

English Grammar - The Tense System

Future Tenses

The future is one of the most complex areas of the English language. So many different tenses and ideas can be used with future meanings.

The seven most common are as follows (not in any order of frequency):

1. **The future simple:** e.g. I'll pick you up later.
2. **The future continuous:** e.g. I'll be getting on the train at five p.m.
3. **The future perfect:** e.g. I'll have finished my exams by Monday.
4. **The future perfect continuous:** e.g. He'll have been driving for two hours before he reaches Paris.
5. **Be going + infinitive:** e.g. It's going to rain later.
6. **The present simple:** e.g. The train leaves platform five in ten minutes.
7. **The present continuous:** e.g. I'm meeting her for coffee tomorrow.

In this unit we will look at all of the above structures in more detail. There are normally a number of forms available for what you want to say, but forms 5 and 7 are the most frequently used. Please also note that tenses 6 and 7 above are normally used as present tenses, but also have future applications.

When you feel comfortable with the information contained in this unit, complete the worksheet as before.



1 FUTURE SIMPLE

Form

Affirmative	I shall/will You will He/she/it will + verb We shall/will They will
Negative	I will not/shall not, you will not etc.
Question	Shall /will I? Will you? Etc.
Negative Question	Will/shall I not? Will you not? or Won't /shan't I? etc
Contractions	I'll, you'll, shan't, won't etc.

Note: shall/shan't (UK only)

Usages

- ❖ **Future facts and certainties**
 - *He'll be 28 in July.*
 - *Spring will start in March as usual.*
 - *When will you know?*
- ❖ **Promises**
 - *I'll put the check in the post.*
- ❖ **Predictions (Based on no present evidence, as opposed to 'be going to')**
 - *It'll rain before morning.*
- ❖ **Assumptions/speculations**
 - *That'll be the bailiffs at the door.*
 - *What will happen in next week's episode?*
 - *They'll have to sell the house, I expect.*
- ❖ **Spontaneous decisions (contrast with 'be going to' for planned decisions)**
 - *I'll get my coat.*
- ❖ **Threats**
 - *You'd better go or I'll hit you.* (Please note that this is really an alternative to the first conditional, which you will come across in unit 10)

Shall/will

Shall is frequently used in making suggestions, invitations etc. In affirmative sentences its use has become more formal.

Will generally expresses a stronger intention, coercion, or determination, than *shall*.

What shall we do with the evidence?

You shall go to the ball.

Shall we dance?

Where shall I send your mail?

Shall I do that for you?

Typical mistakes/errors

Here are some typical student mistakes and errors.

Make a note of the nature of the mistake or error for each example.

- ❖ Sunday I will to go on a picnic.
- ❖ We'll going to win tomorrow.

Confusion between “be going to” and the future simple is common.

Teaching ideas

- ❖ **Fortune telling/palm-reading.**
- ❖ **With present simple in time clauses.**
 - *She'll be happy when we arrive.*
- ❖ **Going on a holiday/lost in the desert - what will you take?**
- ❖ **Winning the lottery: what will you do?**
- ❖ **Predicting future changes in the next X years using various topics.**
- ❖ **Predicting what others will be like in X year.**
- ❖ **Songs:**
 - “When I’m 64” by the Beatles.
 - “You’ll Take the High Road” (traditional.)
 - “That’ll be the Day” by Buddy Holly.



2 FUTURE CONTINUOUS

Form

subject + will + be + verb +ing (present participle)

Affirmative	Yes/no questions	Negatives
We'll be waiting for you.	Will you be holding a red rose? Yes, I will. / No, I won't.	I won't be wearing a dress.

Usages

The future continuous form is used in the following ways:

- ❖ To say that something will be in progress at a particular moment in the future – *This time tomorrow I'll be lying on the beach.*
- ❖ To 'predict the present' to say what we think or guess might be happening now – *John will probably be having lunch now.*
- ❖ For polite enquiries referring to other people's plans, but not to influence the listener's intentions – *Will you be coming to the party?*
- ❖ To refer to future events which are fixed or decided (without suggesting personal intention) – *Professor Smith will be giving another lecture at the same time next week.*

Typical student errors/mistakes

- ❖ Missing part of the structure:
 - *We will be wait for you.*
 - *We will waiting for you.*
- ❖ Function:

The idea that the action will continue around a specific point in the future may cause confusion.

Teaching Ideas

- ❖ **Arranging diaries/ dates** "What will you be doing at 2.00pm on Tuesday?"
- ❖ **Trying to get out of the date from hell**
 - "Can I see you on Friday?" "No, I'll be washing my hair." "Saturday?" "No, I'll be painting my toes." "Sunday?" "No, I'll be...", etc.
- ❖ **Illustrative situations**
 - "3 police cars are speeding through the night. They have just received information that a notorious criminal is playing roulette at this very moment in a gambling club"... What is the criminal doing at this moment? *What will he be doing when the police get there?*

3 FUTURE PERFECT

Form

will + have + past participle

Affirmative	Yes/no questions	Negative
I will have worked here for 2 years.	Will you have worked..? Yes, I will. /No, I won't.	She will not have worked...

Usage

The future perfect tense is used to say that something will have been done, completed or achieved by a certain time in the future.

*The builder says he'll have finished the roof by Monday.
The car will soon have done 100,000 miles.*

The perfect structures are all relative. In the case of the future perfect, we look back on the past (a completed action) from a future standpoint. That is "past in the future".

A sentence with the future perfect generally uses an adverbial expression that signals when a future event will be completed.

By the end of the summer I will have completed this course.

At the end of the year I will have mastered this computer!

You will have reviewed the material before you sit the exam, I presume?

When they arrive I will have finished cooking dinner.

Typical student errors/mistakes

❖ Form: *I will have been finished by tomorrow.
I will be finish by tomorrow.*

❖ Function:

The future perfect can often be confused with future perfect continuous - the distinction between completion of action by a certain time in the future and how long something will have continued for by a certain time (future continuous) needs to be made.

Teaching Ideas

- ❖ **Fill in future diaries and elicit questions in the future perfect**
 - *What will you have done by...*
- ❖ **Invention of an extremely successful future career**
 - Students tell each other what they will have done by certain ages/years
- ❖ **Choose a famous historical personage and note down important dates in his/her life**
 - Students then explain by which age their character will have done certain things
 - *By 1796 he will have married*
- ❖ **A romantic novelist writes 300 page books. He/she writes ten pages a day and takes no holidays. Use the future perfect to answer the questions:**
 - *How many pages will she have written after ten days?*
 - *After a month?*
 - *After a year?*
 - *After ten years?*
 - More questions/situations can be developed around this idea.



4 FUTURE PERFECT CONTINUOUS

Form

will + have + been + verb + ing

Affirmative	Yes/no questions	Negatives
I will have been working for seven years.	Will you have been working...? Yes, I will./ No, I won't.	He will not have been working...

Usage

We can use the future perfect continuous to say **how long something will have continued by a certain time.**

By the time you get here, I'll have been working for six hours.

Compare this to the **future perfect** tense. What general rule could be applied to the teaching of the two forms?

The future perfect continuous often includes an adverbial expression that begins with *by*. Write a model sentence for each example:

By next week...

By this time tomorrow,...

Typical student errors/mistakes

Form: *Next Christmas I'll have been learn English for four years.*
By this time tomorrow, I'll be drinking for twelve hours.

Teaching idea

- ❖ How long will you have been learning English/ working/ going to school/ living in your present house by next summer?

5 BE GOING + INFINITIVE ('GOING TO' FUTURE)

Form

verb 'to be' in the present, plus going to, plus base form of verb

Affirmative	Yes/no questions	Negatives
I am going to play football next week.	Are you going to play football next week? Yes, I am. / No, I'm not.	I am not going to play football next week.

This tense can cause confusion, as the structure looks very similar to the present continuous, especially when the present continuous form uses the verb 'to go'. The difference is that the 'be going to' structure is always followed by a verb.

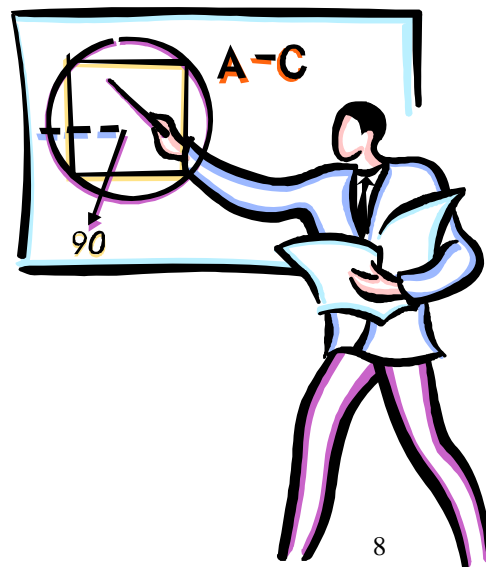
Usages

- ❖ **Intentions**
 - *I'm not going to do it.*
- ❖ **Predictions based on present evidence**
 - *I think it's going to rain later!*
- ❖ **Plans (decisions made before speaking)**
 - *I am going to visit my family in April.*

The 'be going to' future's usage is frequently confused with the future simple. The two structures are often taught together to help students appreciate the differences.

Teaching Ideas

- ❖ **Making holiday/birthday party plans.**
- ❖ **Going to game** (What am I going to draw/do/buy? Based around mime and prompts).
- ❖ **Itinerary from a courier.**
- ❖ For younger learners, **plan what they are going to be when they grow up**. Older learners can plan successful future careers.
- ❖ **Make predictions based on evidence**, such as weather forecasts etc.
- ❖ **Songs:** E.g. "Mannish Boy" by Muddy Waters.



6 PRESENT SIMPLE

Form – see present tenses.

Usages

- ❖ **To suggest a more formal situation**
 - *Our new shop opens next month.*
- ❖ **For timetables and schedules**
 - *The train to Edinburgh leaves from platform 6 at 10.30 a.m.*
 - *We fly to Dublin on Sunday, then we go on to New York on Tuesday.*
- ❖ **To suggest a more impersonal tone (often implying an outside compulsion)**
 - *They leave tomorrow for Paris.*
 - *We start filming tomorrow.*

Teaching ideas

- ❖ Compiling or sharing information from airport or railway schedules.
- ❖ Writing press releases about your company's future plans.
- ❖ Discussing weekly timetables.

7 PRESENT CONTINUOUS

Form – see present tenses.

Usages

- ❖ **For definite arrangements**
 - *We're taking our holiday in July.* (We've booked it and bought the tickets)
 - *I'm going for a drink later.*
- ❖ **For decisions and plans without a time frame**
 - *I'm leaving you.*

Teaching ideas

- ❖ **Diaries/Schedules** – Any activity using future diaries can be adapted. Blank diaries can be given to students for completion. They then try to find a time when they are both free to meet for lunch, go to the cinema, etc...
- ❖ **Role-play** – Secretary and client where the client is trying to make an appointment to see a busy boss.

All of these kinds of activities should encourage the use of the present continuous for the future.