

A

As, when and while

Reminder → M1 & M8

We can often use **as**, **when** or **while** to mean 'during the time that', to talk about something that happens when something else takes place:

- As / When / While** Miguel was eating, the doorbell rang.

We use **when** (*not as* or *while*) to introduce a clause which talks about –

☆ an event that takes place at the same time as some longer event (in the main clause):

- They were playing in the garden **when** they heard a scream.

☆ the circumstances in which the event in the main clause happens:

- When** they are fully grown these snakes can be over two metres long.

We also use **when** to mean 'every time', and we prefer **when** to talk about past periods of our lives:

- I still feel tired **when** I wake up in the morning. (= 'every time')
- His mother called him Robbie **when** he was a baby. (= a past period)

We prefer **when** if one event happens immediately after another, particularly if one causes the other:

- You'll see my house on the right **when** you cross the bridge.
- When** the lights went out, I lit some candles.

In the first sentence, 'as' or 'while' would suggest 'during the time that' and the continuous would be more likely ('... as / while you are crossing ...'). In the second sentence 'as' or 'while' would be very unlikely because lights usually go out instantaneously.

We prefer **as** to say that when one thing changes, another thing changes at the same time:

- As** the cheese matures, its flavour improves. (*rather than* When the cheese ...)

We can also use 'While ...', particularly with a continuous tense: 'While the cheese is maturing ...'.

We prefer **while** or **as** (rather than **when**) to talk about two longer actions that go on at the same time, although **while** is more common than **as** in informal speech:

- I went shopping **while** Liam cleaned the house. (*or ... as* Liam cleaned ...)

We use **while** or **when** (rather than **as**) to avoid ambiguity where 'as' could mean 'because':

- While** you were playing golf, I went to the cinema. (*As* you were playing ... = *Because* ...)

B

Before, after and until

We use **before** or **after** to talk about an event happening earlier or later than another event:

- I put on my coat **before** I went out.
- The message arrived **after** I'd left.

We can often use either **until** or **before** when a situation continues to happen up to a time indicated in the adverbial clause:

- I had to wait six weeks **until** / **before** the parcel arrived.

However, we use **until** to talk about an action that continues to a particular time and then stops:

- They sat on the beach **until** the sun sank below the horizon, and then they went home.

and when the adverbial clause describes the *result* of an action in the main clause:

- He cleaned his shoes **until** they shone. ('shining' is the result of 'cleaning'.)

C

Hardly, no sooner, scarcely

When we say that one event happened immediately after another we can use sentences with **hardly**, **no sooner**, and **scarcely** (see also Unit 100). After **hardly** and **scarcely** the second clause begins with **when** or **before**; after **no sooner** it begins with **than** or **when**:

- The concert had **hardly** begun *before* all the lights went out.
- I had **no sooner** lit the barbecue *than* / *when* it started to rain.

We often use a past perfect in the clause with **hardly** (etc.), **no sooner** or **scarcely** and a past simple in the other.

Exercises

79.1 Complete these sentences with **as**, **when** or **while**. If possible, give alternative answers and notice any differences in meaning. **A**

- 1 She fell over she kicked the ball.
- 2 we were younger our parents had to pay for our music lessons.
- 3 I speak Spanish, I talk slowly to help people understand me.
- 4 I packed all the books away, Lana made a note of their titles on her laptop.
- 5 She stayed at home watching television her brother was at school.
- 6 Where did you live you got married?
- 7 the results started to come in, it became clear that President Como had lost the election.
- 8 The humidity started to increase the day wore on.
- 9 The snow was getting deeper and deeper we waited for the train to arrive.
- 10 the paint dries it changes colour from a light to a deep red.

79.2 If necessary, correct or improve these sentences. **A**

- 1 As I'm older I'd love to be a dancer.
- 2 When the boy watched in fascination, the ants picked up the dead beetle and carried it off to their nest.
- 3 The disk drive makes a buzzing sound while I switch my PlayStation on.
- 4 As the car went by, someone waved to me from the back seat.
- 5 While Kasem had finished, he tidied up the room and left.
- 6 I was in the shower as the phone rang.

79.3 Complete this talk about the life and work of a professor with **before** or **until** or both if possible. **B**

- 1 He continued to work at London University he retired in 2007.
- 2 he left his native country, he learned English by listening to the radio.
- 3 It wasn't long he was appointed Professor of Chemistry.
- 4 He married Martha he moved to England in 1960.
- 5 he came to England he worked in his father's grocery shop.
- 6 He applied for research positions he was appointed to a post at London University.
- 7 He was almost unknown outside his field he was awarded the Nobel Prize.
- 8 He would work in his lab for days at a time he had completed an experiment.

79.4 Complete the sentences in any appropriate way. **C**

- 1 The paint on the sitting room wall had scarcely dried ...
before my daughter put her dirty hands all over it.



- 2 Martin had no sooner recovered from a broken ankle ...
- 3 He had hardly put down the phone ...
- 4 We had no sooner eaten ...
- 5 Lisa had hardly finished speaking ...
- 6 I had scarcely driven to the end of the street ...