

Prediction and probability

There are many ways to talk about prediction and probability:

We can use *will* or *going to*.

There are going to be fewer Americans and Europeans to do the jobs available.
Even the US will have 5% fewer people of working age by 2015.

We can use modals.

The economic situation may improve.

We can use lexical phrases.

Certain: *There's certain to be more outsourcing of production in the next 10 years.*

Probable: *It's quite probable that Russia will join the European Union.*

Possible: *Maybe we'll have to hire a new CEO.*

Unlikely: *It's unlikely that Coke will lose its position.*

Impossible: *It's just not possible to meet that deadline.*

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A Look at the following examples and say whether the lexical phrases suggest they are: **certain, probable, possible, unlikely or impossible.**

- 1 *There's no chance of us entering the European Union.*
- 2 *There's bound to be an increase in interest rates soon.*
- 3 *I doubt whether there will be a stock market crash next year.*
- 4 *They probably won't call off the strike.*
- 5 *Our CEO's taking a salary cut. It's out of the question.*
- 6 *It's possible that the retirement age will be increased to 70.*
- 7 *Perhaps the majority of managers will be women in the future.*
- 8 *It's highly likely that China will become the dominant world power.*
- 9 *There's a good chance that the World Wide Web will have serious problems.*
- 10 *Poor infrastructure will definitely undermine economic growth.*

B In pairs say what you really think about the likelihood of a stock market crash next year, the retirement age being increased to 70, the majority of women being managers, China becoming the dominant world power, and the World Wide Web having serious problems.

C Work in pairs. Make predictions about your company, your country or yourself. Use as many forms from the Language review box and Exercise A as possible. You may also find the phrases in the box below useful:

In my lifetime ...

Before long ...

In the near future ...

In the next ... years

Over the next decade ...

By this time next year ...

By the end of this century ...

Sometime in the next decade / century

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- 1 A number of modal verbs are used to make predictions. The modal indicates the speaker's degree of certainty.

They **will** be there by now (100% certain)

They **won't** have any trouble finding our office, they've been here many times (100% certain)

They **must** have arrived by now (80% certain)

They **can't** have arrived yet (80% certain)

They **should** have arrived by now (60% certain)

They **may / could have** arrived by now (40% certain)

They **might** have arrived by now (20% certain)

- 2 Conditional statements contain hypotheses about the way the future may turn out:

If we use solar power, we'll **probably** save money.

If you try harder you **would be able to** do it.

- 3 The future perfect and the future continuous predict what will be in progress or will have been accomplished in the future:

By 2050 businessmen **will be taking** orders from the moon.

By 3000 scientists **will have discovered** how to transmit objects by electronic means.

- 4 There are a number of lexical expressions of likelihood. These include:

about to bound to going to

He's tapping his glass, I think he's **about to / going to** make a speech.

She's **bound to** be late, she always is.

- 5 The following lexical phrases can be used to discuss the future: *certain, probable, possible, unlikely or impossible*.

There's **certain** to be more changes in the world's weather systems over the next few decades.

It's quite **probable** that an economic upturn will start next year.

Maybe, there'll be a change of management in the coming months.

It is **unlikely** that the retirement age will be increased to 75.

It is just **impossible** to imagine the World Wide Web having serious problems in future.

- 6 There are a number of useful time phrases that can be used to talk about the future:

In my lifetime I will see China becoming a dominant world power.

Before long the company will decide to merge with a bigger company.

In the near future everybody will be using wind power.

In the next ... years there will be a huge change in the way we travel.

Over the next decade governments will start reducing air traffic.

By this time next year I will be promoted.

By the end of this century the way we conduct business in the world will be very different from now.

Sometime in the next decade / century man will inhabit other planets.