Word for Word

Shall we talk about using *will* and *shall* in scientific writing?

Both *will* and *shall* are helping verbs used to express futurity in American English, but only *will* is used in scientific writing.

In formal writing, *shall* was once used with first-person pronouns to express the writer’s belief that a future action or state is likely or inevitable, whereas *will* was used with these pronouns to express the writer’s willingness or consent to do something. (Only *will* was used with all second- and third-person nouns, regardless of the intent of expression.) ¹⁻³

**Examples:**

We shall dine in Paris tomorrow evening.

We will dine in Paris tomorrow evening.

*Will* and *shall* are considered to be practically interchangeable nowadays, and *will* has become almost universally favored. (Decades ago, grammarians were already writing that “*will* has edged out *shall* as the people’s choice.”⁴) *Shall* still appears in the occasional legal document (though *must* is often preferred⁵), but its use otherwise is
generally limited to posing polite first-person questions that make suggestions or request information.

**Examples:**

Shall we dine in Paris tomorrow evening?

What shall we eat when we get there?

With *will* now doing much of the work *shall* once did, it is both appropriate and preferred to use *will* exclusively in formal writing, including scientific writing.

**Example:**

We will confirm these findings in future studies.

### References

2. [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shall](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shall)
3. [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/will](https://www.merriam-worderb.com/dictionary/will)
5. [https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/conversational/shall-and-must/](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/conversational/shall-and-must/)

— Joe Munch

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