Workshop 14: Small Words, Big Difference ✦

Name: _____

Level: _____

In this workshop you will go over the small words that change the meaning of a whole sentence. You will practise in, on and at, learn the verbs that always take the same preposition, write the -ing form correctly after like, love, don't mind, don't like, hate and enjoy, choose between be and do in questions, and use can with no to and no -s. You will train your ear on a real video, and at the end you will record a short video of your own for our Facebook group.

Your plan for today ▸

Part 1 — Small words for time: in, on, at (grammar and vocabulary)
Part 2 — verb + -ing (grammar)
Part 3 — be or do? and can (grammar)
Part 4 — Small words, big difference (reading and video)
Part 5 — My free time (your video project)

What you need ☞

- One video from YouTube. The link is in Part 4. Watch it with the subtitles switched OFF.
- Your phone, to record your own video for Part 5.
- About 90 minutes. You can do it in one sitting, or over two days.

How to work through this workshop ✎

- Work at your own pace. Nobody is watching you, and there is no clock.
- Watch the video as many times as you need. Three times is normal.
- Write your answers straight into this document, or print it and write by hand.
- If you are not sure, write your best guess. A guess tells me more than an empty line.

☀ Part 1 — Small Words for Time: in, on, at

a. The three little words

English uses three words where Spanish often uses one. Think of three boxes, from big to small.

in the big box: months, seasons, years, and the morning, the afternoon and the evening.
in July · in winter · in 2026 · in the morning

on one day inside the big box: days and dates.
on Monday · on 2nd March · on Friday evening

at one moment inside the day: clock times.
at 11 o'clock · at half past two

Two fixed phrases do not follow the pattern. Learn them exactly as they are: **at night** and **at the weekend**.

⚠ **Be careful!** A date is a day, so it takes **on**: on 2nd March, *not* in 2nd March. The month on its own takes **in**: in March. This one catches almost everybody, so read it twice.

b. Practice: in, on or at?

Write the correct word in each gap.

1 My birthday is _____ July.
2 Their wedding is _____ 2nd March.
3 She goes to bed _____ about 11 o'clock.
4 We have our English class _____ Tuesday.
5 It often snows _____ winter.
6 The film starts _____ 8.30.
7 My mother was born _____ 1972.
8 I don't work _____ the weekend.
9 He always reads _____ night.
10 My sister arrives _____ Sunday 14th June.
11 I usually study _____ the evening.
12 We go on holiday _____ December.

c. Verbs that always take the same little word

Some verbs in English always go with the same preposition. Learn the verb and its little word together, as if they were one word.

look for = *buscar* I can't find my keys. Can you look for them?
wait for = *esperar* I'm coming! Wait for me!
listen to = *escuchar* I listen to music every morning.
talk to / speak to = *hablar con* I need to talk to the doctor.
think about = *pensar en* She often thinks about her family.
ask for = *pedir* He asked for a glass of water.
arrive is the exception, because it changes. You **arrive at** a building, but you **arrive in** a city or a country. We arrive at the airport. We arrive in Bogotá.

⚠ **Be careful!** Spanish and English do not always choose the same little word, and sometimes Spanish uses none at all. Escuchar música is listen to music, never listen music. Esperar a alguien is wait for somebody, never wait to somebody.

d. Practice: for, to, about or at?

1 I can't find my glasses. Can you look _____ them?
2 I need to talk _____ the doctor about my results.
3 I'm coming! Wait _____ me!
4 I love listening _____ salsa when I cook.
5 She often thinks _____ her holiday in Cartagena.
6 He was thirsty, so he asked _____ a glass of water.
7 We arrive _____ the airport at six in the morning.
8 Please listen _____ me. This is important.

e. Practice: find the mistake

Each sentence has one mistake. Write the sentence correctly.

This sentence is wrong	Write it correctly
1 Their wedding is in 2nd March.	
2 My birthday's at July.	
3 I listen music every morning.	
4 Wait to me! I'm coming!	
5 We have an exam in Monday.	
6 The class starts on nine o'clock.	

f. One weather word, two forms

Most weather words have two forms, a noun and an adjective, and the adjective usually ends in **-y**.
✓ There's a lot of **fog** today. *(noun)* ✓ It's **foggy** today. *(adjective)*

Complete the table.

noun	adjective
sun	sunny
cloud	cloudy
_____	windy
rain	_____
fog	_____
_____	snowy

g. Write about you

Tip: *There is no wrong answer here. Use in, on and at where you can.*

1 When is your birthday? Use in with the month, then on with the date.

2 What is the weather like in your city in December, and what do you do at the weekend?

✎ Part 2 — verb + -ing

a. The rule

After like, love, don't mind, don't like, hate and enjoy, the second verb always ends in -ing.

I love cooking for my family.
I like going to the cinema.
I don't mind getting up early.
I don't like doing the housework.
I hate waiting for the bus.

We also use the -ing form after **enjoy**: I enjoy watching football on TV.

⚠ **Be careful!** In Spanish you say *me gusta hacer*, with the infinitive. English does not work that way here.

✓ **I like doing the housework.** ✗ **I like do the housework.**

✓ **I don't mind getting up early.** ✗ **I don't mind to get up early.**

After don't mind and enjoy, the -ing form is the ***only*** correct one. With like, love and hate you will sometimes hear to + verb (I love to dance). That is not wrong, but in this course we always use the -ing form.

would like is different, and it always takes to + verb: I would like to start yoga.

b. Spelling of the -ing form

most verbs: add -ing	work → working · hear → hearing · listen → listening
verb ending in -e: take the e away, then add -ing	live → living · dance → dancing · have → having
short verbs ending in one vowel + one consonant: double the consonant	get → getting · run → running · swim → swimming

c. Practice: write the -ing form

1 work → _____	**2** get → _____	**3** live → _____
4 run → _____	**5** study → _____	**6** dance → _____
7 have → _____	**8** swim → _____	**9** take → _____
10 listen → _____	**11** shop → _____	**12** write → _____

d. Practice: complete the sentences

Write the -ing form of the verb in brackets.

1 I don't mind _____ up early. *(get)*
2 Do you like _____ the housework? *(do)*
3 My aunt loves _____ the tango. *(dance)*
4 We hate _____ for the bus in the rain. *(wait)*
5 He doesn't like _____ in the morning. *(run)*
6 I really enjoy _____ to live music. *(listen)*
7 They don't mind _____ on Saturdays. *(work)*
8 My brother loves _____ in the sea. *(swim)*

e. Practice: find the mistake

Each sentence has one mistake. Correct it using the -ing form.

This sentence is wrong	Write it correctly
1 I don't mind get up early.	
2 Do you like do the housework?	
3 She enjoys to cook for her family.	
4 I hate wait for the bus.	
5 He loves play the guitar.	

6 We don't mind to work on Saturdays.	

f. Word partners

Some verbs and nouns go together in English. Complete each sentence with one verb from the box. Use each verb once.

buy · call · have · hear · take · tell

1 It's my sister's birthday tomorrow. I need to _____ her a present.
2 We're going to _____ a party on Saturday. Can you come?
3 Stand there and smile. I want to _____ a photo.
4 It's raining and it's late. Let's _____ a taxi.
5 Don't _____ anyone. It's a secret!
6 Be quiet! I can _____ a strange noise in the kitchen.

g. Write about you

Tip: *Remember the -ing form. Example: I love cooking at the weekend.*

1 I love _____
2 I like _____
3 I don't mind _____
4 I don't like _____
5 I hate _____
6 My best friend loves _____

❖ Part 3 — be or do? and can

a. Read the conversation

Camila meets her neighbour Sara on the stairs. Read what they say, and look at the words in **bold**.

Sara: Hi Camila! What **are you doing**?
Camila: I'm carrying twenty kilos of shopping up the stairs.
Sara: Oh! **Do you** need help?
Camila: Yes please. **Can you** take this bag?
Sara: Of course. So, what **do you do**?
Camila: I'm a nurse. And **are you** tired? You **look** tired!
Sara: I am now!

b. Think about the grammar

Look at the conversation again. Why does Sara say "What are you doing?" in one line and "What do you do?" in another?

be or do?

Use **be** (am, is, are) when the sentence is about something happening NOW, or when there is no other verb.

What are you doing? *(now)* **Are you hungry?** *(there is no other verb)*

Use **do or does** when the sentence is about a habit, a job or a fact, and there IS another verb.

What do you do? *(your job)* **Do you play the guitar?** *(a habit)*

Easy trick: try adding *at this moment* to the question. If it fits, use **are**. If it does not fit, use **do**.

✓ What … you doing *at this moment*? → **are**

✗ What … you do *at this moment*? → **do**

c. he, she, it: add -s

In the present simple, the verb takes **-s** after he, she and it.

I work → he works. I go → she goes. I study → he studies. I have → she has.

But after **does** and **doesn't** the verb has NO -s, because does is already carrying it.

✓ What time does she **go** to bed? ✗ What time does she **goes** to bed?

✓ He doesn't **like** jazz. ✗ He doesn't **likes** jazz.

d. Practice: circle the correct words

1 A: What **are you / do you** doing? B: I'm studying.
2 A: What **are you / do you** do? B: I'm a nurse.
3 **Are you / Do you** hungry? Yes. What's for dinner?
4 What song **are you / do you** listening to?
5 **Are you / Do you** play the guitar?
6 A: What's that noise? B: **They're having / They're have** a party upstairs.
7 The weather is cold, but **it isn't / it doesn't** raining.
8 Look! The sun **shines / is shining**.
9 The museum **close / closes** at 2.00 on Mondays.
10 What time **do / does** she usually go to bed?

e. Practice: complete with the correct form

1 My sister _____ in a hospital. *(work)*
2 What time _____ the shop open? *(do)*
3 He _____ getting up early. *(not like)*
4 The bank _____ at four o'clock. *(close)*
5 _____ your brother play football? *(do)*
6 She _____ three children. *(have)*
7 My father _____ to work by bus. *(go)*
8 _____ it often rain here in May? *(do)*

f. can + infinitive: no to, no -s

can never changes, and the verb after it never changes either.

✓ **I can play the piano.** **She can play the piano.** **They can play the piano.**

✗ **She cans play.** ✗ **She can to play.** ✗ **She can plays.**

Questions: put can first. **Can you come tonight?** not Do you can come tonight?

Negative: **can't**. I can't swim.

⚠ **Be careful!** "He can't play the violin" means he does not play it at all. "He can't play the violin very well" means he does play it, but he is not good. Two small words change the whole meaning.

g. Practice: circle the correct words

1 She **can play / can to play / cans play** the piano.

2 **Do you can / Can you / You can to** come tonight?

3 My brother **can't / doesn't can** swim.

4 **Can she / Does she can** speak French?

5 They **can to come / can come** on Saturday.

6 He **can drives / can drive** a bus.

h. Practice: write the question

Tip: *More than one question is possible in some items. Just make sure you start with the right word: do, does, are or can.*

Your question	The answer
1 _____?	I'm a teacher.
2 _____?	I'm cooking dinner.
3 _____?	Yes, I can. I play the guitar.
4 _____?	She goes to bed at eleven.
5 _____?	No, I'm not. I'm not tired at all.
6 _____?	Yes, I do. I love salsa.

☞ Part 4 — Small Words, Big Difference

a. One small word decides the answer

In a listening or reading test, the difference between the right answer and the wrong one is often one small word:

very · only · never · sometimes · doesn't

Read or listen to the whole sentence before you choose. The small word is often at the end, where it is easy to miss.

b. Practice: match the sentence with its meaning

Match each sentence (1–6) with its meaning (a–f). Write the letter in the box.

1		He can't play the violin.	a) He does not play the violin at all.

2		He can't play the violin very well.	b) They are quiet most of the time, but not always.
3		My neighbours never make a noise.	c) In the morning she drinks coffee and nothing else.
4		My neighbours sometimes make a noise.	d) He plays the violin, but he is not good at it.
5		She drinks only coffee in the morning.	e) In the morning she drinks no coffee.
6		She doesn't drink coffee in the morning.	f) They are quiet all the time.

⚠ **Careful with NOT** When a question asks what a text does NOT say, or which thing is NOT true, underline the negative word first. The right answer is the one that is missing from the text, not one of the ones that are in it.

c. Practice: read about Ana

Ana, a music teacher in Bogotá

Ana is a music teacher in Bogotá. She teaches the guitar and the piano, and at the weekend she sings in a small band. She loves working with children, and she doesn't mind teaching in the evening, because she does not like getting up early. In her free time she goes swimming on Saturdays and she reads a lot.

1 Which of these does the text NOT say about Ana?

a) She teaches the guitar. b) She sings in a band. c) She plays the violin. d) She goes swimming.

2 Ana doesn't mind _____.

a) getting up early b) teaching in the evening c) working in the morning

d. ▶ Now watch the video

An Oxford Online English lesson: How to Talk About Your Free Time and Hobbies in English
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoyhPZDp3dE

- Turn the subtitles **OFF** before you start. Click the CC button under the video.
- Watch it three times: once for the general idea, once to write your answers, and once to check them.
- It is normal not to understand every word. Listen for the words you do know.
- If the link does not open, search YouTube for: Oxford Online English free time and hobbies.

e. Watch once, without stopping. What is the video about? Write two or three sentences.

f. Watch again. Write five verb + -ing phrases that you hear.

Tip: *For example: playing football, going swimming. Check your spelling against the rules in Part 2.*

1	**2**
3	**4**
5	

g. Watch again. Write three questions you hear, and say whether each one uses be or do.

Tip: *Example: "What do you like doing in your free time?" takes do, because it is about a habit and there is another verb.*

The question you heard	be or do, and why
1	
2	
3	

h. Now answer these questions about yourself, in full sentences.

1 What do you like doing in your free time?

2 What are you doing at this moment, apart from this workshop?

3 Is there a hobby you would like to start? Why?

▶ Part 5 — My Free Time (Your Video)

Now it is time to use everything from today in a real situation. Record a short video on your phone, between 60 and 90 seconds, and post it in our private Facebook group. Nobody outside the group can see it. Watch your classmates' videos and leave one friendly comment on at least two of them.

a. How to do it

1 Read the five questions below and think about your answers. Do not write a full script: notes sound natural, a script sounds like reading.

2 Practise once or twice out loud. Nobody is watching.

3 Record the video. If you make a mistake, keep going. I would rather hear a real voice than a perfect one.

4 Post it in the Facebook group before the next class.

5 Watch two classmates' videos and answer their questions in the comments, in English.

b. Answer these five questions in your video

1 What do you do? Say your job, or what you study. *(This question takes do.)*

2 What are you doing today? Look around you and tell us. *(This question takes be.)*

3 What do you like doing in your free time? Use three verbs with -ing.

4 What can you do well, and what can't you do very well? Use can and can't.

5 Finish with a question for the group, using in, on or at. For example: What do you do on Sundays?

c. Use this language in your video

- I'm a … / I study … At the moment I'm …
- I love / I like / I don't mind / I don't like / I hate + verb + -ing
- I can … quite well, but I can't … very well.
- on Mondays · at the weekend · in the morning · in December

d. A model video (about 70 seconds)

Camila ▶

Hi everyone, I'm Camila. I'm a nurse, and I work at a hospital in the centre of the city. At the moment I'm sitting in my kitchen with a cup of coffee, and my dog is sleeping under the table. In my free time I love cooking, I like walking in the park, and I don't mind doing the housework if there's music on. I hate getting up early, but I do it every day! I can swim quite well, but I can't cook rice very well. It's always terrible! And my question for you is: what do you do on Sunday mornings?

e. Your notes. Do not write a full script.

f. Before you post it, check

- ☐ My video is between 60 and 90 seconds.
- ☐ I answered all five questions.
- ☐ I used do for the job question and be for the "now" question.
- ☐ I used at least three verbs with -ing.
- ☐ I used can and can't.
- ☐ I finished with a question using in, on or at.
- ☐ I posted it in the Facebook group and commented on two classmates' videos.

Can you…? ✦

Tick the box if you can do it. If you cannot, go back to that part.

- ☐ use in, on and at with months, dates and clock times, and remember at night and at the weekend
- ☐ use look for, wait for, listen to, talk to, think about and ask for with the right little word
- ☐ name the weather as a noun and as an adjective (fog and foggy)
- ☐ write the -ing form of a verb with the correct spelling
- ☐ use verb + -ing after like, love, don't mind, don't like, hate and enjoy
- ☐ choose between be and do in a question
- ☐ add -s after he, she and it, and leave it off after does
- ☐ use can with no to and no -s
- ☐ hear the difference that very, only, never and sometimes make in a sentence
- ☐ talk about my free time in a short video

✦ Well done. You finished Workshop 14.

Send me this document and post your video in the Facebook group before our next class. If something was difficult, write it below and we will start the next class with it.