

Is there a future in it for us? ... Yes! – an exercise by S.K. Meyer (based on M. Swan, Practical English Usage)

As much as we may try, it's hard to live in the moment. Not only do we think about what happened yesterday, last month, or even about when we got teased when we were little, but we also project ideas about ourselves and our lives into the future, whether we want to talk about this evening, tomorrow, next year, or even when we can finally fulfill a long-cherished dream.

Luckily for you, English has four basic future tenses that it commonly uses for talking about the future and for predicting: present continuous, future simple (will), “going to” and the present simple. (We'll look at the sophisticated futures, separately.)

1. CLICK ON, DRAG and DROP these terms onto the box where you think they should go. *TRICK:* there are too many boxes!

(P.S., a “drag to” box wants to get its content dropped onto its left hand corner, otherwise, the content may bounce back.)

FUTURE SIMPLE

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

“GOING TO”

PRESENT SIMPLE



Do this before going ahead!

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Let's start looking at these four basic future tenses one-by-one, and how some of them are used for PREDICTING (because talking about the future is a kind of predicting, isn't it?!).



2. **PRESENT CONTINUOUS** (*to be* + *verbing*): We use the present continuous with progressive verbs for PLANS ON THE CALENDAR, even if the reference to the calendar isn't expressed because it's understood. For this reason, we use it to PREDICT THINGS THAT ARE *IN* OUR CONTROL. We do NOT use it for states of being. (*HINT*: Watch out for "to go"!!!)



a. Star's going to India next Christmas. ... *Is this a good use of the present continuous for the future?* TICK: YES | NO

b. It is being rainy, next week. ... *Is this a good use of the present continuous for the future?* TICK: YES | NO

We also use it for emphasizing an arrangement, the beginning of the future action, or identifying the person who will be doing it.

c. "Who's cooking lunch?" ... *Is this a good use of the present continuous for the future?* TICK: YES | NO

d. "The game is kicking off at 3 PM." ... *Is this a good use of the present continuous for the future?* TICK: YES | NO

We also use it for expressing decisions (NOT taken in this moment), for emphatic refusals, and for emphatic imperatives.

e. "I'm not washing your car!" ... *Is this a good use of the present continuous for the future?* TICK: YES | NO

f. "You're finishing your vegetables!"... *Is this a good use of the present continuous for the future?* TICK: YES | NO

3. **“GOING TO INFINITIVE”**: We use the idiomatic expression “going to” with progressive verbs to express an INTENTION to do something that HASN’T BEEN PROGRAMMED. We also use it for PREDICTING THINGS *OUT* OF OUR CONTROL.



CLICK ON, DRAG and DROP “CORRECT” or “INCORRECT” into the right boxes (TRICK: there are LEFTOVERS!):

CORRECT – CORRECT – CORRECT – CORRECT – INCORRECT – INCORRECT – INCORRECT – INCORRECT

a. “I think that it’s going to snow, tomorrow, maybe we should stay home.”

b. “I’m going to go to Rome on the 4th of next month; do you want to come with me?”

We also use it for emphasizing not *who* is going to do it, but *WHAT* is going to be done, or for when asking for a DECISION.

c. “When are we going to eat?! I’m hungry!”

d. “Who’s going to cook lunch, you or me?”

We also use it to talk about expected permanent states:

e. “Their new house is going to look over the river.”

f. “If you do that, I’m going to be so mad at you!”

DRAG the LEFTOVERS, too! (whether the words “CORRECT” &/or “INCORRECT”): –

4. **SIMPLE PRESENT**: We use the simple present for the future for talking about things that are IMMINENT (today, or in the next day, or two). (The reason for choosing the simple present for the *present* is also a *kind of future* and PREDICTING, if you think about it: for things that are habitual and/or on a time table.) TICK the correct answer.



a. "When is the meeting, this afternoon?" CORRECT | INCORRECT

b. "I'd love to join you for dinner, tonight, but I can't, I have guests, I'm sorry." CORRECT | INCORRECT

c. "It rains this evening, so wipe your feet when you come into the house." CORRECT | INCORRECT

We also use the simple present for the future to give instructions, and to make comments:

d. "To make the quiche fluffy, you beat the eggs before folding them in." CORRECT | INCORRECT

e. "To make his mom happy, John sends her daffodils, lily of the valley, and blue bells." CORRECT | INCORRECT

Finally, we use the simple present for the future in subordinate clauses, that is, clauses that aren't complete sentences:

f. "When you go to the store, this morning, it would be a good idea to get some milk, too." CORRECT | INCORRECT

g. "When you would go to the store, this morning, it is a good idea to get some milk, too." CORRECT | INCORRECT

5. **FUTURE SIMPLE (will + infinitive with no "to")**: We use the future simple to PREDICT things BASED ON WHAT WE BELIEVE, OR WHAT WE KNOW BECAUSE OF OUTSIDE EVIDENCE. TICK the correct answer:



a. "If he keeps acting like that to the cops, he'll get a big fine, one day!" CORRECT | INCORRECT

b. "Oh, no! Her son'll take drugs?! He ends up in jail for sure!" CORRECT | INCORRECT

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One of the most common reasons that we use “will” for the FUTURE is for something that has been DECIDED IN THAT MOMENT and that WE DO WILLINGLY. We also use it to express CERTAINTY and for ASKING FOR a DECISION, or INSTRUCTIONS. READ the *HINTS*, then CLICK ON the pulldown menu, and CHOOSE:



c-d. “When you (c) _____, we (d) _____ you, happily.

e-f. “Can you help me, please? (e) _____ only take a minute.” – “Sure, (f) _____ you, no problem!”

HINTS: 1: If done unwillingly, use “could”; 2: In BrE, for the first person singular and plural – *I* and *we* – *shall* is used instead of *will* for asking for a decision, although *will* is used more and more because of the influence of AmE movies and television; 3: NEVER use “will” or “-ll” in a subordinate clause, i.e., that couldn’t stand on its own as a complete sentence.

Because *will* is formal, we use *will* when we want to talk about FUTURE IMPERSONAL THINGS (thus, also for work). *HINT*: *will* is also stronger and more formal than -*ll*, so we use it for FORCEFUL DETERMINATION, too: TICK the correct answer:

f. WAITER: “What will you have?” CORRECT | INCORRECT

g. CUSTOMER: “I will have the fish, thank you.” CORRECT | INCORRECT

Finally, we use *will* and -*ll* for making promises, threats, orders, & refusals. CLICK, DRAW & CONNECT options to sentences:

h. PROMISE “We’ll take three hundred crates of your very best Italian spumante.”

i. THREAT “No thanks, I won’t be able to come this time around, but ask me, again, soon, OK?!”

j. ORDER “If you do your homework, Ms. Meyer will be very happy.”

k. REFUSAL “If you don’t do your homework, Ms. Meyer will be very sad.”

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6. Are you all mixed up? I hope not! ... Ha, but these questions are! CLICK ON the pulldown menu, and CHOOSE correctly!

a. She _____ her hair cut, tomorrow.

b. I _____ to Rome sometime next year. (HINT: Read it, CAREFULLY!!!)

c. The meeting _____ at three, this afternoon.

7. Now try, again. CLICK ON, DRAG and DROP these terms onto the box where you think they should go. (SAME TRICK!)

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