# Add new optional time bases

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# Add new optional time bases v5
## Proposal for C23

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We propose the inclusion of optional macros for time bases that are modeled after ISO 9945's CLOCK_MONOTONIC, CLOCK_PROCESS_CPU_ID, and CLOCK_THREAD_CPU_ID.
**History:** This is a follow-up of N2402, N2417 and N2460 or parts thereof. WG14 has already voted in favor of the addition of **TIME_MONOTONIC**; **TIME_ACTIVE** and **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE** so far found no consensus but didn't meet strong opposition, either.
**Changes:**
v4: (1) Improve reference to calendar time and emphasize on monotonicity. (2) Add dealing with **timespec_getres**, since we have that now. (3) Emphasize more on the optional aspect of all the definitions.
v5: (1) Remove provisions for possible implementation-defined changes to the calendar time (2) Address some wording issues (execution environment, implementation) (3) Separate the optional features into more bits, so WG14 may vote on them seperately.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The interfaces in `time.h` to manipulate time values have grown mostly unattended over the years and present several problems that could be easily avoided with more modern, redesigned interfaces. This paper is concerned with the following problem:

— The standard allows implementations to add more time bases than **TIME_UTC** but gives no guidance in which direction to go with such new base values.
— POSIX already provides normalized semantics for some other time bases than **TIME_UTC**, and it would be good if we could avoid that practices with similar named time base emerge that diverge from these.

### 1.1. Strategy

C11 and C17 left the addition of new time bases completely to the implementation. Although it is a good principle to leave room for extensions, certain of them already have a connotation in other normative context. In particular, ISO 9945 already provides specifications for four different time bases, two for elapsed time measurement (CLOCK_REALTIME and CLOCK_MONOTONIC), and two for active processing (CPU) time (CLOCK_PROCESS_CPUTIME_ID and CLOCK_THREAD_CPUTIME_ID).
C11's **timespec_get** and **TIME_UTC** are modeled after ISO 9945's clock_gettime and CLOCK_REALTIME, so we propose not handle the latter, and to suppose that the specification for **TIME_UTC** is sufficient. In particular, we do not intend to solve the divergence between ISO 9899 (refering to other ISO standards concerning time) and ISO 9945 for universal time measurements that seems to have emerged for taking into account (or not) leap seconds.
For the other three, we propose to add optional macros to the standard, such that the names, if defined, bind implementations to a particular semantic. ISO 9945 and ISO 9899 differ slightly in their interfaces and have different terminology, so we propose to have macro names according to C's terminology with a prefix TIME:

— **TIME_MONOTONIC** for a time base that is not affected by changes to calendar time. The intent is to provide a measure of time as perceived by the execution environment in its current physical reference system. (This is in contrast to calendar time as measured by **TIME_UTC** which is subject to normative and cultural adjustments.)

— **TIME_ACTIVE** which is the active processing time that is accounted for the whole execution. The intent is to provide a value that is consistent with the return of the **clock** function as specified by the C standard.
— **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE** which is the same, but accounted on a per thread base.

Since these macros will generally have different values from the ones provided by ISO 9945 (there the constants have the opaque type `clockid_t`) we can impose positive values without invalidating components of ISO 9945.

### 1.2. Elapsed time

ISO 9945 has two different "clocks" for measurement of elapsed time, `CLOCK_REALTIME` and `CLOCK_MONOTONIC`. They differ eventually in the starting point of the measurement (*epoch* vs. boot time) and, more importantly, concerning their behavior when the system time is set:

— `CLOCK_REALTIME` changes when the clock is set to a new value, *e.g* if a background time daemon adjusts to a drift indicated by a time servers, or if calendar time is adjusted with a leap second. This is the only clock in ISO 9945 that is mandatory, and as such plays a similar role as **TIME_UTC** for ISO 9899.
— `CLOCK_MONOTONIC` is supposed not to be affected by such changes of the system clock and to measure physical time as perceived by the execution environment.

We propose to model the latter by **TIME_MONOTONIC** and to modify 7.27.1 p2 as follows:

> ...
> **TIME_UTC**
> TIME_MONOTONIC
> which expand~~s~~ to ~~an~~ integer constant*s*, ~~*that*~~ designat~~es~~*ing* the ~~*UTC*~~*calendar time and monotonic time* base*s, respectively.*

And then to add a new paragraph:

> *3′ The definition of macros for time bases other than* **TIME_UTC** *are optional. If defined, the corresponding time bases are supported by* **timespec_get** *and* **timespec_getres**, *and their values are positive.*

For **timespec_get** we then add text to the end of 7.27.2.5 p3:

> *The optional time base* **TIME_MONOTONIC** *is the same, but the reference point is an implementation-defined time point; different program invocations need not to refer to the same reference points.*[FNT1] *For the same program invocation, the results of two calls to* **timespec_get** *with* **TIME_MONOTONIC** *such that the first happens before the second shall not be decreasing. It is implementation-defined if* **TIME_MONOTONIC** *accounts for time during which the execution environment is suspended.*[FNT2]

With the attached footnotes:

> [FNT1] *Commonly. this reference point is the boot time of the execution environment or the start of the execution.*
>
> [FNT2] *The execution environment may for example not be able to track physical time that elapsed during suspension in a low power consumption mode.*

QUESTION 1. *Shall we adopt* **TIME_MONOTONIC** *as proposed in N2957 section 1.2?*

### 1.3. Active processing time

In C17, active processing time during a program invocation can be measured by means of the **clock** function. Unfortunately this functions has several problems, the most sever being that it may overflow without notice after a relatively short execution time, for example after 36 minutes on systems with a signed **clock_t** of width 32 and a **CLOCKS_PER_SEC** value of 1 million. Another disadvantage of **clock** is that there is one legacy C implementation that gets this function fundamentally wrong when compared to the C standard: it accounts for elapsed time instead of active processing time. Repeatedly, this leads to confusion when code is ported from or to conforming implementations. For these reasons we think that **clock** is best deprecated and replaced by an appropriate time base for **timespec_get**. For the time being, we also propose to adapt the wording of for the **clock** function to make its purpose more clear.

ISO 9945 has two such "clocks", namely CLOCK_PROCESS_CPUTIME_ID and CLOCK_THREAD_CPUTIME_ID, which we propose to adapt to the needs of the C standard, named **TIME_ACTIVE** and **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE**. The rationale for this choice of naming is that the C standard neither defines the terms processor nor CPU, and that we want to emphasize that the measured time omits times of inactivity of the executed program.

Because implementations might need to dynamically distinguish different values for these bases for concurrent program invocations (processes) or threads, the specifications of the values exempts them from being compile time constants (append to 7.27.1 p2):

> ... ~~,~~ *; and*
> TIME_ACTIVE
> TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE
> *which, if defined, expand to integer values, designating overall execution and thread-specific active processing time bases, respectively.*

and we add in 7.25.1 p3:

> *If defined, the value of the optional macro* **TIME_ACTIVE** *shall be different from the constants* **TIME_UTC** *and* **TIME_MONOTONIC** *and shall not change during the same program invocation. The optional macro* **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE** *shall not be defined if the implementation does not support threads; its value shall be different from* **TIME_UTC**, **TIME_MONOTONIC** *and* **TIME_ACTIVE**, *it shall be the same for all expansions of the macro for the same thread, and the value provided for one thread shall not be used by a different thread as* base *argument of* **timespec_get** *or* **timespec_getres**.

For **timespec_get** itself the text proposal in 7.27.2.5 is then quite simple:

> *For the optional time bases* **TIME_ACTIVE** *and* **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE** *the result is similar, but the call measures the amount of active processing time associated with the whole program invocation or with the calling thread, respectively.*

Calls with **TIME_ACTIVE** could replace calls of **clock**, now that we would also know how to query the resolution of this time base with **timespec_getres**. Therefore we propose to add a recommended practice at the end of 7.27.2.5:

> ***Recommended practice***
>
> *5 It is recommended that timing results of calls to* **timespec_get** *with* **TIME_ACTIVE**, *if defined, and of calls to* **clock** *are as close to each other as their types, value ranges and resolutions (obtained with* **timespec_getres** *and* **CLOCKS_PER_SEC**, *respectively) allow. Because of its wider value range and*

> *improved indications on error,* **timespec_get** *with time base* **TIME_ACTIVE** *should be used instead of* **clock** *by new code whenever possible.*

QUESTION 2. *Shall we adopt* **TIME_ACTIVE** *and* **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE** *as proposed in N2957 section 1.3 ?*

### 1.4. Adjust the clock

Optionally, we also propose to modify the wording for the **clock** function, 7.27.2.1 p3:

> The clock function returns the implementation's best approximation ~~*to the processor time used by the program*~~ *of the active processing time associated with the program execution* since the beginning of an implementation-defined era related only to the program invocation.

QUESTION 3. *Shall we change the wording for the* **clock** *function as proposed in N2957 1.4?*

In addition, it could be good to indicate the future direction for these interfaces. Therefore we could add the following to "Future library directions", 7.31.16 p1 (the current version is missing the paragraph number):

> *The time bases* **TIME_MONOTONIC**, **TIME_ACTIVE** *and* **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE** *may become mandatory in future versions of this standard.*

and add a new paragraph after that.

> *2 The function* **clock** *is an obsolescent feature.*

QUESTION 4. *Shall we add the wording for possible future requirement of* **TIME_MONOTONIC**, **TIME_ACTIVE** *and* **TIME_THREAD_ACTIVE** *as proposed in N2957 1.4 the future library directions?*

QUESTION 5. *Shall we add the wording for the obsolescence of* **clock** *as proposed in N2957 1.4 the future library directions?*

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