

# Future tenses in English

## Going to

There is no one 'future tense' in English. There are 4 future forms. The one which is used most often in spoken English is 'going to', not 'will'.

We use 'going to' when we want to talk about a plan for the future.

- I'm going to see him later today.
- They're going to launch it next month.
- We're going to have lunch first.
- She's going to see what she can do.
- I'm not going to talk for very long.

Notice that this plan does not have to be for the near future.

- When I retire I'm going to go back to Barbados to live.
- In ten years time, I'm going to be boss of my own successful company.

We use 'going to' when we want to make a prediction based on evidence we can see now.

- Look out! That cup is going to fall off.
- Look at those black clouds. It's going to rain soon.
- These figures are really bad. We're going to make a loss.
- You look very tired. You're going to need to stop soon.

We can replace 'going to go' by 'going'.

- I'm going out later.
- She's going to the exhibition tomorrow.

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## Will - future

Some people have been taught that 'will' is '**the future**' in English. This is not correct.

Sometimes when we talk about the future we cannot use 'will'.

Sometimes when we use 'will' we are not talking about the future.

We can use 'will' to talk about future events we believe to be certain.

- The sun will rise over there tomorrow morning.
- Next year, I'll be 50.
- That plane will be late. It always is.
- There won't be any snow. I'm certain. It's too warm.

Often we add 'perhaps', 'maybe', 'probably', 'possibly' to make the belief less certain.

- I'll probably come back later.
- He'll possibly find out when he sees Jenny.
- Maybe it will be OK.
- Perhaps we'll meet again some day.

We often use 'will' with 'I think' or 'I hope'.

- I think I'll go to bed now.
- I think she'll do well in the job.
- I hope you'll enjoy your stay.
- I hope you won't make too much noise.

We use 'will' at the moment we make a new decision or plan. The thought has just come into our head.

- Bye. I'll phone you when I get there.
- I'll answer that.
- I'll go.
- I won't tell him. I promise.

# Future tenses in English

## Going to or will

When we want to talk about future facts or things we believe to be true about the future, we use 'will'.

- The President will serve for four years.
- The boss won't be very happy.
- I'm sure you'll like her.
- I'm certain he'll do a good job.

If we are not so certain about the future, we use 'will' with expressions such as 'probably', 'possibly', 'I think', 'I hope'.

- I hope you'll visit me in my home one day.
- She'll probably be a great success.
- I'll possibly come but I may not get back in time.
- I think we'll get on well.

If you are making a future prediction based on evidence in the present situation, use 'going to'.

- Not a cloud in the sky. It's going to be another warm day.
- Look at the queue. We're not going to get in for hours.
- The traffic is terrible. We're going to miss our flight.
- Be careful! You're going to spill your coffee.

At the moment of making a decision, use 'will'. Once you have made the decision, talk about it using 'going to'.

- I'll call Jenny to let her know. Sarah, I need Jenny's number. I'm going to call her about the meeting.
- I'll come and have a drink with you but I must let Harry know. Harry, I'm going to have a drink with Simon.

# Future tenses in English

## Present forms for the future

We use the present continuous to talk about things that we have already arranged to do in the future.

- I've got my ticket. I'm leaving on Thursday.
- I'm seeing Julie at 5 and then I'm having dinner with Simon.
- He's picking me up at the airport.
- The company is giving everyone a bonus for Christmas.

In many situations when we talk about future plans we can use either the present continuous or the 'going to' future. However, when we use the present continuous, there is more of a suggestion that an arrangement has already been made.

- I'm going to see him./I'm seeing him.
- I'm going to do it./I'm doing it.

We use the present simple to talk about events in the future which are 'timetabled'. We can also use the present continuous to talk about these.

- My plane leaves at 6 in the morning.
- The shop opens at 9.30.
- The sun rises a minute earlier tomorrow.
- My plane is leaving at 8.30.
- The shop is closing at 7.00.
- The sun is rising at 6.32 tomorrow.

# Future tenses in English

## Will - other uses

Older textbooks often refer to 'will' as 'the future tense' and this has confused a lot of learners. It is important to remember that when we talk about the future we cannot always use 'will' and that when we use 'will' we are not always talking about the future.

Here 'will' is clearly referring to the future.

- If I speak to her, I'll tell her about it.
- I'll probably visit Sue when I go to Oxford.
- Next birthday she'll be 32. Or so she says.

In these examples, however, 'will' is referring to events happening at the present.

- The car won't start.
- If that's the phone, I'll get it.
- Will you have another cup of coffee?

When we use 'will' referring to the present, the idea being expressed is usually one of 'showing willingness' or 'will power'.

- My baby won't stop crying. I've tried everything and I'm really exhausted.
- I am the boss. You will do as I say.
- I need quiet to write this but he will keep on talking to me. I wish he would leave me alone.

We use 'will' for requests, orders, invitations and offers.

- Will you give me a hand?
- Will you please take a seat?
- Will you have some cake?
- I'll help you.

We use 'will' to make promises or threats.

- I'll do it at once.
- I'll phone him back immediately.
- I won't forget this.
- I'll get my own back some day.

## Future tenses in English

We use 'will' for habit.

- A cat will always find a warm place to sleep.
- My car won't go any faster than this.

We use 'will' for deduction.

- I expect he'll want us to get on with it.
- The phone's ringing. That will be Mark.