

The Time

Time is an important part of our daily life. We need it in order to plan out our days, know when to go to work, or even just catch the bus to town. Luckily, telling time in English isn't so complicated.

Below, we've gathered the most important phrases and expressions to help you do this. You'll learn both how to ask for the time and how to tell it, as well as useful cultural insights into the English-speaking world. Jump on in and become an English time-telling master!

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Asking for the Time

There are lots of different ways to ask about time in English. Here we've collected the most important questions for you. They'll help you plan events, make dates, find out when your next flight will leave, and much more!

What time is it?

Do you know what time it is?

Do you have the time?

Could you tell me the time?

When do you want to meet?

What time does the flight leave?

How long is this flight going to take?

How long will this class take?

I have been waiting for half an hour.

When should we be ready to go?

What time does the flight leave?

To find out when something happens, ask questions beginning with What time does. An example of this is: What time does the soccer game start?. In response to a question like What time does the flight leave? you could say The flight leaves around 3:00 pm in the afternoon.

How long is this flight going to take?

Use the sentence pattern How long is + ACTIVITY + going to take? to ask how long something will take. For example, How long is the meeting going to take?. A typical response will start with It will take..., as in It will take about an hour. Other questions that mean the same things as How long is this going to take? are How long will this take? and How long will this last?.

I have been waiting for half an hour

In English, there is a special way to describe something that you began in the past and continue to do now. In order to do this, you have to use the sentence pattern I have been + ACTIVITY + for + PERIOD OF TIME. An example of this is: I have been driving for hours. This means that you began to drive hours ago and continue to drive now. A response to I have been waiting for half an hour might be something like: I'm sorry that I'm late.

Telling the Time

Once you are able to ask and understand questions about time, then you'll need to be able to tell the time as well. Check out the phrases and examples below to find out how to do this!

It's exactly 12 o'clock.

It's almost four o'clock.

It's 9:30 am.

It's half past nine.

It's around 3:45 pm.

It's quarter after three.

It's 5:45 am.

It's 12:45 pm.

The drive will take about two hours.

Dinner is at seven o'clock.

Time is flying by!

It's around 3:45 pm

Most of the English-speaking world uses a 12 hour system instead of a 24 hour system like in many other countries. This means that you often have to add either am or pm to specify whether the time is between midnight and noon (am) or between noon and midnight (pm). So, for example, 9:00 am means 9:00 in the morning. Whereas 9:00 pm means 9:00 in the evening. English speakers will often leave out am or pm when the context is clear, which is meant. A question or a speaker's reaction would most likely be the typical response to a statement like this. Here is an example response to It's around 3:45 pm: Oh no, I think I'm going to be late for my next class!.

It's quarter after three

This is another way to say It's 3:15. It's quarter to three would be another way to say it's 2:45. Be careful when you use quarter after and quarter to. Quarter after is used when you would say it's fifteen minutes after... whereas quarter to is used when you'd say it's fifteen minutes to.... A typical response to a statement about time will usually be another question or the speaker's reaction to the time. For example, a response to It's quarter after three might look something like this: It's that late already?.

Dinner is at seven o'clock

To say when something is happening, you have to use the preposition at plus the time. Some more examples of this are: The game starts at 8:00, School starts at quarter after eight, and I'm going to my friend's house at 5:00. Somebody might answer a sentence like this with either a question or a reaction. For example, Ok, then we still have enough time to go for a walk.

Time is flying by!

That's right! In English the time is able to fly. This sentence doesn't actually mean that the time is flying through the sky like an airplane though. It's an English idiom that means the time is going very quickly. Maybe you're having fun with some friends at a party, or reading a really good book? It's in moments like these when we seem to forget about the time that it's able to fly by us. In response to this idiom, somebody might agree or disagree with you. For example like this: Yeah, it's flying too quickly!.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the most essential English phrases for talking about time?

What time is it?

Do you know what time it is?

When do you want to meet?

What time does the flight leave?

How long is this flight going to take?

It's around 3:45 pm.

It's quarter after three.

What do am and pm mean?

The English-speaking world uses a 12 hour system when telling time. This means that am and pm are used to specify whether the time is in the morning (from midnight to noon) or in the afternoon / evening (from noon to midnight). For example, It's 4:30 am. means it's 4:30 in the morning, whereas It's 4:30 pm. means that it is 4:30 in the afternoon.

What do quarter to and quarter after mean when telling the time?

Quarter to can be used whenever there are 15 minutes until the next hour. For example, 2:45 could also be said to be quarter to 3. Make sure that whenever you use quarter to you use it with the coming hour! 2:45 does NOT mean the same thing as quarter to 2; that would be 1:45. Quarter after is the opposite and can be used whenever it's 15 minutes after the hour. For example, 3:15 could also be said to be quarter after 3.

What does o'clock mean?

O'clock is the short version of according to the clock and is often said when the hour is full. This means if the time is exactly 12:00, 1:00, 5:00, etc then we say o'clock at the end of our sentence. For example, 12:00 = It's twelve o'clock. or 9:00 = It's nine o'clock.. Many English speakers, however, will leave o'clock out and would instead pronounce these examples as It's twelve. or It's nine..



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