

Talking About The Future and Future Plans (I will . . . / I am doing . . . / I'm going to . . .)

It's New Years and everyone has made resolutions. This is a time of year when everyone looks forward to think about what the new year will hold. And, more importantly, it's a time when we talk—at least to ourselves—about our plans for the new year.

It's a time for talking about the future.

If you can understand this, you probably know 'will' for the future, like in these examples:

- I will go to the doctor's office tomorrow.
- He will take a look at the problem with my head.
- Maybe then my wife will stop worrying.

It's not a difficult verb to use—you just put it in the sentence ahead of where the 'real' verb goes—but did you know that most native speakers don't use it very often? I'm not saying that we never use it, I'm saying that there are alternatives, and we use them pretty often.

Nobody—at least, nobody I know of—can say for sure what will happen in the future. Talking about the future is a matter of discussing what *might* happen, and what we *plan* for or *expect* in the future.

What Might Happen: “Will”

What kind of weather will we have tomorrow? Nobody knows. Not even the man in the TV who's job it is to tell us. The best he can do is say that there's a 60% chance of rain. That means that rain is only 60% likely. Or, that rain *might* happen. Things that might happen—that means, things that we don't plan or expect (see below)—are normally described with will:

- Maybe it will rain tomorrow.
- Do you know if my parents will visit this week?
- What do you think the new President will do in his first year?
- Who will win tonight's soccer game?

It's important to remember that **will is (almost) never wrong when talking about the future**, it fits in any sentence. But it doesn't sound very certain. (If “it *might* rain” is a 60% chance, then “I'm *certainly*

going to learn English” is a 100% chance.)

Practice:

What will you do tomorrow if it rains? Write it here with 'will.'

What might the world be like in the year 2100? Write it here with 'will.'

What Usually Happens: “I Am Doing”

You might know the progressive tense for what you're doing *right now*. (“Right now, I'm reading about the different future forms in English.”) It's called the progressive (or continuous) tense. Normally, it's used to talk about the present, and it's formed with a present tense form of the verb 'to be' and the -ing form for a verb, like in these examples:

- He is driving too fast.
- What are you doing?
- I'm eating chocolate cake.
- The President is flying to Berlin.

The odds are that you knew all that, already. Did you also know that it can also be used to talk about the future? When you use the progressive and attach a time in the future to the sentence, it's a form of referring to the future:

- What are you doing after the English class?
- I'm going to a concert in January.

Just like the word 'will' has a certain 'feeling' or 'sound' to it (remember, 'will' sounds uncertain), 'I am doing' has it's own sound. We use it when we're talking about something that happens regularly, or about casual plans.

Here's an example: every Sunday afternoon you go to your parent's for coffee. Then, on Friday someone asks at work: “What are you doing this weekend?” You can answer “I'm going to my parent's

house for coffee.” Because it's something you do every Sunday—it happens regularly—it's normal to use the progressive with it's future meaning.

Another example: your girlfriend and you have a plan to go to Udo Jürgens's concert on Saturday. It will be your first Udo Jürgens concert, so this isn't a regular happening, but it's a solid plan. Here, it's normal to say “we're going to Udo Jürgen's concert on Saturday” because it's a plan.

Here are some other examples:

- We're celebrating Christmas with my in-laws. (Because we always do.)
- I'm flying to America for Thanksgiving. (Because it's a plan, and because I go every year.)
- My wife and I are going to Udo Jürgen's concert on January 19th. (Because it's a plan.)
- He's working all day on Monday. (Because it's a plan.)

Practice:

What are some things you do regularly? Write when you will do them next with 'am doing.'

What are your plans for the weekend? For your next vacation? Write them here with 'am doing.'

When Nothing Can Stop You: “I'm Going To”

It's New Year's and we're talking about resolutions. The word 'resolution' is connected to the word 'resolute.' 'Resolute' is a word you don't hear much anymore. 'Resolute' refers to a person who won't stop, someone who's prepared to pay any price for what they want to do. We think of revolutionaries—for better or for worse—as being 'resolute.'

These days, I think people who are resolute are considered a little crazy.

On New Year's Eve, however, it's okay to be resolute. It's okay to say “No matter what happens, I'm going to lose ten pounds this year!” Or “this will be the year that my English becomes perfect!” And there's English to make what you say sound resolute: 'I'm going to. . .' Here are some examples:

- I'm going to lose ten pounds this year.
- We're going to visit France this spring.
- He's going to do the same thing as every year.

When you use going to, you make it sound like you're hitting the table with your fist. This is very resolute English, and it should be: I'm a little bit crazier about losing the ten pounds than I am about going to the Udo Jürgens concert, and I want the people I'm talking to to know that.

Practice:

What are the things you're resolute about? Write a sentence or two using 'going to.'

Congratulations! You've made it to the end! I suggest you take a break, and then come back and look at the last exercises.

EXERCISES:

Answer the following questions with 'will,' 'am doing' and 'am going to do,' as they fit best.

1. What kind of weather do you expect to have tomorrow?
2. What do you do every Saturday morning? What are you doing this Saturday morning?
3. John has an airplane ticket and reservations for a vacation in the Bahamas next week. What's he going to do next week?
4. What's your favorite sports team? How will they perform this year?
5. What's the first thing you do every morning at work? What's the first thing you're going to do tomorrow (or the next time you go) at work?
6. Nothing will stop Peter from his dream of touring India in 2010. What's he going to do in 2010?
7. Mark and Mary meet every Thursday after work for a cappuccino. What will they do next Thursday?