

When do we use present tenses to talk about the future?

Present tenses are used to talk about future actions and events that have some present reality. If we say that something 'is going to happen' or 'is happening', we are usually referring to an action that is already planned or decided.

'What are you doing this weekend?' 'I am visiting my grandparents.'

'Look out! We are going to crash.'

Note that we do not usually use the simple present tense to talk about the future.

The two continuous verb forms that are used to talk about the future are the present continuous and be going to.

Present continuous

The present continuous tense is mostly used to talk about personal arrangements and fixed plans, especially when their time and place have been decided.

We are going to France next week.

I am seeing John tomorrow.

What are you doing this evening?

What are we having for lunch?

Be going to

This structure is preferred in an informal style. It is also used to talk about pre-planned future events. Here the emphasis is on the idea of intention.

He is going to buy a new car. (= He intends to buy a new car sometime soon.)

When are you going to get a job? (= When do you intend to get a job?)

Be going to is also used to predict the future on the basis of present evidence.

Jane is going to have another baby. (There is present evidence – Jane is pregnant now.)