



Basic Grammar Unit 3

These materials are only suitable for use in the Basic Grammar class. There is some information, there are some tasks, but they only make sense when used as the basis for thinking and discussing in class. The content of each unit has been drawn from a variety of sources: from various grammar books and my own ideas and teaching experience. At the beginning of the term I hand out a bibliography with details of all the grammar books I have drawn on. These books are indicated only with an abbreviation here.

Unit 3 Talking about the future.

This unit looks at the different ways English has of expressing future time. There is information, guidelines, examples, questions and tasks.

Task (1)

First of all, test yourselves.

(1) In which of the following does the speaker express that he has already made the arrangements:

- a) We´re getting married on Saturday
- b) We´ll get married on Saturday
- c) We´re going to get married on Saturday

(2) In which of the following is a fortune teller speaking:

- a) Your best friend is going to have a baby
- b) Your best friend will have a baby

(3) In which of the following does the speaker want the other to come:

- a) Are you going to come?
- b) Will you come?
- c) Will you be coming?

- (4) In which of the following does the falling of the rock depend on the person's sitting on it:
- a) Don't sit on that rock. It'll fall
 - b) Don't sit on that rock. It's going to fall
- 5) Which of the following expresses a firm belief that the event will take place:
- a) John goes tomorrow
 - b) John'll go tomorrow
 - c) John is going to go tomorrow
- 6) Which of the following would you be most likely to see as a headline:
- a) PM going to Washington
 - b) PM will go to Washington
 - c) PM to go to Washington
- 7) Which of the following expresses a spontaneous decision:
- a) I'm going to go tomorrow
 - b) I'm going tomorrow
 - c) I'll go tomorrow
 - d) I'll be going tomorrow

Question:

What ways do you know of expressing future time? What do you know about when each form is used?

Task (2)

Skim through the following texts, highlighting all the ways you can find of expressing future time.

You will be surprised at the publication dates of these texts – but that is deliberate!

Text 1

YOUR STARS, by Constance Sharpe (adapted!)

ACQUARIUS (Jan 21 – Feb 19)

An excellent week for work. A development on Wednesday could have an important effect on your future.

PISCES (Feb 20 – March 20)

Business transactions go well. Tomorrow is the best day for signing contracts. Your private life may not be too easy.

ARIES (March 21 – April 20)

Take care tomorrow – it doesn't look like your lucky day. But the week improves as it goes along. Saturday could be exciting.

TAURUS (Apr 21 – May 21)

If relationships go wrong, it will probably be your fault for being demanding.

GEMINI (May 22 – Jun 21)

Branching out in a new direction could lead to a more prosperous future.

CANCER (June 22 – Jul 22)

A good week for careers and getting ahead, but a quiet one socially.

LEO (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

Careers and practical projects favoured, particularly anything in partnership.

VIRGO (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

Don't let frustration tempt you to make a major change. It wouldn't work out.

LIBRA (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

You'll get into a muddle over money. Surprise development within the family.

SCORPIO (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

Now is the time to do something about your life. It is a lucky period.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22 – Dec 21)

Don't rely on other people's promises. You'd be wise not to make any move before Friday.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22 – Jan 20)

Not the best of weeks emotionally. A friend or relation may be hurtful.

(Adapted from the Sunday Mirror)

Text 2

Hattersley to champion the lowest paid

By Our Political Staff

Mr Roy Hattersley will step up his challenge to Mr Neil Kinnock for the votes of low-paid workers in the Labour leadership race tomorrow with a call for a statutory minimum wage linked to an incomes policy.

Mr Hattersley is expected to argue that a minimum wage policy would be meaningless without planned incomes and that free collective bargaining damages the lowest paid.

This tactic is directed at particular groups of union members who are about to be consulted by their leaders on how their votes should be cast in the electoral college in October.

Text 3

19 lost at sea in helicopter holiday crash

(.....) Mr David Harris, MP, whose St Ives constituency includes the Scillies, said the helicopter shuttle had had “a superb safety record.”

He said he would call for the fullest inquiry, adding: “What has happened will not shake my confidence in the helicopter service. I will continue to use it all the time.”

Text 4

Hattersley tells “Why we lost”

By ADAM RAPHAEL, Political Editor

(.....) Mr Scargill, recalling his earlier predictions of closures, said: “Who told the truth in 1980? Today, as I speak, we have the bitter fruit of my predictions. Twelve North-East pits have been condemned, and I say two-thirds more will be closed.

Are you going to accept it down on your knees? Or are you going to stand and fight against the end of your industry?”

Text 5

Treatment for A-level shock

OBSERVER STUDENT SERVICE

By Julian Ayer

All over England and Wales next week postmen will be delivering letters informing A-level candidates about their results. Upwards of 10,000 students will be looking for courses either in universities, polytechnics or colleges.

A few applicants will have much better results than they expected. They will be seeing if they can get into a higher status institution.

The large majority of the estimated 10,000 candidates on the move will be students with lower A-level grades than expected, unable to take up their conditional offer. They will have to plan a new strategy – particularly if they are moving from a place in a university to one in a polytechnic or college.

Text 6

The facts the Mermaid has to face

By JUDITH JUDD

Whatever the bakers and creditors may say, Lord Miles, 75, founder of London's Mermaid Theatre, is not giving up his 30-year-old dream.

He announced last week that the theatre's trustees could not sell it to meet its £650,000 debts because it was owned by the public, including a little boy who sent 25p raised by an Aladdin pantomime staged in his bedroom.

Text 7

Intercontinental Travel

Technology enables people to move about; millions surge to and fro across the globe and in the end the result seems a bit self-defeating: everywhere becomes the same. Still, no one seems to be able or willing to stop the trend, and in the next twenty years

technological advance is obviously going to give us a lot more of it.

For intercontinental travel there are likely to be two growth points: for the moderately prosperous, ever larger jumbo jets, powered perhaps by nuclear reactors and carrying a thousand passengers by 1980; and for the rich and important, small extremely fast hypersonic transports which could put the other side of the world only a couple of hours away.

(The Sunday Times Magazine 30.11.1969 !)

Text 8

High Speed Trains in Britain

The overall strategy is that we introduce the high speed train in about 1974 with a maximum speed of 125 miles an hour on existing track and with existing signalling (.....) and this will be followed by the Advanced Passenger Train, which has more advanced technology, on a longer time scale (.....).

(Director of British Rail Research Lab, on a BBC programme "Transport Tomorrow" early 1970s?)

Text 9

"Well, then, are you coming or not?" said Ramona. "Why are you so hard to pin down?"

"I shouldn't go out - I have a lot to do - letters to write."

"What letters! You're such a mystery man. What are these important letters? Business? Perhaps you should discuss it with me, if it is business. Or a lawyer, if you don't trust me. But you have to eat, anyway. Or perhaps you don't eat when you're alone."

"Of course I do."

"Well, then?"

"Okay, said Herzog. "Expect me soon. I'll bring a bottle of wine."

(Saul Bellow, Herzog. 1973)

NB I am afraid I can't trace the newspaper articles any more, beyond the fact that they were taken from the Observer.

Task (3)

Make a list of all the different forms you have found in these texts to express future time.

Do you know anything about the difference in meaning between them?

That is not so difficult, but if you stop and think for a moment, you will remember how in Unit 1 (Talking about the present) we saw how one form could have different functions.

Take a closer look at the texts and see if you can detect different meanings of “will” and different meanings of “going to”.

Expressing the future

"It is obvious that we cannot be as certain of future happenings as we are of events past and present, and for this reason even the most confident statement about the future must still indicate something of the speaker's attitude towards it." (Meaning and the English Verb, p52)

In English, futurity can be expressed by means of

verb tenses/ forms (present simple, present progressive)

modal auxiliaries (will, may, might etc)

adverbials (tomorrow, next week etc)

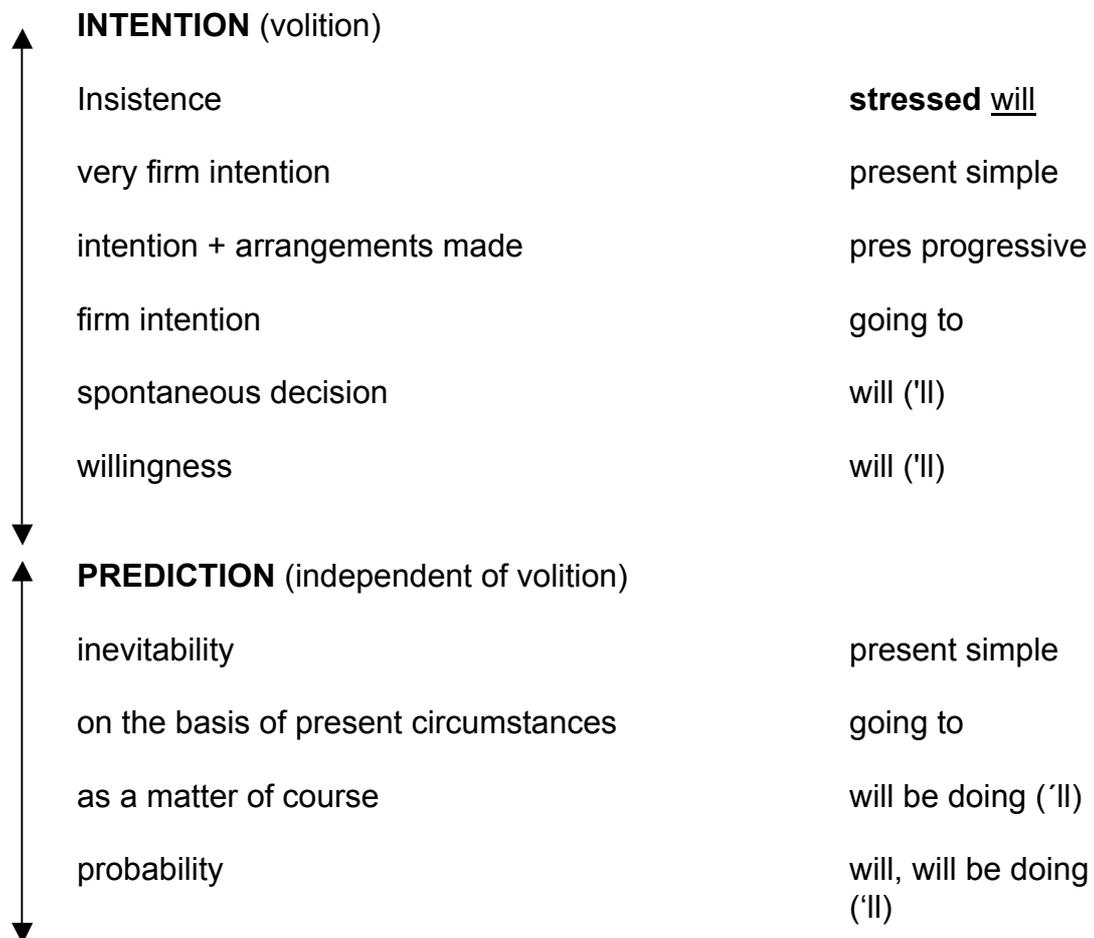
other expressions (is going to, is to, is likely to, is expected to)

It may be helpful to think of statements about the future as expressing either

(A) an intention (volition = wanting to)

(B) a prediction (independent of volition)

(This is an idea from CGI which I find useful)



In other words, statements about the future express

the futurity of the event/state

and - the strength of the agent's intention

or - the probability of occurrence i.e. the degree of certainty with which the speaker believes the event will take place

An intention is anything which the agent consciously wishes to do. It can be fully arranged or it can be a vague wish, a hope, a threat. It can even be insistence on not doing something.

"A prediction here means anything from stating that a certain event is scheduled to happen to stating that the speaker personally believes that a certain event may take place."

(CGI)

Task (4)

How would you interpret the following sentences? Give each sentence two different contexts, to show clearly the two different possible meanings.

John won't see the doctor.

I'm going to fail my exams.

More notes on expressing the future:

(A) INTENTION (Volition)

An intention can be regarded, very loosely, as anything which the agent consciously wishes to do. This can range from strong determination to a vague wish. (CGI)

Realisations:

will (stressed): I **will** do it, and you won't stop me!

This implies insistence, (the fist thumping on the table.)

present simple: we introduce the high speed train in 1974 ..

I go tomorrow whether you like it or not!

This implies such a firm intention that the event is expressed as being inevitable. (Cf. present simple used to express inevitability of a prediction.)

present progressive: I've ordered a taxi. It's coming at 10.
We're meeting tomorrow to discuss arrangements. (We fixed the time last week.)
He's leaving for London on Friday

Here the future is felt to have been planned or prearranged by some human agent; someone has decided something and made the arrangements. Since the present progressive can also mean something going on at the present, if you want to use it to talk about a planned and prearranged future you usually need to add an indication of future time (at 10, tomorrow, on Friday etc).

NOTE that the present progressive can be used only when the future is felt to be one that has been planned or prearranged by some human agent.

Thus the following are deviant (incorrect English)

* The sun is setting at 8 tomorrow.

* It is raining tomorrow.

going to: When are you going to get married?
What are you going to do when you grow up? I'm going to be an engine driver.

This can be roughly paraphrased by "intend to" and implies fore-planning and conscious deliberation about the future, and a strong expectation that the intention will be carried out. It is a future resulting from a present intention.

will (unstressed) and usually spoken and written as "ll":

What about you, Fiona? Oh, I think I'll have a Scotch, please.

You sit down and have a rest. I'll clear up the kitchen.

This implies a more spontaneous decision made by the speaker around the time of speaking, or simply general willingness to do something. It is the most neutral form of expressing intention.

(So, you might ask: how do I know if "will" means intention and not prediction? If the verb is a dynamic one, expressing something a human agent can actually do, then the intention meaning is likely.)

may, could, might:

Well, I might come tomorrow, if the weather's good.

These auxiliaries weaken the strength of the intention.

(B) PREDICTION (independent of volition)

Here we are looking at the forms which express the future as happening independently of the will or desire of any human agent. Once again it is a rough categorisation and the idea of prediction is taken to range from an event which is sure to happen due to natural laws, to one which just might happen under certain circumstances. In other words, prediction involves the speaker's judgement, not his wishes or intentions. (CGI)

Present simple:

(Horoscope) Tomorrow is the best day for signing contracts.

(Time tables) The train leaves at 9 tomorrow night.

The exams are in the last week of term, I think.

Christmas is on a Sunday next year.

Here the speaker expresses the future event as being fixed and inevitable. He sees it as being completely determined by present circumstances, whether these circumstances be natural laws or "unalterable" human arrangements (time table, calendar etc). The future is expressed as being independent of the agent's desire or willingness. (CGI)

The commonest use of this form is for scheduled events such as those in time tables, itineraries, calendars.

When the speaker uses the present simple to express a future event we might say that she puts aside the doubt one normally feels about the future. (CGE)

The adverbial of future time makes the future reference clear.

She goes to London = She is in the habit of going to London.

She goes to London next week = Scheduled event in the future.

Question:

Why is it normal and possible to say

- The sun sets tomorrow at 8p.m.

Why is it not normal and possible to say

- It rains tomorrow.

Note that in dependent clauses introduced by conditional and temporal conjunctions (if, unless, when, as soon as, as, till, after, before, once, even if, as long as, whether) the future is usually expressed by the present tense.

e.g.

I'll tell you if it hurts.

The swallows will return when the spring comes.

Going to:

Ooooooh, I think I'm going to be sick.

It looks as if it's going to snow.

She's going to have a baby.

Careful, that vase is going to fall.

Going to is used with non-human agents (the vase, the sky), and with human agents but non-volitional verbs (have a baby, faint, be sick) to express prediction. It is a prediction of the future based on present circumstances.

"It can be said to be present-oriented in that it implies that there currently exists a state of affairs which in the normal course of events will lead to the proposition coming to be the case." (Wekker)

The future results from causative factors in the present. It can, but not necessarily, also carry the expectation that the event will happen soon. (CGE)

Will + progressive:

I'll be going to town next week anyway, so it'll be no bother at all to do your shopping.

Will you be coming to the meeting?

This expresses the future as happening as a matter of course, independently of the will of anyone concerned.

It is the form typically used when offering help to someone without placing them under any obligation.

In questions this form is very useful for avoiding the suggestion of intention in the simple "will" construction. It is thus more polite.

(All these problems arise from the subtle differences in meaning of the word "will")

"Will you come?" is more like an invitation.

"Will you be coming?" is more like a simple question.

Will + progressive:

At this time next week we'll be sitting in here again, thinking about grammar ...

This form is also used for a prediction of temporary situations in the future. It is quite simply the future form of:

"We are sitting in here now, thinking about grammar .."

Will ('ll) unstressed:

(Weather forecast) Tomorrow will be sunny and mainly dry, with cloudy intervals.
I'll be 21 next birthday!
Careful. If you do that, you'll hurt yourself.

This is a neutral and much used form for expressing the future. By some grammarians it is called "the future tense". Since it is pretty neutral it teams up well with modifiers like "probably" and "perhaps".

Is to (be to):

007 is to leave next week for Moscow – special assignment.
PM to visit China.

This implies that arrangements, especially official ones, have been made, and the event is expected to take place. In newspaper headlines "is to" is normally abbreviated to "to".

Task (4)

Make a few predictions about the grammar class in 2010.

Have you got any plans or made any arrangements for the semester break?

Task (5)

Here is the framework of a simple sentence:

we + to leave + time adverb (at the weekend)

Use the appropriate future form so that this simple sentence fits the following contexts:

- a); there's no way out of it.
- b); if it's alright with you.
- c); well, that's what we intend to do.
- d); it's all arranged.
- e); we can give you a lift if you like.

Task (6)

Fill in the appropriate form of the future:

(1) We (have) a drink with Peter tonight. He's invited us. You know it's his last night. He (leave) tomorrow.

(2) Jack: I don't want to get married. I (never get) married.

Mother: That's what you think now. But one day you (meet) a girl .and (fall) in love.

(3) Wait a bit. Don't drink your tea without milk. The milkman (come) in a minute.

(4) I've just arranged to do a part-time job. I (start) on Monday.

What (you do) the rest of the time?

I (study).

(5) This time next week I (have) my first skiing lesson.
And this time next month you(lie) in bed with a broken leg!

(6) There's someone at the door. I(go), but I expect
it's someone for you.

Task (7)
(CGI)

Write a horoscope for both signs in one of the following pairs:

Aquarius/Pisces	Leo/Virgo
Aries/Taurus	Libra/Scorpio
Gemini/Cancer	Sagittarius/Capricorn

Some general characteristics (!):

Aquarius	practical, tolerant
Pisces	sensitive, idealistic
Aries	impatient, generous
Taurus	strong sexual desires, violent
Gemini	self-centred, argumentative
Cancer	spiteful, jealous
Leo	good leader, trusting
Virgo	willing to serve, dependable
Libra	hesitant, romantic
Scorpio	secretive, ambitious
Sagittarius	sceptical, eager to learn
Capricorn	snobbish, strong family feeling

Task (8)

Contrast the following pairs of sentences. What is the difference?

(1) At the restaurant:

Joe: I'm going to have shrimp salad and a steak.

Nick: I think I'll have a steak, too.

(2) a) I'm seeing Paula tonight.
b) I see Paula tonight.

(3) a) I'm going to take Jan out to dinner tonight.
b) I'm taking Jan out to dinner tonight.

Updated March 2008