

Time expressions

A

Phrases with *time*

We got to the meeting **in time** [before the meeting started].

My brother is always **on time** [not early or late].

It's time (for us) **to go**. [used to say that something should happen now]

Do you **have time for** a cup of coffee? [have enough time to do something]

Call me **the next time** you're in London. [on the next occasion]

The weather was wonderful **the last time** we were there. [on the last occasion]

Sophie and I arrived **at the same time**, 9 o'clock exactly.

B

Time prepositions often confused

I'll be here **until** 4.30. [I won't leave before 4.30]

I'll be there **by** 8.15. [not later than 8.15]

I've worked here **for** six months. (*for* + a period of time, e.g. a week, ten days, two years)

I've worked here **since** May. (*since* + a point in time in the past, e.g. last Friday, March, 2011)

I worked on a farm **during** the summer. (this tells you 'when')

I worked on a farm **for** a month. (this tells you 'how long') (NOT ~~during~~ a month)

I'm going back to Brazil **in** ten days' **time** [ten days from now]. (NOT ~~after~~ ten days)

C

Approximate periods of time – past, present and future

Past

I've known Lucia **for ages** [for a long time, e.g. many years].

I haven't been to the dentist **recently/lately** [e.g. in the last few months].

I saw Tom **recently** [e.g. a few weeks ago / not long ago].

I used to go skiing, but that was **a long time ago** [e.g. 5– 10 years ago; *syn* **ages ago**].

My sister went to the zoo **the other day** [e.g. a few days ago, perhaps a week].

Present

I don't see my brother much **these days** [a period including the past and now; *syn* **nowadays**].

Future

This dictionary's fine **for the time being** [for now / the near future – but not for a long time].

I'm sure I'll go to America **one day** [in the future but I don't know when].

D

Counting time

There are 60 **seconds** in a minute; 60 minutes in an hour; 24 hours in a day; 7 days in a week; 2 weeks in a **fortnight**; 52 weeks in a year; 10 years in a **decade**; 100 years in a **century**.

E

Take and last

We use **take** to say how long we need to do something.

It takes me half an hour to get to school.

We can walk, but it'll **take (us)** a long time.

We use **last** to talk about how long something continues, from the beginning to the end.

The course **lasts for** ten weeks.

How long does the film **last**?

The battery in my camera didn't **last long** [continue for a long time].

Complete the sentences.

- 1 I'll see you the next time I come to London.
- 2 The shop closes at 5.30. If we don't hurry, we'll never get there time.
- 3 I always get to meetings time; I hate it when people are late.
- 4 I'm afraid I won't time to see you this week.
- 5 I'll have to go soon. It's time me to pick up the children from school.
- 6 Julian and I got to the station at the time.

Choose the correct word to complete the sentences.

- 1 I'll see you in / after ten days' time.
- 2 The teacher told us to finish our homework by / until Monday.
- 3 We can't leave by / until the others get back.
- 4 I've been in the army for / since I was eighteen.
- 5 They've worked here for / since / during six months.
- 6 I visit my uncle every week for / since / during the winter.
- 7 I was at university for / since / during three years.
- 8 She's going back to France in / after three months' time.
- 9 I haven't seen them for / since last Thursday.

Replace the underlined words with more 'approximate' time expressions.

- 1 I had my hair cut two weeks ago. recently
- 2 I went to Egypt with my parents but that was ten years ago.
- 3 I went to the library three days ago.
- 4 I haven't been to the cinema for the last three weeks.
- 5 I haven't been to a concert for three or four years.
- 6 This computer will be fine for the next year.

Test your general knowledge. Can you complete these sentences with the correct number or period of time? Choose from the options given:

1963 10 1960s 7 50 19 fortnight. 20

- 1 Michael Jackson died in 2009.
- 2 The Olympic Games usually last about a
- 3 Picasso was born in theth century, and died in theth century.
- 4 President Kennedy died in That's over years ago.
- 5 It takes approximately hours to fly from London to New York.
- 6 The best athletes can run 100 metres in less than seconds.
- 7 The was the decade in which the USA and USSR were trying to be the first country to put a man on the moon.