

# A SCHEME FOR TEACHING PREPOSITIONS OF TIME IN THE LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL.

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about	during	past
after	for	since
at	from	till
before	in	until
by	on	within

These are the 15 prepositions of time listed in H.E. Palmer's **Grammar of English Words**. One could add one or two others (e.g. *towards*, *throughout*) but they do not seem very important.

Let's attempt to break the list up into logical groupings and to establish some priorities:—

## Form One

Most teachers find it necessary to revise or re-teach Telling the Time in the first term. It is convenient to do this before introducing practice of the Simple Present Tense. AT + Clock time can be introduced naturally here. TO and PAST also arise naturally in telling the time. It is also quite easy to establish the relationship between FROM and TO as a way of measuring time.

e.g. Ali does his homework *from* 7 o'clock *to* 8 o'clock.

Now, or later, decide whether to teach *till* or *until* (to present both words at once will certainly lead to confusion) and explain that UNTIL is another way of saying 'to' in the *from ... to* pattern of the last example: -

e.g. Ali does his homework *from* 7 o'clock *until* 8' clock.

Also in Year One, the days of the week will need to be revised and this is a convenient moment for teaching ON.

e.g. *On* Monday, Tuesday, etc.

If the months of the year are revised, then IN can be presented and practised:

e.g. Ali's birthday is *in* May.

Later in the year *in* and *on* can be introduced with dates:

e.g. He was born *in* 1968.

He was born *on* 1st May, 1968.

Towards the end of Year One it is possible to revise IN, ON and AT contrastively:

e.g.

AT	clock-time meals	at half-past three at breakfast
ON	days dates	on Tuesday on 31st August
IN	parts of the day* months seasons years	in the morning in November in summer in 1981

\*exception: *at* night

Unit 12a of the Syllabus introduces BEFORE and AFTER with phrases of time and pupils do not seem to find these items particularly difficult. Mealtimes provide a simple starting point:

e.g. *before* breakfast, *after* dinner, etc.

So in Year One, eight of the 15 prepositions can be covered without great strain.

## Form Two

Unit 17c of the Syllabus introduces the prepositions FOR and SINCE in association with the Present Perfect Tense. Although these items occur in the Form One portion of the Syllabus, many teachers prefer to postpone teaching the Present Perfect until Year Two, at least with weaker pupils. *Since* is closely connected with this tense but *for* can of course be used with past, present or future time. Nevertheless they make a neatly contrasting pair.

Try to show that *for* is used with a **period** of time:

e.g. for ten minutes  
for three days

while *since* is used with a **point** of time and means 'from that point of time in the past until now'.

e.g. since Friday  
since 10 o'clock

ABOUT (in the sense of 'approximately') can be slipped in at some convenient point during the year.

e.g. The bell will ring *about* 11.20 a.m.

AGO is not a preposition at all (so grammarians say) but it is certainly an important time word, even if it is not listed as a separate Syllabus item. Teach and practise in association with the Simple Past Tense.

## Form Three

There are now only three prepositions left from our original list, all presenting possible conceptual difficulties to the learner: DURING, WITHIN and BY.

*Within*, though less common, is especially beloved by the SRP examiners! It may be enough simply to teach pupils to understand its meaning without asking them to use it. Explain that it is another way of saying 'inside':

e.g. The letter will arrive *within* three days  
= The letter will arrive 'inside' three days.  
(or: before three days pass).

*During* is not used with measurements of time as *within* is. Teach in suitable contexts such as:

It rained during the night.

Hamzah went to sleep during the lesson.

*By* is very difficult to explain. If we link it to *since*, it is possible to show that it is used with a point in time:

e.g. *since* Friday (= from Friday till now)

*by* Friday (=from now until, and including, Friday: any point 'inside' this time.)

whereas *for* and *within* are used with a **period** of time:

e.g. for two weeks  
within two weeks

These concepts of 'point' and 'period' are certainly difficult for young learners to grasp; but simple drilling may succeed if explanations fail!