

PRESENT CONTINUOUS (FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS) – B1

Main theme addressed	In this lesson, you will learn about the use of the present continuous for future arrangements.
Key Goals	<p>Here is an outline of what you will learn today:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to use the present continuous for future arrangements 2. The differences between the verbal forms that refer to the future

1. How to use the present continuous for future arrangements

a) The value of the present continuous for future arrangements

You have learnt to talk about the future by using “will” or “going to”. One of the other ways to express the future is to use the **present continuous**. It is very common to use the present continuous to talk about the future in the case of **arrangements that are planned**.

Consider the following sentences and their explanations.

- Positive sentence: “I’m having dinner with friends tonight”.

This sentence means that you have already made plans with your friends, you have not just decided to have dinner with them.

- Negative sentence: “Luke isn’t seeing his family this weekend.”

Luke has not made any arrangements to see his family this weekend.

- Question: “What are you doing on Saturday?”

What have you planned to do on Saturday?

b) The use of time expressions

When the present continuous is used to express future arrangements, it is often used with **words expressing the time the plan will happen**.

Here are the words expressing time in the previous examples:

“I’m having dinner with friends **tonight**.”

“Luke isn’t seeing his family **this weekend**.”

“What are you doing **on Saturday**?”

If time expressions are not found in the sentence, the fact that the action happens in the future can be derived from the **context**. This is especially the case when talking about a schedule.

Example:

Two students are discussing an e-sports competition they have next week. One says to the other: “We are playing three games in the afternoon and two games in the evening.”

Please note that the present continuous can only be used for future arrangements **when the events are controlled by people**: in other words, someone arranged it.

For example:

You should not say “it’s **raining** this afternoon” (no one has decided to make it rain). Instead, you should say “it’s **going to** rain this afternoon”.

Key notions:

- It is very common to use the present continuous to talk about the future in the case of **arrangements that are planned**.
- The present continuous for future arrangements is used with **time expressions**, or the fact that the action happens in the future can be derived from the **context**.

Exercise:

Indicate with Yes or No whether you can use the present continuous to talk about the future in these sentences. The missing verb is in infinitive form in parenthesis.

1. It (be) _____ freezing this afternoon.
2. Anna (visit)_____ her sister for tea tomorrow.
3. Elsa (enjoy)_____ having a relaxed conversation with her little sister.

Answers:

1. No: you cannot use the present continuous as the weather is not caused by anybody's decision.
2. Yes: Anna has made arrangements to visit her sister tomorrow.
3. No: you can only arrange for an activity, not how you will react to it.

2. The differences between the verbal forms that refer to the future

By now you have probably learnt about several ways to talk about the future. Here are all of them:

- Be going to,
- Will,
- Present Simple,
- Present Continuous.

The grammatical structure of these forms have been covered in previous lessons. In this part, we will focus on the differences among these verbal forms to express the future.

- We use **Present Continuous** to talk about **plans or definite arrangements** for the future.

Example:

I am going to visit Spain next year.

- We use **“will”**:
 - to make **predictions**,
 - to talk about **future events we have not arranged yet**,
 - to talk about **future events or facts that are not personal**,
 - to talk about **something we decide to do at the time of speaking**, including offers, promises or suggestions.

Examples:

I think it will rain tomorrow.

People will eat less meat in the future.

The telephone is ringing. I will answer it.

- We use “**Going to**”:
 - to talk about events in the future we have **already thought about and intend to do, but have not arranged yet,**
 - to make **predictions when there is present evidence.**

Example:

I am going to visit them tomorrow.

Look at the clouds! It is going to rain.

NOTE: Avoid using “going to” with the verb “go”: use the present continuous in this case.

Example: I am going to Spain next week.

- **Present Simple** can be used to talk about the future:
 - **in time clauses** with a conjunction (after, as soon as, before, by the time, when, while, until),
 - **in conditional clauses** (if, in case, provided, unless, supposing, what if),
 - **for formal arrangements**, while the present continuous suits informal situations better.

Compare the following sentences to understand the difference between the different ways to talk about the future.

“My family **is organizing** a party when we get back from our trip.”

Present continuous is used as it is a definite arrangement in an informal context.

“The university semester **starts** on the 7th of September.”

Present Simple is used as this is a definite arrangement in a formal context.

“We’re **going to** hire a car to go to the Alps.”

“Going to” is used as we have decided to hire a car, but we have not arranged for it yet.

“I’m sure we **will enjoy** this movie, there are dinosaurs in it!”

The use of “will” in this sentence means that the person speaking is making a prediction based on their own guess.

“We’re **going to** have a very nice trip, Jim is a safe driver.”

“Going to” is used here to show that the person speaker is making a prediction based on what they know about Jim’s driving skills.

Exercise:

Fill the gap by writing the verb in parenthesis in the appropriate verbal form to talk about the future.

1. I (go) _____ London tomorrow.
2. I am excited because I heard there (be) _____ otters.
3. First, I (see) _____ the lions.
4. I (go) _____ there at 9.30.
5. I (meet) _____ my friend Elsie for lunch if she is free.
6. The winter opening times (start) _____ from the 22nd of October.
7. By then, the zoo (close) _____ earlier and it (be) _____ more difficult for me to go there.
8. From November, some animals (start) _____ hibernating and it (be) _____ impossible to see them.

Answers:

1. am going to
2. will be
3. will see
4. am going
5. will meet
6. start
7. closes – will be
8. start – is

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<https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/flatmates/episode73/languagepoint.shtml>

<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/grammar-practice/present-continuous-future-arrangements>

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