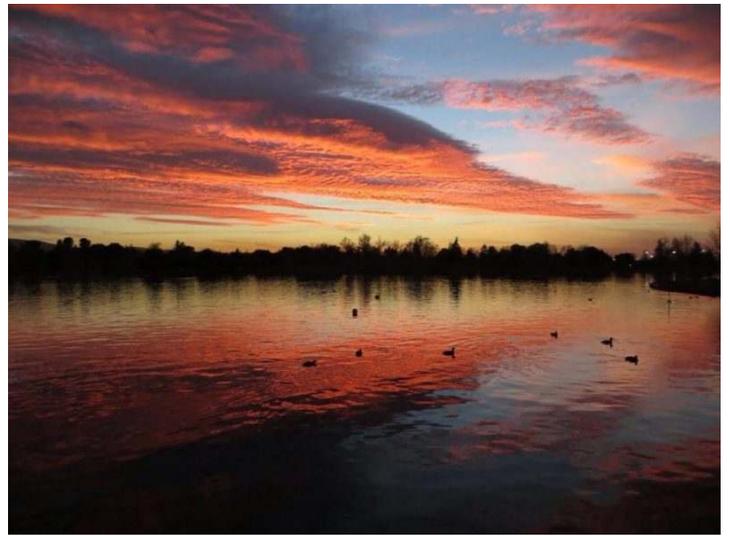


TWILIGHT DEFINITION

Twilight is the time of day between daylight and darkness. Astronomers, the experts on nighttime, recognize three kinds of twilight:

1. **CIVIL TWILIGHT.** It starts as soon as the sun dips below the western horizon. There's enough light to see, but people turn on their lights to drive a car, and the streetlights are starting to come on. Civil twilight officially ends when the sun is 6 degrees below the horizon.
2. **NAUTICAL TWILIGHT.** It begins when it's fairly dark outside. By definition, nautical twilight ends when a distant line of a sea horizon stops being visible against the background of the sky – about when the sun is 12 degrees below the horizon. Some people still call it twilight.
3. **ASTRONOMICAL TWILIGHT.** It ends when all traces of sky glow are gone. By definition, astronomical twilight ends when the sun is 18 degrees below the horizon. Then astronomers can begin to observe the stars, assuming no clouds are in the way!



Just after Sunset

You can define twilight simply as the time of day between daylight and darkness, whether that's after sunset, or before sunrise. It's a time when the light from the sky appears diffused and often pinkish. The sun is below the horizon, but its rays are scattered by Earth's atmosphere to create the colours of twilight. **We have twilight because Earth has an atmosphere. Some light scatters through small particles in the atmosphere – so there's still some light in the sky even after the sun has gone down.**

If you could see twilight from outer space, you'd find that it isn't marked by a sharp boundary on Earth's surface. Instead, the shadow line on Earth – sometimes called the terminator line – is spread over a fairly wide area on the surface and shows the gradual transition to darkness we all experience as night falls.

This image of twilight on Earth viewed from space is a single digital photograph from June of 2001 via the International Space Station orbiting at an altitude of 211 nautical miles. The sun illuminates the scene from the right. The cloud tops reflect gently reddened sunlight filtered through the dusty troposphere, the lowest layer of the planet's nurturing atmosphere.



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Or you can use generally accepted terminologies as shown here, to apply specific meaning to specific fields of applications.

AK, with EarthSky Notes

