

How to Talk about the Future (4 Ways)

Let's look at the four most common ways to express the future in English.

Many people think that the only way to talk about the future in English is by using "will + base form". But English uses a range of different constructions to talk about the future. These are the four most common forms. (The future continuous, future perfect and future perfect continuous are used much less frequently, and only in very specific situations.)

Note: It can be difficult to give exact rules for future constructions. In many situations, more than one form is possible. People use the following rules most of the time.

1. The future simple (will + base form)

We mainly use the future simple for **predictions** (guesses or opinions), **future facts** (neutral or formal language), **spontaneous decisions** and **promises**.

For example:

- I'm sure he'll **pass** the exam. (*prediction*)
- The moon **will be full** tomorrow. (*future fact*)
- It's cold. I'll **close** the window. (*spontaneous decision*)
- Don't worry. I **won't be** late tomorrow. (*promise*)

Click here for all uses of the future simple: [learnenglishgrammar.com/future-simple-use/](https://www.learnenglishgrammar.com/future-simple-use/)

2. Be going to + base form

We mainly use this construction for **predictions** (based on present evidence), **future facts** (conversational language) and **plans** or **intentions**.

For example:

- Be careful! You're **going to drop** those plates. (*prediction*)
- The **moon's going to be** full tomorrow. (*future fact*)
- In this presentation, I'm **going to talk** to you about climate change. (*plan or intention*)
- The students **aren't going to buy** a present for their teacher. (*plan or intention*)
- **Is Julia going to go** to London next year? (*plan or intention*)

! Students are sometimes confused by the repetition of **go** in sentences like the last one. Here **go** is simply the main verb, like **talk** and **buy** in the previous sentences.

Click here for a comparison of the future simple and "be going to + base form":

learnenglishgrammar.com/will-or-be-going-to-comparison/

3. The present continuous

For **fixed personal arrangements** in the future, we mainly use the present continuous. These are plans that we have already made, and they usually involve an activity that required organising (going somewhere, seeing somebody, etc.). These sentences typically include a time and/or place.

! Students sometimes confuse the present continuous with "be going to + base form", especially when **go** is the main verb.

For example:

- He's **seeing** the doctor on Monday.
- Where **are they meeting** their friends?
- Lisa's **going** to the movies this weekend. (**go** is the main verb)
- Max and I **are going** swimming after work. (**go** is the main verb)

Most of the time, we can use “be going to + base form” here as well, but it is more common to use the present continuous if we have already organised things.

Let’s compare these two sentences:

- He’s **seeing** the doctor on Monday.
- He’s **going to see** the doctor on Monday.

The first sentence sounds more definite — he has probably already made the appointment. The second sentence sounds like an intention — he has possibly made the appointment.

Let’s compare these two questions:

- **Is** Julia **going** to London next year?
- **Is** Julia **going to go** to London next year?

Similarly, these two questions basically mean the same thing. However, with the first question it sounds like we are asking if Julia has made definite plans — if she has bought tickets, organised accommodation, etc.

! In sentences that do not involve an arranged activity with a time and/or place, we do not usually use the present continuous. For example, in this sentence, the present continuous would sound strange. It would sound like you are talking about the present and not the future:

- In this presentation, I’m **going to talk** to you about climate change.

4. The present simple

We usually use the present simple for future events based on a **timetable or schedule**. These are a type of future fact. These are usually set by an organisation — these are not personal plans.

For example:

- The train **leaves** at 4 o’clock.
- The Olympics **begin** next week.
- I **start** work at 6 am tomorrow.
- What time **does** the shop **close**?
- When **do** the sales **end**?

We also use the present simple in sentences about the future **after conjunctions** like **when, after, before, until** and **as soon as**. We usually use the future simple in the other clause. It is sometimes possible to use the present perfect instead of the present simple in these types of sentences.

For example:

- When I **finish** work, I'll call you.
- They'll celebrate after they **win** the game.
- Please lock the door before you **leave**.
- We won't start until everyone **arrives**.
- As soon as the lesson **finishes**, we'll go home.

Notes:

1. For **predictions**, we usually use the future simple if it is based on an opinion or belief. We tend to use "be going to + base form" if it is based on current evidence (things that we know, or can see or hear).
2. For **future facts**, we usually use the future simple in neutral or formal language and "be going to + base form" in conversational language.
3. For **future facts based on a timetable or schedule**, we usually use the present simple, but the future simple (formal), "be going to + base form" (conversational) and the present continuous (conversational) are also possible.