

Use of *The* before *Last* and *Next***I. Ø last year or the last year?**

- (1) *I went to China last year* (= "a calendar year," i.e. from January to December).
 (2) *I've been working on this project for the last year* (= "the past 12 months").

II. What does the last century mean?

- (3) *The social connections of Americans have changed during the last century* (Frodesen & Eyring, 2000, p. 8).
 (4) *This was well known during the last century* (Collins COBUILD English Usage, 1992, p. 347).

You do not use **last** like this in front of 'decade' or 'century'. You do not say, for example, that something happened 'last decade'. You say that it happened **in the last decade** or **during the last decade** (Collins COBUILD English Usage, 1992, p. 347).

III. However,

- (5) "**Last century**, *cuabas* were the great cigar of the world" (1996 NYT).
 (6) The vineyard, founded in 1889, looks pretty much like it must have looked **last century** (1996 NYT).

IV. So, when do we say Ø last/next or the last/next?

- Before nontemporal nouns (**NonTN's**) and plural temporal nouns (**PluTN's**), always use *the last*.
- Before singular temporal nouns (**SgTN's**),
 1. Use **Ø last** when the SgTN refers to a **whole unit** and is understood from "**now**."
 e.g. *I arrived in France last week.*
 (= in **the week** before this one)
 2. Use *the last*
 - a. when *last* means "**past**," or when the SgTN refers to its **individual members**.
 e.g. *I've been here for the last week.*
 (= for the past **seven days**)
 - b. when *last* means "**final**."
- Use *the previous* when the temporal noun is understood from "**then**."
 e.g. *I must add at once that these animals are what we call "queens," young females that have mated in the previous summer or autumn* (Brown).
- *Decade* and *century* are **PluTN's**, so they always combine with *the last/next*.

Figure 1. Rules for (the) last

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- Before **NonTN's** and **PluTN's**, always use *the next*.
 - Before **SgTN's**
 1. Use \emptyset *next* when the SgTN refers to a **whole unit** and is understood from "**now**."
e.g. *I'm going to Korea **next year**.*
(= in **the year** after this one)
 2. Use *the next*
 - a. when the SgTN refers to its **individual members**.
e.g. *I'll be here for **the next week**.*
(= for the next **seven days**)
 - b. when the SgTN is understood from "**then**."
past: e.g. *She said she would file her dissertation **the next week**.*
present: e.g. *One day he is happy, and **the next day** he is depressed.*
future: e.g. *Isaiah is going to Korea the third week of June, and he'll go to Japan **the next week**.*
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Figure 2. Rules for (the) next

V. What are temporal nouns?

- Temporal nouns refer to a point or period of time.
- *Time* is **not** a temporal noun, so both \emptyset *last/next time* and *the last/next time* are acceptable without a change in meaning.
e.g. "*I'd like the room I had **the last time**.*" "*Sounds exactly like **last time**.*" (Brown)

VI. What are singular temporal nouns?

- (a) dates, e.g. *last Nov. 1*
- (b) seven days of the week, e.g. *last Monday*; twelve months of the year, e.g. *last June*; four seasons of the year, e.g. *last fall*
- (c) other temporal nouns such as *weekend, week, month, year, and season*.

VII. How is "understood from 'now'" different from "understood from 'then'"?

- (7) *Three weeks ago, Matthew said he would go to Spain **next week**.*
- (8) *Three weeks ago, Matthew said he would go to Spain **the next week**.*

- Which sentence implies that Matthew has already gone to Spain?
- (7) is understood from "**now**," which is also called "**deictic**," while (8) is understood from "**then**," which is also called undeictic.

VIII. Deictic shifts with time adverbials in reported speech (*The Grammar Book* by Celce-Murcia & Larsen Freeman, 1999, p. 697)