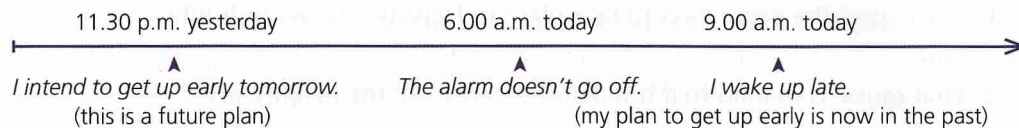


# 29 Future in the past

## 1 was/were going to + infinitive

Sometimes we need to describe the future from a viewpoint in the past. We often use *was/were going to* to do this:

*I was going to get up early this morning but the alarm didn't go off!*



When we use *was/were going to*, the plan is not usually fulfilled (i.e. it did not happen):  
*The fitness club was going to increase its annual subscription but so many members protested that it backed down.* (It didn't increase the subscription.)

We also use this form to make excuses for things we have not done:

*I was going to buy you a birthday present but I couldn't find anything you'd like.*

We can use the negative to talk about things we have done but did not intend to do:

*We weren't going to disturb you but we thought you should hear the news from us.*

However, it is possible to describe a past intention that is fulfilled. This is made clear in the context:

*'Thanks for posting my letters.'*

*'That's OK. I was going to post mine anyway.'* (I did post them.)

## 2 Other ways of expressing the future in the past

*Was/were going to* is a very common way of expressing the future in the past. But it is possible to transfer any form with future meaning to the past:

PRESENT/FUTURE FORM	PAST FORM	EXAMPLES
present continuous	past continuous	<i>They were coming for dinner, but in the end they didn't arrive until after midnight.</i>
<i>will/shall</i>	<i>would</i>	<i>The heating wasn't working so we hoped the engineer wouldn't take long.</i>
<i>will be + -ing form</i>	<i>would be + -ing form</i>	<i>Little did we know that we would still be waiting in the lounge in three hours' time!</i>
<i>will have</i>	<i>would have</i>	<i>The Cabinet thought the oil crisis would have ended before the election.</i>
<i>is/are about to/due to</i>	<i>was/were about to/due to</i>	<i>As she raised her arm, he realised she was about to hail a taxi.</i>
<i>is/are to</i>	<i>was/were to</i>	<i>He was to arrive at the airport at nine. We were to have been met by the tour guide.</i>

When we transfer these forms to the past, they keep the same meaning, e.g. we use the present continuous to talk about arrangements, so the past continuous also refers to arrangements:

*We were meeting them at the concert hall, but we didn't know which entrance they were waiting at.*



With *was/were (due) to + present infinitive*, we don't know if the event happened or not:

*The exam results were (due) to arrive at the school today. We can phone to find out whether they have arrived.*

However, *was/were (due) to + perfect infinitive* (e.g. *to have done*) tells us that the event did not occur:

*The exam results were (due) to have arrived at the school today but apparently they haven't been released yet.*