

Shall

Introduction



I **shall** see that it gets done by next week - trust me.

Definition

Shall is a modal verb which is used for talking about the future. For other uses, see [modal verbs](#).

Construction

This is rarely used and, apart from some special exceptions, it is only used with 'I' and 'we'.

Affirmative:	subject + shall + verb	I/we shall go.
Negative:	subject + shall + not + verb	I/we shall not go.
Interrogative:	shall + subject + verb	Shall we go?

Contracted form

In the affirmative and one form of the negative, this is the same as for [will](#).

Affirmative I'll We'll

Negative form 1 **Negative form 2**

I'll not **I shan't**
We'll not **We shan't**

Use

Shall can be used as an alternative to 'will' when using future tenses.

I **shall** do that tomorrow.

We **shan't** be ready on time.

In 15 years, I **shall** be retired and living by the sea.

This time next week, we **shall** be sitting on the beach.

If we don't work more quickly, we **shan't** have finished before the deadline.

Shall we see you at the party?

Shan't you be there?

Notes

1. This is rarely heard nowadays but some people prefer to use it some of the time. This includes occasions when we choose to be flippant or because we enjoy playing with the language. "What do you think will happen?" "I don't know - we **shall** see!"
2. It is sometimes considered a little stronger than **will** and is, therefore, more likely to be used when making promises or expressing determination. "Don't worry, I **shall** do it tomorrow. I promise."
3. In conversation, **shan't** is more common than **shall not**. The latter is used for emphasis. "I **shall not** change my mind so don't ask me again."
4. In everyday use, **shall** is only used with 'I' and 'we'. However, in some older literature you will find it with 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they'. "You shall not pass!" says Gandalf in *Lord of the Rings*.

Also, it may occasionally be heard in conversation with 'you', especially for emphatic use or when someone is angry.

"You **shall** do your homework tonight"! "You **shall** not speak to me like that again".

5. In formal written rules and **legal** language, **shall** can also be used with 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they'. For example, FIFA's rules include: "The referee **shall** ensure an injured player is safely removed from the field of play."
6. The interrogative form is rare, possibly because it sounds like a suggestion rather than a prediction. Negative questions are, therefore, a little more likely to be heard. "**Shan't** we be seeing you at the meeting?"

7. It is generally advisable for learners of English to avoid using **shall** as an alternative to **will** unless they feel very confident about when it is appropriate.

Examples



We **shall** be there by 5 - looking forward to it.



I **shall** just ignore them.



I **shan't** be at the meeting tomorrow - I'll be too busy.



"**Shan't** we see you at the seminar next week?" "No, I'll be on holiday."

Legal terms



The supplier **shall** dispatch all orders within three days of payment.

In some legal documents, contracts, laws and formal rules, it is also used with 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they'.

Affirmative: He/she/it/they **shall**

Negative: He/she/it/they **shall not**

Note that:

1. These documents are written in formal English so contractions are not used.
2. There is no necessity for an interrogative form in these documents.

Use	Example
To express obligations	The employer shall pay compensation in the event of a successful claim. These rules shall apply to all participants. The terms of this lease shall be from 2016 until 2022.
To express negative obligations	The company shall not be liable for any loss or damage. The amount paid shall not exceed the insured sum set.
To express prohibition	Members of the forum shall not purchase nor sell any music that is known to be stolen from its legal owner. No candidate shall be allowed to enter the room more than thirty minutes after the start of the exam.
To state requirements	A score of 60% shall be deemed a pass. The Contractor's sub-contractors shall not be considered as being employees or agents.

Note that in both the UK and USA, there is some disagreement about this use of **shall**. For example:

1. Some people believe it should be avoided and that 'will' should always be used. Others use 'will' in order to express a client's obligations and **shall** for the other party's obligations with no difference in meaning.
2. Others believe that **shall** can also be used to mean 'may' or 'can', as in the United States Constitution, or to state a fact:

No Person shall be a Representative who shall not have attained to the Age of twenty five Years, and been seven Years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State in which he shall be chosen.

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Last update: **2023/02/14 14:21**

