

When we have made some form of commitment to an arrangement, e.g. by buying tickets or organising something with other people, we tend to use the present continuous:

*I'm staying in tonight. I promised my flatmates I'd cook lasagne for them.*

The emphasis here is on the 'arrangement', rather than the speaker's own intention.

These two forms are often interchangeable with little difference in meaning, but the present continuous tends to 'distance' the action from the speaker and his/her choice.

We also use the present continuous for impersonal plans:

*Computer City has announced that it is opening four new shops next month.*

**FORMALITY CHECK** With impersonal uses like this, the present continuous is seen as a little more formal than *be going to*, and is more likely to be used:

[*Computer City has announced that it is going to open four new shops next month.*]



We cannot use this form with events which are beyond human control, e.g. the weather, because these events are predictions, not intentions or arrangements:

*X It's snowing tomorrow. ✓ It's going to snow tomorrow. ✓ It will snow tomorrow.*

#### 4 Future continuous *will/won't be + -ing* form

We can use the future continuous to talk about events that are a result of or part of an arrangement made in the past:

*Trains won't be running to Upminster this weekend due to essential track repairs.*

With this structure the future event is seen as arranged, so we use this as a tactful way of refusing an invitation or asking about someone's plans:

*I'm sorry, I can't come to your wedding as I'll be working on that day.*

*Will you be staying long?*

Compare:

*Are you staying long?* (more direct, less polite than *Will you be staying long?*)

There is, in fact, little difference between this and the use of the present/future continuous for arrangements. The future continuous distances the arrangement a little, making it more fixed and less open to change.

#### 5 *be to + infinitive*

We use *be to + infinitive* in formal English to talk about official arrangements in the future:

*The President is to hold an official reception for the visitors.*

This construction is common in writing, especially in news articles:

*Crash investigators are to release their findings to the press later today.*

The verb *be* is often omitted in headlines, both for 'formal' and 'informal' topics:

**PRESIDENT TO HOLD  
OFFICIAL RECEPTION**

**EastEnders stars to marry**

We often use *be to* in *if* clauses (► Unit 37) when the event in the *if* clause is dependent on the event in the main clause:

*If tennis in this country is to improve, more money and commitment will be necessary.*

(= More money and commitment must be given first for tennis to improve.)

**FORMALITY CHECK** We can also use *be (not) to + infinitive* for formal commands and instructions:

*You are not to disturb the head teacher while the inspectors are here next week.*

It is quite common to use the passive for instructions with *be to* (without referring to the future):

*These pills are not to be taken with any other form of medicine.*