

Time expressions

Adapted from "First Certificate Language Practice" by Michael Vince

Explanations

The Explanations section focuses on problem areas only. Other time expressions are included in the Practice section.

Present time

Nowadays and *these days*

Both contrast the present with the past.

Nowadays more women have careers. What are you up to these days?

Notice that the word *actually* is not used with a time reference, as it is in many European languages. *Actually* means *in fact* or *really*.

Future time

- *In*

In can refer to future time. When we use it like this, it refers to the end of a period of time.

I'll be there in a moment.

I'll be back in a week.

- Calendar references

If today is Monday:

Wednesday is the day after tomorrow or the day after next.

Wednesday is also in two days' time.

Next Monday is this time next week.

- *At the end, in the end, at last*

At the end refers to a point in time.

I left at the end of the film.

In the end means *after a lot of time or eventually*.

I think that our side will win in the end/eventually.

We waited for ages, and in the end/finally we left.

At last shows that we are pleased because a long wait has ended.

At last you have arrived!

- *Presently*

This means in a few moments. It is a formal use.

Just a minute. I'll be with you presently.

Past time

- *Once*

This can mean *in the past*. It can also mean *from the time when*.

I lived here once. (in the past)

Once she gets here, we can leave. (when)

- Periods of the day
Last is used with **night**, but not with *morning*, *afternoon* or *evening*.
They left yesterday morning and came back last night.

• Calendar references

If today is Monday:

Saturday night was the night before last.

- *In those days* and *at that time*

Both refer to a past time we have already mentioned.

I met Janet in 1980. In those days I was a keen dancer.

- *After*, *later* and *afterwards*

After is followed by an object.

I'll see you after the holidays.

Later means *after some time*. It is not followed by an object.

I'm busy now. I'll call you back later.

Afterwards means *after something has happened*.

The film is starting now. I'll tell you afterwards.

Other problems

- *In*: *In January, In 1968, In the morning/afternoon/evening*

On: *On Thursday, On my birthday*

At: *At six o'clock, At night, At midday/midnight, At the weekend*

- *For*: *I lived there for ten years.* (for+ a period of time)

Since: *I have lived here since 1999.* (since + a point in time)

Ago: *Edward died two years ago.* (how far back in the past)

- *By*: *I need your homework by next week.* (not later than next week)

Until: *I'll be away until next week.* (all the time up to next week)

- *On time*: *Bill is never late, he's always on time.* (not late)

In time: *Luckily the police arrived in time to help.* (early enough)

Key points

- 1 Some time expressions are connected with particular tenses.

Claire arrived an hour ago.

I've been living here since 1977.

John worked there for two years.

Sally has been studying French for six months.

I haven't been to the theatre for ages. Terry will have left the cafe by then.

- 2 *For* can sometimes be left out.

Sandra waited three hours in freezing weather.

