
- Do you fancy coming to our Xmas party – tonight?
- Are you doing anything – tonight?
- That a pity. We'll definitely let you know sooner – next time.
- My plane lands **at** a quarter to six in the morning, so can we meet an hour after that?
- That's fine, but my next meeting starts **at** a quarter past three, so I'll need to finish before then.
- I'm going to York **for** a few days, so can we meet at the end of next week?
- Are you doing anything special – this weekend?
- Would you like to join us for dinner – this evening?
- Great. You won't regret it. I'll email you a map – later (today).

Ending phone calls

- If you have any further questions, please feel free to phone again **at** any time.
- That's fine. Speak to you – later, then.
- Okay, I'll pass your message onto him. I'm sure he will get back to you – soon.
- No, that's okay, thanks. I'll just call again – later. Thanks for your help.
- I'm just about to get on the train, so can you call again **in** about an hour when I get off?

Ending meetings

- Anyway, I have another meeting **in** 10 minutes, so we'll have to stop there, if that's okay.
- We don't seem to be getting anywhere. Let's sleep on this and try again – next Monday.
- We still have five minutes left, so is there any other business **before** we bring the meeting to a close?
- That sounds perfect, but I just need to check with my boss **before** I can sign.
- I'll check with my boss and get back to you **in** the next two days.

Mentioning future contact

- I hope we have the chance to do business again **in** the near future.
- See you **on** Monday.
- Okay, see you **in** a few minutes, then.
- I'll send you an update **in** April, probably on the 15th.
- I look forward to meeting you – next week.
- Speak to you – this evening, then.

Play a similar guessing prepositions game. Choose one section above, say its title, and read out two or three phrases with gapped prepositions for your partner(s) to guess. They can be the same or different prepositions this time.

Prepositions of time roleplays

Choose one example sentence from above, think of and explain a suitable situation to use that sentence, then roleplay that situation with your partner (just saying what you would write if it's an emailing situation).

Roleplay the situations, using the list of phrases above to help. For emailing ones, just say what you would write.

- Meet someone who you've met before and just chat
- Meet someone who you haven't met for a long time and catch up with their news
- Meet someone who you've met before, chat, and then start a business meeting with them
- Meet someone who you've met before and chat, including recommending places to go
- Meet someone who you've met before, chat, and end with an invitation
- Have a business meeting including a PowerPoint presentation with line graphs
- Make arrangements (e.g. fix a meeting) by phone
- Make arrangements (e.g. fix a meeting) by email
- Ask for advice by phone
- Ask for advice by email
- Make a request by email
- Make a request by phone
- Hold a progress check meeting
- Phone someone and ask to speak to someone else (who is not there)
- Take part in a job interview, including discussion of your past, present and future
- Take part in a performance review with your boss, including setting goals

Do the same with just the lists of prepositions to help, then with no help.

Different ways of saying times presentation

Write at least one other way of saying each time below. Some can take the same preposition of time, but some need different ones. Then look above for ideas.

- in two days
- in two years
- in two weeks
- in three days
- now/ presently/ currently
- at noon
- at eight o'clock in the evening
- before Saturday
- soon
- recently
- see you Monday
- on July 4th
- in the afternoon on Friday
- on the twenty fifth of December
- on January 13th
- eleven o'clock in the evening
- within the next three months
- later today
- at five forty five a.m.
- at three fifteen
- the day before yesterday
- two years ago
- two months ago
- for three or four minutes

Test each other on the expressions below:

- Read out one of the paired phrases and the NOT... X phrase and see if your partner can repeat back the correct version
- Read out one expression and see if your partner can say something with same meaning
- Choose one of the lines with more than two expressions with the same meanings, read out two, and see if your partner can say something else with the same meaning

Suggested answers

Ones in brackets () with NOT and X don't have that meaning or are incorrect English.

- in two days – the day after tomorrow (NOT two days later X NOT two days after X)
- in two years – the year after next (NOT two years later X NOT two days after X)
- in two weeks – the week after next (NOT two weeks later X NOT two weeks after X)
- in three days – in three days' time
- now/ presently/ currently – at the moment (NOT at that moment X)
- at noon – at midday/ at 12 p.m./ at twelve o'clock in the afternoon
- at eight o'clock in the evening – at eight o'clock at night/ at eight p.m. (NOT at eight o'clock p.m. X NOT at twenty o'clock X NOT at eight o'clock in the afternoon X)
- before Saturday – by Friday (NOT on Friday X)
- soon – in the near future
- recently – in the recent past (NOT in the near past X)
- see you Monday – see you on Mon/ see you next Mon (NOT see you on next Mon X)
- on July 4th – on Independence Day/ on the 4th of July
- in the afternoon on Friday – on Friday afternoon (NOT in Friday afternoon X)
- on the twenty fifth of December – on Christmas Day/ on December 25th
- on January 13th – on the 13th of January
- eleven o'clock in the evening – eleven p.m./ eleven o'clock at night
- within the next three months – within the next quarter/ in the next quarter/ in the next 3 months (NOT in three months X)
- later today – later (NOT soon X)
- at five forty five a.m. – at a quarter to six in the morning
- at three fifteen – at (a) quarter past three
- the day before yesterday – two days ago (NOT 2 days before X NOT 2 days earlier X)
- two years ago – the year before last (NOT the year before last year X)
- two months ago – the month before last
- for three or four minutes – for a few minutes

Differences between prepositions of time

Explain the different meanings of these pairs of prepositions of time expressions:

- in two days/ two days after (that)
- in two days/ two days later
- by Saturday/ before Saturday
- on Christmas Day/ at Christmas
- in three months/ within three months
- two years ago/ two years earlier
- two years ago/ two years before (that)
- I need it until Friday/ I need it by Friday

Choose one of the pairings below and tell your partner what both words are. Then choose a sentence with one of those two words from above for your partner to guess the missing word from. If they are wrong, explain why it's a mistake.

- at/ on
- on/ in
- on/ - (= nothing)
- in/ -
- ago/ before
- in/ after
- in/ within
- by/ within
- for/ since

Try to do the same with these pairings, making up your own example sentences:

- yet/ already

Prepositions of time opposites

Write opposites of the expressions below:

- tomorrow
- last week
- the day before yesterday
- two days ago
- two day earlier/ two days before (that)
- in a week
- in the distant past
- in the near future/ soon
- I have already done it

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Suggested answers

- tomorrow - yesterday
- last week – next week
- the day before yesterday – the day after tomorrow
- two days ago – in two days
- two day earlier – two days later/ two days after (that)
- in a week – a week ago
- in the distant past – in the distant future/ in the recent past
- in the near future/ soon – in the recent past/ recently/ in the distant future
- I have already done it – I haven't done it yet

Test each other on the phrases, including in the opposite way (saying the word on the right for your partner to remember one on the left).