# Future Tenses



## Worksheet 1: Futurity & the "No Future Tense" Debate

*Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)*

### Reference: Is There a Future Tense at All?

Many grammarians argue English has **no morphological future tense**: unlike past (walk/walked), futurity is expressed periphrastically — through modals (*will, shall*), semi-modals (*be going to, be to*), and present forms. **will** is arguably a modal of prediction/volition, not a tense marker. Futurity is thus bound up with **modality** (irrealis): the future is inherently non-factual, which is why it recruits modal machinery.

| Position | Claim | Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| No future tense | futurity = modality + periphrasis | no future affix; will = modal |
| will as modal | prediction/volition, not pure time | "That'll be him" (present deduction) |
| present-as-future | present forms carry futurity | "The train leaves at nine." |
| irrealis link | future is non-factual | shares forms with conditionals/ hypotheticals |

### Part A – Theoretical Analysis

1. Set out the case that English has **no future tense**. Address the morphological argument (no future affix), the modal behaviour of *will*, and the use of present forms for future time.
2. "That'll be the postman" and "Oil will float on water" use *will* with no future reference. Explain what these reveal about *will* as a marker of **modality** (prediction) rather than time.
3. Futurity patterns with **irrealis** (the unreal). Explain why the future's non-factual status makes it natural for English to express it with the same modal resources it uses for hypotheticals and conditionals.

**Score: _____ / 20**

# Worksheet 2: Corpus, Register & Variation

*Name:* _____ *Date:* _____ *Level: C2 (CEFR)*

## Reference: What Corpora Show About Futurity

Corpora reveal that **going to** (often reduced to *gonna*) dominates speech while **will** dominates writing; that **shall** has receded to legal, formal and first-person-question uses; that **be to** clusters in news and officialese; and that hedged futures (*is likely to, is expected to, is set to*) saturate journalism and academic prose. Each leaves a measurable register fingerprint.

| Pattern | Corpus tendency |
|---|---|
| going to / gonna | conversation; informal; high frequency |
| will | writing; predictions; formal register |
| shall | legal, ceremonial, I/we questions; receding elsewhere |
| be to / be set to | journalism, officialese ("is to visit") |
| is likely/expected to | academic hedging; news forecasting |

### Part A – Diagnose Register / Variety

| # | Sentence | Register / variety & evidence |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | "The lessee shall not assign the tenancy." | |
| 2 | "I'm gonna grab a coffee, want one?" | |
| 3 | "Unemployment is expected to edge higher next quarter." | |
| 4 | "The Queen is to open the new wing on Thursday." | |

### Part B – Recast Across Registers

Take the proposition *The bank will raise interest rates next month* and recast it as: (a) a hedged academic forecast; (b) a news headline/lead; (c) casual speech.

1. (a) _____
2. (b) _____
3. (c) _____

### Part C – Register-Corpus Map

Place each in its most likely corpus: *shall be deemed · is set to unveil · it'll be fine · gonna head off · is projected to decline*

| Corpus | Forms |
|---|---|
| Legal / contractual | |
| Journalism | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Academic / forecasting | |
| Informal / spoken | |

**Score: _____ / 25**

# Worksheet 3: Style, Voice & Rhetorical Futures

*Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)*

## Reference: The Future as Rhetoric

Future forms carry stance and voice. The prophetic/oratorical **shall** (*we shall not fail*) commits and inspires; the assertive **will** converts forecast into certainty; hedged futures perform caution and credibility; the **be to** of headlines lends inevitability; the future perfect projects a vantage point from which the present is already history. Skilled writers deploy these consciously.

| Effect | Device | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Resolve / inspiration | oratorical shall | We **shall** rebuild. |
| Assertive certainty | bare will | History **will** vindicate them. |
| Studied caution | hedged future | The effect **is likely to** be modest. |
| Inevitability | be to (headline) | Talks **are to** resume. |
| Retrospective vantage | future perfect | By then, we **will have forgotten** this. |

### Part A – Name the Effect

1. "We shall overcome, however long it takes." _____
2. "Posterity will judge us harshly." _____
3. "Any gains are likely to prove temporary." _____
4. "A century from now, they will have forgotten our names." _____

### Part B – Deploy with Control

Rewrite each neutral sentence using the device named; note the stance it projects.

| # | Neutral | Rewritten + stance |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | We are going to keep trying. (→ oratorical shall) | |
| 2 | The reform might not achieve much. (→ studied hedge) | |
| 3 | People will eventually forget this scandal. (→ future perfect vantage) | |

### Part C – Pastiche

Write a short peroration (4–5 sentences) in an oratorical register using **shall** and an assertive **will**; then recast it as a cautious analyst's forecast using hedged futures. Annotate the shift in stance.

| # | Line |
|---|---|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **3** | |
| **4** | |
| **5** | |
| **6** | |

**Score: _____ / 30**

# Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis & Writing

*Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)*

### Part A – Critical Text Analysis

That English lacks a future tense is, on the face of it, a paradox: no language is more preoccupied with what is to come. The resolution lies in recognising that futurity, being irreducibly uncertain, is a species of modality. When we say the sun will rise, we are not locating an event in time so much as predicting it; the will that carries the forecast is the same will that, in "that will be the postman", carries a present deduction. By the time linguists had accepted this, the folk category "future tense" had long since hardened into the grammars — and there, one suspects, it will remain, whatever the analysts conclude.

1. Identify every instance of *will* and classify its meaning (prediction, deduction, habitual, volition) — showing that not all are "future".
2. The passage argues futurity "is a species of modality". Reconstruct the argument and assess it against the counter-view that *will* is a tense auxiliary.
3. Analyse "By the time linguists had accepted this…" — how do the tense choices establish a temporal vantage, and what rhetorical effect does the closing "it will remain" achieve?
4. Evaluate the passage's own use of future forms as an enactment of its thesis.

### Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening two paragraphs (220–260 words) of a scholarly essay on: "English expresses futurity through modality, not tense." Requirements — include and underline: (1) one use of **will** that is **not** future (deduction or habitual); (2) one hedged future performing caution; (3) one **future perfect** establishing a vantage point; (4) one precise **metalinguistic term** (modality, irrealis, periphrastic, epistemic, volition) used correctly; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to each claim; (6) one **conjunct** that maps the argument's logic precisely.

| # | Line |
|---|---|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |
| 6 | |
| 7 | |
| 8 | |

**Features: _____ / 6  Word count: _____  Score: _____ / 35**

# Answer Key & Teacher Notes

*For teacher use only — C2 Level, Future Tenses*

## Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 Morphology: English inflects for past (–ed) but has no future affix; futurity is always periphrastic (will/shall + base, be going to, present forms). Syntax: *will* behaves like a modal (no -s in third person, followed by bare infinitive, occurs in the modal slot). Semantics: present forms routinely carry future time ("leaves at nine"), so futurity isn't tied to a dedicated form. Hence "future tense" is a notional, not a morphological, category. · 2 In both, *will* makes no reference to future time: "that'll be the postman" is a present deduction; "oil will float" is a timeless generalisation. They show *will* encodes modality (prediction/necessity) whose most common—but not sole—use happens to be future. · 3 The future is inherently unknowable/non-factual (irrealis); languages therefore tend to mark it with modal resources rather than a plain tense. English simply generalises the pattern: the same modals and past-for-unreal machinery serve conditionals, hypotheticals, and futures alike.

## Worksheet 2 – Part A (model)

1 legal/contractual — deontic *shall*. · 2 informal spoken — *gonna*, tag question. · 3 academic/ journalistic forecasting — *is expected to*, hedged. · 4 news/officialese — *is to* + scheduled event.

## Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

(a) The bank is likely to raise interest rates next month. (b) Bank set to raise rates. (c) The bank's gonna put rates up next month.

## Worksheet 2 – Part C

Legal: shall be deemed. · Journalism: is set to unveil. · Academic/forecasting: is projected to decline. · Informal/spoken: it'll be fine / gonna head off.

## Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 oratorical resolve/inspiration. · 2 assertive certainty. · 3 studied caution (hedge). · 4 future perfect — retrospective vantage.

## Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 We shall keep trying. (resolve/inspiration) · 2 The reform is unlikely to achieve much. / may achieve little. (studied caution) · 3 In time, people will have forgotten this scandal. (vantage from a later point).

Assess intentionality: the marked future must produce a legible stance and the neutral alternative be recoverable.

## Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 "the sun will rise" (prediction/future); "the will that carries the forecast" (metalinguistic reference); "that will be the postman" (present deduction); "it will remain" (prediction with a wry, quasi- habitual certainty). Not all are future-time. · 2 Argument: futurity is uncertain → uncertainty is modality → the marker of futurity (*will*) is modal, evidenced by its non-future deductive/generic uses. The counter-view treats *will* as a tense auxiliary; the passage answers it with the deduction example, where no future time is involved. · 3 "had accepted" (past perfect) sets a vantage before "had hardened"; the shift sequences the intellectual history, and the closing "it will remain" projects that history forward, wryly predicting the folk category's persistence. · 4 The passage enacts its thesis: it uses *will* in plainly non-future ways ("that will be the postman", "it will remain"), demonstrating in its own prose that *will* is modal, not merely temporal.

## Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

| Criterion | Descriptor at C2 | Marks |
|---|---|---|
| Non-future will | Deductive/habitual use, correct | 0–6 |
| Hedged future | Caution performed precisely | 0–5 |
| Future perfect vantage | Retrospective viewpoint established | 0–5 |
| Metalinguistic accuracy | Term used correctly, no overclaiming | 0–5 |
| Epistemic calibration | Two hedges matched to claim strength | 0–5 |
| Argument & length | 220–260 words; contestable claim developed | 0–5 |

The C2 benchmark is conscious control: a student who writes an oratorical *shall* or a deductive *will* and can explain, in a footnote, why the form carries modality rather than time has demonstrated mastery.