

## at, on and in: time

*at* + clock time

*in* + part of day

*on* + particular day

*at* + weekend, public holiday

*in* + longer period

### 1. clock times: *at*

*I usually get up at six o'clock.*

*I'll meet you at 4.15.*

*Phone me at lunch time.*

*At* is usually left out before *what time* in an informal style.

*What time does your train leave?*

### 2. parts of the day: *in*

*I work best in the morning. three o'clock in the afternoon.*

*We usually go out in the evening.*

Note the difference between *in the night* (mostly used to mean 'during one particular night') and *at night* (= during any night). Compare:

*I had to get up in the night.*

*I often work at night*

In an informal style, we sometimes use plural (days etc) with no preposition.

*Would you rather work days or nights?*

We use *on* if we say which morning/afternoon etc we are talking about, or if we describe the morning/afternoon etc.

*See you on Monday morning*

*We met on a cold afternoon in early spring.*

### 3. days: *on*

*I'll ring you on Tuesday.*

*My birthday's on March 21<sup>st</sup>.*

*They're having a party on Christmas Day.*

In an informal style we sometimes leave out *on*.

*I'm seeing her Sunday morning.*

We use plurals (Sundays, Mondays etc) to talk about repeated actions.

*We usually go out and see Granny on Sundays.*

### 4. public holidays and weekends: *at*

We use *at* to talk about the whole of the holidays at Christmas, New Year, Easter and Thanksgiving (AmE).

*We're having the roof repaired at Easter.*

But we use *on* to talk about one day of the holiday.

*Come and see us on Christmas Day.*

*What are you doing on Easter Monday?*

British people say *at the weekend*; Americans use *on*.

*What did you do at the weekend?*

## 5. longer periods: *in*

*It happened **in the week** after Christmas.*

*I was born **in March**.*

*Our house was built **in the 15<sup>th</sup> century**.*

*Kent is beautiful **in spring**.*

*He died **in 1616**.*

## 6. other uses of *in*

*In* can also be used to say how soon something will happen, and to say how long something takes to happen.

*Ask me again **in three or four days**.*

*I can run 200 metres **in about 30 seconds**.*

The expression *in ...'s time* is used to say how soon something will happen, not how long something takes. Compare:

*I'll see you again **in a month's time**.    It'll be ready **in three weeks' time**.*

*He wrote the book **in a month**. (NOT ... ~~in a month's time~~)*

In American English, *in* can be used in negative sentences, like *for*, to talk about periods up to the present.

*I haven't seen her **in years**.*

## 7. expressions with no preposition

*At/on/in* are not normally used in expressions of time before *next, last, this, that* (sometimes), *one, any* (in an informal style), *each, every, some, all*.

*See you **next week**.*

*Come **any time**.*

*Are you free **this morning**?*

*I didn't feel very well **that week**.*

*I'm at home **every evening**.*

*Let's meet **one day**.*

*We stayed **all day**.*

These prepositions are not normally used, either, before *yesterday, the day before yesterday, tomorrow* or *the day after tomorrow*.

*What are you doing **the day after tomorrow**?*

And prepositions are usually dropped in questions beginning **What/Which + expression of time**, and in answers which only contain an expression of time.

***What day** is the meeting?*

***Which week** did you say you're on holiday?*

***What time** are you leaving? ~ **Eight o'clock**.*

Notes taken from: Michael Swan, *Practical English Usage*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Oxford University Press, 2005.