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What time the server is on, and why PHP and MySQL can disagree

Databases

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What time the server is on, and why PHP and MySQL can disagree

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A form that records the wrong time, an order dated yesterday, a scheduled job firing two hours early - it is nearly always the same thing: **a server does not have one clock, it has three**, and they do not have to be in the same time zone.

The three clocks

Clock	Who uses it
The system one	The machine's time. It appears in server logs and in file timestamps.
PHP's	What your site uses when it calls *date()*. **This is the one that rules your site**, and it need not match the system.
The database's	What MySQL uses in *NOW()* and *CURRENT_TIMESTAMP*.

> **This is where mismatched times are born.**
> If one part of your site records the time with **PHP** and another lets the database fill it with **NOW()**, and the two clocks are not in the same zone, you end up with different times recorded for the same event. Nothing errors - it only surfaces when somebody notices the numbers do not add up. If your site records dates, it is worth confirming this **before** you need them.

How to find yours, in two minutes

Do not guess: the value that matters is **your** account's. Create a file called `time.php` in *public_html* with these lines:

```
<?php
echo 'PHP: ' . date('Y-m-d H:i:s T') . ' (' . date_default_timezone_get() . ')<br>';
$db = new mysqli('localhost','USER','PASSWORD','DATABASE');
echo 'MySQL: ' . $db->query('SELECT NOW()')->fetch_row()[0];
```

1. Replace the user, password and database name with your account's - see **creating databases and using phpMyAdmin**.
2. Open `yourdomain.co.mz/time.php` in the browser.
3. Compare the two lines. If they do not match, that is the problem you have been chasing.
4. **Delete the file afterwards.** It holds your database password - it cannot stay there.

How to put your site on the time you want

You do not have to ask us for anything: each account can choose its own, and it affects nobody else.

Where	How
WordPress	Under *Settings* → *General*, pick the city from the time zone list. WordPress then shows everything in that time, whatever the server does. It is the simplest route and covers most cases.
Your own PHP site	One line at the start: *date_default_timezone_set('Africa/Maputo')* - or whichever city suits you.
The whole domain at once	In cPanel, under *MultiPHP INI Editor*, set *date.timezone* for the domain. It then applies to every PHP file on it - see **how to change your PHP version**
Just one SQL query	Convert inside the query itself, with *CONVERT_TZ()*.

The right zone for these markets.
Use `Africa/Maputo` for Mozambique and `Africa/Luanda` for Angola. Do not write «UTC+2» or «UTC+1» by hand: the city name is better because it follows any future rule change by itself. Neither country observes daylight saving, but anyone with visitors in Europe gains from using the name, because there the clock changes twice a year.

Times in e-mail and in logs

Two things you cannot change from the site, and it helps to know:

1. **In e-mail messages**, the time travels with its zone in the header, and each mail program shows it *converted to the reader's zone*. That is why the same message appears at different times on different computers - and that is correct.

2. **In server logs** - the ones we open when you ask for help - the time is the system's. When you write to us about a problem, give the time **and the zone** you saw it in. It saves us searching two hours away from it.

If you need to rule the whole clock

On a shared plan the system time is common to the whole machine and is not changed per account - what you change is PHP's and your queries', which is what matters to 99% of sites. If your application genuinely requires the entire system in another zone, that means a server of your own: see **shared hosting vs VPS**.

NEED A HAND?

Times on your site not adding up? Show us the example.

Open a ticket →

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