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ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN PLAIN ENGLISH

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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**:

via https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/futureinpast.html

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](#)