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The Nile year

Twelve months, five extra days, and a year that fell behind.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art describes the official civil calendar the Egyptians used to write dates.

The official figure	What the page says
When	In use by at least the middle of the Old Kingdom (ca. 2450 B.C.), and quite possibly several centuries earlier.
The year	Twelve months of thirty days each (360 days), plus five epagomenal days — days outside the regular months — at the end of the year.
Seasons	Inundation (Akhet), Emergence (Peret) and Harvest (Shemu), of four months each.
How a date was written	As a specific day within a specific month of a season, e.g. Day 15, Month 3 of the Inundation Season.
The drift	A true astronomical year has 365.25+ days, so the civil calendar fell back by a quarter day or so each year. Its seasons often did not match the agricultural year. Scholars have not agreed when the civil system began.

This sheet does not attach later Gregorian month-ranges to Akhet, Peret or Shemu, and it does not treat a modern Coptic new year as the ancient civil new year.

Three questions

1. How many days were in the twelve regular months, before the five extra days?
2. Name the three official seasons.
3. By how much did the civil year fall behind each year?

Answers: 360. Akhet, Peret and Shemu. A quarter day or so.

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Telling Time in Ancient Egypt. Checked 17 November 2026. egypt.ages.im is independent of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the British Museum. No photographs are included on this sheet.

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