Will *or* be going to?

**A** Introduction

**1** **Think about your plans for this weekend.**

* How would you answer if someone said: “What are you doing this weekend?”
* Can you think of any other ways of saying your answer? Do they all have the same meaning?

**2** **Which of B’s answers seem most natural?**

a) A: Do you want a sandwich?

B: I’m going to have lunch in ten minutes. Thanks anyway.

**or:** B: I’ll have lunch in ten minutes. Thanks, anyway.

b) A: I’m going to go home now.

B: Okay. I’ll see you on Saturday.

**or:** B: Okay. I’m going to see you on Saturday.

**3 Look at the following text taken from a popular novel. For each verb in bold, decide which tense was used in the original:** *will* **or** *be going to****.***

[A child has hurt her ankle and is being helped by strangers who have found her.]

What we **do** is take you back. Jake **have to** carry you because you

can’t walk. But what we **do** first is give you a nice drink, and we can

have a little chat while you rest a bit. Your ankle **be** all right. It’s

only a sprain. It **hurt** a bit but soon it **be** well.

**Observations**

* You have probably already learned something about these two common future forms. However, the difficulty is knowing when to choose which form (or the other future forms). Our starting point is the following:
* *Will* seems to be best for situations when you are in the process of making a decision about the future.
* *Be going to* seems best for situations when you are informing someone about a plan you have already made.

**B**  Discovering patterns of use

**1** **Linking predictions to present circumstances**

Compare these two remarks.

* **Why do you think the format of the verb** *rain* **is different in (a) and (b)?**

1. It’ll rain tomorrow as soon as we get to the beach, I bet you ten pounds.
2. According to the weather forecast, it’s going to rain tomorrow. Maybe we

shouldn’t go to the beach.

**Observations**

* If we make a general prediction about something, we can use *will*.
* If we link our prediction to the present in some way, we can use *be going to*.
* In sentence (b) above, the speaker uses *be going to* because he / she wants to emphasise that the prediction is based on the present weather forecast. Here are some more examples of linking a prediction with the present:

“Look out! Your chair’s going to collapse!” (I can see it starting to happen.)

“You’re going to find it difficult to get a ticket. Mandy says they were sold out during the first week.” (There are already difficulties.)

“I’ve eaten too much. I think I’m going to be sick.” (I can feel it now.)

**2 Making decisions versus telling people about them**

Compare these two situations.

* **In which one is the speaker** *deciding* **something with another person and in which one is the speaker** *informing* **the other person?**

a) [Jenny and Ronan are talking about a new job which Ronan has just obtained.]

Jenny: When will you get the contract then? When do you start?

Ronan: Helen’s going to see Mary on Friday.

Jenny: Oh right.

b) [Sue and Clare are having lunch together; the waitress is showing them to their

table.]

Waitress: Would you like smoking or non-smoking?

Clare: Smoking, please.

Sue: Non-smoking.

[both laugh]

Clare: Well you sit down there and I’ll sit up here!

**Observations**

* When you are telling someone about an arrangement which has already been made, it is usually appropriate to use *be going to* (or one of the other future forms).
* When you are in the process of making an arrangement, it is generally better to use *will*. If you use *be going to* while you are making decisions with someone, it may seem as if you are not allowing the other person to have an opinion.

“I’m going to drive.” (The person you are speaking to has no choice.)

“I’ll drive.” (The person you are speaking to can respond to the suggestion.)

* In extract **B2(b)** above, the (joking) decision to sit in different parts of the restaurant is a reaction to something which has just happened. If Clare had said, “You sit down there, but I’m going to sit up here,” it would seem as if she was serious and had decided to sit elsewhere and was informing her friend of her considered decision.

These differences in meaning are due in part to the way in which the two forms behave in conditional contexts. This is dealt with in **C**.

**C** Grammar in action

*Will* and *be going to* in conditional circumstances

Look at the extracts below.

* In extract (a) do you think Susan has:

already decided to *break* (i.e. start spending) her twenty-pound note? Or has she not decided to do so and will only break it if someone wants a drink?

* What would it have meant if she had used *will break*?
* In extract (b), why does Helen not say *she will eat them*?

1. [This is taken from a conversation between a group of friends who are just about to leave the house to go for a drink.]

Susan: I’m going to break a twenty-pound note, if anyone wants a drink.

1. [Helen is talking about a friend who can’t keep sweets for long without eating them.]

Helen: If she’s got sweets in the house, it’s because she’s going to eat them straight away.

**Observations**

* *Will* and *be going to* behave rather differently from each other in the context of conditional clauses (or situations which imply conditions on future actions / events).
* In C(a) above, Susan has **already decided** to break the twenty-pound note, and therefore the information in the if clause (if anyone wants a drink) cannot affect or alter the ideas of the main clause (I’m going to break a twenty-pound note…].
* If Susan said *I’ll break a twenty-pound note, if anyone wants a drink*, the meaning would be different. This would imply that the ideas in the if clause would **cause** her to break into the note (and that otherwise she would not spend it).

**Summary**

* Use *will* to make decisions about the future made at the time of speaking.
* Use *be going to* to talk about decisions you have already made.
* Use *be going to* to talk about things that are strongly connected to the present situation (for example, if they have already begun).
* You can use *be going to* to **remind** someone of something but be careful when you **arrange** something with them. They may think you are deciding for them!

(See below.)

**Reminding:**

A: I’ve won a weekend trip to Paris for the 27th.

B: We’re going to be in Scotland then. Have you forgotten?

**Arranging:**

A: What do you want to do tonight?

B: We’re going to clean the living-room.

A: Well, you might be, but I’m not!

* *Will* and *be going to* behave differently from each other in the context of conditional clauses.

*Will + if* clause = the action in the *if-*clause is strongly dependent on the action in the main clause:

“I’ll water the plants, if they’re dry.”

*be going to* + *if-*clause = the action in the main clause is already decided, and therefore less dependent on the action in the *if-*clause:

“I’m going to water the plants, if you want to help me.”

Further exercises

**1 Here is a slightly edited real conversation between two young women having lunch together in a café in London.**

* Note what verb forms they use when they are talking to each other, and what forms they use when they talk to the waitress.
* Why do you think the verb forms are the way they are?

A: I’m going to have an Old timer burger with cheese.

B: Right, I’m going to have, I think I’m going to have a vegetarian burger with barbecue sauce on it.

A: Mm. Are you going to have a starter? What are you going to have?

B: I’m either going to have nachos or potato skins.

A: I’m going to have deep fried mushrooms.

[The waitress, C, comes up to take their order.]

A: I’ll have the deep fried mushrooms with an Old timer burger. Can I have cheese on it?

C: Yeah.

B: And I’ll have a vegetarian burger with barbecue sauce.

C: Okay.

**2 Imagine you have just read this news clip and you are telling someone informally what you have just read.**

(Note: We do not normally use *is to* in informal spoken English. What would you say instead?)

**KATE’S NEW MOVIE**

Veteran film actress Katharine Hepburn is to make another film at the age of 85. She will begin filming *This Can’t Be Love* in Vancouver, Canada, in October.

**3 Think of situations when you might say the following.**

1. I’m going to have a headache tomorrow morning.
2. You’ll get about five thousand pounds for it, I should say.
3. You’re going to get a message tomorrow.
4. You’ll get a letter, and they’ll probably invite you for an interview.

**4 In each of these sentences decide whether you think the speaker is arranging something with someone, deciding something or informing/reminding someone and then fill in** *will* **or** *be going to***, as appropriate.**

1. You \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ring Jo, and I’m supposed to organise the food – that’s what we said; don’t go changing everything now.
2. If you like, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ see to the car hire if you get the plane tickets.
3. Right, if that’s the case then I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ leave the letter with you and she can pick it up tomorrow.
4. The boss \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ meet the visitors for coffee at 11.30. She wants to know if you’d like to come along.

from *Exploring Grammar in Context*

Notes:

Present continuous and prior arrangements

* **Present continuous** is often used with future reference to indicate things that are arranged or decided:

A: ***You’re coming*** *on Friday, yeah?*

B: *If I can, yeah.*

* Present continuous is not used for future events over which there is no control:

*It’s going to rain tomorrow, according to the weather forecast. (****not:*** *~~It’s raining tomorrow~~*  (✗)

* **Present continuous** suggests arrangements have already been made:

***I’m having*** *a chat with her next week.* (We’ve arranged to do that.)

*I’m going to have a chat with her next week.* (unclear whether it is arranged, or just the speaker’s intention)

Present simple and fixed schedules

* **Present simple** can be used to talk about fixed events in the future, particularly referring to timetabled and scheduled events:

*The next flight* ***doesn’t leave*** *till 20.25.*

*Their training* ***starts*** *the end of September, so it should be quite interesting.*

* It can also be used to refer to expected events in the future:

A: *So when* ***do we do*** *a firmer estimate on this? (When shall we do this?)*

B: *Now.*

C: *Okay.*

* Be careful: present simple is not used for making promises and offers:

*That looks heavy.* ***I’ll carry*** *it for you.* (**not:** *~~I carry it for you~~.* (✗))

*I promise* ***I’ll look*** *at it tonight.* (**not:** *~~I promise I look at it tonight~~.* (✗))

*Be going to* versus *will*

We discussed above one of the differences between be going to and will. We noted that if you say “I’m going to drive”, the person you are speaking to has little choice in the matter, but if you say “I’ll drive”, the other person can respond to the suggestion or offer. This means that there are situations where it is important not to sound too decisive and assertive, and choosing be going to instead of will may have an undesired effect.

For example, if you are in a restaurant and you are paying for yourself, it would be quite appropriate to say, while looking at the menu:

***I’m going to have*** *the chicken.*

This might be inappropriate if someone else is paying for you, in which case it would be better to say:

*I think* ***I’ll have*** *the chicken.*

* You will often see *going to* spelt as *gonna* in written dialogues, to indicate the way it is usually pronounced in formal speech:

*Hopefully* ***she’s gonna*** *be back by then.*

*Be going to and present continuous*

* ***Be going to***and the **present continuous** can both be used to refer to the future, but the present continuous suggests a more pre-determined or fixed arrangement, while ***be going to*** is more a statement of an intention or a prediction based on present evidence:

*When* ***are you going to*** *ring me?* (asking the other person what his/her intention is)

*When* ***are you ringing*** *me?* (I know we’ve arranged to talk on the phone; please remind me when we have agreed to do it.)

*When* ***are you heading off*** *again, Bill?* (The speaker already know Bill is going on another trip and wants to know when it is fixed for. *Be going to* would be less definite here and might be understood as asking Bill whether he intended to make another trip.)

* When referring to states in the future, rather than events, ***be going to*** is used, since state verbs are not normally used with the continuous form:

*Any idea when the car’s* ***going to be*** *ready?* (**not:** *Any idea when the car’s ~~being ready~~?* (✗))

***You’re going to need*** *more than that.* (**not:** *~~You’re needing~~ more than*

*that.* (✗))

***I’m going to have to*** *go to bed soon.* (**not:** *~~I’m having to go~~ to bed soon.* (✗))

* Both forms are used for orders and prohibitions:

[to a toddler who picks up a knife] *No,* ***you’re not going to play*** *with that!*

(could also have been *No* ***you’re not playing*** *with that!*)

*Be going to* and a continuous infinitive

*Be going to* can occur with a **continuous infinitive** form. In this way it is possible to make a statement about future vents that will be in progress at a given time in the future, based on present evidence.

*I think* ***we’re going to be seeing*** *George Brumfit later in the conference.*

***We’re going to be struggling*** *to find enough vases for all these flowers.*

От Галя Елкина всем: 05:28 PM

On my weekend I will go at work to teach kids to program.

От Татьяна Мельникова всем: 05:28 PM

I will watch the Eurovision final, read book and do homework.

От Полина Лазебникова всем: 05:29 PM

I want to do 4 homework on information security. I also want to meet with my friend.

От Pavel Moiseenko всем: 05:29 PM

I am going to do my homework, go for a walk, and watch a movie.

От Софья Логинова всем: 05:31 PM

For this weekend, I plan to visit my father and do my homework.