There are several constructions that are used to describe thoughts about the future that someone had at some point in the past. These constructions are known as the Future in the Past:

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Future in the Past is used to express the idea that in the past you thought something would happen in the future. It does not matter if you are correct or not.

- *I was going* to have a party, but nobody could come.
- *Tom always knew he would be* a good student.
- *Mary was very happy on Saturday morning. She was visiting* her friends that evening.

**How to use Future in the Past**

Future in the Past most commonly uses two different forms – the structures with ‘going to’ and ‘would’. These are both used to talk about an event or activity that was in the future at a particular moment in the past.

**‘Was / were going to’**

The Future in the Past can be used to describe an earlier prediction with the help of ‘was / were going to’.

- *Mike was going* to buy a new shirt, but he couldn’t find one.
- *Sorry I interrupted. Were you going to* say something?
1. This form is used to describe a future plan or intention relative to the time of speaking.
2. This form is often used when the anticipated event did not actually happen.
3. It is formed with ‘was/were + going to + infinitive of the planned verb.

‘Going to’ is used to talk about the future from the present moment:
– The traffic is awful! I think (present view) I’m going to be late.

‘Was/were going to’ is used to talk about the future from some point in the past:
– I thought (past view) I was going to be late, but I’m right on time.

This form can be used either at the beginning or later in the sentence:

• I was going to work out but I decided to watch TV instead.
• I forgot she was going to visit.

‘Would’

The Future in the Past can be used to describe a future event or action with the help of ‘would’.

• Michael was told that his car would be fixed by 5 o’clock.
• Did you ever think you would become a pilot?

1. This form suggests an expectation or a possibility, but not necessarily a plan.
2. It is often paired with verbs relating to the subject’s thoughts (think, suspect, know, hope) in the simple past.
3. ‘Would’ is the past tense of ‘will’.
4. Formed using would + infinitive (without to).
5. This form can also be used to introduce something that is currently true.

• I always thought I would live in Paris, but I still live in Edinburgh.

‘Will’ is used to talk about the future from the present moment:
– I think (present view) I will finish my work today. It shouldn’t take too long.

‘Would’ is used to talk about the future from some point in the past:
– I thought (past view) I would finish my work today, but there was still a lot left to do.

• I thought I would be late.
• I knew you would win!
Past Continuous

The Future in the Past can also be used to talk about an *arranged future event* from a time in the past.

- Jenny was very nervous on Monday morning. She was *taking* her English test that afternoon (arranged future event in the past).
- Gabriel had been cleaning the room all day. His mother was *arriving* that evening.
- We had to go to bed because we were *flying* early the next morning.

In such statements we use the Past Continuous:

**Apologies and excuses**

Future in the Past is often used to introduce apologies. It can introduce an excuse or explanation of why a situation did not unfold as planned.

- I’m so sorry. I was *going* to prepare the reports today but I completely forgot about them.
- Please accept my apologies. I thought the order would be complete by now but there’s been a delay at the plant.

**Passive voice**

Future in the Past can also be used in the passive voice. We use it when we want to focus on the planned or anticipated event or action, rather than on the subject of the sentence.

The main verb changes as follows: ‘infinitive’ → ‘to be + past participle’.

- The problem was *going to be discussed* at today’s meeting (by us).
- I knew the problem would be fixed (by him).

**How NOT to use Future in the Past**

Future in the Past cannot be used with time clauses such as before, after, by the time, as soon as, unless. In these cases, the Past Simple or the Present Simple should be used (depending on whether or not the future event referred to has happened).

Consider the following examples:
I was going to drop you off before I was going to go shopping.
I was going to drop you off before I went shopping.

We thought we would go swimming after we would finish our assignments.
We thought we would go swimming after we finished our assignments.

I already told Mark that when he would arrive, we would go out for dinner.
I already told Mark that when he arrived, we would go out for dinner.

Here’s a good video from BBC Learning English explaining how to use the Future in the Past correctly:

Read more about past tense:
- Past Simple Tense
- Past Continuous: Statements and Negative
- Present Perfect for Unfinished Past
- Past Perfect: Statements & Negative