

# Adverbs of time

## Introduction



The meeting finished **early** so I'm on my way home **now**. I'll see you **later**.

## Definition

Adverbs of time tell us about time and duration.

## Uses

We use them with verbs to answer the questions, "When?" and "How long?"

They can tell us exactly or less precisely when something happens and are often used as time markers in a narrative. We also use them to talk about duration.

Adverb	Meaning and use	Examples
ago	a time in the past	I started working here two years <b>ago</b> . I decided to change jobs a long time <b>ago</b> .

<b>for</b>	<b>a period of time - can be used with different tenses</b>	<p>I worked as an engineer <b>for</b> five years; now I'm a project manager.</p> <p>I've been a project manager <b>for</b> two years.</p> <p>I'm working at head office <b>for</b> a few weeks because they need help.</p> <p>I'm going to Italy <b>for</b> three weeks.</p>
<b>since</b>	<b>from a point in the past - usually used with perfect tenses</b>	<p>I've been a project manager <b>since</b> 2011.</p> <p>I'd worked as an engineer <b>since</b> leaving university but I wanted a change.</p> <p>I've been leading this team <b>since</b> I started.</p>
<b>still</b>	<b>continuing, not finished - maybe suggesting longer than expected</b>	<p>I asked him to send us a replacement but we're <b>still</b> waiting for it.</p> <p>My English is improving but I <b>still</b> find it difficult to speak on the phone.</p>
<b>after</b>	<b>following</b>	We're having a meeting <b>after</b> lunch.
<b>afterwards</b>	<b>after something - we use it to avoid repeating a noun</b>	We're having lunch at 12.00 and there'll be a meeting <b>afterwards</b> .
<b>before</b>	<b>preceding</b>	We're having a meeting <b>before</b> lunch.
<b>beforehand</b>	<b>before something - we use it to avoid repeating a noun</b>	We're having lunch at 12.00 but there'll be a meeting <b>beforehand</b> .
<b>already</b>	<b>before now or a particular time Used for emphasis or to suggest 'sooner than expected'.</b>	<p>We've <b>already</b> had success in China; now we want to try Japan.</p> <p>I arrived late and they'd <b>already</b> started.</p> <p>The deadline for the report is Friday but I've <b>already</b> finished it.</p>

<p><b>early</b></p>	<p>near the beginning of a period or before an expected time</p>	<p>I like getting up <b>early</b> at weekends.                  He's arriving <b>early</b> tomorrow afternoon.                  My presentation's at 11.00 but I want to get there <b>early</b> so I can prepare.</p>
<p><b>earlier</b></p>	<p>a (usually short) time before something. ['earlier' is also the <b>comparative</b> form of the adjective 'early']</p>	<p>I saw Xavier <b>earlier</b> but I don't know where he is now.                  This is the agenda that I wrote <b>earlier</b> but I need to change it now.                  I spent the afternoon relaxing because I'd prepared the dinner <b>earlier</b>.                  We went to Paris <b>earlier</b> in the year to meet them so they're going to come here next time.</p>
<p><b>late</b></p>	<p>near the end of a period or after an expected time</p>	<p>I usually get up <b>late</b> on Sundays.                  I like working <b>late</b> at night when it's quiet.</p>
<p><b>later</b></p>	<p>a (usually short) time after something ['later' is also the <b>comparative</b> form of the adjective 'late']</p>	<p>I'm seeing Karine <b>later</b> so I'll give her your message.                  Let's discuss it again <b>later</b> in the week.</p>
<p><b>recently</b></p>	<p>a short time ago/in the recent past/until now</p>	<p>I've been playing tennis a lot <b>recently</b>.                  She <b>recently</b> changed jobs.</p>
<p><b>lately</b></p>	<p>'recently' but used with the present perfect It is <u>not</u> the same as late.</p>	<p>We've been making progress <b>lately</b>.                  I haven't seen him <b>lately</b>.</p>
<p><b>finally</b></p>	<p>in the end - sometimes suggests difficulties</p>	<p>We had meetings all week and <b>finally</b> reached an agreement.</p>

<b>eventually</b>	<b>'finally' but suggests a particularly long time or maybe problems or difficulties</b>	<b>He spent six months trying to persuade them to change their marketing strategy. <b>Eventually</b>, they agreed with him.</b>
<b>ever</b>	<b>at any time</b>	<b>If you <b>ever</b> need any help, just ask. Do you <b>ever</b> travel with your job? She's happier than <b>ever</b>, now that she has a new job. Have you <b>ever</b> been to China?</b>
<b>long</b>	<b>to talk about duration</b>	<b>Have you been waiting <b>long</b>?</b>
<b>yet</b>	<b>1. until now in the present perfect 2. 'still' in the present</b>	<b>I haven't met the new boss <b>yet</b>. I'm not working in the Paris office <b>yet</b> - I'll probably start next month. [= I'm <b>still</b> not working in the Paris office, although I expected to be by now.]</b>
<b>just</b>	<b>in the recent past - usually with perfect tenses but also possible with past tenses if very recent</b>	<b>We've <b>just</b> signed the contract so we're going out to celebrate <b>later</b>. I <b>just</b> saw him - he left the office two minutes ago. I was <b>just</b> thinking about you - I'm glad you've called.</b>
<b>then</b>	<b>1. at that time 2. next</b>	<b>I was working in Paris <b>then</b>. <b>Then</b> I moved to the South of France.</b>

## Construction

These adverbs have a variety of meanings and uses so there are no simple rules about word order. They might appear at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a sentence depending on the structure or the tense.

## Time markers

We use some adverbs of time when narrating a series of actions or events. For example, when telling a story, describing a process or giving instructions:

**First**, you need to find a suitable venue. **Then** agree on a date that is convenient for everyone and **finally** send reminders to everyone.

**Firstly**, all candidates will be interviewed by the panel. **Secondly**, they will have to give a short presentation. **Next**, the shortlisted candidates will be invited for a second interview. And **finally** the successful applicant will be notified by phone and the others by email.

### Note that

1. **First** and **firstly** have the same meaning but **firstly** is a little more formal.
2. "At first" is not an adverb and has a different meaning from **first** and **firstly**. It refers to an early stage of something. For example:

I started working for a big company last year. **At first**, it was difficult to remember people's names but now I know nearly everyone.

I didn't like him **at first** but now we get on well together.

Similarly, 'at last' is not an adverb. It has a similar meaning to **finally** but emphasises that something has taken a very long time:

I looked everywhere for him. **At last**, I found him in the canteen.

Here's the train - **at last!**

3. **Then** has the same meaning as **next** in this context.

## 'During'

'During' is a **preposition** and is not used in the same way as **for** to talk about duration:

He worked here during three years. ❌  
He worked here **for** three years. ✔️

'During' is used in these ways:

1. To talk about something that happens throughout a period of time:

This restaurant is open during the day. ✔️ [from some time in the morning until the evening]

The restaurant was open during one day last week. ❌  
The restaurant was open **for** one day last week. ✔️

2. To talk about a more specific period:

During the company's first two years, it was successful. ✔️  
During two years, the company was successful. ❌

3. To talk about something that happened at an unspecified point within a period of time:

She was born during the Second World War.  
I sometimes wake up during the night.  
He called me during the meeting.

## Examples



Three weeks **ago**, we went to London **for** the weekend.



We couldn't find Jodi this morning. **First** we looked in her office. **Then** we tried the boardroom and **finally** found her in the canteen.



The figures have been better **lately** but we haven't reached our targets **yet**.



"It's lovely to see you again. What have you been doing **since** last time?" "Well, I got promoted **recently** so I've been travelling a lot. How about you?" "I'm **still** based here at the moment but I'm moving to the London office **later** this year."



"Here's the agenda. I've **just** finished it." "Thanks. How **long** will the meeting last, do you think?" "Not **long** - I've got to go straight to the airport **afterwards** so we're finishing **earlier** than usual." "Great - see you **later**."

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