

# The use of ‘going to’

‘Going to’ is a specific form of the present continuous, with an entirely different meaning. Unlike other forms of the present continuous, it is always followed by a verb in the bare infinitive form (infinitive without ‘to’).

## Structure for ‘going to’

The basic structure for ‘going to’ is: **subject + to be + going to + infinitive form of the main verb**

‘Going to’ is a form of the **present continuous** that is always followed by the bare infinitive form of the main verb; it is the presence of this infinitive verb that differentiates it from the continuous form of the verb ‘to go’, which can be followed by a noun or an adverb.

Consequently, the two forms below have completely different meanings. Compare the forms below:

- : I’m going to school.
- : I’m going to go to school.

Also, notice the difference between the following:

- : I’m going faster.
- : I’m going to go faster.

In addition to the present form of ‘going to’, there is a past form, which is also known as ‘the future in the past.’ To create this form, conjugate the verb ‘to be’ in the past tense. For example:

- : I was going to go to school.
- : I was going to go faster.

This means that it can be conjugated in the past (past continuous), as well as in the present. However, it can’t be combined with the future or with other modals.

Here is the word order in positive and negative statements:

tense	subject	verb ‘to be’	(not/ contraction)	going to	bare infinitive of the main verb plus compliment
+ Present	She	<b>is</b>		going to	live her life.
- Present	They	<b>are</b>	(not/aren’t)	going to	give us the engagement ring.
+ Past	She	<b>was</b>		going to	take the train.
- Past	They	<b>were</b>	(not/weren’t)	going to	fly to Spain.

In questions, we invert the subject and ‘to be’:

‘to be’ in the present tense	subject	going to	bare infinitive
+ ? Are	you	going to	take a cab?
- ? Isn’t	she	going to	buy flowers?

‘to be’ in the past tense	subject	going to	bare infinitive
+ ? Were	you	going to	take a cab?
- ? Wasn’t	she	going to	buy flowers?

## Uses of ‘going to’

‘Going to’ is a form that is used to talk about **the future**. As there are many ways of talking about the future in English, it’s important to differentiate ‘going to’ from other future forms. In particular, we use ‘going to’ to express:

- an intention to do something.
  - Vivienne Westwood was going to see more of the world.
- a prediction based on tangible evidence.
  - Many people are afraid that online banking is going to take over, and branches are going to close.

We don’t usually use ‘going to’ if we are making the decision at the moment of speaking; instead, in these cases, we would use ‘will’.

- It’s started raining, so I’ll use the Underground instead of walking.

We also use ‘will’ when we are making a prediction but there is no tangible evidence.

- Lloyds Bank will probably make money this year; after all, all banks make money.

It is worth noting that these rules are not strict, and in some cases and regions, the different forms can be used interchangeably.

A common mistake is to assume that ‘going to’ is used to talk specifically about events that are taking place in the near future. In fact, ‘going to’ can be used to talk about events that are quite far in the future.

- I’m determined to be a taxi driver, so first I’m going to study hard, and after 34 months, I’m going to become a taxi driver.
- Lloyds is buying more and more storefronts on the high street, which means that more and more branches are going to open up over the next five years.

On the other hand, when used in the past (future-in-the-past), ‘going to’ usually indicates an intention that failed to come true.

- Vivienne Westwood was going to stay married to Derek Westwood, but then realized that this ordinary life wasn’t for her.

**EXERCISE 1** Correct the mistakes in the sentences.

Four of the five sentences below have mistakes, and one of them doesn't have any mistakes at all. Correct the sentences that have errors in them.

- 1/ Derek Westwood was going share his life with his wife, Vivienne, but she had other ideas.
- 2/ The Routemaster buses were going to stay in service for only 17 years.
- 3/ When I return home to Australia, the first thing I going to do is have a Marmite sandwich.
- 4/ Lloyds Bank is going to close its high-street branches, but then decided to change strategy and open even more of them.
- 5/ What are you going to to eat for breakfast?



The team leader  
is going to jump first!  
Ready, Robert?

**EXERCISE 2** Replace the current form with 'going to'.

The sentences are written in the present or past tense; change them into sentences with 'going to', but try to keep the same tense, if possible.

- 1/ I have eggs, bacon, sausages, fried bread, baked beans and mushrooms for breakfast because I'm so hungry!
- 2/ I take the Underground in order to be sure to get there on time, but I didn't have enough money.
- 3/ Does Lloyds Bank open branches in the high street?
- 4/ What do you have for breakfast?
- 5/ Did Vivienne Westwood have an ordinary life?

**EXERCISE 3** Complete the sentence.

Choose the correct option to complete the sentence.

- 1/ I've already planned my breakfast meal: \_\_\_\_\_ orange juice first, then coffee, and finally a fruit smoothie with toast and organic jam.  
a. I'm having • b. I'll have • c. I'm going to have
- 2/ Look at all those glamorous people! This \_\_\_\_\_ a really exciting fashion show!  
a. has been • b. is going to be • c. is being
- 3/ Engine-powered buses \_\_\_\_\_ replace horse-drawn omnibuses.  
a. have • b. are going to • c. were going to
- 4/ Vivienne Westwood \_\_\_\_\_ participate in the May 1968 demonstrations, but they didn't get to Paris in time.  
a. would • b. was going to • c. is going to
- 5/ Lloyds Bank has maintained its presence in the high street, so \_\_\_\_\_ easier for the elderly to continue banking with them.  
a. it's going to be • b. it will be • c. it was going to be