

Year 2003

Article of the month June

How do we count the hours?

That is easy - twenty-four hours to a day.

It sounds simple enough, but in our daily lives, we use two systems.

The first counts from 00:00 to 24:00 and starts at midnight.

We use it especially for travel by train, bus, boat and aeroplane and apply it without any hesitation.

However, we also use a system of two times twelve hours.

To discriminate between the hours before noon and those after, we add the abbreviations a.m. (*ante meridiem, before noon*) or p.m. (*post meridiem, after noon*).

We may feel that the starting points of this reckoning are midnight and noon, but the actual switch is at one o'clock.

As shown in the table below, we continue normally after twelve, and do not start over until one o'clock.

The example is for a.m. to p.m., but it is equally valid at night if you interchange the a.m. and p.m. labels.

...	
11:57 (v.m.) (a.m.)	
11:58 (v.m.) (a.m.)	
11:59 (v.m.) (a.m.)	
12:00 (n.m.) (p.m.)	← 1
12:01 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
12:02 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
12:03 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
...	
...	
12:57 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
12:58 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
12:59 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
01:00 (n.m.) (p.m.)	← 2
01:01 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
01:02 (n.m.) (p.m.)	
...	
...	

← 1 wisseling v.m. n.m. change a.m. p.m.
 ← 2 nieuw startpunt new startpoint

Despite the fact that counting starts over as late as 01:00 hours, the labels a.m. and p.m. are already switched at 12:00.

Yet, we know how to apply this strange system faultlessly in our daily lives.

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English translation: RH