

Unit 41: VERBS & FUTURE TIME

English does not have a future tense. We can use:

be going to (Unit 37) **will** (or **shall**) (Unit 31)

present continuous (Unit 22) present simple (Unit 19)

Which one do you use?

1 *Personal plans and intentions*

a **You are deciding now: use will or shall**

I think I'll **visit** my uncle tomorrow.

“That’s all for today,” said the teacher. “Tomorrow we’ll **have** a little test.”

I think I **will take** the exam next summer.

Just a minute and I’ll **get** him for you.

b **You have already decided, but you have not arranged anything yet: use be going to**

I’m **going to visit** my uncle tomorrow.

“Did you hear that?” asked the teacher. “Tomorrow we’re **going to have** a little test.”

He **is going to take** the exam next summer.

c **You have made arrangements. Now it is not just your intention — you have done something about it: use present continuous**

I’m **visiting** my uncle tomorrow.

Your uncle knows this – perhaps he has made plans to welcome you.

The teacher says we’re **having** a test tomorrow.

The teacher has made a plan – a student cannot change it.

He **is taking** the exam this summer.

He has entered his name for it and paid the exam fee.

NOTICE: Present continuous is a polite way to refuse an invitation because it shows that you cannot accept (not that you don’t want to accept!).

I’m afraid I can’t come tomorrow. I’m **visiting** my uncle.

2 *Prediction*

What is your opinion about the future?

a **General: use will or shall**

Do you think they'll **win** the game?

The world's population **will** likely **reach** 9.2 billion in 2050.

This time tomorrow, I'll **be relaxing** on the beach.

b **Because of the present situation use be going to**

If they play like that for the whole game, they're **going to lose**.

It's cold! And look at the sky! I think it's **going to snow**.

We need 20 minutes to finish, but there's only 10 minutes left. We're not **going to have** time.

c **Because of a fixed arrangement which cannot change: use present simple**

My plane **leaves** at six this evening.

This is the timetable.

The sun **rises** tomorrow at 6:32.

Because of the time of year:

The course **begins** next week.

NOTICE: I'll **see** him today.

This is an intention – you are deciding now.

I'll **be seeing** him today.

This is a prediction – and it is probably arranged.

NOTICE: The future is never certain. We often use the modal verbs **could, may, might** (Units 29-30) and also **should** (Unit 33) to show how possible we think something is.