

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 21st**.*

*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 15th 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*, 3rd Ed., Oxford University Press, 2005.