



Time Drills

Contrast times

S1: What did you do last weekend?

S2: I'm going to go with my friends last weekend.

TR: I **WENT** out with my friends **LAST WEEKEND**. Let's repeat.

TR/S: I **WENT** out with my friends **LAST WEEKEND**. X3+

TR: I'M **GOING TO** go out with my friends **NEXT WEEKEND**.

TR/S: I'M **GOING TO** go out with my friends **NEXT WEEKEND**. X3+

TR: Last weekend.

SS: I went out with my friends last weekend.

TR: Next weekend.

SS: I'm going to go out with my friends next weekend.

Simple Past / Present Perfect

I **went** to Starbucks twice **yesterday / last week / last month / last year**.

I **have been** to Starbucks twice **today / this week / this month / this year**.

I **went** to Starbucks + **finished time**

I **have been** to Starbucks + **unfinished time**

TR: New York, last year

ST: I went to New York last year.

TR: New York, this year

ST: I've been to New York twice this year.

In On At

I took a trip **IN winter / December / 2013 / the morning**

We left **ON my birthday / Monday / December 5th**

She bought tickets **AT 6 o'clock / night / midnight**

TR: summer

ST: in summer

TR: 8 o'clock

ST: at 8 o'clock

Until / by

Can you do this report today?

I can do it **until** three. = I can work on it **from now to** three.

I can do it **by** three. = I can finish it **before** three.

I can't do it **until** three. = I'm busy **from now to** three.

I can't do it **by** three. = I can't finish **before** three.



Time Drills

Time drills aren't too complicated. What we are looking at is helping students see the difference between the various tenses in English and developing them so well that they become second nature for them leading to accurate production. In this case, I've presented sentences with errors that the teacher may want to use a time drill to help correct.

In the case of a simple slip up, I might just drill one pattern. However if a student has a hard time switching tenses or using one particular tense, it becomes helpful to perform more in-depth drills involving contrast.

About the examples:

Compare / Contrast

In this first example I've presented a conversation segment between two students which the teacher is listening to. When the student makes a mistake the teacher interrupts and drills to correct the pattern and reinforce correct patterns.

In this case I've contrasted two times. For the sake of brevity I haven't included comparisons or contrasts between more times but that is certainly doable. Ideally the drill is done quickly, thirty seconds to two minutes so the students can quickly get back to their conversation.

In some cases you might drill more times, simple past, present, future for example. I would do this based on the students' needs, the type of errors they make or the types of *regular* errors they make. In most cases I keep it to two times so as not to overwhelm students during their conversations. In group classes you might want to expand your drills as part of an opening or closing drill.

Simple Past / Present Perfect

Here I've presented one particular pattern that students tend to make a lot of mistakes with. This was also a pattern I found particularly hard to explain when I was just starting to teach. Since it's a good example of a common error, it's great to practice working on how you want to drill this high frequency pattern. Contrasting finished and unfinished time clauses has worked the best for me. I also tend to work on "I've been there three times." = in my life. We don't actually say "in my life," it's just understood.

IN ON AT

These are three simple words that are notorious for how often students make a mistake using them. Try doing a quick drill with one or two of them and call out the time word associated with it. I've listed a simple version but mix it up. Call out only in and on words. Call out only at and on words. Do it as a warm up, do it as a review, do it as a quick drill associated with correction. Try it as a quick game calling out all sorts of times and dates and see if people can make sentences for them. There's LOADS of ways to play with it.

By / Until

These two terms are notoriously tough. The examples I used here are the best I've

found. They seem so similar that it's easy to think they are both ok.

- O I have to finish by six.
- O I have until six to finish.

These two patterns basically contain the same meaning but there is a nuance that's a little hard to grasp. After all we wouldn't say

- X I have to finish until six.
- X I have by six to finish.

They seem to have the same meaning but are used differently. Rather than confuse students with two patterns like this, I've chosen to use the examples included on the first page as more concise and easy to digest, remember and use.

How to use the worksheet.

- 1. Listen to your students and look through your lessons and materials with the time words on this worksheet in mind. Look out for any times when you think they might come up. Think about your students and the kinds of mistakes they make. Do they make the sorts of errors pointed out here?**
- 2. Practice making each of the different types of example drills listed.**
- 3. Share your ideas in a group discussion with other teachers.**
- 4. Ask yourselves which drills and examples work best for which terms and use them accordingly with your students. Keep the ones that work, toss the ones that don't.**

Credit

All images created by hand, by Mike Kloran. Check out more of my illustration and educational design at:

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