

Grammar Future Forms

Not Just WILL! – Guide to Future Forms in English

Future in English is a whole collection of different tenses and forms – not just **WILL**!

1. We need to select the most appropriate tense or form for what we want to communicate. If you only use **WILL** for every future situation, you will sound unnatural – apart from when it should be used. We use **WILL** for a number of very specific uses (below), rather than for discussing general future actions, like what you are doing tomorrow: use **PRESENT CONTINUOUS** or **GOING TO** instead.
2. Learners often overuse **WILL**, in some cases because their L1 has a particular future tense and they feel that **WILL** is equivalent to that. Try saying each example sentence below with **WILL** and you will see how unnatural many of them sound. There are NO dedicated future verbs in English so we use present and past forms instead, e.g. infinitive, present participle, past participle, and modal verbs like **WILL** and can.
3. Some learners only ever use **WILL** or **GOING TO** for future in English, but it is recommended to learn all the future forms, so you can always use the most appropriate one.

Revise the full list of tenses and forms below:

Use:	Tense / Form:	Example:	
decision at the moment of speaking [spontaneous]	will	[Doorbell rings] I'll get it!	
promise / assurance		I will call you every day.	
offer		I'll help you fix the roof later, if you like.	
prediction [without present evidence]		[I think...] Harrison will be re-elected next year.	
refusal		No, I won't go out for a drink with you.	
fact		He said that the blue whale will become extinct.	
hope / expectation		I will look forward to seeing you on Monday!	
formal command		You will finish your dinner, Harriet!	
suggestion [question form only]		shall	Shall we meet at 8pm?
intention / plan		be going to	I'm going to buy a new dress next week.
prediction [with present evidence]	[It looks like...] The bus isn't going to stop!		
command	You're going to finish your dinner, Harriet!		
arrangement	present continuous	I'm having a meal with David later.	
scheduled event		<i>Hamilton</i> is coming to Edinburgh in August!	
timetabled event	present simple	The train leaves at 11:43 tomorrow morning.	
after: when / as soon as / until, etc.		I'll tell you when / as soon as I get there.	
an action in progress at a specific time	future / con	At 7am tomorrow I'll be eating my breakfast.	
completed action before a later time	future / perf	I'll have read the book by the time you get here.	
incomplete action before a later time	fu / perf / con	I'll have been reading the book for an hour by the time you get here.	

Future forms with **BE**:

preview an imminent action	be + about to	Jack is (just) about to dive into the pool.
show a fixed arrangement	be + set to	Gina and Martin are (all) set to marry in May.
formal command	be to	You are to tell Jim not to park there anymore.

Future forms with modal verbs:

possibility	can / could / may / might	I can give you a lift to work on Tuesday.
obligation	must / have to	I must return that book to the library tomorrow.
advice	should / ought to	You ought to go to the concert tonight.
necessity	need to	We need to talk to you as soon as possible.

Future forms with conditionals:

real future = real possibility	1st conditional	If you wake up late, you will miss the bus!
hypothetical future	2nd conditional	If I got the job, I would move to Northampton.
3 rd cond. + 2 nd cond. for a future result	mixed cond.	If I'd got that cake, tomorrow would be great.