

How Do We Measure Time?

When we think about the passage of time, we have many different ways that we can measure it. As newborns, we are completely helpless and totally dependent upon our parents or other concerned adults. As very young children, we probably did not appreciate the passage of time and how valuable time is. Over the years, we gained perspective of the passage of time.

Many of us might look at the calendar on the wall and think about time as a series of annual events. We may not remember each of these events in great detail, but we generally do perceive the passage of time as a series of related events. The first year of life is usually marked by a celebration as we transition from a baby to a toddler. In those early years, the event itself is more important than the specific day of the year, with celebrations marking the first birthday, the first year of school, school graduations, and special social, cultural, or religious events. As we transition into young adulthood and beyond, measurement of the passage of time transitions to a more long-range view, looking at how we are affected over years or decades. At the same time, as a society, our thoughts are measured in much smaller amounts—we need to consider time relative to seconds, microseconds, nanoseconds, and beyond.

All the while, as we were experiencing the passage of time, our appreciation of time began to change. Rather than considering how time affected us individually, the passage of time generally required devices that provide details of many more events. As technology changed, we made the transition from dependence on the wall clock to tell us when the school day began and when it ended. It didn't always keep good time, as I'm certain that it slowed down in the middle of the day and didn't catch up until we returned home. We would then be with our friends until we went to bed, and we would begin everything again the next morning.

Our dependence on the wall clock and the calendar decreased, and we eventually became dependent on a watch that was on our wrist. Aptly named, the wristwatch started as a simple watch (although some folks use the wristwatch as a piece of jewelry), but today, this device can do almost anything for those who possess one. It is often said that rocket scientists at NASA were able to land a man on the moon using technology that was a little less sophisticated than a cellular phone.

Today, the wristwatches are far more capable than a simple device that just tells time. Many of us have wristwatches that tell the time and the weather and news, and there's a calculator on that wristwatch along with a radio. All our lives, we have heard people talk about the future. Don't look back because the future is with us today.

Aren't we lucky? We can watch our watch tell us all sorts of things. Sometimes it tells us things that we have to know, and we are happy to receive that information. Other times, the watch tells us of events that we did not want to hear, and our lives were not enriched by the telling. Nonetheless, we listened, and many of us knew how to make things better or, at the very least, how to get back to those bucolic days gone by.

Here we are, June 26, 2020. My previous editorial was hopeful that after a few months, the proverbial light would appear at the end of the tunnel that would be directing us toward a better place. Unfortunately, the better place is no better than it was 2 months ago. Our wristwatch can still tell time, predict the weather, identify today's date, play games, and perform all sorts of activities that seem a bit irrelevant at the present time. Fortunately, we understand the solution: keep social distance, use a face mask, avoid crowds, wash your hands, respect each other, and say a prayer. At the same time, we should recognize that individuals are allowed to make independent choices, regardless of how logical or illogical they seem to be. Even if we know that there are ways to reduce the spread of disease, we cannot expect everyone to act responsibly. It becomes confusing because some folks have no desire to be compliant and will work hard to not do the things that improve outcomes, even when it is a matter of life and death. I guess I am all for the notion that we should be free to make decisions for ourselves, but we cannot let those desires get in the way of common sense for the folks who value life.

Now is the time to be safe.

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