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Cambridge English Exam?



## Expressing willingness and unwillingness

# WILL / WOULD

**Will and Won't** are used most often in English to talk about the future.

However, they also have other functions, one of which is to express willingness and unwillingness. Likewise, **Would and Wouldn't** are not only used for conditional sentences, but can also be used to express willingness when speaking about the past.

### In the present : will, won't

**We can use will to say that someone is willing to do something:**

- Mike is a nice person; he will always help you if you need him.

**We can use will not / won't to express an unwillingness to do something:**

- There is no point in talking to him – he won't listen.
- The baby won't eat anything.

### In the past : would, wouldn't

**When speaking about the past, we can use would to express that someone was generally willing to do things:**

- Mike was a really nice person; he would always help anyone in any situation.
- He wouldn't come—he said he was too busy.

**We don't use would to speak about single occasions in the past:**

✓ She agreed to help me. / ✗ ~~He would help me.~~

**However, we can use would not / wouldn't to express an unwillingness to do something (both generally and on single occasions):**

- My dad always helped with the cooking, but he wouldn't wash the dishes.  
*(generally)*
- I was late for work today because my car wouldn't start. *(single occasion)*

**Won't and Wouldn't are also used for inanimate objects:**

- If the door won't open, try jiggling the key in the lock.
- My car wouldn't start, so I had to take the bus.