

# Conditionals

Conditional sentences are statements discussing known factors or hypothetical situations and their consequences. Complete conditional sentences contain a conditional clause (often referred to as the if-clause) and the consequence.

- If you help me, I will help you.
- If I win the lottery, I will buy a new car.

*Note: The if clause tells you the condition (If you study hard) and the main clause tells you the result (you will pass your exams). It is possible to start conditional sentences with the main clause, as the order of the clauses does not change the meaning.:*

- *If you study hard, you will pass your exams.*
- *You will pass your exams if you study hard.*

There are four different types of conditional sentences in English. Each expresses a different degree of probability that a situation will occur or would have occurred under certain circumstances.

- Zero Conditional Sentences
- First Conditional Sentences
- Second Conditional Sentences
- Third Conditional Sentences

Let's look at each of these different types of conditional sentences in more detail.

## Zero Conditional Sentences

Zero conditional sentences express general truths—situations in which one thing *always* causes another. When you use a zero conditional, you're talking about a general truth rather than a specific instance of something.

The structure is: *If/When* + present simple >> present simple

Consider the following examples:

- If we don't brush our teeth regularly, we get cavities.
- When the sun goes down, it gets dark.

## First Conditional Sentences

First conditional sentences are used to express situations in which the outcome is likely (but not guaranteed) to happen in the future.

The structure is usually: *if/when* + present simple >> *will* + infinitive

Look at the examples below:

- If you rest, you will feel better.
- If you set your mind to a goal, you'll eventually achieve it.

## Second Conditional Sentences

The second conditional is used to imagine or express present or future situations that are impossible or unrealistic.

The structure is usually: *if* + past simple >> + *would* + infinitive

Consider the examples below:

- If I inherited a billion dollars, I would travel to the moon.
- If I were you, I wouldn't mention it.

*Note: When if is followed by the verb be, it is grammatically correct to say if I were, if he were, if she were and if it were.*

- *If I were a bird, I would fly away.*
- *If she were the prime minister, she would invest more money in schools.*

## Third Conditional Sentences

Third conditional sentences are used to imagine a different past or to explain that present circumstances would be different if something different had happened in the past.

The structure is usually: *If* + past perfect >> *would have/could have* + past participle

Look at the following examples:

- If you had told me you needed a ride, I would have left earlier.
- I wouldn't have left my job if I had known how difficult it is to find another one.

## Exceptions and Special Cases When Using Conditional Sentences

### Use of the Simple Future in the If-Clause

Generally speaking, the simple future should be used only in the main clause. One exception is when the action in the if-clause will take place *after* the action in the main clause. For example, consider the following sentence:

- If aspirin will ease my headache, I will take a couple tonight.

The action in the if-clause is the aspirin easing the headache, which will take place only after the speaker takes them later that night.

### “Were to” in the If-Clause

The verb phrase ‘*were to*’ is sometimes used in conditional sentences when the likely or unlikely result is particularly awful or unthinkable. In this case, *were to* is used to place emphasis on this potential outcome. Consider these sentences:

- If I were to be sick, I would miss another day of work.
- If she were to be late again, she would have to have a conference with the manager.
- If the rent were to have been a penny more, they would not have been able to pay it.

Note that the emphatic “were to” can be used to describe hypothetical scenarios in the present, future, and past.

### Punctuating Conditional Sentences

Despite the complex nature of conditional sentences, punctuating them properly is really simple!

Use a comma after the if-clause when the if-clause precedes the main clause.

- If I’d had time, I would have cleaned the house.

If the main clause precedes the if-clause, no punctuation is necessary.

- I would have cleaned the house if I’d had time.

### Conditional Sentences with Modal Verbs

In first conditional sentences, we use a simple present tense in the if-clause and will + infinitive in the main clause. This is the standard form. Alternate forms with other auxiliaries are also possible.

We are going to look at conditional sentences using the modals “can”, “must”, “may” and “might”, instead of “will.” The conditional used with these modal verbs is usually the first conditional. Note that first conditional forms with modals express ideas such as permission, advice, future possibilities etc. Read the sentences given below.

- If you finish your homework, you can watch TV.
- If you have a few hours to spare, you may visit the museum.

You can use could and might instead of would in unreal conditional clauses.

- If I had money, I could spend it. → (I would be able to spend it.)
- If I had money, I might spend it. → (I would possibly spend it.)

### **If and Adjectives**

In a formal style, subject + be is sometimes left out after if.

- If in doubt, ask for help. (= If you are in doubt, ask for help.)
- If interested, please let me know. (= If you are interested, please let me know.)

### **Provided (that), As long as, Suppose, Imagine**

Many words and expressions can be used with a similar meaning to if. Common examples are: *imagine (that)*, *suppose (that)*, *supposing (that)*, *providing (that)*, *provided (that)*, *as long as*, *on condition that* etc.

The words imagine, suppose and supposing are used to talk about what might happen.

- Supposing you lost your job, what would you do?
- Imagine you won a jackpot!

Provided that, as long as and on condition that are used to make conditions.

- You may take two days off on condition that you work on the weekend.
- You can stay with us as long as you share the expenses.

### **Mixed conditionals**

We can use mixed conditionals when we imagine a past change with a result in the present or a present change with a result in the past.

**1. Past/Present**

Here's a sentence imagining how a change in a past situation would have a result in the present.

- If I hadn't got the job in Tokyo, I wouldn't be with my current partner.

So, the structure is: *If* + past perfect >> *would* + infinitive.

**2. Present/Past**

Here's a sentence imagining how a different situation in the present would mean that the past was different as well.

- It's really important. If it wasn't, I wouldn't have called you on your holiday.

And the structure is: *If* + past simple >> *would have* + past participle.