

Part 2: Speculating about the future

Modal verbs

will = you are confident that something will happen: *Time travel **will** one day be possible.*

may/might = there is a possibility, but you're not 100% sure: *Time travel **may/might** one day be possible.*

could = it's logically or physically possible, but you are not saying that it will definitely happen: *It **could** happen one day.*

should / ought to = you think it is logical/reasonable to expect that

something will happen, although there may be unforeseen setbacks: *It **should** happen fairly soon if our projections are correct.*

Adverbs with will and won't
You can use adverbs such as *certainly, almost certainly, definitely, easily, probably* with *will* and *won't* to clarify or modify your speculations: *We **will probably** have colonized the moon before the end of the century.* The adverbs usually come between *will* and the main verb but before *won't*: *We **certainly** won't have developed a*

way to travel through time.

Adverbs with may, might, and could

You can use the adverbs *possibly / (very) well / easily* with *may, might, and could*: *Our grandchildren **may / might / could well** travel to the moon.*

Phrases: the following phrases can also be used to speculate about the future: *be sure to / bound to* = you're confident that something will happen: *They're **bound to** find a clean alternative to oil. **be (highly) likely to/***

that = you're fairly confident but not 100% sure: *It's **likely to** happen in the next twenty years. **be (highly) unlikely to/that** = you're fairly confident something will not happen: *It's **highly unlikely that** people will ever live on the moon.**

Note: use *to + infinitive* after *likely/unlikely* when the subject of the verb is the same: *We're **likely to be** late.* Use *that* when the subject is different: *It's **likely that we'll** be late.*

► Now do Exercise 2.

Look at the verbs and phrases in bold in the predictions (a–c). Match them with the three categories (1–3).

- a Travel by teleportation and force fields **could** become scientific realities within decades.
- b Time travel **will definitely** be possible in the future.
- c Telepathy, force fields, and invisibility **are likely to** become reality at some point in the future.

- 1 certain (you are sure this will happen) _____
- 2 fairly confident (you are almost sure this will happen) _____
- 3 uncertain (you think it's possible but you aren't sure) _____

Make the sentences (a–c) negative.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Underline the correct alternatives.

- a I **may / won't** well have to do some work over the weekend.
- b I **probably won't / might not** be taking another vacation until next year.
- c I think I **could / should** be able to get this exercise done fairly quickly.
- d It's highly unlikely **to be / that I'll be** going out tonight.
- e I'm **bound to / It's unlikely to** get a new job before the end of the year.
- f I **certainly won't / won't certainly** be studying English by this time next year.

Look at the phrases in the box. Which could be used to replace ...

could easily is bound to is sure to may may very well
might should will almost certainly will probably

a could?

b will definitely?

c are likely to?

Rewrite the sentences using the words in parentheses.

a Self-driving cars will replace human drivers by the middle of the century. (definitely)

b A cure for cancer could easily be within our reach in the next decade. (highly likely)

c The Earth will eventually be destroyed by overpopulation. (sure)

d It may well become possible to colonize Mars before the end of the century. (we should)

e Anyone could soon be incubating babies using artificial wombs. (will)

f Coastal cities like Miami and Rio de Janeiro may soon be adversely affected as sea levels rise.
(likely)

g Organ donors are likely to become things of the past, thanks to advances in stem cell
technology. (easily)

h Many jobs will be done by computers, creating more free time for human beings. (bound)