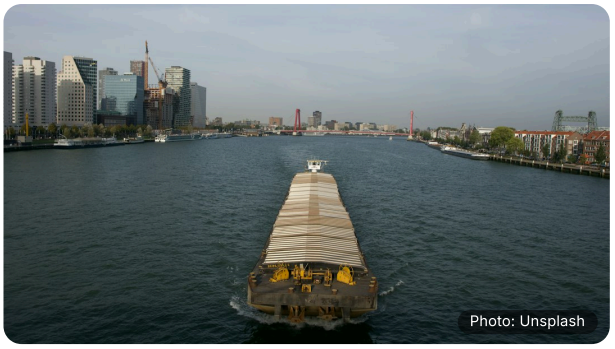
Panama Canal to reduce daily transits

LEVEL B2


Photo: Unsplash

I. WARM-UP

1. How does international trade affect daily life in your town?
2. What problems can a long drought create for transport?
3. When have you had to change plans because of weather?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

maritime
relating to the sea, ships, or shipping

drought
a long period with very little or no rain

phenomenon
a fact or event in nature that can be observed

transit
the act of passing through a place

auction
a sale where people bid higher prices to win something

watershed
land area where water drains into a river or lake

bottleneck
a point that slows movement because many must pass through it

impose
to officially order and apply a rule or limit

III. READING

The Panama Canal Authority may cut traffic again as an El Niño-driven drought worsens. The canal handles 5% of global maritime trade and about 40% of US container traffic, so fewer transits will raise costs and slow schedules.

From October, an average of 29.5 vessels may transit daily, down from 36 in August and 32 in September, according to a draft plan. In August, ships waited up to 10 days to enter; one container ship reportedly paid about $4m in a daily auction to skip the queue.

The 82km waterway links the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean and relies on fresh water from Lake Gatun's watershed. Its locks lift ships 26 metres. When lake levels drop, the authority can impose limits to preserve water and keep large vessels safe.

In 2023, daily transits were cut from 38 to 22, creating a bottleneck and pushing companies to seek alternative routes. Restrictions could worsen because the El Niño climate phenomenon is forecast to peak later this year, after months of low rainfall in the region.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "Panama canal traffic to be cut again as...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the canal reducing traffic again?
2. What share of trade passes through the canal?
3. How many daily transits does the draft plan assume from October?
4. What delays and extra costs occurred in August?
5. What does the authority do when lake levels drop?

V. DISCUSSION

1. How might these cuts affect prices where you live?
2. Should auctions be used to manage the queue? Why or why not?
3. What climate risks should ports plan for this decade?
4. What alternative routes could shippers use, and at what cost?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Will vs going to (prediction)

Use will + base verb for a simple prediction or an opinion (I think, I'm sure, perhaps). Use am/is/are going to + base verb when something you can see now shows what is coming.

"Ships are queuing now, so deliveries **are going to be** *late."*

"Fewer transits **will raise** *costs and slow schedules."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

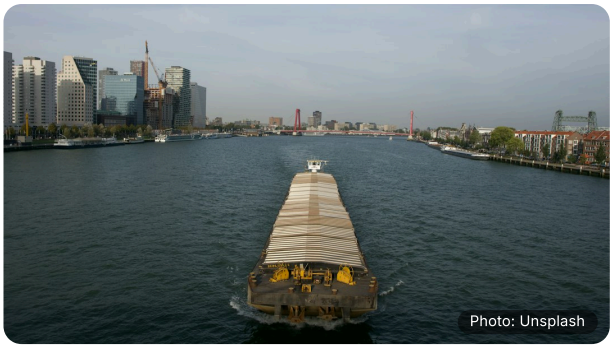
Complete each sentence with will or be going to. Use going to when there is evidence now.

1. Lake levels are low, so the authority (impose) ___ limits. _____
2. I think shipping costs (rise) ___ if the drought continues. _____
3. Look at that queue! Those ships (wait) ___ for days. _____
4. I'm sure shippers (look) ___ for other routes next year. _____
5. Perhaps the rains (return) ___ next year. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Unsplash

I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 8–10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or concept-check maritime, drought, phenomenon, transit, auction, watershed, bottleneck, and impose. Use a map to show the 82km route and Lake Gatun.
- Run a two-part reading: first scan for numbers and dates; then read for causes and effects. Pair students to compare notes before tackling comprehension and the discussion.
- For mixed levels, ask confident students to estimate price impacts using the figures, while others summarise the situation in five sentences using the key terms.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Start with a quick poll on whether prices will rise, then ask for two concrete examples (fuel, food).
2. Split the room: one side for auctions, one against. After arguments, swap sides and rebut.
3. Elicit a list (storms, heat, drought). Put them on the board and rank by likelihood and impact.
4. Give three options on the board (around Cape Horn, Suez, rail/road). Ask pairs to note pros and cons.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 70-word advisory note from the canal authority explaining October's limits.

Debate: Groups prepare 2-minute cases for or against queue-jump auctions during drought restrictions.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

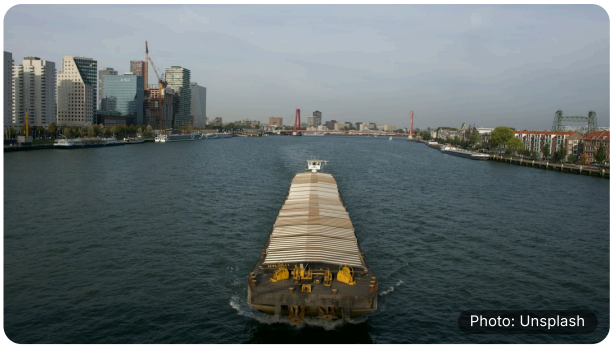
Grammar exercise: Will vs going to (prediction)

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

TEACHERS ONLY

These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Unsplash

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the canal reducing traffic again?
   Because an El Niño-driven drought is worsening.
2. What share of trade passes through the canal?
   5% of global maritime trade and about 40% of US container traffic.
3. How many daily transits does the draft plan assume from October?
   An average of 29.5 vessels per day.
4. What delays and extra costs occurred in August?
   Waits of up to 10 days; one ship paid about $4m to skip the queue.
5. What does the authority do when lake levels drop?
   It can impose limits to save water and protect ships.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence with will or be going to. Use going to when there is evidence now.

1. Lake levels are low, so the authority ___ limits. **is going to impose**
2. I think shipping costs ___ if the drought continues. **will rise**
3. Look at that queue! Those ships ___ for days. **are going to wait**
4. I'm sure shippers ___ for other routes next year. **will look**
5. Perhaps the rains ___ next year. **will return**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use will + base verb for a simple prediction or an opinion (I think, I'm sure, perhaps). Use am/is/are going to + base verb when something you can see now shows what is coming. (Example 1 constructed.)

"Ships are queuing now, so deliveries **are going to be** *late."*

"Fewer transits **will raise** *costs and slow schedules."*