

## Other ways of talking about the future

A

Some phrases are commonly used to refer to actions or events in the future with a meaning similar to **be about to + infinitive** (see Unit 12C). We can use **be on the verge of ... / brink of ... / point of ... (+ -ing or noun)** to say that something will happen soon:

- People **are on the verge of** starvation as the drought continues.
- Scientists **are on the brink of** making major advances in the fight against AIDS.
- Exhausted, mentally and physically, she **was on the point of** collapse.

**Be on the brink of** usually refers to something important, exciting, or very bad.

We use **be due to (+ infinitive)** to say that something is expected to happen at a particular time, **be sure / bound to (+ infinitive)** to say that something is likely or certain to happen, and **be set to (+ infinitive)** to say that something is ready to happen:

- The company's chief executive **is due to** retire next year, but following today's announcement of further losses she **is sure to** be asked to leave sooner.
- 'Will there be somewhere to get a coffee at the station?' 'Oh, yes, there's **bound to** be.'
- Her new film **is set to** be a great success.

Note that we use **due to + noun** to give the reason for something, not to talk about the future (e.g. **Due to fog**, all flights from the airport have been cancelled).

B

We use some verbs with a **to-infinitive** to talk about intentions:

- We **guarantee to refund** your money if you are dissatisfied with the computer.

The **present simple + to-infinitive** or **present continuous + to-infinitive** can be used with the verbs marked \* to talk about intentions:

- I **aim to get** to Bangkok by the end of June. (or I'm **aiming to get** ...; I **was aiming to get** ... is also possible, but more tentative)

Also: **aim\***, **agree**,  
**expect\***, **hope\***,  
**intend\***, **mean**,  
**plan\***, **promise**,  
**propose\***, **resolve**,  
**undertake**, **want\***

Some people, particularly in speech and in journalism, use **be looking + to-infinitive** to mean planning a course of action:

- We're **looking to create** 3,000 jobs in the city over the next year.

C

When the phrases and verbs in **A** and **B** are used with past tense forms, they are usually concerned with future events seen from the past (see also Unit 14):

- It was his 64th birthday in 2006 and he **was due to retire** the following year.
- Nathan **had resolved to become** fluent in Spanish before he left university.
- The new management **had been looking to create** 20 new jobs.

D

Some people use **shall** (and **shan't**) instead of **will** (and **won't**) in statements about the future with **I** and **we**. However, it is more common to use **will** (particularly its contracted form 'll) and **won't**:

- He was a good friend and we **shall** miss him greatly. (*more commonly* ... we'll miss ...)
- I'm just going to buy a newspaper. I **shan't** be long. (*more commonly* I **won't** ...)

In current English we don't usually use **shall / shan't** with other subjects to talk about the future, although this is found in formal rules and in older literary styles:

- The match referee **shall** be the sole judge of fair play.
- All people of the world **shall** live together as brothers.

## Exercises

13.1 Expand the notes to complete the news extracts, using the phrases in **A**.

verge – become    sure – face    brink – go    set – launch  
 set – make    sure – provide    ~~bound – raise~~    due – return  
 point – sign    ~~point – move~~    verge – quit    due – undergo

- 1/2 The decision of Cornico to relocate its international headquarters to Switzerland is bound to raise questions about the government's new profits tax. It seems that other major financial firms are also on the point of moving their headquarters out of London.
- 3/4 NASA's latest Mars probe is ..... to Earth later today. A spokesperson for NASA said that the probe would be bringing back rock samples that are ..... exciting new information about the planet.
- 5/6 The Countryside Conservation Society is ..... a new million-Euro scheme for the protection of endangered plant species. It is estimated that over 200 species are ..... extinct in the country.
- 7/8 Sources at the United Nations have said that the governments of North and South Alicia are ..... an agreement to end their long-running border dispute. However, any agreement is ..... resistance from rebel forces in South Alicia, who have said they will fight on.
- 9/10 Tennis star Sancho Gomez is ..... a second operation on his injured shoulder. He was ..... tennis earlier this year after a first operation was unsuccessful.
- 11/12 EU agriculture ministers are ..... an important announcement on increasing support to farmers when they meet in Brussels on Monday. 'Many farmers are ..... out of business,' said the Italian representative, 'and the matter must be decided very soon.'

13.2 Complete the sentences with the verb pairs from the box. Use either the present simple or present continuous for the first verb. If both tenses are possible, write them both. **B & C**

aim – to study    expect – to finish    ~~look – to replace~~    intend – to move  
 propose – to deal    resolve – to give up    guarantee – to find

- 1 My computer is now five years old, and I 'm looking to replace it with a faster one.
- 2 In the first half of the course we'll study microbiology, and in the second half I ..... with genetic engineering.
- 3 We haven't completed the work yet, but we ..... it later this week.
- 4 I haven't done much work at college so far, but I ..... harder from now on.
- 5 Every New Year he ..... eating biscuits, but by February he has started again.
- 6 We can't provide the spare parts ourselves, but we ..... a supplier who can.
- 7 At the moment I commute for over three hours a day, but I ..... closer to my work in the next few months.

13.3 Underline the possible options. **D**

- 1 I have passed your letter on to the manager who *shall / will* reply shortly.
- 2 Sorry, but I *shan't / won't* be able to give you a lift after all.
- 3 I think your parents *shall / will* be very happy with your decision.
- 4 Only people over the age of 18 *shall / will* be eligible to vote in the referendum.
- 5 You *shan't / won't* want to eat your dinner tonight after all that chocolate.