

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

Future forms with BE:

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

Future forms with modal verbs:

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

Future forms with conditionals:

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