

By and until By the time ...

A

By ... = not later than:

- I sent the documents to them today, so they should receive them **by Monday**. (= on or before Monday, not later than Monday)
- We'd better hurry. We have to be home **by 5 o'clock**. (= at or before 5 o'clock, not later than 5 o'clock)
- Where's Sarah? She should be here **by now**. (= now or before now – so she should have already arrived)

This milk has to be used **by 14 August**.

B

We use **until** (or **till**) to say *how long* a situation continues:

- 'Shall we go now?' 'No, let's **wait until** it stops raining.' or '... **till** it stops raining.'
- I couldn't get up this morning. **I stayed in bed until** half past ten.
I didn't get up **until** half past ten.

Compare **until** and **by**:Something *continues until* a time in the future:

- Joe **will be away until** Monday.
(so he'll be back **on** Monday)
- I'll **be working until** 11.30.
(so I'll stop working at 11.30)

Something *happens by* a time in the future:

- Joe **will be back by** Monday.
(= he'll be back not later than Monday)
- I'll **have finished my work by** 11.30.
(= I'll finish my work not later than 11.30.)

C

You can say '**by the time** something happens'. Study these examples:

- It's too late to go to the bank now. **By the time we get there**, it will be closed.
(= the bank will close between now and the time we get there)
- (from a postcard) Our holiday ends tomorrow. So **by the time you receive this postcard**, I'll be back home.
(= I will arrive home between tomorrow and the time you receive this postcard)
- Hurry up! **By the time we get to the cinema**, the film will already have started.

You can say '**by the time** something happened' (for the past):

- Karen's car broke down on the way to the party last night. **By the time she arrived**, most of the other guests had left.
(= it took her a long time to get to the party and most of the guests left during this time)
- I had a lot of work to do yesterday evening. I was very tired **by the time I finished**.
(= it took me a long time to do the work, and I became more and more tired during this time)
- We went to the cinema last night. It took us a long time to find somewhere to park the car. **By the time we got to the cinema**, the film had already started.

Also by **then** or **by that time**:

- Karen finally got to the party at midnight, but **by then**, most of the other guests had left.
or ... but **by that time**, most of the other guests had left.

Exercises

120.1 Complete the sentences with **by**.

- 1 We have to be home not later than 5 o'clock.
We have to be home by 5 o'clock.
- 2 I have to be at the airport not later than 8.30.
I have to be at the airport
- 3 Let me know not later than Saturday whether you can come to the party.
whether you can come to the party.
- 4 Please make sure that you're here not later than 2 o'clock.
Please make sure that
- 5 If we leave now, we should arrive not later than lunchtime.
If we leave now,

120.2 Put in **by** or **until**.

- 1 Steve has gone away. He'll be away until until Monday.
- 2 Sorry, but I must go. I have to be home by 5 o'clock.
- 3 I've been offered a job. I haven't decided yet whether to accept it or not. I have to decide Friday.
- 4 I think I'll wait until Thursday before making a decision.
- 5 It's too late to go shopping. The shops are open only until 5.30 today. They'll be closed now.
- 6 I need to pay the phone bill. It has to be paid by tomorrow.
- 7 Don't pay the bill today. Wait until tomorrow.
- 8 A: Have you finished redecorating your house?
B: Not yet. We hope to finish by the end of the week.
- 9 A: I'm going out now. I'll be back at about 10.30. Will you still be here?
B: I don't think so. I'll probably have gone out then.
- 10 I'm moving into my new flat next week. I'm staying with a friend until then.
- 11 I've got a lot of work to do. By the time I finish, it will be time to go to bed.
- 12 If you want to take part in the competition, you have to apply by 3 April.

120.3 Use your own ideas to complete these sentences. Use **by** or **until**.

- 1 David is away at the moment. He'll be away until Monday.
- 2 David is away at the moment. He'll be back by Monday.
- 3 I'm just going out. I won't be very long. Wait here.
- 4 I'm going out to buy a few things. It's 4.30 now. I won't be long. I'll be back.
- 5 If you want to apply for the job, your application must be received.
- 6 Last night I watched TV

120.4 Read the situations and complete the sentences using **By the time** ...

- 1 I was invited to a party, but I got there much later than I intended.
By the time I got to the party, most of the other guests had left.
- 2 I intended to catch a train, but it took me longer than expected to get to the station.
By the time, my train had already left.
- 3 I wanted to go shopping after finishing my work. But I finished much later than expected.
By the time, it was too late to go shopping.
- 4 I saw two men who looked as if they were trying to steal a car. I called the police, but it was some time before they arrived.
By the time, the two men had disappeared.
- 5 We climbed a mountain and it took us a very long time to get to the top. There wasn't much time to enjoy the view.
By the time, we had to come down again.