

Language Learning and Teaching

Grammar Substitution Drills. Learn or teach English grammar by focusing on just one area at a time. Use “substitution drills” to reinforce the lesson. Then practice what you’ve learned by talking with some native speaker friends.

In a “substitution drill” you focus on only one part of the sentence at a time and substitute different words for the original word. This forms several slightly different sentences. Say all of the sentences out loud. This will help you develop fluency and practice “getting it right”.

You can also make cards with words or pictures to represent the parts of the sentence.

Below are some examples of substitution drills for the sentence *Yesterday I went to the market.*

Make cards to represent the parts of the sentence. This will help you visualize the sentence structure.

time	subject	verb	preposition	location
Yesterday	I	went	to	the market.

This sentence has five parts: time, subject, verb, preposition, location. Each part can be substituted.

You could draw pictures (instead of writing words) on cards to help you make substitutions, too. For example, to represent the “location” words:

- draw some fruit (to represent the market)
- draw a bridge
- draw a cross (to represent the church)
- draw a medical cross (to represent the hospital)
- draw a book or school house (to represent the school)

You could use a calendar to help you visualize the “time” substitutions.

You could draw stick figures in action to represent the “verbs”.

Follow the drill patterns modeled in the column on the right.

time - Substitute the “time” word, which is usually the first or the last part of the sentence.

Yesterday This morning Last night The day before yesterday Last week	I went to the market.
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subject - Substitute the “subject”.

Yesterday	I you he she David we they	went to the market.
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location - Substitute the “location” (e.g., the object of the preposition *to*).

Yesterday I went to	the market. the bridge. church. the hospital. school.
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verb and **preposition** - Substitute the “verb” and the “preposition”.

Yesterday I	went	to	the market.
	returned	from	
	sat	in	
	stayed shopped	at	

If you **negate** the sentences, you use *did + not + simple verb*:

Yesterday I didn't	go	to	the market.
	return	from	
	sit	in	
	stay shop	at	

question - If you turn the sentence into a question, you move the “time” word to the end and put the “question” word first. Use “*did*” + simple verb:

How	did you	go	to	the market yesterday?
What time		return	from	
With whom		sit	in	
Why		stay shop	at	