

Probability

by Adrian Doff

Level: Intermediate and above

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: – To say whether things will probably happen or not.
– To talk about things you expect or don't expect to happen.
– To say whether things are likely or unlikely.

There are three ways of using this worksheet:

- Give the worksheet to students to work through independently, and then in the next lesson go through the exercises and deal with any points that arise.
- Use the worksheet for an active classroom lesson. The notes below give ideas for doing this.
- Do not give the worksheet out in class but use it as the basis for your own lesson, getting ideas and phrases from the students and presenting language on the board (use the notes below to help you). Then give out the worksheet at the end and ask students to do the exercises for homework.

Warm-up

Warm-up: Establishing the concept

Ask students to think about events in the news at the moment. Write the word *probably* on the board, and ask students to write (or just think of) a sentence about something they think will or won't happen. They should include the word *probably* in their sentence.

Ask students to read out their sentences. This is a way of leading into the concept of 'probability', but will also show you whether students use the word *probably* correctly.

Give out the worksheet.

Worksheet

Language focus

1. Read through the examples and establish what they are about. Possible answers:

1. A Japanese visitor, coming to visit a company for a few days.
2. A company that has been accused of, e.g. accepting bribes – the managing director has to make a public statement.
3. A reception being organized, with guests invited for food.

2. *probably, probably*. Read the examples, and point out:

- *It is probable that the US will ...* and *The US will probably ...* mean the same
- the position of *probably* in positive and negative sentences.

To practise, give a few positive and negative sentences and ask students to add *probably*, e.g.:

- The film will start at 9.00 – The film won't start at 9.00
- They're at home – They aren't at home

If you like, you could ask them to write the sentences down, then read them out to the class.

Note: *probably* can also come at the beginning of a sentence:

Probably, the US will increase interest rates next month.

3. *I expect, expect to, should*. Read the examples, and focus on the two structures with *I expect*:

- *I expect* + clause – you are saying you think this will happen
- *I expect to* + infinitive – you are saying this is what you have planned

Point out the use of *should* with the same meaning, e.g. *We should arrive at 10.30*. In this case, this doesn't mean 'We ought to arrive', but 'We probably will arrive'.

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To practise, give a few situations and ask students to write short emails using the expressions in this section, e.g.:

- You are visiting a company in Paris. Send an email to tell them when you will arrive.
- You are writing a report. Send an email to the boss to say when it will be finished.
- You are attending a conference. Send an email to a colleague saying when you will be there.

4. **likely, unlikely:** Read the examples and point out that *likely* is an adjective. To show this, write on the board:

It is probable that the US will increase interest rates.

Then show how *likely* is used in the same position:

It is likely that the US will increase interest rates.

Then show the alternative structure *is likely to + infinitive*:

The US is likely to increase interest rates.

To practise, give a few topics (e.g. the weather, a person or a company in the news, the political situation, the economy). Ask students to choose one and write a prediction, using the word *likely*. Then they read out their sentences.

Practice

1. Talk or write:

Students write sentences. Then ask them to read out what they have written.

Alternative: Give students a few moments to think about one of the topics and possibly make a few notes. Then ask them in turn to tell you what they think will happen.

Larger classes: Do this as pairwork, then ask a few students what their partner told them.

2. Exercise:

Do the exercise together round the class; or let students do it alone or in pairs, then go through it together.

Possible answers:

- ... we should get the contract...
- The price of oil is likely to rise again next year.
It is likely that the price of oil will rise again next year.
- We expect to finish the plans by the end of the week.
I expect we will finish the plans by the end of the week.
- They're probably having problems with their computer systems.
- ... so I don't expect she'll be back in the office until tomorrow.
- ... so she doesn't expect to be back in the office until tomorrow.

Other language areas you could explore:

1. modals expressing possibility

- *He may/might/could arrive tonight.*




2. other ways of expressing possibility

- *There's a possibility that...*
- *maybe, perhaps*
- *There's a (good) chance that...*

3. ways of expressing certainty

- *will certainly/definitely...*
- *I'm (quite, absolutely) sure/certain that...*
- *There's no doubt that...*
- *They are sure/certain to...*

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<p>I don't expect Mr Kazaki will want to do much on the first evening but he would probably like to go on a tour of the city on Thursday.</p>		<p>We think it's likely that the managing director, Andrew Bond, also received money from the government, but he is unlikely to admit this in his statement tomorrow.</p>		<p>The guests probably won't arrive before 8.00 pm but my colleague, Katya Visnic, and I expect to be there at around 6.00 pm to help organize the catering.</p>	
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probable, probably

Positive sentences

probably comes after auxiliary verbs (*is, was, will, etc.*), but before main verbs:

- The flight **was probably** cancelled.
- They'**ll probably** phone us.
- They **probably stayed** overnight in London.

Negative sentences

probably comes before *isn't, wasn't, won't, didn't, etc.*:

- They **probably won't** arrive today.
- There **probably wasn't** time to phone from the airport.
- They **probably don't** know our number.

I expect

To talk about the future, we can use *I expect ...* or *I don't expect ...*

- I expect** they'll be late. (= They'll probably be late.)
- I don't expect** they'll arrive this evening. (= They probably won't arrive this evening.)

expect to, should

If something has been planned, we can use (*don't*) *expect to*:

- I **expect to** finish my report by Wednesday. (= I'll probably finish it.)
- We **don't expect to** encounter any serious difficulties in selling the product.

We can also use *should* instead of *expect to*:

- I **should** finish my report by Wednesday. (= if all goes well)
- Our new range of perfumes **should** be in all the major stores by October. (= we expect this to happen)

likely, unlikely

likely and *unlikely* are adjectives (not adverbs). They mean the same as *probable* and *improbable*:

It is	likely unlikely	that ...	<p>It's quite likely that the new Ford Flamingo will be successful. It's unlikely that the board of directors knew what was going on.</p>
is/are	likely unlikely	to ...	<p>The new Ford Flamingo is quite likely to be successful. The board of directors are unlikely to have known what was going on.</p>

Talk or write



Think of:

- a) something you think will probably happen
 - b) something you or your company is planning to do.
- Write a few sentences, using expressions from this worksheet.

Exercise

Change each sentence so that it includes an expression from this worksheet, using the word in brackets.

How many different answers can you think of?

- a) If we work hard, we'll get the contract to supply pipes for British Gas. (**should**)
- b) The price of oil will rise again this year. (**likely**)
- c) We'll finish the plans by the end of the week. (**expect**)
- d) They're having problems with their computer systems. (**probably**)
- e) She's in a meeting this afternoon, so she won't be back in the office until tomorrow. (**expect**)