

Time clauses

They are introduced by subordinating conjunctions like "after, as soon as, as, before, since, until/till, when, while". They are used to say when something happens.

Uses:

- "When" usually means "at the time":

[He was nine when his father died.](#)

- "When, as, while" can be used for two events happening at the same time, with the meaning "during the time":

[The earthquake occurred when/as/while they were sleeping.](#)

- "As soon as" means "immediately after":

[As soon as Laura had left the house, it started to rain.](#)

- "Before" means "earlier than" and "after" means "later than":

[He left before I could explain anything.](#)

[We're going to tidy up after everyone is gone.](#)

- "Until/till" mean "up to a certain time":

[I won't leave until/ till I have finished everything.](#)

- "Since" means "from a particular time in the past until a later time, or until now":

[I haven't played rugby since I left university.](#)

Word order: time clauses can have an initial or final position (i.e. before or after the main clause):

1) subordinating conjunction + subject + verb ..., / subject + main verb ...:

[Before I could explain anything, he left.](#)

2) subject + main verb .../ subordinating conjunction + subject + verb ...:

[He left before I could explain anything.](#)

Tenses and aspects (simple, perfect, continuous) used:

1) After time subordinating conjunctions we use present tenses to refer to the future. In the main clause we typically use a future or imperative form:

[When you are in town, visit me.](#)

[As soon as we get the tickets, we'll send them to you.](#)

2) After time subordinating conjunctions we use past tenses to refer to the past:

[When I went out, it was raining.](#)

[As soon as she got out of bed, the telephone stopped ringing.](#)

The past tense we use depends on the information contained in the conjunction:

- "After" and "before" contain precise information about the sequence of events (what happened first and what afterwards), so we don't need to use past perfect for the action that happened first. We can use past simple in both clauses:

[She ate after I left \(past simple\).](#)

[She ate after I had left \(past perfect in the subordinate "after" clause\).](#)

[She left before I telephoned \(past simple\).](#)

[She had left before I telephoned \(past perfect in the main clause\).](#)

- "When" doesn't indicate the order in which things happened so we often need to use the past perfect to show that something happened before something else:

[When she called, he had eaten lunch.](#)

3) "While, as" and sometimes "when" are used to describe something with duration that happened at the same time as something else. Therefore, they are followed by continuous tenses:

I saw Peter while/as/when I was getting off the bus. (past continuous).

I hope you'll think of me for a moment while/as/when I'm taking my driving test. (present continuous)

4) "As" and "when" can also be followed by simple tenses:

He gets more attractive as he gets older. (present simple)

She attended an art school when she was fourteen. (past simple)

5) "As soon as" and "till/until" are followed by simple or perfect tenses:

As soon as we get the tickets, we'll send them to you. (present simple)

As soon as she got out of bed, the telephone stopped ringing. (past simple)

As soon as I had written all my e-mails, I did some gardening. (past perfect)

I won't discuss anything till/ until I've spoken to my wife. (present perfect)

Hold these for me till/ until I ask for them. (present simple)

6) "Since" is followed by a perfect or a simple tense, depending on the meaning:

I've known her since we were at school together. (past simple: we aren't at school)

I've known her since I've lived in this street. (present perfect: I live in this street)

In the main clause we usually use a perfect tense:

I have played tennis since I was ten. (present perfect)

We had been good friends since we were at university. (past perfect)

When we use "since" to say how long ago something happened, we use a simple tense in the main clause:

It's three months since you were here last. (present simple)

It was ages since we last played tennis. (past simple)

* Notice: some of the time conjunctions (after, before, since, until, till) are also **prepositions** which indicate time. When we use them as prepositions, they are followed by nouns, object pronouns, or verbs in the -ing form:

He came in after midnight.

After completing the book, I sent it to Madrid for publication.

He arrived home before me.

Before leaving he said good-bye to each of them.

We've been waiting here since two o'clock.

She's been quite different since coming back from America.

I worked until/ till 4 p.m.