

Grammar Reference

Present continuous and 'be going to' for talking about the future

Meaning and use

We can use the **present continuous** to talk about the future when we have already arranged to do something. It's definite, not just an idea. Perhaps we have put the arrangement in our diaries.

'Are you free at 2 o'clock on Tuesday?' 'No, I'm meeting a client.'

We can use **be going to** to talk about something that we have decided to do in the future, but not arranged yet. It's possible that the plan might change.

When I finish at college, I'm going to spend a year travelling.

The uses of the present continuous and 'be going to' with future meaning are very similar and it is often possible to use either of them, with little or no change in meaning.

We also use **be going to** for something that we expect to happen because we can see from the present situation that it is very likely. We can't use the present continuous in this way.

It's so cold. I'm sure it's going to snow soon.

Oh no! That car's going to hit the tree.

Form

Present continuous

Subject + am/is/are + -ing form

Be going to

Subject + am/is/are + going to + infinitive

For both tenses, we usually use contractions, or short forms (I'm, he's, we're, etc.) when we are speaking.

Positive

I'm spending the day on the beach tomorrow with Zach.

We're going to look for a nice restaurant with a view of the sea.

Negative

We're not visiting the museum on Saturday.

They're not going to visit the Taj Mahal.

Question

What are you doing at the weekend? (= what have you arranged?)

What are you going to do at the weekend? (= what is your plan?)

Are they going to get married in the summer?

Take note: time expressions

For both the present continuous for arrangements and 'be going to' for plans, we often use time expressions like **at half-past ten, next Thursday, at the weekend, soon**.

Are you coming home soon?

I'm going to send out all the invitations next week.

Take note: arrangements and timetables

Use the present continuous and NOT the present simple for things that you have arranged to do. Use the present simple for future events on timetables and programmes.

We're going by train tomorrow morning.

The train leaves at 7.45.

Spoken English

We often pronounce **going to** as '**gonna**', especially in informal conversation.

