

Future in the past

The future in the past (or 'the future seen from the past') can be expressed by putting any of the forms used to talk about the future into the equivalent past form. The exception is the Present Simple for future.

Future form	Function	Future in the past
Present Continuous <i>am/is/are going to</i>	arrangements intentions/plans/ predictions based on observed fact	Past Continuous <i>was/were going to</i>
<i>will (+ infinitive/ have + past participle/be + -ing)</i>	predictions/ promises	<i>would (+ infinitive/ have + past participle/be + -ing)</i>

Past Continuous

- To talk about arrangements in the future, we use the Present Continuous:
*We **are meeting** our friends for lunch tomorrow.*
- To talk about an arrangement made in the past for what was then the future, we use the Past Continuous:
*We **were meeting** our friends for lunch the following day.*
- If the verb *be* is emphasised in the Past Continuous, this can imply that the arrangement was made, but did not happen:
*We **were meeting** our friends for lunch. (Something came up and they couldn't make it.)*

Was/were going to

- To talk about plans/intentions in the future, we use *am/is/are going to*:
*We're **going to** spend a year travelling around the world. I'm **going to** tell you your marks in the next lesson.*
- To talk about plans/intentions/decisions made in the past for what was then the future, we use *was/were going to*. This use usually indicates that the event did not happen:
*We **were going to** spend a year travelling around the world, but we changed our minds. I **was going to** tell you your marks this lesson, but I'm not ready yet.*
However, it is possible to use *was/were going to* when the intention was actually fulfilled:
*'Thanks for mailing the package.' 'That's fine. I **was going to** mail my letters anyway.'*

Would

- To make predictions or promises in the future, we usually use *will*:
*It **will be** a wonderful opportunity to meet the artist in person.*
*We know they **will be working** when we arrive.*
*By next week, they **will have bought** all the books they need.*

- To talk about predictions or promises made in the past for what was then the future, we use *would*:
*It **would be** a wonderful opportunity to meet the artist in person.*
*We knew they **would be working** when we arrived.*
*By the following week, they **would have bought** all the books they needed.*

Other ways of expressing the future in the past

- Verbs used to express plans
These verbs are often used to express plans made for the future at a point in the past. We don't necessarily know whether or not the action happened:
plan + to + infinitive/plan on + -ing
*We **planned/were planning to leave/on leaving** the following day.*
intend to
*Rosie **intended/was intending to meet** us in Italy.*
- was/were to*
This structure is often used to talk about official arrangements or things destined to happen:
*The meeting **was to take** place in two days' time.*
(We don't know if it happened or not.)
BUT
*The meeting **was to have taken** place. (But it didn't.)*
- was/were due to*
This structure is often used to talk about plans that were part of a timetable, or things that were expected to happen at a certain time:
*Our friends **were due to arrive** at ten that night.*
(We don't know if it happened or not.)
BUT
*Our friends **were due to have arrived** at ten that night.*
(But they didn't.)
- was/were supposed to*
This structure is often used to talk about things that were arranged, but didn't happen:
*You **were supposed to give** that to me.*
- was/were about to + infinitive and on the point/verge of + -ing*
These structures are often used to talk about things that were to happen very soon:
*Oh, what a coincidence! I **was just about to call** you.*
*I **was on the point/verge of leaving** when he phoned me.*