Expressions of future time

- English provides several ways of referring to events which are to take place later than the speech moment (i.e. in future time).
- Each of them has its own modal meaning since futurity and modality are blended: the speaker can never be certain of future situations.
- The forms and phrases expressing future time reference are not interchangeable.
Lyons: Futurity is never a purely temporal concept; it necessarily includes an element of prediction or some related modal notion.

- The so-called Future tense in the Indo-European languages (which is of comparatively recent development in many of them) is partly temporal and partly modal.
The grammar of English provides several ways of referring to events which are to take place later than the speech moment.

- Each of these verbal expressions is related to particular shades of meaning.
  - Will / shall + Infinitive.
  - Will / shall + Progressive infinitive
  - Be doing + Infinitive
  - Present Progressive
  - Present Simple tense
will / shall / 'll

- modal auxiliaries and auxiliaries of the future
- it is difficult to separate them
- We cannot be as certain of future happenings as we are of events past and present.
- Even the most confident prognostication must indicate something of the speaker’s attitude and so be tinged with modality.
**will / shall / 'll**

a. prediction: It will soon start raining. 
Due to this meaning, the phrase is common in the main clause of **conditional sentences**: 
If the rain does not stop soon, the river will overflow its banks. 

Shall + Simple Infinitive is used in elevated style with second- and third-person subjects: 
The time shall come when king Arthur and his knights shall rise to defend England.
will / shall / 'll

b. spontaneous decision:
A: There's no beer left.
B: I'll buy some more on the way home.

c. volition: will you? 'are you willing to?':
Will you come to the party tonight?
The addressee's willingness to do X can be interpreted as an invitation to do X.
will + Progressive form

a. expresses on-going temporary activity at a fixed ‘Tense Locus’ in the future:
This time next week I'll be strolling along the avenues of Paris.

It ‘indicates that a predicted event will happen independently of the will or intention of anyone concerned’ (Leech 1971):
He will be sitting for the exam soon.
**will + Progressive form**

*Will* + non-progressive verb form $\rightarrow$ volition (willingness, wish, desire); such expressions can be used to convey **indirect requests** and **invitations**:

*Will you talk to her tonight?* (request)

*Will you come to the party tonight?* (invitation)

The progressive form rules out the volition interpretation, and the following examples are only **questions** about the addressee's **present expectations of future doings**:

*Will you be talking to her tonight?* (question)

*Will you be coming to the party tonight?* (question)
**shall + Progressive form**

It is used with a first-person subject to denote a future situation independent of the will of the speaker:

I shall be spending all day at home: I’ve got a lot of things to do.

**will/shall + Perfect form**

Will + Perfect form denotes a situation, taking place before a future ‘Tense Locus’:

By the end of the month Irene will have finished work on this project.

Shall + Perfect Infinitive is used with a first-person subject to express past-in-the-future:

By the end of the month we shall have submitted our diploma papers.
be going to ('future fulfilment of present situation'), informal gonna

a. future culmination of present intention:
   What are you going to do with the money?
   This meaning is possible with human subjects:
   Nelly is going to spend Christmas abroad.
   (the intention will be carried out)
**be going to** ('future fulfilment of present situation'), informal *gonna*

b. **future culmination of present cause:** *It is going to rain.*

This construction is used to denote situations located in the immediate future. It is possible with both human and non-human subjects:

*The sky is overcast: it is going to snow.*
*She is going to cry.*
Present Progressive

a. future outcome of present arrangement (under the control of the speaker/subject):

We are going to London next week.

It is possible with verbs denoting single actions or events. Often used with reference to immediate future: I'm going home now.

b. strong determination: I'm not signing that contract.
Present Tense with future reference - ‘future as fact’

This is a future event determined by present facts/circumstances (plan, programme):

The lecture starts at 10.15 tomorrow.
The train leaves Paddington at 4.50.

Sentences with present simple verb forms referring to the future normally contain an adverbial modifier of time denoting future time reference:

We launch the project next week.
The Present Simple form denotes future situations when it is used in subordinate clauses such as

a. adverbial clauses of real condition:
   - *If it rains, they won’t be able to play tennis.*

b. adverbial clauses embedded in future-referring main clauses:
   - *I’ll talk to you when I come back.*

c. and after expressions such as *take care, make sure, see (to it), suppose:*
   - *Take care you don’t slip on the ice.*
**be about to + Infinitive**

This phrase is used to refer to a situation in the immediate future:

> Hurry up! The ceremony is about to begin.

**be on the point of + Gerund**

This phrase denotes immediate future time reference:

> Don’t interrupt her! She is on the point of telling the truth about it.

**be to**

A future outcome of present arrangement (under the control of an outside will):

> We are to go to England next week.