

Will, shall

Introduction



He **will** eat at his desk even though there is a canteen.

Definition

Will is a modal auxiliary verb which has different uses.

Construction

affirmative: subject + 'will' + **bare infinitive** **It will start.**

negative: subject + 'will' + 'not' + **bare infinitive** **It won't start.**

interrogative: 'will' + subject + **bare infinitive** **Will it start?**

Note that like other modal auxiliaries, **will** has no infinitive and we use the same form with 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'we' and 'they'. 'Do' is not used to form negative or interrogative sentences.

Uses

Uses	Examples
Requests	<p>Will you help me with this case? It's rather heavy.</p> <p>Will you sit down so I can see the film?</p>

Expressing determination	We will never surrender. [Winston Churchill] I will win this race.
Willingness [see below]	I won't be spoken to in that manner. My car won't start.
Tendency/habit [see below]	He will keep wearing those shoes even though they have holes in them. Ice will melt in the sun. She'll always phone me when she's working away.
Deduction	That'll be John on the phone. He promised to phone me today. He was sick? Oh that'll be why he didn't come to the meeting on Tuesday.
Polite orders/directives	Sorry but I'll have to ask you to move your car as you are blocking the entrance. Hello, come in. Will you close the door, please?

The present continuous

Will can also be followed by the present continuous when making deductions. For example:

They'll be having lunch now; it's half past twelve.

Gilbert will be driving to the airport now so don't call him yet.

Willingness

If you are willing to do something, it means that you have no objection to do it if it is needed. For example:

I won't be spoken to in that way. = I am not willing to be spoken to in that way. I object to it.

When we use this for objects, we are replacing an old English verb that is no longer used. It expresses the same meaning. For example:

The fire won't light because the paper is too wet. = The fire is not willing to light.

'Will' or 'should' or 'must' for deduction?

These are all used in the same way but with different levels of certainty.

For example, someone hears a knock on the door at the time that the postman usually arrives and says:

That should be the postman. [It's probably the postman but it could be someone else.]

That must be the postman. [I'm certain it's the postman but there's a slight possibility that it isn't.]

That will be the postman. [I have no doubt at all that it's the postman.]

Tendency/habit

Sometimes we use **will** as an alternative to the present simple to talk about something that happens regularly. For example:

When he gets home on Fridays, he will sit in the garden and smoke his favourite cigars.

=

When gets home on Fridays, he sits in the garden and smokes his favourite cigars.

If we are unhappy about something that happens regularly, we use the same structure but we emphasise **will** and do not contract it. For example:

He will smoke in the house! It's so annoying - he should do it in the garden.

Examples



Will you come this way please?



You **will keep interrupting me! Can you let me finish my sentence?**



We **will stay here until we have an agreement.**



I **won't put up with this noise any longer. **Will** you two sit down and be quiet?**



That **won't** be John calling, he's on holiday.



My car **won't** start.

'Will' as a verb

'Will' as a verb is a different word to the modal auxiliary. There are two verbs 'to will':

1. To desire something very strongly, for example: 'I willed her not to drop the glasses'.
2. To bequeath, for example: 'My uncle willed me his library of encyclopaedias.'

See also

1. For future uses and standard contractions see [Future Will](#).
2. For conditional uses see [first conditional](#).

Shall



Shall we dance?

Shall is a modal auxiliary verb which has different uses.

This is only used with 'I' and 'we' in the interrogative form.

Shall + 'I'/**'we'** + bare infinitive **Shall** I help?

Note that like other modal auxiliaries, **shall** has no infinitive and we use the same form with 'I', 'you' 'he', 'she', 'it', 'we' and 'they'. In the uses below, it is only used with 'I' and 'we'. 'Do' is not used to form negative or interrogative sentences.

Use	Examples
To make or ask for suggestions	Shall we have a break now? Where shall we go tonight?
To ask for advice	Shall we park here or over there? Shall I return his call?
To make offers	Shall I help you with that? Shall we take you to the airport?
In question tags for suggestions with 'Let's' and with 'will' for spontaneous decisions	Let's go out for dinner, shall we? I'll do that tomorrow, shall I?

Shall can also be followed by the present continuous when making suggestions. For example:

Shall I be preparing the vegetables while you're making the dessert? [informal]

Unlike using **shall** as an alternative to 'will' when talking about the future, **shall** as a modal is very common in conversation:

What **shall** we have for dinner tonight?

**Shall I apply for the job I told you about? What do you think?
Shall I do that for you?**

Examples



Well, we need a break. **Shall I be clearing up while you're making tea?**



Let's get together again on Friday, **shall we?**



I'll prepare the corn, **shall I?**



Shall I explain that again or do you understand now?



Where **shall** we go next?



"It's cold in here." "It is. **Shall I close the window?**"



What shall I do?!

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2023/02/14
14:21

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