

Future in the past: was going to and would

CEFR B1-B2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

The past forms of will and going to: plans that may never happen, predictions and interrupted moments.

The rule

Was going to: a past plan

- Form: was or were going to + base verb: "I was going to study, but I fell asleep."
- The plan was real at the time. It may have happened, or it may have been cancelled.
- A but often shows that the plan changed: "She was going to travel, but she broke her leg."
- Were going to is used with you, we and they; was going to with I, he, she and it.

Would: the future seen from the past

- Form: would + base verb: "He said he would arrive at six."
- Would is the past form of will, so it reports a prediction or promise made earlier.
- In stories, would shows what the character expected: "She knew the winter would be hard."
- Would also describes past habits: "Every summer we would swim in the lake."

Was about to: a moment about to happen

- Form: was or were about to + base verb: "I was about to leave when the phone rang."
- It describes a moment right before an action, often interrupted.
- The interruption often comes with when: "We were about to sit down when the guests arrived."
- The same meaning appears with on the point of + -ing: "She was on the point of crying."

Was to and were to

- Form: was or were to + base verb: "The train was to leave at noon."
- This sounds formal and appears in news, plans and historical writing.
- It can describe an arrangement: "We were to meet outside the theatre."
- The perfect form was to have done describes an arrangement that did not happen: "He was to have spoken, but he withdrew."

Future in the past in reported speech

- Will usually becomes would in reported speech: "I will help you" becomes "She said she would help me."
- Going to usually becomes was or were going to: "I am going to move" becomes "He said he was going to move."
- The time words also shift: tomorrow becomes the next day, next week becomes the following week.

- The choice between would and was going to keeps the original meaning: prediction against plan.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. I ___ call you, but my battery died.

2. She said she ___ send the photos.

3. We ___ leave when the storm started.

4. He knew the trip ___ be difficult.

5. They ___ move house last year, but the sale failed.

6. The train ___ leave at noon, according to the old timetable.

7. I was ___ to call her when she walked in.

8. He promised he ___ help us move.

9. Every summer we ___ swim in the sea until dark.

10. She said she ___ going to study medicine.

11. I thought it ___ rain, so I took a coat.

12. The meeting ___ to start at nine.

13. I was going ___ phone you, but I lost your number.

14. The children ___ about to go to bed when the fireworks started.

15. She was on the point of ___ when the phone rang.

16. I asked when the parcel ___ arrive.

17. He was ___ have spoken at the event, but he withdrew.

18. They told us the bus ___ leave at six.

19. I ___ buy milk on the way home, but the shop was closed.

20. Nobody knew what ___ happen next.

Answer key

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1. **was going to** — A past plan uses was going to + base verb.
2. **would** — In reported speech, will shifts back to would.
3. **were about to** — Were about to + base verb describes the interrupted moment.
4. **would** — Would is the future seen from the past for a prediction.
5. **were going to** — Were going to reports the past plan that changed.
6. **was to** — Was to + base verb is the formal past arrangement.
7. **about** — Was about to describes the moment just before the action.
8. **would** — A promise reported later uses would, the past form of will.
9. **would** — Would can describe repeated past habits.
10. **was** — The reported plan shifts from is going to to was going to.
11. **would** — Would expresses the prediction made at the past moment.
12. **was** — Was to + base verb describes the formal past arrangement for a singular subject.
13. **to** — Was going to takes the to-infinitive to form the past plan.
14. **were** — The plural subject children takes were about to.
15. **leaving** — On the point of takes the -ing form.
16. **would** — The reported question about the future shifts will to would.
17. **to** — Was to have done describes an arrangement that did not happen.
18. **would** — Reported information about the future uses would.
19. **was going to** — The past intention that failed needs was going to.
20. **would** — The future seen from the past uses would.