

All about the future form

The future form is difficult because we have the tendency to use 'will' for everything in the future. As a native speaker I use 'will' when I talk about my plans and intentions in the future. While this is technically incorrect, it is acceptable in spoken English as there is no impact on meaning. In a 'quick-fire' business meeting you do not want to be slowed down by thinking about which form of the future you should be using.

However, in written communications it is worth being more precise. It is here that you can invest the time to use the future form with accuracy. We use a range of grammar forms for the future, these can be broadly divided into four groups.

Group 1: Possibilities/ideas about the future.

We use 'could'/'may'/'might' to talk about ideas that are 50/50, that are not certain. Don't forget when you use modal verbs you always follow with the infinitive form (without 'to').

Example: We could go to the cinema if there is a good film showing.

Example: I might attend the conference; I am not sure.

Group 2: Making a decision in the moment.

We use 'will' or 'won't' to talk about a decision taken in the moment.

- **Example:** Great idea! I will come to the cinema.
- **Example:** I will speak to Mike about the conference.
- **Example:** I won't attend the meeting, I have too much work.

Group 3: Plans.

3.1: We use 'going to' to talk about intentions and precise plans. You can use 'going to' when you have decided to do something but have not yet organised it (an intention). You can also use 'going to' to describe detailed plans with precise times.

- **Example:** I have decided I am going to retake the French exam.
- **Example:** I am going to meet Peter tomorrow at 9.00 am.

3.2: We use any other form of the present continuous (outside of 'going to') to talk about precise plans where you reference a particular time in the future.

- **Example:** We are visiting Naples in May.
- **Example:** I am meeting Peter tomorrow at 9.00 am.

3.3: We use the present simple to talk about official plans, for example, train timetables, flight information, office or factory schedules etc.

- **Example:** The production team starts work at 7.00 pm.
- **Example:** The flight departs at 7.30 am on 2 July 2017.
- **Example:** The museum opens at 9.00 am tomorrow.

Group 4: Predictions.

Note: We use slightly different grammar forms to talk about predictions rather than a plan. A prediction is often a feeling about your future, but you can also make predictions based on evidence.

4.1: We use 'will'/'won't' to talk about confident predictions about the future.

- **Example:** I will be married by the time i am 40!
- **Example:** England will win the World Cup.
- **Example:** I won't move back to London.

4.2: We use 'might'/'may'/'could' to talk about predictions where we are not certain, it is 50/50.

- **Example:** I might go to Portugal this summer; it depends on work.
- **Example:** England could win the World Cup - they will need a lot of luck.

4.3: We use 'going to' to make strong predictions based on evidence.

- **Example:** The clouds are dark I think it is going to rain.
- **Example:** The profits were strong last quarter; I am sure profits are going to increase in Q2.