

Ask about English

Shall / will



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BBC Learning English – Ask about English

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A question from Zuzana in the Czech Republic:

Hello. I am Zuzana; I am calling from the Czech Republic. And I would like to know if there is any serious stylistic difference between 'I shall' and 'I will' in the future simple tense, and if 'I will' is, for example, unacceptable in a particular society, and if 'I will' can be considered as a mistake in an exam.

George Pickering answers:

Well Zuzana, thank you very much for your very interesting question. The first thing I want to say is I wouldn't worry about trying to use 'shall' rather than 'will'. I can think of no social situations where using 'will' instead of 'shall' would cause social offence.

In fact, in modern English, 'shall' is rarely used in American English and only in specific situations in British English. 'Will' is the dominant form today.

So when giving information about the future and making predictions, we can use either 'shall' or 'will' with the 'I' and 'we' forms.

So we can say either, 'I shall be ready at 8 o'clock' or 'I will be ready at 8 o'clock'. In both cases the contracted form is 'I'll'. We would normally use 'will' with 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they'.

For example, 'Tomorrow it will be cold and foggy with light showers in the east.'

Do you understand?

Zuzana responds:

Yeah, I understand it. Thank you.

George Pickering responds:

That's great.

George Pickering is an educational coach, consultant and trainer. He is an associate tutor at the University of Sheffield, and a British Council inspector of language schools in the UK.

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