

Part 2 - The Future forms

So, you've looked at two present tenses and two past tenses. Can you remember what they are, and give examples?

So far, we've used present tenses to talk mainly about the present, and past tenses to talk about the past. Now we're going to mix things up a bit for you, we're going to talk about the future, but we are going to use present tenses!

There are a number of ways of talking about the future in English. Native English speakers intuitively know what to say but most people don't know *why* they say it.

Using present tenses to talk about the future

Look at the following short conversation between two people.



A: *What are you doing tomorrow evening?*

B: *I don't know what I'm doing yet. I don't know what time my train gets in.*



Q: This short conversation uses two different present tenses. Can you spot what and where they are?

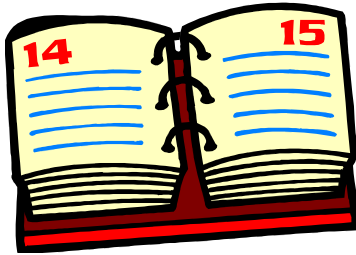
A: Speaker (A) uses the present continuous '*What **are** you **doing** tomorrow evening?*'

Speaker (B) also uses the present continuous: '*what **I'm doing** yet.*'

He/she also uses the present simple '***I don't know***' and '*...**my train gets in.***'

Despite using the present tenses, these two people are not talking about the present, they are talking about tomorrow, i.e. the future.

Firstly, let's look at speaker A. This speaker is using the present continuous. Do you remember in chapter 3 we talked briefly about why we might use the present continuous to talk about the future?



Well done if you remembered that we can use the present continuous to talk about future planned events. Speaker A is asking speaker B about his/her plans for tomorrow. It might be useful to think of this form as the '**diary future.**'

Think of some other answers (B) could give to the question A has asked:

I'm going out for dinner with a friend.
I'm taking my girlfriend to the cinema.
I'm meeting an old school friend.

As you can see, there is no change in the formation of the present continuous to learn when it is used to talk about the future. It is simply a case applying what you (and your students) know to a new use.

Now look at speaker B. Did you spot earlier that B uses the present continuous and the present simple? Yet he/she is also talking about the future in part of the sentence.

I don't know what time my train gets in.

There are two parts to this sentence. The first part (or clause) is '*I don't know...*' In this part the speaker is talking about **NOW**. He/she doesn't know **at the moment**. The second part '*...my train gets in.*' is talking about the future.

So why does speaker B use the present simple and not the present continuous?

Well, it isn't a personal planned event. **B is talking about a timetabled event.** When we talk about timetables or other things with fixed times, then we use the present simple, for example:

The flight from Moscow lands at 3.30.

I think the film starts at 8 o'clock.

"Come on, hurry up! The train leaves in half an hour!"

We can also use the present simple to talk about people in the future if their plans are formal and fixed. For example:

I finish work at 6 tomorrow so we can meet after that.

My brother's doing well, thanks. He starts his new job next week.

We go on holiday on 6th July. Can you look after our dog for us?



There is a straightforward summary of present tenses used for the future at <http://www.edufind.com/english/grammar/Tenses15.cfm>.