

## Relative items in date strings

*Relative items* adjust a date (or the current date if none) forward or backward. The effects of relative items accumulate. Here are some examples:

```
1 year
1 year ago
3 years
2 days
```

The unit of time displacement may be selected by the string ‘year’ or ‘month’ for moving by whole years or months. These are fuzzy units, as years and months are not all of equal duration. More precise units are ‘fortnight’ which is worth 14 days, ‘week’ worth 7 days, ‘day’ worth 24 hours, ‘hour’ worth 60 minutes, ‘minute’ or ‘min’ worth 60 seconds, and ‘second’ or ‘sec’ worth one second. An ‘s’ suffix on these units is accepted and ignored.

The unit of time may be preceded by a multiplier, given as an optionally signed number. Unsigned numbers are taken as positively signed. No number at all implies 1 for a multiplier. Following a relative item by the string ‘ago’ is equivalent to preceding the unit by a multiplier with value *-1*.

The string ‘tomorrow’ is worth one day in the future (equivalent to ‘day’), the string ‘yesterday’ is worth one day in the past (equivalent to ‘day ago’).

The strings ‘now’ or ‘today’ are relative items corresponding to zero-valued time displacement, these strings come from the fact a zero-valued time displacement represents the current time when not otherwise changed by previous items. They may be used to stress other items, like in ‘12:00 today’. The string ‘this’ also has the meaning of a zero-valued time displacement, but is preferred in date strings like ‘this thursday’.

When a relative item causes the resulting date to cross a boundary where the clocks were adjusted, typically for daylight saving time, the resulting date and time are adjusted accordingly.

The fuzz in units can cause problems with relative items. For example, ‘2003-07-31 -1 month’ might evaluate to 2003-07-01, because 2003-06-31 is an invalid date. To determine the previous month more reliably, you can ask for the month before the 15th of the current month. For example:

```
$ date -R
Thu, 31 Jul 2003 13:02:39 -0700
$ date --date='-1 month' +'Last month was %B?'
Last month was July?
$ date --date="$(date +%Y-%m-15) -1 month" +'La
Last month was June!
```

Also, take care when manipulating dates around clock changes such as daylight saving leaps. In a few cases these have added or subtracted as much as 24 hours from the clock, so it is often wise to adopt universal

time by setting the TZ environment variable to 'UTC0' before embarking on calendrical calculations.