

Unit 116

By and until

By the time ...

a **By** (+ a time) = not later than:

- I posted the letter today, so they should receive it **by Monday**. (= *on or before Monday, on Monday at the latest*)
- We'd better hurry. We have to be at home **by 5 o'clock**. (= at or before 5 o'clock, at 5 o'clock at the latest)
- Where's Ann? She should be here **by now**. (= now or before now; so she should have already arrived)

You cannot use **until** with this meaning:

- Tell me **by Friday** whether or not you can come to the party. (*not* 'Tell me until Friday')

We use **until** (or **till**) to say how a situation continues:

- 'Shall we go now?' 'No, let's wait **until** (or **till**) it stops raining.'

Compare **until** and **by** in these sentences:

- Tom will be away **until Monday**. (so he'll come back on Monday)
- Tom will be back **by Monday**. (= he'll be back on or before Monday, on Monday at the latest)
- I'll be working **until 11 o'clock**. (so I'll stop working at 11 o'clock)
- I'll have finished my work **by 11 o'clock**. (= I'll finish my work at or before 11 o'clock, at 11 o'clock at the latest)

b You can also say **by the time** (something happens), Study these examples carefully:

- It's not worth going shopping now. **By the time we get to the shops, they will be shut**. (= they will shut between now and the time we get there)
- (*from a letter*) I'm flying to the United States this evening. So **by the time you receive this letter, I'll probably be in New York**. (= I will arrive in New York between now and the time you receive this letter.)

When you are talking about the past, you can use **By the time** (something happened), ...

- Tom's car broke down on the way to the party last night. **By the time he arrived, most of the guests had left**. (= It took him 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. **By the time I finished, I was very tired**. (= It took me a long time to do the work and I became more and more tired during this time.)
- It took them a long time to find a place to park their car. **By the time they got to the theatre, the play had already started**.

You can also use **by then** or **by that time**:

- Tom finally arrived at the party at midnight. But **by then** (or **by that time**), most of the guests had left.

before 11 o'clock, at 11 o'clock at the latest)

