

By and until By the time ...

A

By (+ a time) = not later than:

- ☐ I sent the letter to them today, so they should receive it **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** (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:

- ☐ David **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:

- ☐ David **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 arrived at the party at midnight, but **by then** (or **by that time**), most of the guests had left.

Murphy, Raymond. English Grammar in Use: A Self-Study Reference and Practice Book for Intermediate Learners of English - with Answers. 3rd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Will be doing and will have done → Unit 24 By (other uses) → Units 42B, 60B, 12B