Telling the time in Dutch (why half vier is 3:30)

Telling the time in Dutch has one trap: half counts toward the next hour, so half vier is 3:30, half on the way to four, not half past four. Whole hours take uur (drie uur is three o'clock), the quarters are kwart over and kwart voor, and the minutes just before and after the half count from the half: tien voor half vier is 3:20. In writing, Dutch uses the 24-hour clock with a dot: 15.30 uur. Below: one hour in five-minute steps, then each part of the system, the parts of the day and the mistakes learners make most.

Telling the time in Dutch: one hour, 3:00 to 4:00

Every hour works the same way, so one hour is enough to learn the system. The third column shows what each time counts from: the hour that has passed, the half hour or the hour that is coming. The last column is the same time in the afternoon, as Dutch writes it.

Telling the time in Dutch from 3:00 to 4:00, in five-minute steps

3:00
Dutch: drie uur
Counted from: the whole hour
Written, in the afternoon: 15.00 uur

3:05
Dutch: vijf over drie
Counted from: five past 3:00
Written, in the afternoon: 15.05 uur

3:10
Dutch: tien over drie
Counted from: ten past 3:00
Written, in the afternoon: 15.10 uur

3:15
Dutch: kwart over drie
Counted from: a quarter past 3:00
Written, in the afternoon: 15.15 uur

3:20
Dutch: tien voor half vier, also twintig over drie
Counted from: ten before 3:30
Written, in the afternoon: 15.20 uur

3:25
Dutch: vijf voor half vier
Counted from: five before 3:30
Written, in the afternoon: 15.25 uur

3:30
Dutch: half vier
Counted from: halfway to 4:00
Written, in the afternoon: 15.30 uur

3:35
Dutch: vijf over half vier
Counted from: five past 3:30
Written, in the afternoon: 15.35 uur

3:40
Dutch: tien over half vier, also twintig voor vier
Counted from: ten past 3:30
Written, in the afternoon: 15.40 uur

3:45
Dutch: kwart voor vier
Counted from: a quarter before 4:00
Written, in the afternoon: 15.45 uur

3:50
Dutch: tien voor vier
Counted from: ten before 4:00
Written, in the afternoon: 15.50 uur

3:55
Dutch: vijf voor vier
Counted from: five before 4:00
Written, in the afternoon: 15.55 uur

4:00
Dutch: vier uur
Counted from: the whole hour
Written, in the afternoon: 16.00 uur

In short: up to a quarter past, count forward from the hour with over (past). From 3:20 to 3:40, count from the half hour: voor half before it, over half after it. From a quarter to the hour, count back from the next hour with voor (to, literally before). The numbers themselves are on Dutch numbers.

Whole hours: drie uur

A whole hour is the number plus uur (hour): Het is drie uur. (It is three o'clock.) On the clock uur stays singular: drie uur, never drie uren. It is one of the 200 most common Dutch words, on the list of the 1,000 most common Dutch words.

The whole hours in Dutch, with their 24-hour forms

1:00
Dutch: één uur
Night and morning: 1.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 13.00 uur

2:00
Dutch: twee uur
Night and morning: 2.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 14.00 uur

3:00
Dutch: drie uur
Night and morning: 3.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 15.00 uur

4:00
Dutch: vier uur
Night and morning: 4.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 16.00 uur

5:00
Dutch: vijf uur
Night and morning: 5.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 17.00 uur

6:00
Dutch: zes uur
Night and morning: 6.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 18.00 uur

7:00
Dutch: zeven uur
Night and morning: 7.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 19.00 uur

8:00
Dutch: acht uur
Night and morning: 8.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 20.00 uur

9:00
Dutch: negen uur
Night and morning: 9.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 21.00 uur

10:00
Dutch: tien uur
Night and morning: 10.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 22.00 uur

11:00
Dutch: elf uur
Night and morning: 11.00 uur
Afternoon and evening: 23.00 uur

12:00
Dutch: twaalf uur
Night and morning: 0.00 uur (midnight)
Afternoon and evening: 12.00 uur (noon)

One o’clock is often written één uur, with accents, so that it is not read as een uur (an hour). Noon is twaalf uur ’s middags; midnight is middernacht or twaalf uur ’s nachts.

Uur comes only after a whole hour. With half, kwart, over and voor it is left out: half vier, kwart over drie, tien voor vier. And because twee uur can also mean two hours, the small word om (at) marks the clock time: om twee uur is at two o’clock, while Ik heb twee uur

gewacht. is I waited for two hours.

Half: why half vier is 3:30

Half vier means half an hour before four: the clock is halfway to four. English counts the half from the hour that has passed (half past three); Dutch counts it toward the hour that is coming. German does the same as Dutch, with halb vier.

This is the trap for English speakers, and in British English it is a double trap, because “half four” there means 4:30. In Dutch, 4:30 is half vijf. A quick check: take one hour off. Half vier is three and a half, half acht is seven and a half, half twaalf is eleven and a half.

Half hours in Dutch

1:30
Dutch: half twee
Written, in the afternoon or evening: 13.30 uur

2:30
Dutch: half drie
Written, in the afternoon or evening: 14.30 uur

4:30
Dutch: half vijf
Written, in the afternoon or evening: 16.30 uur

6:30
Dutch: half zeven
Written, in the afternoon or evening: 18.30 uur

7:30
Dutch: half acht
Written, in the afternoon or evening: 19.30 uur

9:30
Dutch: half tien
Written, in the afternoon or evening: 21.30 uur

11:30
Dutch: half twaalf
Written, in the afternoon or evening: 23.30 uur

As a length of time, half works the English way: een half uur (also written halfuur) is thirty minutes, and anderhalf uur is an hour and a half. Na een half uur zijn Olena en Peter klaar. (After half an hour Olena and Peter are done; from Solliciteren.)

Kwart over and kwart voor

Kwart is a quarter. Kwart over drie is a quarter past three, 3:15, and kwart voor vier is a quarter to four, 3:45. As with half, no uur follows. Fifteen minutes as a length of time is een

kwartier, a quarter of an hour, and 45 minutes is drie kwartier: Ik ben er over een kwartier. (I will be there in a quarter of an hour.)

Voor and over: the minutes in between

Over means past and voor means to (literally before). Dutch counts the minutes from the nearest landmark: the whole hour or the half hour.

Up to a quarter past, the landmark is the hour that has passed: vijf over drie, tien over drie. From 3:20 to 3:40 it is the half hour: tien voor half vier, vijf voor half vier, then vijf over half vier, tien over half vier. From a quarter to the hour, it is the hour that is coming: kwart voor vier, tien voor vier, vijf voor vier.

3:20 and 3:40 have two correct forms. The usual one in the Netherlands counts from the half: tien voor half vier and tien over half vier. Twintig over drie and twintig voor vier are also correct, and you will hear them; some of the free texts on this site use them (twintig over zes, twintig voor zeven). Learn to understand both, and use the one you hear around you.

Minutes that are not a multiple of five follow the same plan: 3:07 is zeven over drie, 3:23 is zeven voor half vier, 3:52 is acht voor vier.

Asking the time: Hoe laat is het?

To ask the time, say Hoe laat is het?, literally “how late is it?”, with hoe laat as two words. To a stranger, Weet u hoe laat het is? is more polite. The answer starts with Het is, and the time of an event takes om (at).

Asking and giving the time in Dutch

Hoe laat is het? · What time is it?
Weet u hoe laat het is? · Do you know what time it is? (polite)
Het is drie uur. · It is three o’clock.
Het is bijna drie uur. · It is almost three o’clock.
Het is precies drie uur. · It is exactly three o’clock.
Hoe laat begint de les? · What time does the class start?
Om negen uur. · At nine.

In Belgium you will also hear Om welk uur? (At what hour?). The Flemish government’s language advice service does not count it as standard Dutch; hoe laat works everywhere.

Words around the clock

Dutch words for times and lengths of time

om drie uur · at three o'clock
rond drie uur · around three o'clock
vanaf drie uur · from three o'clock on
tot vijf uur · until five o'clock
van negen tot vijf · from nine to five
op tijd · on time
te laat · late (Ik ben te laat. I am late.)
te vroeg · too early
over tien minuten · in ten minutes
een kwartier · a quarter of an hour
een half uur · half an hour
drie kwartier · three quarters of an hour
anderhalf uur · an hour and a half

Over has a second meaning that catches learners. Before a length of time it means in: over tien minuten is in ten minutes, and over drie uur is in three hours. At three o'clock is om drie uur.

Morning, afternoon, evening and night

Dutch does not use a.m. and p.m. When the hour alone is not clear, the part of the day comes after it: om acht uur 's ochtends (8 a.m.), om acht uur 's avonds (8 p.m.). Most of the time the situation makes it clear, and people just say om acht uur.

The parts of the day in Dutch

's ochtends, 's morgens
English: in the morning
Roughly: until noon

's middags
English: in the afternoon
Roughly: noon to about 6:00 p.m.

's avonds
English: in the evening
Roughly: from about 6:00 p.m.

's nachts
English: at night
Roughly: midnight to about 6:00 a.m.

In the Netherlands middag is the afternoon, from noon to about six, which is why goedemiddag means good afternoon (the greetings by the time of day are on Dutch greetings). Lunchtime is tussen de middag. In Belgium middag usually means only noon to two; the afternoon there is de namiddag and the late morning de voormiddag. Between the two countries, the simplest thing is to name a clock time.

The 's is short for an old word for "of the". When a sentence starts with it, the next word

takes the capital: ’s Avonds is Kateryna thuis. (In the evening Kateryna is at home; from Een uur te vroeg.) This morning, tonight and the other words around today are on days of the week and months in Dutch.

The 24-hour clock in writing: 15.30 uur

In writing, Dutch uses the 24-hour clock. Timetables, opening hours, appointment letters and invitations say 15.30 uur, not 3:30 p.m. The language advice of the Taalunie, the body behind the official Dutch spelling, prefers a dot between the hours and the minutes, then uur written out: 8.15 uur, 12.30 uur, 22.00 uur.

A colon (15:30) is also accepted, and u. is the short form of uur: 15.30 u. Timetables and screens usually leave uur out.

In a range, uur often comes only once, at the end: van 12.00 tot 18.00 uur. Midnight is 0.00 uur at the start of a day and 24.00 uur at the end of one. (This page writes times the English way in English, 3:30, and the Dutch way in Dutch, 15.30 uur.)

Written times in Dutch and how people say them

7.45 uur
Said: kwart voor acht
In English: 7:45 a.m.

12.00 uur
Said: twaalf uur ’s middags
In English: noon

15.30 uur
Said: half vier ’s middags
In English: 3:30 p.m.

18.20 uur
Said: tien voor half zeven
In English: 6:20 p.m.

20.10 uur
Said: tien over acht ’s avonds
In English: 8:10 p.m.

23.45 uur
Said: kwart voor twaalf
In English: 11:45 p.m.

0.00 uur
Said: middernacht
In English: midnight

In conversation, people turn the written time into the clock words of this page: 15.30 uur becomes half vier, with ’s middags only if it is not clear. Announcements on the train read the 24-hour form aloud as the hour, uur and the minutes: 16.33 is zestien uur drieëndertig.

Typical mistakes

- **Half vier as 4:30.** It is 3:30: half an hour to four. 4:30 is half vijf.
- **Tien over half vier as 4:10.** It is 3:40, ten past the half on the way to four. Once half is in the time, the hour you hear is the next one.
- **Uur after half or kwart.** Uur goes only with a whole hour: drie uur, but half vier and kwart over drie, never half vier uur.
- **Drie uren.** On the clock uur never takes the plural: drie uur, elf uur. Minutes do: tien minuten.
- **At three without om.** A point in time takes om: om drie uur, om half vier. Over drie uur is in three hours.
- **a.m. and p.m.** Dutch uses neither. Say 's ochtends or 's avonds, or write the 24-hour time: 20.00 uur.

See it in a text

The free texts on this site are full of clock times: a job interview at four, a bus at ten past eight, a shop that opens at noon on Sunday. Each sentence below is quoted word for word from its text.

- **Het is drie uur. Om vier uur heeft hij een sollicitatiegesprek.** It is three o'clock. At four he has a job interview. **Luca kijkt naar de klok: kwart over drie.** Luca looks at the clock: a quarter past three. **Om vijf voor vier is Luca bij het bedrijf.** At five to four Luca is at the company. (De deur, A1)
- **De klok in haar keuken staat op half negen. Ze zet de klok een uur terug: half acht.** The clock in her kitchen says half past eight. She sets it back an hour: half past seven. (Een uur te vroeg, A1)
- **Twintig voor zeven. Over twintig minuten gaat de bel.** Twenty to seven. In twenty minutes the doorbell rings. (Twintig voor zeven is 6:40, also tien over half zeven. Geen stroom, A1)
- **Op de deur staat: 'Zondag geopend van 12.00 tot 18.00 uur.' Twaalf uur, dat is te laat!** The door says: "Open on Sunday from noon to 6 p.m." Twelve o'clock, that is too late. (Written 12.00, said twaalf uur. Melk op zondag, A1)
- **Maandag begint ze in de keuken van het ziekenhuis, om zes uur 's ochtends.** On Monday she starts in the hospital kitchen, at six in the morning. **De eerste bus uit haar wijk is pas om twintig over zes bij het ziekenhuis.** The first bus from her neighborhood

does not reach the hospital until twenty past six. (De fiets van 40 euro, A2)

- **De bus naar Leeuwarden ging om tien over acht.** The bus to Leeuwarden left at ten past eight. (Storing, A2)
- **Nour kijkt op de klok: kwart over zeven. De supermarkt sluit om acht uur.** Nour looks at the clock: a quarter past seven. The supermarket closes at eight. (Sint-Maarten, A2)
- **Joost kijkt op de klok: half twaalf.** Joost looks at the clock: half past eleven, 11:30. (De pasfoto, A2)
- **'Hoe laat begin ik?' vraagt ze.** "What time do I start?" she asks. **'Om zeven uur,' zegt Peter.** "At seven," says Peter. (Solliciteren, A2)

Read next

Een uur te vroeg is a free A1 story about the clock, with audio, a glossary and questions. Kateryna has worked in the kitchen of a care home in Tilburg for three weeks. On Monday the clock in her kitchen at home says half zeven, she runs to work, and the door is closed.

Read it once for the story, then again and say every time out loud. More stories at this level are in the free A1 texts.

For a whole book at this level, Fairy Tales is the A1 volume of the Dutch Readers series: eight famous fairy tales, from Little Red Riding Hood to The Little Mermaid, retold in easy Dutch, with a glossary and questions after every tale. In Cinderella the clock matters too: she has to leave the ball before twaalf uur. It is out now as a paperback.

What time is half vier in Dutch?

Half vier is 3:30, written 15.30 uur in the afternoon. Dutch counts the half toward the next hour: half an hour to four. So half acht is 7:30, half twaalf is 11:30, and 4:30 is half vijf.

How do you say 3:15 and 3:45 in Dutch?

Kwart over drie (a quarter past three) and kwart voor vier (a quarter to four). No uur follows them: uur goes only with a whole hour, as in drie uur.

Is 3:20 tien voor half vier or twintig over drie?

Both are correct. The usual form in the Netherlands counts from the half hour: tien voor half vier for 3:20 and tien over half vier for 3:40. Twintig over drie and twintig voor vier are heard too, and some of the free texts on this site use them.

How do the Dutch write the time?

With the 24-hour clock, a dot and uur: 15.30 uur, 8.15 uur. A colon (15:30) is also accepted, and u. is the short form of uur. In conversation the same time is said with the clock words: half vier, with 's middags if it is not clear.