

## If clauses & conditional sentences

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There are four basic types of conditional sentences in the English language. Each type has two parts - the main clause and the if clause.

Zero conditional: *I take my umbrella if it rains.* First conditional: *I'll call you if I work late.*

Second conditional: *If the bus didn't arrive on time, I would drive you to the airport.* Third conditional: *She wouldn't have come if I hadn't invited her.*

### **Zero conditional**

The zero conditional describes situations that are always true. *If* has the same meaning as *when* or *whenever*.

*If I go to school, I get up at seven.* (Whenever I go to school I get up at the same time.)  
*If you park your car on double yellow lines, you pay a fine.* (Whenever you park illegally, you pay a fine.)

We use the present simple tense in both the main clause and the if clause.

### **First conditional**

The first conditional refers to the present or future. First conditional sentences are used to speculate about possible situations that can really happen.

*If he studies hard, he'll pass the exams.* *If we catch the 10.15 train, we will arrive on time.* *If you don't get the ticket, what will you do?*

We use the present tense in the if clause and will + bare infinitive in the main clause.

### **Second conditional**

The second conditional also refers to the present or future. In second conditional sentences we speculate about situations that will probably never happen.

*If I had more time, I would help you.* (But I am not free at the moment. I can't help you).  
*If I won a million dollars, I would start a business of my own.* (But I know that it is not realistic.)

We use the past tense in the if clause and would + bare infinitive in the main clause.

Note: the verb *to be* can have a specific form in the if clause.

*If I were rich, I wouldn't work.* *If he were younger, he would marry her.*  
(But *was* is also possible: *If I was rich, I wouldn't work.* *If he was younger, he would marry her.*)  
*But: If I were you, I wouldn't do it.* (In this expression, *were* is much more usual than *was*.)

### **The first conditional versus the second conditional**

The main difference between the first and second conditional is about probability: the first conditional is realistic, the second conditional is unrealistic.

Sometimes we can use either the first or second conditional with the following difference in meaning. *If I see him, I will tell him.* (I suppose I will see him, because we go to the same school.)

*If I saw him, I would tell him.* (I don't think I will see him, because he is ill.) *If I need your help, I'll call you.* (It is probable that I will need your help.)

### Other forms

Apart from the basic forms (if + the present simple + will and if + the past simple + would), we can use other verb forms in the first and second conditional sentences in the English language.

#### Type 1

*If you have finished your dinner, you can ask for the bill.*

*If you are feeling tired, take a rest.*

*If he is a good skier, he might make it.*

*If you want to be slim, you should eat less.*

*If you meet her, could you let me know?*

#### Type 2

*If I knew his address, I might go and see him.*

*If we were on holiday, we would be lying on a beach now.*

*Why are we watching this film? If we were watching the news, it would be more interesting.*

### Third conditional

The third conditional sentences always refer to the past. We speculate about situations that happened or did not happen in the past.

*If I had won a million, I would have started a business of my own.* (But I didn't win anything.) *If he had met her, he would have told her.* (Unfortunately, he didn't meet her.)

*If we hadn't practised, we wouldn't have won the match.* (But we practised and won.)

We use the past perfect in the if clause and perfect infinitive (have + past participle) in the main clause.

### Other forms

Apart from the basic form of the third conditional sentences, we can use other verb forms in English.

*We didn't save any money. If we had saved some money, we might have bought the house.*

*She wasn't there and I wasn't sitting next to her. But if she had been there, I would have been sitting next to her.*

*I was looking at the trees when I fell off the bike. If I hadn't been looking at the trees, I wouldn't have fallen off the bike.*

### Mixed conditionals

In the mixed conditional sentences we can combine the second and third conditional.

*If he had left immediately, he would be here now.* (He didn't leave immediately and isn't here.)

*If I had studied hard when I was young, I wouldn't be a porter now.* (I didn't study and I am a porter.)

*If we hadn't told him the way while he was preparing for his journey, he would get lost now.* (We told him and he isn't lost.)

### Inverted conditionals

We can also make conditional sentences by changing the word order in the if clause.

*Had he booked the hotel room, he wouldn't have slept at the camp. (If he had booked ... ) Were I in your position, I would accept it. (If I were ... )*  
This form is less common, quite formal and is mostly used in writing.

### **Note**

*If* is the most frequent expression in the if clauses, but other expressions are also possible. *even if, provided (that), unless, on condition (that), in case*

*You will leave tonight even if you don't want to.*

*You can have your birthday party provided that you aren't noisy.*

*We'll sell you the ranch on condition you pay in cash.*

*You should take a dictionary with you in case you forgot some words.*

*Unless you do something, she won't come back. (If you don't do anything, .*

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