Predictions & Speculation Summary

Will & Going to for Future Predictions

Will and going to are the two forms used for predicting future events.

Will

We use will/won’t + infinitive to talk about what we think or know about the future and to ask questions about the future. For example:

Our team will win the football.
I think it will be warmer next week
He will meet us at the station tomorrow.
Will they join us later?

Going to

We use be (+ not) + going to + infinitive for making firm predictions based on current evidence:

Look at those black clouds, it’s going to rain.
Many small businesses are going to suffer because of this financial crisis.
We’re going to be late, there’s so much traffic.

Often will and going to can be used interchangeably for predicting without a significant difference in meaning:

The forecast says it will be sunny tomorrow
The forecast says it is going to be sunny tomorrow
I think they are going to be late
I think they will be late.

Will or Going to + Adverbs of Certainty

We can use adverbs of certainty to express different degrees of certainty about the future:

- surely, certainly, clearly, definitely, probably, doubtfully, obviously, undoubtedly

We will definitely come
It will possibly work
You’re probably going to win
He is surely going to be late

She definitely won’t agree
That possibly won’t change
They probably aren’t going to listen to us
I’m certainly not going to finish it tonight

Note: The adverbs such as definitely, probably and possibly come after will in positive sentences but come before won’t in negative sentences.

- maybe & perhaps

The adverbs maybe and perhaps normally go at the beginning of a clause:

Maybe he will come later
Perhaps I’ll see you there

Maybe we won’t go after all
Perhaps they’ll stay another week
May, Might & Could for future speculation

May, might & could are modal verbs which do not change according to person. They act as auxiliary verbs so negative and question forms don’t require the auxiliary verb “do”.

Subject + may/might/could + infinitive without to

May, might & could are used to speculate about the future. They express uncertainty, we are not sure what will happen or what we will do. In this context there is no significant difference in meaning between these three modal verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tr>
<td>We might go to the cinema</td>
<td>They might not stay until tomorrow</td>
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<tr>
<td>I may see you tomorrow</td>
<td>She may not want it</td>
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<tr>
<td>He could leave early</td>
<td>It couldn’t be John, he’s in Australia</td>
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Note that the question forms with “might” and “may” are only used when asking permission to do something, they are not asking about the possibility or probability of something.

Speculating about the past

May, might & could can also be used in the past form:

Subject + may/might/could + have + past participle

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tr>
<td>They might have gone to shop</td>
<td>They might not have visited Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He may have finished early</td>
<td>We may not have seen him before</td>
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<td>She could have bought the car</td>
<td>You could have missed the flight</td>
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There is also a continuous form in the past:

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<td>They might have been listening</td>
<td>They may not have been working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He could have been training</td>
<td>She might not have been looking</td>
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Other ways of expressing degrees of probability:

be bound to happen                  be doubtful that
be sure/ to happen                  be uncertain
be likely to happen                 be unlikely to happen

Adverbs of degree can be added to likely to adjust the degree of probability:

+++ extremely, highly              - not very
++ really, very                    -- not
± quite                            --- not at all

It’s extremely unlikely he’ll come to the party tonight, he’s got a deadline at work.
It’s very likely they will cancel their holiday if Maria has to go to hospital.
It’s not at all likely the merger will go ahead, given the current financial situation.