

Galilean and special relativity · supported focus

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Physics · HL

Scope and prerequisites

Supported HL focus. First assessment 2025; full Physics guide acquired (84 PDF pages). Remaining guide, assessment and practical requirements retain their recorded holds.

Prerequisites: read the stated quantities and units, use arithmetic and the model conditions below. Each lesson develops its own method before independent transfer. These are original or explicitly fictional teaching examples, not actual measurements or completed assessed learner investigations.

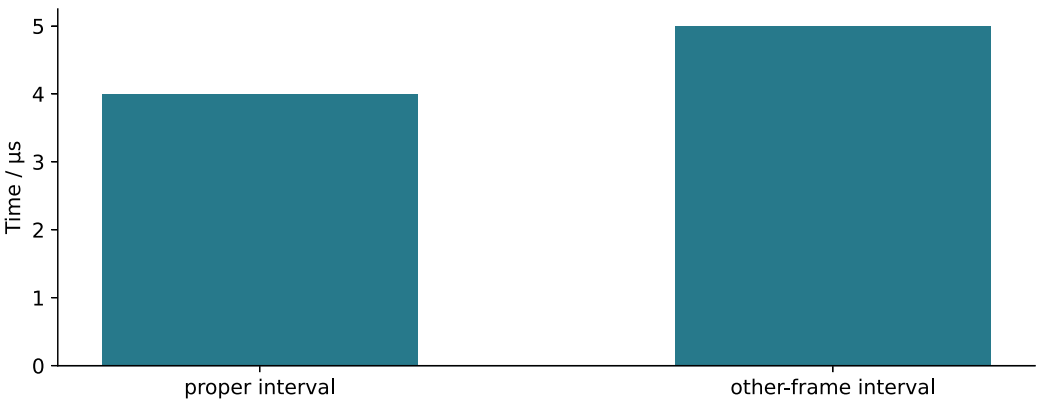
Relativity and measuring events

■ What would explain this observation?

- Two observers can assign different times between the same events. A clock reading has meaning only when the frame and events are specified.
- Start with a prediction. State the quantities or features you would compare, then decide what evidence could distinguish two explanations.

■ Build the model

- In special relativity, inertial observers measure the same vacuum light speed. Time dilation compares **proper time** measured where two events occur at one place with the interval in another **inertial frame**.
- proper time: Time between events measured at one location in a frame; inertial frame: A frame in which a free body moves at constant velocity.



■ Choose evidence that can test it

- The Lorentz factor is 1 divided by the square root of 1 minus speed squared over light speed squared. Galilean velocity addition is an approximation for speeds much smaller than light speed.
- Label which frame measures proper time or proper length before substituting. Use event coordinates consistently. Do not combine lengths from one frame with time intervals from another without transformation.

■ Work from known quantities

- State the known values and their units. Choose the relation because its assumptions fit this case, then rearrange before substitution.
- Known: $v = 0.60c$ and proper time is 4.0 microseconds. $\gamma = 1/\sqrt{1-v^2/c^2} = 1/\sqrt{1-0.60^2} = 1.25$. $\Delta t = \gamma \Delta t_0 = 1.25 \times 4.0 = 5.0$ microseconds in the stated second frame.

Example:

A proper interval is 8 microseconds and gamma is 1.25. Find the other-frame interval. Use the same sequence: known quantities → model → relation → substitution → unit and interpretation.

■ Check the conclusion and its limits

- Time dilation is not an instrument fault. Proper length is measured in the object rest frame; a contracted length is measured in a frame where it moves.
- Return to the original observation. Explain what the result supports, which conditions it assumes, and one way to test a competing explanation.

Warn:

All inertial observers must measure the same time interval between any two events. This claim is false: Time dilation is not an instrument fault. Proper length is measured in the object rest frame; a contracted length is measured in a frame where it moves.

Key:

Relativity and measuring events: The Lorentz factor is 1 divided by the square root of 1 minus speed squared over light speed squared. Galilean velocity addition is an approximation for speeds much smaller than light speed.