

Will or Shall?

What is the difference between *will* and *shall* in English?

Shall can sometimes be used instead of **will**, and you will often see it in classic literature. However, people are using it less and less, especially in American English. In American English, it is mainly used in legal language.

In British English, **shall** is still fairly common in first-person (I/we) questions for:

- **making offers:**
 - **Shall** I **make** some coffee?
 - **Shall** we **take** you to the station?
- **making suggestions:**
 - **Shall** I **show** her the report?
 - **Shall** we **go** there on Monday?
- **asking for decisions/suggestions:**
 - I've lost my passport. What **shall** I **do**? (= What do you suggest?)
 - Where **shall** we **meet**?

For the above, speakers of American English would typically replace **shall** with **should**.

! For these types of questions, the meaning changes if you use **will**. If you use **will**, you are simply asking about a future event — you are not offering or suggesting something.

For example: **Will** we **go** there on Monday?

= Is the plan to go there on Monday?

There are a few other situations in which people still sometimes use **shall**. In these cases, you can usually replace it with **will** without changing the meaning. However, **shall** sounds much more formal and is uncommon in everyday English. These situations are:

- **promises:**
 - I **shall** always **remember** your kindness.
 - You **shall** **receive** your payment tomorrow.
- **formal obligations:**
 - The witness **shall** **appear** in court on 17 May.
 - Employees **shall** **wear** a safety helmet at all times.
- **future events:**
 - We **shall** **hear** the results tomorrow.
 - The President **shall** **begin** his speech at 11 am.

Note: The contraction of **shall** is also **'ll**. The negative form of **shall** is **shall not** (short form: **shan't**). For example: I **shan't** be late.