

In this article, we'll explain how to use dates and time correctly. You will also learn to talk about dates and time in different standard ways depending on the context and geographical location.

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Dates

There are many ways to write a **date** in English. How you write it normally depends on **where you live** or whether you want to use the **formal** or **informal date**.

- **16 March 2017**
- **16.03.17** (*day first*)
- **March 16(th), 2017**
- **The 16th of March, 2017**
- **Tuesday March 16, 2017**
- **03/16/17** (*month first*)

Dates in British English

The most common way to write the date in **British English** is to put the **day first**, (optionally with the [ordinal](#) suffix '-st', '-nd', '-rd' or '-th'), then the **month**, and then the **year**.

- *I was born on **the 20th of April, 1983**. (pronounced as 'the twentieth of April nineteen eighty three')*

- *I was born on **20-04-1983**.* (this format is usually used on forms, documents, etc.)

Dates in American English

For writing the date in the **United States**, we can use several standard formats:

Short Format

In the short format, you write the month first, then the day, and then the year after a comma:

- *Jane was in Prague on **January 4, 2013**.* (pronounced as 'January fourth, two thousand thirteen')

Long Format

In the long format, write the day of the week and then the date in the short format:

- *The meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, October 12, 2018**.* (pronounced as 'Tuesday, October twelfth, two thousand eighteen')

Numerical Format

In the numerical format, replace the month, day, and year with [numerals](#), and separate with slashes, full stops or hyphens:

- *He graduated from the University on **05/30/1994**.* (also possible: *05.30.1994* or *05-30-1994*)

Note: You should always be consistent when using any of these formats.

Watch this video to learn more about using dates:

Telling the Time

We can write the time both numerically and in words.

There are two common ways of telling the time.

1. Say the **hour first and then the minutes:**

- 6:25 - *It's six twenty-five.*
- 8:05 - *It's eight O-five.* (the 'O' stands for zero and is pronounced like a long 'o')
- 9:11 - *It's nine eleven.*
- 2:34 - *It's two thirty-four.*

2. Say the **minutes first and then the hour.**

(Minutes + 'past'/'to' + Hour)

For minutes 1-30 we use '**PAST**' after the minutes. For minutes 31-59 we use '**TO**' after the minutes.

- 2:35 - *It's twenty-five to three.*
- 11:20 - *It's twenty past eleven.*
- 4:18 - *It's eighteen past four.*
- 8:51 - *It's nine (minutes) to nine.*

When it is **15 minutes past** the hour we normally say '**(a) quarter past**' + hour.

- 7:15 - *It's (a) quarter past seven.*

When it is **15 minutes before** the hour we normally say '**a quarter to**' + hour.

- 12:45 - *It's (a) quarter to one.*

Of course, we can also say 'seven fifteen' and 'twelve forty-five'.

When it is **30 minutes past** the hour we normally say '**half past**' + hour.

- 3:30 - *It's half past three.*

Of course, we can also say 'three thirty'.

O'clock

We use '**o'clock**' when there are **NO** minutes i.e. when it's exactly **on the hour**.

- 10:00 - *It's ten o'clock.*

- 5:00 – *It's five o'clock.*

Sometimes it is written as '9 o'clock' (numeral + 'o'clock')

Giving the Time

We use '**it is**' or '**it's**' to respond to the questions that ask for the time *right now*.

- *It is half past five* (5:30).
- *It's ten to twelve* (11:50).

We use the structure '**AT**' + **time** when giving the **time of a specific event in the future**.

- *The bus arrives **at** midday/noon/twelve o'clock* (12:00).
- *The flight leaves **at** a quarter to two/one forty-five* (1:45).
- *The concert begins **at** ten o'clock/10 o'clock.* (10:00)

A.M vs. P.M

In English ordinary speech, we normally use the **twelve-hour clock**.

To make it clear whether you mean a time **before** 12 o'clock noon or **after** 12 o'clock noon, we can use '*in the morning*', '*in the afternoon*', '*in the evening*', '*at night*'.

- *He came at a quarter past three (3:15) **in the morning**.*

In more formal situations, we use **a.m.** (a.m = at morning) for the morning and **p.m.** (p.m = past morning) for the afternoon and night.

- ***3a.m** = Three o'clock in the morning.*
- ***3p.m** = Three o'clock in the afternoon.*

Note: Normally, a period separates the letters as they are acronyms, but it is also common to forego adding the commas and just write 'am' and 'pm'.

Remember: 12p.m is **noon** or **midday**, or 'lunchtime' as it is commonly called, while 12a.m is '**midnight**' even though it is technically the first hour of the morning.

See also:

[Numerals: Cardinal and Ordinal Numbers](#)