

American Time Zones

The mainland United States is divided into four time zones: Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific. There is a one-hour time difference between the zones that are next to each other. There are greater time differences between the other zones. For example, if it is 6:00 p.m. in New York City in the Eastern Time Zone, it will be an hour earlier, 5:00 p.m., in Minneapolis, which is in the Central Time Zone. But in Denver, which is in the Mountain Time Zone, it will be only 4:00 p.m., which is two hours earlier than in New York. And in Los Angeles, in the Pacific Time Zone, it is earlier still. It is only 3:00 p.m.

If all of this seems confusing, think about how it must have been in the 1800s in North America when there were at least 80 different time zones. People used the position of the sun to determine what time it was. For example, when the sun reached its highest point for the day, it was noon in that particular community. When communities were isolated and people did not travel widely, time zones were not much of a problem. But when Americans became more mobile and inter-city train travel became more widespread, the different time zones created confusion.

Charles F. Dowd developed the idea for the four time zones. He organized the zones by using meridians as the dividing lines between each zone. Later, those razor-sharp dividing lines were bent a bit, when local geography and customs dictated that some communities should be in one time zone and other nearby towns should be in another time zone. That is why some states today have different cities in different time zones.

America officially adopted Dowd's proposed time zones on November 18, 1883. On that day, people gathered in train stations to watch as clocks were set to conform to the new time zones. Some people did not like the new way of telling time. They thought it went against nature. However, most people felt the time zones

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made the country more efficient. In 1918, Congress made the time zones official. That year, lawmakers passed the Standard Time Act.

- How would establishing official time zones be vital to world commerce?

- It's astounding to realize that some people live in one time zone and work in another. Discuss the potential difficulties with this arrangement.

- How would the ability to adapt to different time zones affect the longevity of a business?