

ESL Lesson: Prepositions For Time Of Day

Difficulty Level: ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

It is very important to use the correct preposition when discussing different times of the day. However, sometimes ESL students can become easily confused between "at" and "in the" when referring to time. In this lesson we will solve this problem once and for all!

The chart below is a useful reference guide for choosing the correct preposition for the time of day.

at	in the
2 o'clock	morning
breakfast time	afternoon
lunch time	day time
dinner time	middle of the day
tea time / snack time	evening
night	middle of the night
break time	

Preposition: AT

Always use the preposition "at" when you are talking about a specific time. Also, use "at" when we are talking about a specific time of day (any point in time that includes the word "time") with the exception of daytime.

Correct Examples:

*The movie will be over **at** 3:00 pm.*

***At** lunchtime, I usually eat a small snack and go for a walk.*

*Our whole family eats together **at** dinnertime.*

*My co-workers and I only have enough time for a coffee and a cigarette **at** break time.*

Incorrect Examples:

I usually read in the night.

It's not good to eat junk food in the breakfast time.

Preposition: IN THE

We use the preposition "in the" most commonly when we generalize about the morning, afternoon, and evening:

*"I normally eat breakfast **in the** morning with my parents".*

"**This**" can be used in exchange of "**in the**" if we are talking about a specific time:

*"I normally eat breakfast **in the** morning with my parents, but **this** morning I ate breakfast alone."*

Strangely, we use the preposition "at" for night, but "in the" for middle of the night, so be careful.

Correct Examples:

*It's best for me to study English twice a day, **in the** morning, and again **in the** evening, after dinner.*

Incorrect Examples:

My brother usually walks the dog at the morning, while I walk the dog at the afternoon.

Tips:

1.) this morning > this afternoon > this evening > **TONIGHT** (not this night)

yesterday morning > yesterday afternoon > yesterday evening > **LAST NIGHT** (not yesterday night)

BUT...

tomorrow morning > tomorrow afternoon > tomorrow evening > **tomorrow night**

2.) Never say "**next, next day**" or "**next, next week**". Instead, say "**in two days**" or "**two day from now.**"

*"He'll be returning from China **in two weeks.**"*

Quiz

Fill in the blank with the correct answer using either "at", "in the", or "this".

- 1.) I'll be going to China at the end of ____ week.
- 2.) We try to eat as a family ____ dinnertime.
- 3.) Due to my companies international presence, it's not uncommon to recieve emails ____ middle of the night.
- 4.) I haven't received an email ____ night in a long time.
- 5.) It takes about twenty minutes to get ready ____ morning, but only 10 minutes to get ready for bed ____ night.
- 6.) Our staff eats together ____ lunchtime but ____ evening we go our separate ways ____ dinnertime.
- 7.) It's not easy taking pictures ____ night.
- 8.) ____ evening I didn't eat ____ dinnertime.
- 9.) I usually have to use the washroom ____ middle of the night.
- 10.) My curfew is ____ 3 ____ morning.

Questions:

Answer the questions in full sentences. Even though they are easy be mindful of the proper preposition you have to use.

- 1.) When do you have dinnertime?
- 2.) What time do you usually wake up and go to bed?
- 3.) During days off, and weekends, how do you fill your time in the middle of the day?
- 4.) What time does your work shift start and finish?
- 5.) How do you unwind after work in the evening?
- 6.) When was your curfew growing up?

Daily Expressions & Idioms:

- 1.) **"In the meantime"**: Means until something expected happens.

*"You're new computer will arrive in the evening. **In the meantime**, you can use my laptop". "The election results won't be televised until after 7pm. **In the meantime**, let's watch the baseball game."*

- 2.) **"Above and beyond"**: More than is required.

*"He's a great worker. He often goes **above and beyond** what is expected of him."*

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