

Future time clauses: when, before, after, until

CEFR B1-B2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

When, before, after, as soon as and until take the present, even when the meaning is future.

The rule

The central rule: present in the time clause

- Pattern: when, before, after, as soon as, until, once or while plus the present simple.
- "I will call you when I get home." Not "when I will get home".
- The present form does not mean present time. It means the event is not finished yet, so it stays outside the will clause.
- The same rule applies to if-clauses in the first conditional: "If it rains, we will stay in."

The main clause can be many things

- Will: "She will text us as soon as she lands."
- Going to: "We are going to start after everyone arrives."
- The present continuous: "I am meeting Tom when the film ends."
- The imperative: "Before you leave, turn off the lights."
- Can, may or should: "Once you finish, you can go home."

Which word to choose

- When marks the moment something happens: "When the film ends, we will walk home."
- As soon as makes the link immediate: "Call me as soon as you hear anything."
- Before and after put the events in order: "Wash your hands before you eat", "After the guests leave, we will tidy up."
- Until or till marks the end point of a wait: "Stay here until I come back."
- Once means "after the moment when": "Once the rain stops, we can play outside."

For actions completed before a future point

- By the time plus the present perfect shows an action finished before a future moment: "By the time you read this, I will have left."
- The present perfect is possible after when for a completed action: "When I have finished the report, I will send it to you."
- The present simple still works in most of these sentences: "When I finish the report, I will send it."
- Use by the time for deadlines, and at the time for moments that are not deadlines.

Common mistakes to watch

- Never put will directly after when, before, after, as soon as, until or once.
- Do not forget the main clause. A time clause on its own cannot stand as a sentence.
- Remember the third person -s in the time clause: "when she arrives", not "when she arrive".
- With if, stay in the same pattern: "If you hurry, we will catch the train."
- While takes an action in progress: "While you are shopping, I will cook."

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. I will call you when I ___ home.

2. As soon as she ___, we will leave.

3. We will not start until everyone ___ here.

4. Before you ___, turn off the lights.

5. After he ___ his homework, he will play outside.

6. I will wait here while you ___ the tickets.

7. By the time you ___ this letter, I will be in Rome.

8. If it ___ tomorrow, we will cancel the picnic.

9. She will text us as soon as she ___.

10. Do not leave the building before the alarm ___.

11. When the film __ , we will go for a walk.

12. We are going to have dinner after they __ .

13. I will tell him the news when I __ him.

14. I will not go out until I __ my work.

15. Once the rain __ , we can play outside.

16. Can you look after the dog while we __ away?

17. He will call you back when he __ a minute.

18. By the time the guests __ , the food will be ready.

19. Unless you __ , you will miss the bus.

20. We will open the presents after dinner __ over.

Answer key

Future time clauses: when, before, after, until · CEFR B1-B2

1. **get** — The time clause takes the present simple even though the meaning is future: when I get home.
2. **arrives** — As soon as introduces a future time clause, so the present simple arrives is correct.
3. **is** — Until marks the end of the wait, and the clause stays in the present simple: until everyone is here.
4. **leave** — Before takes the present simple in a future time clause: before you leave.
5. **finishes** — After introduces the first event, and it takes the present simple: after he finishes.
6. **buy** — While takes the present simple for an action during the wait: while you buy.
7. **read** — By the time is followed by the present simple in this future pattern: by the time you read.
8. **rains** — If-clauses follow the same rule as future time clauses: use the present simple, if it rains.
9. **lands** — As soon as takes the present simple: as soon as she lands.
10. **stops** — Before introduces the future moment in the present simple: before the alarm stops.
11. **ends** — When takes the present simple for the future moment: when the film ends.
12. **arrive** — After takes the present simple, and the main clause can use going to: after they arrive.
13. **see** — When is followed by the present simple: when I see him.
14. **finish** — Until takes the present simple, even though the situation is in the future: until I finish.
15. **stops** — Once means after the moment when, and it takes the present simple: once the rain stops.
16. **are** — While takes the present simple for the future period: while we are away.
17. **has** — When takes the present simple: when he has a minute.
18. **arrive** — By the time is followed by the present simple in a future sentence: by the time the guests arrive.
19. **hurry** — Unless works like if not and takes the present simple: unless you hurry.
20. **is** — After takes the present simple in a future time clause: after dinner is over.