

# The future seen from the past

## Introduction



I **was** only **going to** order a croissant but I changed my mind!

## Definition

These structures are for talking about past events when we want to refer to something that was in the future at that time.

## Construction

We use the past forms of the tenses we usually use to talk about the future. For example:

Jan 2016: It's **going to** be a difficult year for us so we'**ll** have to cut costs.

Dec 2016: We knew in January that it **was going to** be a difficult year for us and that we'**d** have to cut costs.

Future tense	As seen from the past
future simple will	would
am/is/are going to	was/were going to
present continuous	past continuous
present simple	past simple
future continuous 'will' + 'be' + present participle	'would' + 'be' + present participle
future perfect simple 'will have' + past participle	'would have' + past participle
future perfect continuous 'will have been' + present participle	'would have been' + present participle

## Uses

We use the past tense forms of verbs and expressions that we usually use for the future in order to talk about an event or activity that *was* in the future at a certain point in the past.

We don't always know if the activity happened or not:

He didn't give her the results on the phone because he had a lot to do and **was seeing** her later anyway. She was annoyed when she realised this but was happy with the results!

I **was going to** discuss it with her at the meeting the next day but she wasn't there.

## Other expressions for talking about the future

As well as the standard future tenses, we can also use other expressions for the future in this way.

### Expressions with 'be'

Expression	Examples
'be' + infinitive	We were surprised to hear that the company <b>was to</b> lay off 2,000 employees.  She joined the company in 1984 but it <b>was to</b> be another 30 years before she became a senior manager.*  He <b>was to</b> direct two more comedies before switching to science fiction films in the 1990s.*
'be about' + infinitive	I <b>was just about to</b> go to lunch when an emergency meeting was called.
'be due' + infinitive	He <b>was due to</b> retire in March but the company asked him to stay on for another six months.
'be bound' + infinitive	He <b>was bound to</b> refuse - I don't know why you asked him!
'be set' + infinitive	They <b>were all set to</b> go ahead with the barbecue but it rained after all.
be sure/certain/likely /unlikely etc. + infinitive	I knew he <b>was unlikely to</b> accept - it wasn't really the right job for him.
be on the verge/brink/point of + noun or gerund	Scientists at that time didn't realise they <b>were on the brink of</b> a major discovery.

\* **Note that** when 'be' + infinitive refers to the future from the past, it is often used to talk about what happened to someone whether they were in control of these events or not. See **Expressions for talking about the future** for more information.

## Expressions with other verbs

Verb	Examples
aim, expect, guarantee, hope, intend, mean, propose, want etc. + infinitive	They <b>were hoping to</b> get an earlier train but got held up in traffic. He <b>intended to</b> look into the matter as soon as he had time.
'looking' + infinitive	They <b>were looking to</b> expand into North America before the financial crisis.

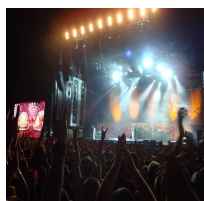
## Examples



When I heard they **were going to** retire to the coast, I was really happy for them. I knew they **wouldn't** regret it.



We went out early because we **were meeting** friends for breakfast at their hotel. We wanted to see them before they **left** for the airport.



We knew the doors **opened** at 6.00 so we had to hurry to make sure we got a spot near the stage.



She was getting excited because it **was** her birthday the next day.



She couldn't have imagined that by the end of the year she'd **be working** for a big international company. Maybe later, she'd get a posting abroad.



**They looked at their list and were pleased to see that by the end of the year, they **would have** visited every country in Europe. When they **got** to the last one, they'd **do** something special to celebrate**