



Future tenses review

Making arrangements

Imagine you have a lot to speak about in your next meeting with your partner(s). Try to find the time when you are both/ all available for longest in the next few weeks.

What tense did you use to talk about times when you are busy and so can't meet (or can't meet for long)? What other future forms are possible in that conversation? What are the differences between them?

Grade these excuses by politeness:

"I'm sorry, I will meet up with my friends then."/ "I'm going to meet up with my friends then."/ "I'm meeting my friends then."/ "I will be meeting my friends then."

Why is there a difference in politeness between the four forms?

What are the names of the tenses in the excuses? What are their uses and differences?

Differences between future tenses

Which groups of sentences below have different meanings? (If there are more than two sentences, they are either all the same or all different.)

- a) "If we employ more staff, we'll get increased customer satisfaction."
- b) "If we employed more staff, we'd get increased customer satisfaction."
- c) "If we'd employed more staff, we would've got increased customer satisfaction."

- a) "I would like to live abroad."
- b) "I will live abroad."
- c) "I'm going to live abroad."

- a) "We plan to open an office in Singapore."
- b) "We are planning to open an office in Singapore."

- a) "We are going to hold a big retirement party for him."
- b) "We are holding a big retirement party for him."

- a) "I've arranged to meet him at 11 o'clock."
- b) "I'm meeting him at 11 o'clock."

- a) "I think unemployment will fall."
- b) "I predict a fall in unemployment."

- a) "I'm coming there later."
- b) "I'm about to come there."

- a) "It'll end in a couple of minutes."
- b) "I'm going to end it in a couple of minutes."

- a) "I'm probably meeting him in August."
- b) "I'm meeting him in August."



What are the differences in meaning between the groups of sentences that are different?

How can you summarise the future uses of will, going to and Present Continuous above and the differences between them?

What is the most general explanation of the differences between those three future tenses?

Which sentences above disprove these common but wrong explanations of future tenses?

- Will is used for the distant future, going to for the mid term and Present Continuous for the near future
- Use Present Continuous for things that are more certain, going to for things which are possible and will for things which are less probable

Which sentences below have different meanings?

- a) "I need some more lever arch files." "I'll go to the shops and get you some."
- b) "I need some more lever arch files." "I'm going to the shops so I'll get you some."

- a) "The ink is going to run out soon."
- b) "The ink will run out soon."

- a) "May I offer to do it for you?"
- b) "Shall I do it for you?"
- c) "I'll do it for you."

Which uses of going and will above were not covered in the first part of this lesson?

Do the same with these other future tenses and future forms

- a) "I'll be writing my second novel by then."
- b) "I'll have written my second novel by then."

- a) "I look forward to hearing from you."
- b) "I'm looking forward to hearing from you."
- c) "Looking forward to hearing from you."

- a) "I look forward to your call."
- b) "I expect you to call."
- c) "I'm waiting for your call."

- a) "Could you do this by Friday?"
- b) "Could you do this until Friday?"
- c) "Could you do this before Friday?"
- d) "Could you do this on Friday?"

- a) "We'll meet again ten days later."
- b) "We'll meet again in ten days."



Suggested answers

The four excuses are already in order of politeness, with the Future Continuous (“I will be + ing”) the most polite because it sounds the most fixed and unavoidable and Future with Will (also called Future Simple, “I will”) the most impolite because it just means there is a strong possibility but nothing is arranged. Present Continuous (“I’m meeting”) is standard in this situation because it means I have an arrangement, but Going to (“I’m going to meet”) wouldn’t usually be polite because it would just mean I have a plan to meet them.

- a) “If we employ more staff, we’ll get increased customer satisfaction.”
- b) “If we employed more staff, we’d get increased customer satisfaction.”
- c) “If we’d employed more staff, we would’ve got increased customer satisfaction.”

All different. (c) is talking about the past. (b) is much more unlikely than (a).

- a) “I would like to live abroad.”
- b) “I will live abroad.”
- c) “I’m going to live abroad.”

All different. (c) is a plan, (a) is a desire, and (b) is a prediction that it will happen.

- a) “We plan to open an office in Singapore.”
- b) “We are planning to open an office in Singapore.”

The same.

- a) “We are going to hold a big retirement party for him.”
- b) “We are holding a big retirement party for him.”

Different. (a) means we are planning to, whereas (b) means at least some arrangements (e.g. booking the space or asking people to come) have already been done.

- a) “I’ve arranged to meet him at 11 o’clock.”
- b) “I’m meeting him at 11 o’clock.”

The same

- a) “I think unemployment will fall.”
- b) “I predict a fall in unemployment.”

The same.

- a) “I’m coming there later.”
- b) “I’m about to come there.”

Different. (b) means very soon.

- a) “It’ll end in a couple of minutes.”
- b) “I’m going to end it in a couple of minutes.”

Different. (b) is my decision, whereas (a) is my prediction about something I can’t control.

- a) “I’m probably meeting him in August.”
- b) “I’m meeting him in August.”

Slightly different. My arrangement is more likely to change in (a).



Present Continuous is used for arrangements (= it has already involved another person in setting it up), Going to is used for plans (=my decision), and Will is used for predictions (= my imagination about something I can't control) above.

*"Will is used for the distant future" etc is disproved by "It'll end in a couple of minutes".
"Use Present Continuous for things that are more certain" etc is disproved by "I'm probably meeting him in August".*

- a) "I need some more lever arch files." "I'll go to the shops and get you some."
- b) "I need some more lever arch files." "I'm going to the shops so I'll get you some."

Different. In (b) it was already planned, but in (a) the person is speaking while deciding.

- a) "The ink is going to run out soon."
- b) "The ink will run out soon."

Different. (a) is based on present evidence, e.g. seeing how much ink is left. (b) is just based on ideas, e.g. experience that it always runs out two weeks after being refilled.

- a) "May I offer to do it for you?"
- b) "Shall I do it for you?"
- c) "I'll do it for you."

The same.

- a) "I'll be writing my second novel by then."
- b) "I'll have written my second novel by then."

Different. In (a) writing will be in progress at that time, but in (b) writing will be finished.

- a) "I look forward to hearing from you."
- b) "I'm looking forward to hearing from you."
- c) "Looking forward to hearing from you."

The same meaning (although formality is different).

- a) "I look forward to your call."
- b) "I expect you to call."
- c) "I'm waiting for your call."

Different. (b) and (c) are basically nagging.

- a) "Could you do this by Friday?"
- b) "Could you do this until Friday?"
- c) "Could you do this before Friday?"
- d) "Could you do this on Friday?"

All different. (a) and (c) are the most common, with (c) meaning "by Thursday". (d) would mean just on that day, while (b) would have the unusual meaning of from now and stopping on Friday.

- a) "We'll meet again ten days later."
- b) "We'll meet again in ten days."

Different. (b) means from now, but (a) means from another time (not the present).