

The future is one area of English grammar that seems to cause so many problems for students learning English.

One way of expressing the future is to use "**be going to**" plus the infinitive of the verb:

*She **is going to** visit her uncle in Monaco next summer.*

Another, with a near identical meaning, is the **present continuous** which we covered [earlier](#):

*She **is buying** a house near Paris before the end of the year.*

You can see from these two examples that we are expressing *a plan*, something we already know we are going to do. Something we thought about earlier.

*I'm **going into** town tomorrow. I already have my ticket.*

*They **are going to do** a computer course together. They signed up today.*

*I'm **seeing** Darren tomorrow. We are meeting at ten in the morning.*

We also use **going to** to talk about something we think will happen in the future because of evidence we see now.

*There **is going to be** a terrible storm. Look at the black sky!*

*He **is going to fail** all his exams. He isn't studying at all.*

When we talk about something we intended to do in the past, but then changed our minds, we use **was going to**.

*I **was going to ring** you, but then I saw I didn't have your number*

*We **were going to play** baseball in the park, but then it started to rain.*

We have [already discussed](#) the use of "**going to**" to talk about the future. It is used to talk about plans already made and also to make predictions based on evidence we see now.

We will now talk about "**will**" and then see how they differ in direct comparison.

Will is a modal verb and is followed directly by an infinitive verb without "**to**".

I will see you tomorrow.

He'll go to the meeting tomorrow.

The main functions of "will" are:

a. to predict a future event:

The party will be at my house at eight o'clock.

The exam will finish in one hour.

b. to express a spontaneous decision:

I'll answer the phone.

You don't have bread! We'll go to the supermarket.

Note the difference between **will** and **going to** in this use. We use **going to** if a decision has been made **before** speaking, but **will** if the decision is made **now**.

John: What are you doing this weekend?

Mary: I'm going to visit Howard in Boston.

John: But Howard is in Chicago this weekend with his parents.

Mary: Oh! I didn't know that! I'll go and visit his brother Stefano then.

In this dialogue, Mary's first answer uses **going to** as it is a plan she made **before**. Her second answer uses **will** as she now has to make a new plan, and her plan to visit Stefano is made **now**, as she speaks.

c. to express a prediction based on opinion, not on fact.

Howes will win the election.

I think she'll get married next summer.

Here, expressions of opinion and belief are common:

I hope we'll see the start of the film

I wonder what will happen if I press this red button. Aaagh!!

She will probably be very late because of the traffic.

He's sure he'll get the job. He said the interview went quite well.

d. The old form of will, "shall" is often used to make offers and suggestions.

Shall we leave now? It's late.

That bag is very heavy. Shall I help you with it?

Present Simple For Future

The **Present Simple** can be used to talk about **scheduled future events**, often related to timetables. We used the present simple as the event is considered "fixed" and unlikely to change time/place.

Examples:

My train leaves at 7pm tomorrow and I arrive in Toronto at 9pm.

The conference begins on Monday and finishes on Thursday afternoon.

Bob Palmer retires next year, we have to think about his replacement.

Note: Only use the Present Simple to talk about the future for this type of "timetabled" events.