Prepositions of Time: Deadlines and Duration `INTERMEDIATE`

> **Focus:** Not later than, Specific time points, Expiry dates, Situations continuing, Till vs Until, End points of actions, Action vs State, Fixed deadlines vs Duration, Future time markers, Future meaning

1. BY (Deadlines and Points in Time)

We use **by** to talk about a **deadline** or a specific end point. It means "not later than" or "at or before" a specific time.

- **Meaning:** The action happens *at* that moment or *before* it.
- **Key Concept:** The action is complete at the time mentioned.
- **Structure:** `By + Time / Date`

> *Examples:*
> - I must finish this report **by** *5:00 PM. (I can finish at 3:00 or 4:55, but not later than 5:00).*
> - **By** *next year, we will have a new house.*

2. UNTIL / TILL (Duration and Continuing Situations)

We use **until** (or the informal **till**) to talk about a situation that continues **up to** a certain moment and then stops.

- **Meaning:** How long an action continues.
- **Key Concept:** Use this for continuous states (sleeping, waiting, working, staying) rather than momentary actions (arriving, finishing).
- **Structure:** `Until + Time / Date`

> *Examples:*
> - *We waited* **until** *midnight. (The waiting continued up to midnight, then stopped).*
> - *I am staying in London* **until** *Friday.*

KEY DIFFERENCE: Action vs. State

- **Use BY** for actions that happen quickly or finish at a point (finish, leave, arrive, submit).
  - *Correct:* "Send it **by** Monday."
- **Use UNTIL** for states that continue over time (wait, stay, sleep, be).
  - *Correct:* "Stay here **until** Monday."

3. BY THE TIME (Conjunction)

We use **by the time** to connect two clauses. It sets a time limit for the main action. The tense we use depends on whether we are talking about the past or the future.

A. Future Meaning

When referring to the future, we use the **Present Simple** after *by the time*. The main clause usually uses the *Future Perfect* or *Future Simple*.

- **Structure:** `By the time + Subject + Present Simple, ...`
- **Example:** By the time he **arrives**, we will have eaten dinner.

B. Past Meaning

When referring to the past, we use the **Past Simple** after *by the time*. The main clause usually uses the *Past Perfect*.

- **Structure:** `By the time + Subject + Past Simple, ...`
- **Example:** By the time the police **arrived**, the thief had escaped.

Practice Exercises

Instruction: Complete the sentences. For **1-8**, fill in the blanks with **by** or **until**. For **9-15**, complete the sentences with the **correct form of the verb** in parentheses (Present Simple or Past Simple).

1. I need to submit my application _____ Friday, or it will be too late.

2. We won't leave the office _____ the boss tells us to go.

3. _____ (you/finish) the project _____ the deadline next week?

4. The store will remain open _____ 10:00 PM tonight.

5. They didn't receive the package _____ yesterday afternoon.

6. Can you make sure everything is ready _____ the guests arrive?

7. Please wait here in the lobby _____ I call your name.

8. _____ the time you _____ (get) this letter, I will be in Paris.

9. _____ the time the ambulance _____ (arrive), the man had already recovered.

10. _____ (the concert/start) _____ the time we _____ (get) there tonight?

11. She had already learned to read _____ the time she _____ (be) four years old.

12. He won't have finished his homework _____ the time his favorite show _____ (begin).

13. _____ the time I _____ (realize) my mistake, had the email already been sent?

14. We will have cleaned the whole house _____ the time our parents _____ (come) home.

15. The rain had stopped _____ the time the players _____ (step) onto the field.

Answer Key

1. **by** (Deadline: not later than Friday)
2. **until** (Duration: staying until a specific event)
3. **Will you finish** ... **by** (Deadline question)
4. **until** (Duration: staying open up to a point)
5. **until** (Negative duration: the event didn't happen up to that point)
6. **by** (Deadline: before the guests arrive)
7. **until** (Duration: waiting continues up to the call)
8. **get** (Future meaning uses Present Simple)
9. **arrived** (Past meaning uses Past Simple)
10. **Will the concert start / Will the concert have started** ... **get** (Future meaning uses Present Simple)
11. **was** (Past meaning uses Past Simple)
12. **begins** (Future meaning uses Present Simple)
13. **realized** (Past meaning uses Past Simple)
14. **come** (Future meaning uses Present Simple)
15. **stepped** (Past meaning uses Past Simple)