Market Talks
EDUCATION CENTER

FOREX · BEGINNER · LESSON 9 OF 15

The Economic Calendar and News Days

How to read an economic calendar, which releases move the market most, what really happens in the seconds around big news, and a simple plan to stay safe

11 min read 8 quiz questions with answer key

FOREX · BEGINNER · LESSON 9 OF 15

The Economic Calendar and News Days

IN ONE SENTENCE

An economic calendar lists every scheduled data release and central bank event, with its time, expected impact, forecast and previous result. The biggest releases can move a currency more in one minute than in the rest of the day. Knowing when they come out, and what can go wrong around them, is one of the simplest ways to protect your account.

What an economic calendar shows

Most of the news that moves currencies is not a surprise in its *timing*. Governments and central banks publish their release dates months in advance. An **economic calendar** collects them all in one place. Free calendars are available on most broker websites, trading platforms and financial news sites.

Each line on a calendar usually shows:

- **Time** of the release, which you can set to your own time zone.
- **Currency** it affects, such as USD or EUR.
- **Impact**, usually shown with one to three icons or colors.
- **Event**, the name of the data or announcement.
- **Actual**, the result, filled in the moment it is published.
- **Forecast**, also called consensus, the average expectation of economists.
- **Previous**, the result from the last release, sometimes revised.

As you learned in Lesson 7, the market reacts to the difference between the actual result and the forecast. A calendar puts these two numbers side by side, so the surprise is visible in seconds.

TIME	CUR.	IMPACT	EVENT	ACTUAL	FORECAST	PREVIOUS
13:30	**USD**	●●●	Non-farm payrolls	**250K**	180K	165K
13:30	**USD**	●●●	Unemployment rate	**4.1%**	4.2%	4.2%
13:30	**CAD**	●●○	Employment change	**22.5K**	20.0K	14.9K
15:00	**USD**	●○○	Wholesale inventories	**0.2%**	0.1%	0.3%

Actual compared with forecast is the surprise the market reacts to. Example data, times in UTC.

Figure 1. An economic calendar, as most websites show it. The values are examples.

High, medium and low impact

Calendars rate each event by how much it usually moves the market. The ratings are a guide, not a rule, and different calendars may rate the same event slightly differently.

- **High impact**: interest-rate decisions, central bank press conferences, employment reports, inflation figures and GDP. These can move a major pair by 50 pips or more within minutes.
- **Medium impact**: retail sales, business surveys (PMIs), trade balance and speeches by central bank members. They can move prices clearly, especially when the result is a big surprise.
- **Low impact**: smaller surveys, housing data and minor reports. They rarely move the market much on their own.

US releases matter most, because the dollar is on almost nine in ten forex trades (Lesson 1). These are the ones to know first:

Release	What it measures	When (New York time)
Fed rate decision (FOMC)	The US policy rate	8 times a year, 2:00 p.m.
Non-farm payrolls (NFP)	Jobs added in the past month, plus unemployment and wages	Usually the first Friday of the month, 8:30 a.m.
Consumer price index (CPI)	Inflation	Monthly, around mid-month, 8:30 a.m.
Retail sales	Consumer spending	Monthly, around mid-month, 8:30 a.m.
GDP	Growth of the whole economy	Quarterly first estimate, about a month after the quarter ends, 8:30 a.m.
ISM manufacturing PMI	Business conditions in factories	First business day of the month, 10:00 a.m.
Weekly jobless claims	New unemployment claims	Every Thursday, 8:30 a.m.

Every other major economy has its own equivalents, such as euro area inflation, UK inflation at 7:00 a.m. London time, or Australia's monthly employment report. Filter your calendar by the currencies you trade.



Figure 2. Calendars rate events by how much they usually move the market. Ratings differ slightly between calendars.

What happens in the minutes around a release

The few minutes around a high-impact release behave very differently from a normal market:

1. **Before the release**, many banks and liquidity providers pull back their prices, because no one wants to be caught on the wrong side. Liquidity thins out and the **spread widens**, sometimes to several times its normal size (Lesson 3).

2. **At the release**, the price can jump dozens of pips in a second. There may be no trades at all at the prices in between.
3. **Just after**, the price often swings back and forth as traders digest the details. A sharp move in one direction that quickly reverses is called a **whipsaw**. Sometimes the first move is completely undone within minutes.
4. **After 15 to 30 minutes**, spreads usually return to normal and a clearer direction often appears.

This pattern is why many experienced traders say the first minutes after big news are for watching, not trading.

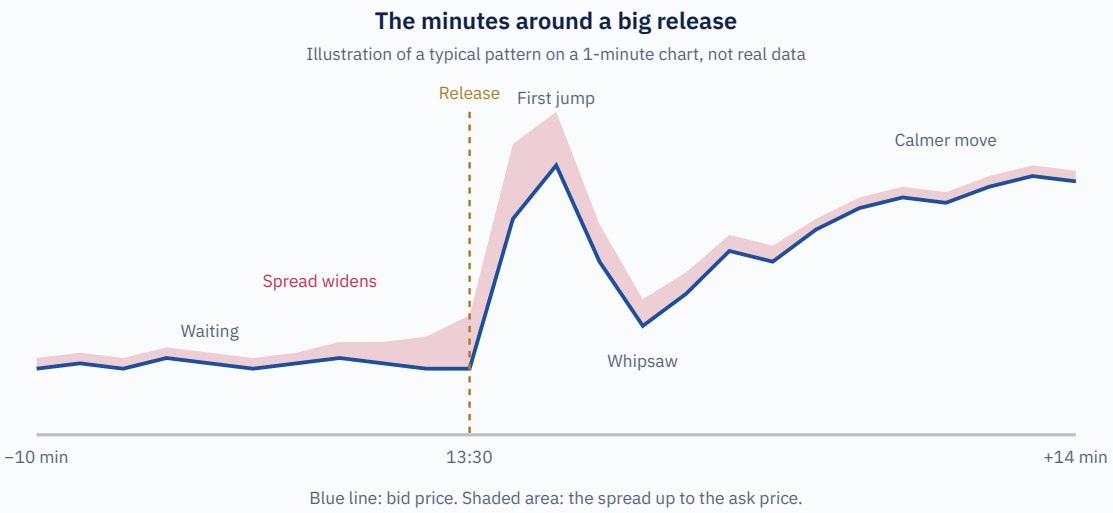


Figure 3. An illustration of what typically happens around a big release: spreads widen, the price jumps, whipsaws, then settles.

Slippage: when your order is filled at a worse price

An order is filled at the best price available when it is triggered. In a normal market, that is almost exactly the price you asked for. But when prices jump, there may be nothing available at your price, and the order is filled at the next price there is. The difference is called **slippage**.

Slippage matters most for **stop loss** orders. David is long EUR/USD with a stop loss at 1.0820, risking 20 pips. Normally, if the price falls, his trade would be closed at 1.0820. But the US jobs report comes out much stronger than expected, and EUR/USD drops from 1.0826 to 1.0808 in a single jump. His stop is triggered and filled at 1.0808, 12 pips worse than planned. His planned 20-pip loss becomes a 32-pip loss.

Slippage can also work in your favor, and many regulated brokers apply it in both directions. But during news, negative slippage on stops is far more common. The same thing happens at the weekly open when the price gaps (Lesson 6).



Figure 4. In a normal market a stop loss is filled at its price. When the price jumps, it is filled at the next available price.

A simple plan for news days

You do not need to predict the news to handle it well. You only need a routine:

- **At the start of each week**, open the calendar, filter it by the currencies you trade and note every high-impact event with its time in your own time zone.
- **Before each event**, decide in advance what to do with any open trade: close it, reduce it, or keep it with a stop you accept may slip.
- **In the last 15 minutes before the release**, do not open new trades.
- **At the release**, watch, but do not chase the first move. Remember the whipsaw.
- **15 to 30 minutes after**, when spreads are back to normal, look again at the chart and decide calmly.

Some traders specialize in trading the news, but it needs fast execution, low costs and experience. Advanced news trading is covered in the Advanced level. For beginners, staying out of the market at release times is a perfectly good strategy.

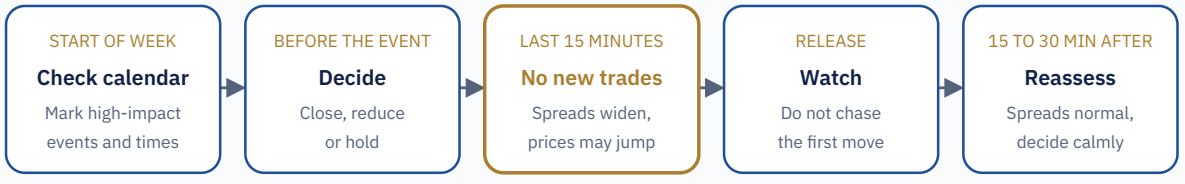


Figure 5. A simple routine for news days.

EXAMPLE: EMMA'S FRIDAY ROUTINE

Emma trades EUR/USD from London. On Monday she sees that the US jobs report is due on Friday at 1:30 p.m. her time. On Friday morning she has a trade in profit, so at 1:00 p.m. she closes half of it and moves her stop to her entry price. The report is a big surprise, EUR/USD jumps and falls back twice, and spreads widen to six pips. Emma does nothing until 2:00 p.m. When the market settles she looks at the chart again, with no damage done and part of her profit already safe.

Time zones and other details

A few practical details make the calendar much more useful:

- **Set your time zone.** Most online calendars show times in your browser's time zone or let you choose one. Check it once, and check it again when the clocks change (Lesson 6).
- **Look at revisions.** The "previous" figure is sometimes revised when the new number comes out. A big revision can change how the market reads the new result.
- **Read beyond the headline.** A jobs report includes unemployment and wages as well as the number of jobs. Sometimes the market reacts to a detail rather than the headline figure.
- **Watch for unscheduled events.** A calendar covers scheduled releases only. Surprise speeches, political news and crises do not appear in advance.

Why this matters for traders

- **Check the calendar every day you trade.** It takes two minutes and prevents most unpleasant surprises.
- **Know your exposure before high-impact news.** Decide in advance whether to close, reduce or hold, and accept that stops may slip.
- **Do not chase the first move.** Spreads are wide, prices whipsaw and the first direction is often wrong.
- **Gold reacts to US data too.** XAU/USD often moves sharply on US jobs, inflation and Fed decisions, and its spread widens a lot around them. The same plan applies.

Key terms

Economic calendar	A schedule of upcoming economic data releases and central bank events, with times, forecasts and results.

Impact rating	A calendar's estimate of how much an event usually moves the market: low, medium or high.
Forecast (consensus)	The average expectation of economists for a data release.
Actual	The real result of a release, published at the scheduled time.
Revision	A change to a previously published figure, made when newer information is available.
Whipsaw	A sharp price move in one direction that quickly reverses, common just after big news.
Slippage	The difference between the price you wanted and the price your order was actually filled at.
Liquidity	How easily a pair can be traded without moving its price; it thins out just before big releases.
FOMC	The Federal Open Market Committee, the Fed group that sets US interest rates.
PMI	Purchasing managers' index, a business survey that gives an early view of economic activity.

Key takeaways

1. An economic calendar shows the time, currency, impact, forecast, previous and actual result of every scheduled release.
2. High-impact events, such as rate decisions, jobs, inflation and GDP, can move a major pair dozens of pips in minutes.
3. Around big releases, spreads widen, prices jump and whipsaw, and the first move is often reversed.
4. When prices jump, stop losses can be filled at worse prices; this slippage can turn a planned loss into a bigger one.
5. A simple weekly routine, deciding in advance and staying out of the first minutes, protects beginners better than trying to predict the news.

Test yourself

Circle one answer for each question. The answer key with explanations is on the next page. You can also take this quiz online at markettalks.info and see your score instantly.

1. On an economic calendar, what does the "forecast" column show?

- A The result of the last release
- B The average expectation of economists
- C The broker's price prediction
- D The time of the release

2. Which of these is usually rated as high impact?

- A A minor housing survey
- B The US non-farm payrolls report
- C A local business confidence index
- D A small regional manufacturing survey

3. At what time are most major US data releases, such as CPI and NFP, published?

- A 8:30 a.m. New York time
- B 2:00 p.m. New York time
- C Midnight UTC
- D 5:00 p.m. New York time

4. What usually happens to spreads just before a high-impact release?

- A They become zero
- B They widen, because liquidity providers pull back their prices
- C They stay exactly the same
- D They are fixed by the central bank

5. What is a whipsaw?

A. A type of order
B. A sharp move in one direction that quickly reverses
C. A weekly gap
D. A fee charged by brokers

6. David's stop loss is at 1.0820. On a news release the price jumps from 1.0826 to 1.0808. Where is his stop most likely filled?

A. Exactly at 1.0820
B. At 1.0826
C. Near 1.0808, the next available price
D. It is cancelled automatically

7. According to the simple news-day plan, what should a beginner avoid in the last 15 minutes before a big release?

A. Checking the calendar
B. Opening new trades
C. Closing trades
D. Looking at the chart

8. Which kind of event will NOT appear on an economic calendar in advance?

A. A scheduled central bank decision
B. A monthly inflation release
C. A sudden political crisis
D. A quarterly GDP report

Answer key

1 B

The average expectation of economists

The forecast, or consensus, is what economists expect. The market reacts to the difference between this and the actual result.

2 B

The US non-farm payrolls report

The US jobs report is one of the most important releases of the month and can move dollar pairs sharply.

3 A

8:30 a.m. New York time

Most major US data comes out at 8:30 a.m. New York time. Fed decisions come at 2:00 p.m.

4 B

They widen, because liquidity providers pull back their prices

Liquidity thins out before big news, so spreads widen, sometimes to several times their normal size.

5 B

A sharp move in one direction that quickly reverses

Just after big news, prices often jump one way and then reverse. Traders who chase the first move can be caught on the wrong side.

6 C

Near 1.0808, the next available price

There were no prices available between 1.0826 and 1.0808, so the stop is filled at the next available price. That difference is slippage.

7 B

Opening new trades

Opening new trades just before a release means facing wide spreads, jumps and possible slippage without knowing the result.

8 C

A sudden political crisis

Calendars list scheduled events only. Unscheduled news, such as crises or surprise announcements, can still move the market at any time.

SOURCES

- US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Release calendar: https://www.bls.gov/schedule/news_release/
- Federal Reserve, Meeting calendars and information: https://www.federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/fomccalendars.htm
- FXStreet, The trader's paradox: Why you avoid rollover but get burned by news: https://www.fxstreet.com/education/the-traders-paradox-why-you-avoid-rollover-but-get-burned-by-news-202512041225
- Investor.gov (US SEC), Stop order: https://www.investor.gov/introduction-investing/investing-basics/how-stock-markets-work/types-orders

Market Talks

CONTINUE LEARNING

Up next: Lesson 10 Leverage and Margin

This lesson is part of the Forex course at the MARKET TALKS Education Center. Beginner lessons are free, each with a quiz and a downloadable PDF. Intermediate and Advanced lessons are for members.

Education Center
Lessons from first principles to advanced topics

Markets Analysis
Technical and fundamental analysis on major markets

Reports
Bitcoin, Gold, Silver, SPX and more

markettalks.info

Telegram @MARKET_TALKS

For education only. Nothing in this document is financial advice. © 2026 MARKET TALKS. You are welcome to share this PDF unchanged.