

Will It Happen? Likely, Unlikely or Inevitable

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

99 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Martin, are we still going to the outdoor concert tomorrow?

Probably.

Have you seen the weather forecast?

Yes.

Maybe it will rain.

Rain is likely.

Cancelling the concert is unlikely.

Getting wet may be inevitable.

That became very precise very quickly.

Today we are learning why those three words are not interchangeable.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox and Practice Arena Five-Minute English.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Today we are comparing likely, unlikely and inevitable.

Let us begin with likely.

Likely means expected or probable, but not completely certain.

The forecast says there is an eighty per cent chance of rain.

So rain is likely.

We can say: Rain is likely tomorrow.

Or: It is likely to rain tomorrow.

And we can say: It is likely that the concert will continue.

Notice the useful patterns.

Something is likely.

Something is likely to happen.



Or it is likely that something will happen.

Can I say, "It will likely rain"?

That is common, especially in American English.

But "It is likely to rain" is a very useful pattern for every learner.

Likely does not mean certain.

Correct.

An event can be likely and still not happen.

Now let us look at unlikely.

Unlikely means not expected or not probable.

The organisers have covered the stage, so cancellation is unlikely.

Or: It is unlikely that the concert will be cancelled.

We can also say: The band is unlikely to arrive late.

Likely and unlikely use the same basic grammar patterns.

But they point in opposite directions.

Exactly.

Likely means we expect it.

Unlikely means we do not expect it.

Is unlikely the same as impossible?

No. An unlikely event can still happen.

Winning a large prize is unlikely, but it is not impossible.

And the weather can always surprise us.

Unfortunately, yes.

Our third word is inevitable.

Inevitable means certain to happen or impossible to avoid because of the circumstances.

If we stand outside in heavy rain without an umbrella, getting wet is inevitable.

Or: Some delays were inevitable during the building work.

Inevitable is much stronger than likely.

Likely means probably.

Inevitable means there is no realistic way to prevent it.

Can an inevitable event be positive?



Yes.

The word is often used for problems or consequences, but not exclusively.

For example: With her talent and preparation, further success seemed inevitable.

We should still be careful with it.

Yes.

If several outcomes remain possible, inevitable is probably too strong.

And we do not usually make it stronger by saying very inevitable.

Something is either unavoidable or it is not.

Let us compare all three words.

Likely means expected, but not certain.

Unlikely means not expected, but still possible.

Inevitable means certain or impossible to avoid.

Time for a quick challenge.

Choose likely, unlikely or inevitable before we answer.

Situation one.

Dark clouds cover the sky, and the forecast gives an eighty per cent chance of rain.

Rain is likely.

Situation two.

The concert has a covered stage and thousands of tickets have been sold.

Cancellation is unlikely.

Situation three.

You leave your umbrella at home and stand in heavy rain for twenty minutes.

Getting wet is inevitable.

Situation four.

A small team has a good idea, but many different outcomes are still possible.

Success may be likely, but it is not inevitable.

Now improve this sentence: Maybe the train will be late.

Do the available facts suggest that it probably will be late?

Then a delay is likely.

Do the facts suggest that it probably will not be late?



Then a delay is unlikely.

Is there no realistic way to avoid the delay?

Then the delay is inevitable.

On the episode page at yourenglishtoolbox.com, you can download the vocabulary worksheet and practise these contrasts with new situations.

That gives you a useful way to check whether you can choose the word without our help.

The direct link is in the episode description.

So, are we going to the concert?

Yes.

Rain is likely, but staying at home is unlikely.

And forgetting the umbrellas?

If you are responsible for them, that may be inevitable.

That seems unfair.

It seems likely.

See you next time, friends.

Goodbye.

