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# Future tenses

English has no single future tense. You choose a form by meaning: will for decisions made now, predictions and promises; going to for plans and for predictions with evidence; the present continuous for fixed arrangements; and the present simple for timetables. After words like when, if and as soon as, use the present simple, not will.

## What to know

### Why English has many ways to talk about the future

In many languages the verb changes its ending to show the future. English does not. Instead it uses several forms, and each one tells the listener something different: is this a plan, a guess, a promise or a timetable?

### Will: decisions now, predictions and promises

Use **will** + base verb for three main jobs. First, a decision you make at the moment of speaking: The bus has gone, so I will walk. Second, a prediction based on your opinion or general knowledge: I think more people will work from home. Third, a promise or offer: I will send you the notes tonight.

- *I think electric cars will become cheaper.* · opinion prediction
- *I will call the library now.* · decision at this moment

### Going to: plans and predictions with evidence

Use **am, is, are + going to** + base verb when you already have a plan or intention: I am going to apply for a scholarship. Use it also when you can see evidence now that something will happen: Look at the traffic. We are going to be late.

### Present continuous and present simple for the future

Use the **present continuous** (am, is, are + -ing) for arrangements: things you have fixed with other people, usually with a time. I am meeting my supervisor on Thursday. We are flying to Toronto at noon.

- *My course finishes in June.* · timetable
- *I am visiting my aunt next weekend.* · arrangement

### Future continuous and future perfect

Two more forms are useful in Speaking Part 2. The **future continuous** (will be + -ing) describes an action in progress at a future time: This time next year I will be studying in London. The **future perfect** (will have + past participle) describes an action finished before a future time: By 2030, the city will have built three new metro lines.

## Exercises

1. The train \_\_\_\_\_ at 7.15 tomorrow morning.
  - a. leave
  - b. leaves

- c. leaving
2. Look at the sky: it \_\_\_\_\_ rain.
- a. is going to
  - b. is going
  - c. going to
3. I will tell you the moment the results \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. arrived
  - b. will arrive
  - c. arrive
4. A: I can't carry all these bags. B: Don't worry, I \_\_\_\_\_ you.
- a. would help
  - b. helped
  - c. will help
5. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) If it (2) will rain (3) tomorrow, (4) we will stay at home.
6. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) I think (2) the cost of living (3) will to rise (4) in the next decade.
7. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): meeting / o'clock. / are / We / tutor / our / two / will meeting / at
8. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): at / nine / tomorrow. / exam / will starting / The / starts
9. Correct this: *As soon as I will finish my degree, I will look for a job.*
10. Correct this: *I am going to visiting my grandparents next week.*

**Practise online, free:** hear every example and check your answers at [www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/future-tenses/practice/](http://www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/future-tenses/practice/)

**IELTS tip.** In Writing Task 2, mix your future forms. Use will for confident predictions and may, could or is likely to for careful ones. In Speaking Part 1, answer questions about your plans with I am going to or I am hoping to, and then add a reason.

## FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

# Future tenses

|           |                                                                                             |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AIM       | Learners choose a future form by meaning and apply the present simple rule in time clauses. |
| TIME      | 30 minutes                                                                                  |
| LEVEL     | B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)                                                                   |
| MATERIALS | This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio                |

## Warm-up

Ask learners to write one thing they will do tonight, one plan for next year and one fixed arrangement this week. Collect a few and write them on the board without labels.

## Lesson steps

1. Sort the board sentences by meaning and elicit the form each one needs: decision, plan, arrangement.
2. Present the evidence test for going to with a picture of dark clouds and a picture of someone with a full diary.
3. Run a 'diary and timetable' pair task: learners ask each other about a week of fixed arrangements using the present continuous, then about a bus timetable using the present simple.
4. Drill time clauses: learners complete five stems (When I get home, As soon as the lesson ends, If it rains tomorrow, and so on) with true sentences.
5. Learners write three predictions about their city in 2040, using will, may and is likely to.

## Extension

Learners prepare a Speaking Part 2 answer on 'a skill you want to learn' with at least four different future forms, and the class listens for the forms.

## Answer key

1. b) leaves. A fixed timetable takes the present simple: the train leaves.
2. a) is going to. You can see clouds now, so you have evidence. Use is going to + base verb.
3. c) arrive. After time expressions such as the moment, as soon as and when, use the present simple for the future.
4. c) will help. An offer made at the moment of speaking takes will. Would needs a condition, and helped is past.
5. Part 2: *will rain* → **rains**. After if, use the present simple, even when the meaning is future.
6. Part 3: *will to rise* → **will rise**. After will, use the base verb with no to.
7. We are meeting our tutor at two o'clock. A fixed arrangement uses the present continuous: are meeting.

8. The exam starts at nine tomorrow. A timetable uses the present simple: starts.
9. As soon as I finish my degree, I will look for a job. After as soon as, use the present simple. Only the main clause takes will.
10. I am going to visit my grandparents next week. After going to, use the base verb.

## Questions learners often ask

**How many future tenses are there in English?** Strictly, English has none, because the verb has no future ending. Learners usually count the main forms: will, going to, present continuous, present simple, future continuous and future perfect.

**Can I use will and going to in the same way?** Often yes, especially for predictions, and in speaking people switch freely. The difference matters most for decisions made now (will) and plans already made (going to).

**Why can't I say when I will arrive?** In a time clause with when, if, before, after or as soon as, English uses the present simple to refer to the future. Say when I arrive, I will call.

**Which future form is best for IELTS Writing Task 2?** Use will for firm predictions and may, could or is likely to for careful ones. Avoid going to in formal writing, where will sounds more academic.

## Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage, 4th edition. Oxford University Press.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S. and Finegan, E. (1999). Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Longman.

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