

# Time for Preschoolers: Duration



*Most preschool-age children are not ready to fully grasp such abstract time concepts as duration (the amount of time an event lasts). But preschoolers already deal with duration in a variety of situations, such as when they have to wait for something they want. Here are some ideas for helping older preschoolers use prediction and estimation to learn how time goes by. (See Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmarks 7.A.ECd, 7.B.ECa, and 7.C.ECb.)*



## Invite older preschoolers to notice how long certain activities last.

- Ask questions such as, “Which do you think takes you a longer time: eating a cracker or drinking a glass of water?”
- Point out parts of a clock face and explain some ways that you use a clock. For example, have children compare the position of the hour and minute hands before and after the class goes outside. What do they notice? Explain that the changes represent seconds and minutes passing.



## Talk with the class about how people keep track of time.

- Explain that many people use seconds and minutes to measure the amount of time it takes to do something.
- Try teaching the children to count seconds by chanting, “One-one-thousand, two-one-thousand...” or “One-a-penny, two-a-penny...” Let them try chanting in time with a digital timer or stopwatch that shows seconds. Keep in mind that counting to 10 or 20 may be challenging for preschoolers, whether using the chant or not.
- Show children how to use timers, stopwatches, and hourglasses.



## Adapt physical activities to help children play with time concepts.

- Invite children to do things for a set amount of time. For example, you might ask a child to predict how many times she can jump in 10 seconds. Then assign other children to count her jumps. Say “GO” and then start the timer when the child begins jumping. Her classmates can count the jumps until the timer sounds. Help them compare predictions to the actual number of jumps.
- Pose new questions on other days: “How many seconds can you stand on one foot?” “How many hiders can the seeker find during 2 minutes of Hide and Seek?” “How many seconds can the class bounce a ball on the blanket before it falls off?”
- Ask children to estimate how many minutes it will take to walk to the bus stop or all around the school building. Use a stopwatch to time the walk. Help them compare the actual times to their estimates.



## Let children investigate time while cooking.

- When you cook with children, ask them to predict how long certain processes will take. “How many minutes do you think it will take the water to start boiling?”
- Invite children to experiment: “Will noodles be done cooking after 1 minute? 5 minutes? 20 minutes?”



For related Web resources, see “Time for Preschoolers: Duration” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

---

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



29 Children's Research Center  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469  
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732  
Toll-free: 877-275-3227  
Email: [iel@illinois.edu](mailto:iel@illinois.edu)  
Internet: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

Illinois State  
Board of Education