

## Future seen from the past

We have the present tense, the past tense and a lot of future forms, but we also have future in the past or the future seen from the past. So when we talk about the past, sometimes we want to talk about something that was in the future at that time. To do this we put the future forms into the past.

There are a number of ways of talking about an activity or event that was in the future at a particular point in the past. In order to express this idea, we can use the past tenses of the verb forms we would normally use to talk about the future (**will - would, is going to - was going to, is leaving - was leaving, is to talk - was to talk**, etc.). Compare the following sentences:

<i>The future from now...</i>	<i>The future from the past...</i>
• The new computer <b>will arrive</b> next week.	• Our computer was broken and we hoped the new one <b>would arrive</b> soon.
• <b>I'm going to grow</b> tomatoes and carrots this summer.	• During the winter I decided that <b>I was going to grow</b> tomatoes and carrots when the summer came.
• <b>I'm collecting</b> my mother from the station this afternoon.	• I left the meeting early because <b>I was</b> collecting my mother at 3.30.
• As it's raining, I think <b>I'll be going</b> home by taxi.	• Jane she said that she <b>would be going</b> home by taxi because of the rain.
• The exam <b>will have finished</b> by 3 o'clock, so I'll see you then.	• The exam was so easy that most people <b>would have finished</b> after 30 minutes.
• The Prime Minister has announced that there <b>is to be</b> an election on May 1st.	• I was on holiday in Greece when I heard there <b>was to be</b> an election back home.
• The workers <b>are to be transferred</b> to a new factory on the outskirts of town.	• She was given a tour of the factory where she <b>was later to be transferred</b> .
• The performance <b>is about to</b> begin. Please take your seats, ladies and gentlemen.	• The performance <b>was about to</b> begin when someone started screaming.

**Induction:** Future in the past is used to express the idea that in the past you thought something would happen in the future

### 1. Future In the Past

Like simple future, future in the past has two different forms in English: "**would or was/were going to**" to refer to the future from the perspective of some point **in the past**. Although the two forms can sometimes be used interchangeably, they often express two different meanings.

#### a. Form

**Would: (conditional simple)** [would + VERB]

- **Affirmative:** I knew you **would help** him.
- **Interrogative:** **Would** you **buy** house?
- **Negative:** I knew you **would not help** him. I **wouldn't stay** here.

**Was/Were Going To:** [was/were + going to + VERB]

- **Affirmative:** I knew you **were going to meet** us at the party.
- **Negative:** I knew you **were not going to stay** at home.
- **Interrogative:** **were** you **going to work**?

## b. Use

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. Future in the past follows the same basic rules as the simple future. "Would" is used to volunteer or promise and "was going to" is used to plan. Moreover, both forms can be used to make predictions about the future.

**\*Use of would + infinitive: voluntarily action, promise, prediction, or habits in the past:**

- **Voluntary action:** I knew Eric would make dinner tonight.
- **Promise:** She promised that she would come to my party.

He promised he **would send** a postcard from Egypt

- **Prediction:** I thought it would be a disaster.

She was sure that Boyne **would never come back**

- **Habit:** He had not believed her when she said they **would meet** only once.

During the war, people **would** eat all kinds of things that we don't eat now.

Early passenger planes **wouldn't** hold more than 30 passengers.

**\*We can also use would + a verb but only after verbs like: though, believed, imagined, knew ...**

- We did not know it would rain.
- My parents always knew I would be a teacher.
- I thought I would be a doctor.

⇒ The conditional simple tense is used when talking about an imaginary or hypothetical action. **It is generally used in conditional sentence type II.** For example:

- If I had enough money, I *would buy* a new laptop. (In fact, I don't have the amount of money to buy the laptop now.)

The conditional sentence type II structure is as follows:

If + simple past..., + conditional simple (would + verb)
Conditional simple (would + verb) + if + Simple past

**\*To talk about *general or repeated willingness in the past* we can sometimes use would, but we can't use would in this way to talk about a *particular occasion in the past*.** Compare:

- Whenever I had to go to town, Ron **would** give me a lift. (= repeated)
- I was late, so Ron gave me a lift to town, (*not ...Ron would give me...*) (= particular occasion)

**However**, we can use **would not** *either* when we talk about unwillingness in general *or* about a particular occasion. Compare:

- We thought that people **wouldn't / would** buy the book. (= general)
- She **wouldn't** say what was wrong when I asked, (*not ...would say...*) (= particular occasion)

**\*\*As a past equivalent of the future simple, would/should must be used instead of will/shall when the main verb of the sentence is in the past tense:**

- I hope (that) I will/shall succeed. I hoped (that) I would/should succeed.
- I know (that) he will be in time. I knew (that) he would be in time.
- He thinks (that) they will give him a visa. He thought (that) they would give him a visa.
- I expect (that) the plane will be diverted. I expected (that) the plane would be diverted.

NB: **When used with the main verb** in the first form, **would** means that something did happen. This is used more often in written English.

- He **would** later **achieve** great success as a TV chef.
- She **would go on** to become the most popular author of her time.

**But in subordinate clauses it is just the past form of will**, and whether it happened or not depends on the context.

- He knew he **would be** able to do it.
- She hoped she **would arrive** in time.
- They decided **they would** skip lunch.

**\*Use of was/were going to + infinitive:**

"[T]he **future-in-the-past**... is used where the speaker wishes to refer to a past time at which a particular event was still in the future, even though now, at the moment of speaking, it is past.

1. **When we use was/were + going to + (base verb), we are talking about a plan or a prediction:**

- **Plan:** David said that he was going to bring his camera with him, but he forgot.

I told you he **was going to come** to the party.

- **Prediction:** I had a feeling that the vacation **was going to be** a disaster.

I had a feeling that it would rain later.

2. **anticipated events that do not occur (Future plans in the past which didn't happen or changed)**

It is frequently used where some anticipated event does not occur or an expectation is canceled.

- I **was going to tell** him, but he didn't give me a chance.
- I thought we **were going to eat** out tonight.
- She **was going to qualify** next year, but now it will take longer.
- Jane said Sam **was going to bring** his sister with him, but he came alone.

**2. Conditional Progressive**

**a. Form**

Would + be + present participle (verb + ing)

- **Affirmative:** I **would be traveling** around the world.
- **Interrogative:** Would you be watching **the match**?
- **Negative:** I **wouldn't be sleeping** all day long.

## b. Use

\*Conditional progressive is used for imaginary situations that might take place if the present circumstances were different.

\*It puts emphasis on the course of an action.

\*It is used in the main clause of conditional sentences type II.

- If he had a lot of money, he **would be traveling** around the world.
- If I were free, I **would be watching** the movie.
- If the music were better, everybody **would be dancing**.
- I **would be having** a good time if I met my friends.

The conditional sentences type II structure is as follows:

If + simple past..., + conditional progressive (would + verb + ing)
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Conditional progressive (would + verb + ing) + if + Simple past
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## 3. Conditional Perfect

Conditional perfect is an English grammatical tense. **It indicates an action that someone would have done in the past. It describes what one would have done differently or how something could have occurred differently if the events had been different.**

### a. Form

Would + have + past participle

- **Affirmative:** I would have traveled around the world.
- **Interrogative:** Would you have traveled around the world?
- **Negative:** I wouldn't have stayed in my hometown.

### b. Use

\*Conditional perfect is used for something that might have happened in the past.

\*It describes what one would have done differently or how something could have occurred differently if the events had been different

\*It is used in the main clause of conditional sentences type III.

- She **would have** met him if she had come earlier.
- You **would have got** more money if you had worked harder.
- If he had studied harder, he **would have passed** the test.
- If we had run faster, we **could have arrived** on time.

The conditional sentences type III structure is as follows:

If + past perfect..., + conditional perfect (would + have + past participle)
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Conditional perfect (would + have + past participle) + if + past perfect
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**\*When we want to indicate that we think an *unreal past* situation - that is, an imaginary situation, or a situation that might have happened in the past, but didn't is certain we use would have + past participle:**

- **I would have been** happy to see him, but I didn't have time.
- If your father had still been alive, he **would have felt** very proud of you today.
- My grandmother **wouldn't have approved** of the exhibition.

**\*\*As a past equivalent of the future perfect tense:**

- I hope he will have finished before we get back. I hoped he would have finished before we got back.

#### **4. Conditional Perfect Progressive**

\*It refers to the unfulfilled result of the action in the if-clause, and expresses this result as an unfinished or continuous action.

\*Emphasis is on the length of time of an action.

##### **c. Form**

Would + have + been+ infinitive + ing

- **Affirmative:** I would have been playing.
- **Interrogative:** would he have been working?
- **Negative:** I wouldn't have been working.

##### **d. Use**

\*We use it for something that might have happened in the past.

\*We use it in the main clause in type III of the if clauses.

- If the weather had been better (but it wasn't), I'd have been sitting in the garden when he arrived (but I wasn't).
- If she hadn't got a job in London (but she did), she would have been working in Paris (but she wasn't).
- If I had had a ball I would have been playing football.
- If I had known it was dangerous I wouldn't have been climbing that cliff.

**\*\*As a past equivalent of the future perfect continuous tense**

#### **3. Use of the Past Progressive ( *past continuous*)= arranged past events**

**For** Future arrangements in the past or arrangements that did not happen but you intended them to happen :

**form:** was/were + verb + ING.

- I couldn't go downtown as I promised because I was meeting my friends.

"When an 'arranged-**future-in-the-past**' concerns a personal arrangement, we normally use the progressive form of the past tense. This parallels the use of the present progressive for arranged post-present situations.

- [Mary and Bill were stuffing a goose.] They **were having** guests **that evening**.
- [There was no point in inviting the Robinsons, as] they **were leaving** the day before the party.
- [The man was very nervous.] He **was getting** married **that morning**.
- [I didn't call him up to tell him the news because] I **was going** to his office **the next day**.

The use of the progressive past is possible even if the context makes it clear that the action planned was not actually performed."

**4. Imminent events: (events just about to happen but didn't actually happened at the end)**

**Form:** Was/were about to+ infinitive.

- I **was about to call** you.
- I **was about to do** some exercise, but I felt tired.

\*\*Was/were on the point of + ING verb or noun. E.g. *he was on the point of retiring.*

**5. Events that took place:**

**Form:** Was/were to+ infinitive.

- I was to see my doctor this morning. (and I saw him)

**6. Events that were expected to happen but didn't.**

**Form:** Was/were to have + past participle.

- The boat, which was to have taken them to the island, failed to arrive.

**Be supposed to**, however, is used in less formal contexts.

- Sorry, I was supposed to help but I was terribly ill.

Earlier today	Now (I am going to go back to the past and look at the future)
• Such a nice day today. I am going to go for a run after lunch.	• I was going to go for a run today but I am feeling a bit tired. We use this form for plans, predictions and intentions that <u>changed</u> just like my intention to go for a run. We can use it for things that <u>happened</u> e.g. I knew it was going to be sunny today.
• I've got to go now; I am meeting Dean at 3 o'clock.	• Sorry I was in a rush earlier, I was meeting the Dean at 3 and I didn't want to be late. We use the past continuous to talk about <u>future arrangements in the past</u> . (It can be used either if the arrangements did not happen but you intended them to happen).
• I've got to go mom I'll call you back	• Ah, I told mom I would call her later. I need to do that now.

<p>later.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think I will have finished all my work by lunch time.</li> </ul>	<p>It is almost supper time, I thought I would have finished all my work by lunch time but it is taking ages.</p> <p>When referring to the future in the past 'will' becomes 'would'.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alright, I am about to call mom now otherwise she will kill me. (to call her in a short time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oh mom is calling... oh hi mom, I was just about to call you mom, no honestly I was about to call you.</li> <li>Am about to becomes was about to.</li> <li>When I was about to call mom she called me.</li> </ul>

### Future in Time Clauses

Like all future forms, future in the past cannot be used in clauses beginning with time expressions such as: when, while, before, after, by the time, as soon as, if, unless, etc. Instead of using future in the past, you must use simple past.

- I already told Mark that when he **would arrive**, we would go out for dinner. *Not Correct*
- I already told Mark that when he **arrived**, we would go out for dinner. *Correct*

### Active / Passive Form

- I knew John **would finish** the work by 5:00 PM. *Active*
- I knew the work **would be finished** by 5:00 PM. *Passive*
- I thought Sally **was going to make** a beautiful dinner. *Active*
- I thought a beautiful dinner **was going to be made** by Sally. *Passive*

⇒ The context in which these forms are used will often indicate whether the activity or event did or did not happen, although in some cases we may not know whether the activity or event happened or not.

Compare:

- I was **meeting** Jim later that day, but I had to phone and cancel. (= I didn't see Jim)
- I didn't phone to break the news to him because **we were meeting** each other later. He was very upset when I told him. (= we saw each other)
- They left the house at 6.00 am and **would reach** Edinburgh some 12 hours later. (= they reached Edinburgh)
- He was sure that the medical tests **would show** that he was healthy. (= we don't know whether he was healthy or not)

⇒ Compare **was/were to + infinitive** and **was/were to have + past participle** used to talk about an activity or event that was in the future at a particular point in the past:

- At the time she was probably the best actor in the theatre company, but in fact some of her colleagues **were to become** much better known.
- He **was to find out** years later that the car he had bought was stolen.
- **I was to have helped** with the performance, but I got flu the day before.

- There **was to have been** a ban on smoking in restaurants, but restaurant owners have forced the council to reconsider.

When we use **was/were to + infinitive** we are talking about something that did actually happen.

When we use **was/were to have + past participle** we are talking about something that had been arranged, but did not happen.

⇒ We don't use **would** in this way to talk about a *particular* occasion in the past. Compare:

- Each time I gave him a problem he **would solve** it for me. *and*
- Last night I gave him a problem and he **solved** it for me. (*not ...he would solve it...*)

⇒ In speech, we can stress **will** or **would** to criticise people's characteristic behaviour or habits:

- She *will* leave all the lights on in the house when she goes out.
- I was happy when Sam left. He *would* talk about people behind their backs.

⇒ When we use stressed **would** in this way, we can also use it to talk about a *particular* occasion in the past. We suggest that what happened was predictable because it was typical of a person's behaviour:

- 'Jackie says she can't help because she's got a lot of work on.' 'Well she *would* say that – she always uses that excuse.'

⇒ If we want to talk about things that happened repeatedly in the past, but don't happen now, we can use **would** or **used to + infinitive**. **Used to** is more common in informal English:

- We **would / used to** lend him money when he was unemployed.
- Tim **would / used to** visit his parents every other weekend.

We use **used to** but not **would** when we talk about past *states* that have changed:

- The factory **used to** be in the city centre.
- **I used to** smoke heavily when I was at university.

⇒ When we use **would** we need to mention a specific time or set of occasions. Compare:

- We **used to** play in the garden, (*not We would play...*)
- Whenever we went to my Uncle Frank's house, we **would / used to** play in the garden.

⇒ We don't use either **used to** or **would** when we say exactly how many times something happened, how long something took, or that something happened at a particular time:

- We **visited** Switzerland four times during the 1970s.
- She **went** on holiday to the Bahamas last week.