



Telling the Time in Foreign Languages

KS2 MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Ages 10-12 🕒 4 min read

Why Time Matters in Every Language

When you're learning a **foreign language**, one of the first practical things you need to know is how to tell the time. Whether you're visiting **France, Spain, Germany**, or any other country, knowing how to ask "What time is it?" and understanding the answer is super useful. Every language has its own special way of talking about time, and these ways can be quite different from English.

The Basic Question: "What Time Is It?"

In **French**, you ask "Quelle heure est-il?" (kel ur ay-teel). In **Spanish**, it's "¿Qué hora es?" (kay OR-ah es). In **German**, you say "Wie spät ist es?" (vee SHPAYT ist es). These phrases literally translate to "What hour is it?" which shows you that most languages think about time in terms of **hours** first.

Think of it like asking someone "What number on the clock face are we at?" rather than the exact minute.

Saying the Hours and Minutes

Here's where it gets interesting. In **English**, we might say "It's three thirty" or "It's half past three." But in **French**, you say "Il est trois heures et demie" which literally means "It is three hours and half." The word "**heures**" means hours, and "**demie**" means half. Spanish uses "y media" (and half), and German uses "halb" (half).

When you need to talk about **minutes**, most languages add them after the hour. In French, "quatre heures quinze" means "four hours fifteen" (4:15). If it's 4:45, the French say "cinq heures moins le quart" which actually means "five hours minus quarter" - they count backwards from the next hour!

Think of it like some languages count "up" from the hour (3:15 = "three fifteen") while others count "down" to the next hour (3:45 = "four minus fifteen").

Special Times of Day

Different languages also have special words for parts of the day. **Midnight** in French is "minuit" and **noon** is "midi." These are treated differently than regular hours. Many European languages also use the **24-hour clock** (military time) instead of dividing the day into am and pm, so 2 pm becomes 14:00 (fourteen hours).

Practice Makes Perfect

The best way to learn time in a foreign language is to practice saying different times out loud. Try asking a friend "What time is it?" in the language you're learning, or set your alarm to remind you to think about the time in **Spanish, French, or German** throughout the day. Before long, telling the time in another language will feel as natural as in English!