



ASK A TEACHER

On Time or In Time?

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Hi there! This week on *Ask a Teacher*, we will answer a question about the difference between "in time" and "on time?"

Question:

Dear VOA,

What is the difference between "in time" and "on time?" I appreciate that you can help me understand them. I'm looking forward to seeing your answer.

Have a great day,

Nguyen

Answer

Thanks for this great question, Nguyen! Both "on time" and "in time" have to do with being **punctual** and deadlines. Sometimes people use these expressions interchangeably, but they are different. And "in time" has a few more uses.

Let's look at each one.

On time

"On time" is an expression that includes a preposition (on) and a noun (time). If something is "on time" it arrives at or by an exact time or deadline. It is not late. You can think of "on time" as when something happens. And if it happens at that exact time, then it is "on time."

Jordan did not submit her homework on time, so she received 5 points off.

The train is always on time so I am never late to work.

Let's move onto "in time."

In time

"In time" is also an expression that includes a preposition (in) and the noun "time." Like "on time," it is used to talk about deadlines and times.

It means early enough or not too late for something to happen. Often, we use it to talk about something in relation to another event or thing using another preposition "for" after the expression.

Even though my train was late, I got to work in time for the meeting.

We made it home in time to watch our favorite show.

"In time" is also used two other ways.

In music, "in time" means to keep a **rhythm** or speed.

The tap dancer was able to keep time with the musicians.

And "in time" also means "eventually." We use it to describe the passage of time and something happening in the future.

In time, the leaves will turn bright colors as autumn settles in.

The medicine will start to work, and you will feel better in time.

Please let us know if these explanations and examples have helped you, Nguyen.

Do you have a question about American English? Send us an email at learningenglish@voanews.com.

And that's *Ask a Teacher*.

I'm Faith Pirlo.

Faith Pirlo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

punctual – *adj.* doing something at the expected time

rhythm – *n.* a regular, repeated pattern of sounds or movements
