BASIC GRAMMAR

CONDITIONAL IF

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CONDITIONAL

Conditional tenses are used to speculate about what could happen, what might have happened, and what we wish would happen. In English, most sentences using the conditional contain the word *if*. Many conditional forms in English are used in sentences that include verbs in one of the past tenses. This usage is referred to as "the unreal past" because we use a past tense but we are not actually referring to something that happened in the past. There are five main ways of constructing conditional sentences in English. In all cases, these sentences are made up of an *if* clause and a main clause. In many negative conditional sentences, there is an equivalent sentence construction using "unless" instead of "if".

Conditional sentence type	Usage	If clause verb tense	Main clause verb tense
Zero	General truths	Simple present	Simple present
Type 1	A possible condition and its probable result	Simple present	Simple future
Type 2	A hypothetical condition and its probable result	Simple past	Present conditional or Present continuous conditional
Type 3	An unreal past condition and its probable	Past perfect	Perfect conditional

Conditional sentence type	Usage	If clause verb tense	Main clause verb tense
	result in the past		
Mixed type	An unreal past condition and its probable result in the present	Past perfect	Present contditional

THE ZERO CONDITIONAL

The zero conditional is used for when the time being referred to is **now or always** and the situation is **real and possible**. The zero conditional is often used to refer to general truths. The tense in both parts of the sentence is the simple present. In zero conditional sentences, the word "if" can usually be replaced by the word "when" without changing the meaning.

If clause	Main clause
If + simple present	**simple present**
If this thing happens	that thing happens.
If you heat ice	it melts.
If it rains	the grass gets wet.

Read more about [how to use the zero conditional](#).

TYPE 1 CONDITIONAL

The type 1 conditional is used to refer to the **present or future** where the **situation is real**. The type 1 conditional refers to a possible condition and its probable result. In these sentences the if clause is in the simple present, and the main clause is in the simple future.

If clause	Main clause
If + simple present	**simple future**
If this thing happens	that thing will happen.
If you don't hurry	you will miss the train.
If it rains today	you will get wet.

Read more about [how to use the type 1 conditional](#).

TYPE 2 CONDITIONAL

The type 2 conditional is used to refer to a time that is **now or any time**, and a situation that is **unreal**. These sentences are not based on fact. The type 2 conditional is used to refer to a hypothetical condition and its probable result. In type 2 conditional sentences, the if clause uses the simple past, and the main clause uses the present conditional.

If clause	Main clause
If + simple past	**present conditional or present continuous conditional**
If this thing happened	that thing would happen. (but I'm not sure this thing will happen) that thing would be happening.
If you went to bed earlier	you would not be so tired.
If it rained	you would get wet.
If I spoke Italian	I would be working in Italy.

Read more about [how to use the type 2 conditional](#) with the present conditional and [how to use the present continuous conditional](#) in type 2 conditional sentence.

TYPE 3 CONDITIONAL

The type 3 conditional is used to refer to a time that is **in the past**, and a situation that is **contrary to reality**. The facts they are based on are the opposite of what is expressed. The type 3 conditional is used to refer to an unreal past condition and its probable past result. In type 3 conditional sentences, the if clause uses the past perfect, and the main clause uses the perfect conditional.

If clause	Main clause
If + past perfect	**perfect conditional or perfect continuous conditional**
If this thing had happened	that thing would have happened. (but neither of those things real that thing would have been happening.
If you had studied harder	you would have passed the exam.
If it had rained	you would have gotten wet.
If I had accepted that promotion	I would have been working in Milan.

Read more about [how to use the type 3 conditional](#) with the perfect conditional tense, and [how to use the perfect continuous conditional](#) in type 3 conditional sentences.

MIXED TYPE CONDITIONAL

The mixed type conditional is used to refer to a time that is **in the past**, and a situation that is **ongoing into the present**. The facts they are based on are the opposite of what is expressed. The mixed type conditional is used to refer to an unreal past condition and its probable result in the present. In mixed type conditional sentences, the if clause uses the past perfect, and the main clause uses the present conditional.

If clause	Main clause
If + past perfect or simple past	**present conditional or perfect conditional**
If this thing had happened	that thing would happen. (but this thing didn't happen so that thir
If I had worked harder at school	I would have a better job now.
If we had looked at the map	we wouldn't be lost.
If you weren't afraid of spiders	you would have picked it up and put it outside.

Conditional Sentences / If-Clauses Type I, II und III

Conditional Sentences are also known as Conditional Clauses or If Clauses. They are used to express that the action in the main clause (without *if*) can only take place if a certain condition (in the clause with *if*) is fulfilled. There are three types of Conditional Sentences.

Conditional Sentence Type 1

→ **It is possible and also *very likely* that the condition will be fulfilled.**

Form: *if* + Simple Present, will-Future

 Example: If I find her address, I'll send her an invitation.

more on Conditional Sentences Type I ►

Conditional Sentence Type 2

→ **It is possible but *very unlikely*, that the condition will be fulfilled.**

Form: *if* + Simple Past, Conditional I (= would + Infinitive)

 Example: If I found her address, I would send her an invitation.

more on Conditional Sentences Type II ►

Conditional Sentence Type 3

→ **It is *impossible* that the condition will be fulfilled because it refers to the past.**

Form: *if* + Past Perfect, Conditional II (= would + have + Past Participle)

 Example: If I had found her address, I would have sent her an invitation.

more on Conditional Sentences Type III ►

Exceptions

Sometimes Conditional Sentences Type I, II and III can also be used with other tenses.

__more on Conditional Sentences used with other tenses__ ►

Exercises on Conditional Sentences

Conditional Sentence Type 1

- Exercise on If Clauses Type I ●○○○○
- Exercise 2 on If Clauses Type I ●○○○○

Conditional Sentence Type 2

- Exercise on If Clauses Type II ●●○○○
- Exercise 2 on If Clauses Type II ●●○○○

Conditional Sentence Type 3

- Exercise on If Clauses Type III ●●●○○
- Exercise 2 on If Clauses Type III ●●●○○

Mixed Exercises on Conditional Sentences

- Type I or II • Exercise 2 • Exercise 3 ●●○○○
- Type I, II or III • Exercise 2 • Exercise 3 ●●●○○
- Fairytale "The Cat and the Mouse" ●●●○○
- Exercise on "New Orleans" text ●●●○○

Exceptions

- Exercise on If Clauses Type I with Auxiliaries ●●●○○
- Exercise on If Clauses Type I • Exercise 2 ●●●●○
- Exercise on If Clauses Type II ●●●●○
- Exercise on If Clauses Type III ●●●●○

Tests on Conditional Sentences

- Conditional Sentences Type 1 ●○○○○
- Conditional Sentences Type 1 and 2 ●●○○○
- Conditional Sentences Type 1, 2 and 3 ●●●○○
- Conditional Sentences Type 1, 2, 3 and Exceptions ●●●●○

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Conditionals: *if*

from [English Grammar Today](#)

Imagined conditions

There are different types of conditions. Some are possible or likely, others are unlikely, and others are impossible:

If the weather improves, we'll go for a walk. (It is possible or likely that the weather will improve.)

If the weather improved, we could go for a walk. (It is not likely that the weather will improve.)

If the weather had improved, we could have gone for a walk. (The weather did not improve – fine weather is therefore an impossible condition.)

These types of conditions are used in three types of sentences, called first, second and third conditional sentences.

Imagined conditions: the first conditional

We use the first conditional to talk about the result of an imagined future situation, when we believe the imagined situation is quite likely:

[imagined future situation]

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences are sometimes confusing for learners of English as a second language.

Watch out:

1. Which type of conditional sentences is it?
2. Where is the if-clause (e.g. at the beginning or at the end of the conditional sentence)?

There are three types of conditional sentences.

type	condition
I	condition possible to fulfill
II	condition in theory possible to fulfill
III	condition not possible to fulfill (too late)

1. Form

type	if-clause	main clause
I	Simple Present	will-future or (Modal + infinitive)
II	Simple Past	would + infinitive *
III	Past Perfect	would + have + past participle *

2. Examples (if-clause at the beginning)

type	if clause	main clause
I	If I **study**,	I **will pass** the exam.
II	If I **studied**,	I **would pass** the exam.
III	If I **had studied**,	I **would have passed** the exam.

3. Examples (if-clause at the end)

type	main clause	if-clause
I	I **will pass** the exam	if I **study**.
II	I **would pass** the exam	if I **studied**.
III	I **would have passed** the exam	if I **had studied**.

4. Examples (affirmative and negative sentences)

type	Examples		
		long forms	**short/contracted forms**
I	+	If I study, I will pass the exam.	If I study, I'll pass the exam.
	-	If I study, I will not fail the exam. If I do not study, I will fail the exam.	If I study, I won't fail the exam. If I don't study, I'll fail the exam.
II	+	If I studied, I would pass the exam.	If I studied, I'd pass the exam.
	-	If I studied, I would not fail the exam. If I did not study, I would fail the exam.	If I studied, I wouldn't fail the exam. If I didn't study, I'd fail the exam.
III	+	If I had studied, I would have passed the exam.	If I'd studied, I'd have passed the exam.
	-	If I had studied, I would not have failed the exam. If I had not studied, I would have failed the exam.	If I'd studied, I wouldn't have failed the exam. If I hadn't studied, I'd have failed the exam.

* We can substitute **could** or **might** for **would** (**should**, **may** or **must** are sometimes possible, too).

- I **would** pass the exam.

- I **could** pass the exam.

- I **might** pass the exam.

- I **may** pass the exam.

- I **should** pass the exam.

- I **must** pass the exam.

Thanks to Kai.

Advertisements

Explanation

- Conditional sentences, if-clauses type I, II, III – Summary
- Conditional sentences – type I
- Conditional sentences – type II
- Conditional sentences – type III
- *if I were you* or *if I was you*
- Mixed conditionals
- Real and unreal conditionals, Modals and position of if-clauses
- Replacing *if* – Omitting *if* – *if* vs. *when* – *in case* vs. *if*
- *will* and *would* in if-clauses

Exercises

- Conditional sentences – Complex Test
- Exercises – Conditional

Conditional Sentences—Rules You Need to Know

- There are four types of conditional sentences.

- It's important to use the correct structure for each of these different conditional sentences because they express varying meanings.

- Pay attention to verb tense when using different conditional modes.

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

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. Consider the following sentences:

If a certain condition is true, then a particular result happens.

I would travel around the world if I won the lottery.

When water reaches 100 degrees, it boils.

What Are the Different Types of Conditional Sentences? 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.

How to Use 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. Consider the following examples:

If you don't brush your teeth, you get cavities.

When people smoke cigarettes, their health suffers.

There are a couple of things to take note of in the above sentences in which the zero conditional is used. First, when using the zero conditional, the correct tense to use in both clauses is the [simple present tense](). A common mistake is to use the simple future tense.

When people smoke cigarettes, their health will suffer .

Secondly, notice that the words *if* and *when* can be used interchangeably in these zero conditional sentences. This is because the outcome will always be the same, so it doesn't matter "if" or "when" it happens.

How to Use 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. 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.

Note that we use the simple present tense in the if-clause and simple future tense in the main clause—that is, the clause that expresses the likely outcome. This is how we indicate that under a certain condition (as expressed in the if-clause), a specific result *will* likely happen in the future. Examine some of the common mistakes people make using the first conditional structure:

If you will rest , you will feel better.

If you rest , you will feel better.

Explanation: Use the [simple present tense](#) in the if-clause.

If you set your mind to a goal, you eventually achieve it.

If you set your mind to a goal, you'll eventually achieve it.

Explanation: Use the zero conditional (i.e., simple present + simple present) only when a certain result is guaranteed. If the result is likely, use the first conditional (i.e., simple present + simple future).

How to Use Second Conditional Sentences

Second conditional sentences are useful for expressing outcomes that are completely unrealistic or will *not* likely happen in the future. Consider the examples below:

If I inherited a billion dollars, I would travel to the moon.

If I owned a zoo, I might let people interact with the animals more.

Notice the correct way to structure second conditional sentences is to use the simple past tense in the if-clause and an auxiliary modal verb (e.g., could, should, would, might) in the main clause (the one that expresses the unrealistic or unlikely outcome). The following sentences illustrate a couple of the common mistakes people make when using the second conditional:

If I inherit a billion dollars, I would travel to the moon.

If I inherited a billion dollars, I would travel to the moon.

Explanation: When applying the second conditional, use the simple past tense in the if-clause.

If I owned a zoo, I will let people interact with the animals more.

If I owned a zoo, I might let people interact with the animals more.

Explanation: Use a modal auxiliary verb in the main clause when using the second conditional mood to express the unlikelihood that the result will actually happen.

How to Use Third Conditional Sentences

Third conditional sentences are used to explain that present circumstances would be different if something different had happened in the past. Look at the following examples:

If you had told me you needed a ride, I would have left earlier.

If I had cleaned the house, I could have gone to the movies.

These sentences express a condition that was likely enough, but did not actually happen in the past. The speaker in the first sentence was capable of leaving early, but did not. Along these same lines, the speaker in the second sentence was capable of cleaning the house, but did not. These are all conditions that were likely, but regrettably did not happen.

Note that when using the third conditional, we use the [past perfect](#) (i.e., had + past participle) in the if-clause. The modal auxiliary (would, could, shoud, etc.) + have + past participle in the main clause expresses the theoretical situation that *could* have happened.

Consider these common mistakes when applying the third conditional:

If you would have told me you needed a ride, I would have left earlier.

If you had told me you needed a ride, I would have left earlier.

Explanation: With third conditional sentences, do not use a modal auxiliary verb in the if-clause.

If I had cleaned the house, I could go to the movies.

If I had cleaned the house, I could have gone to the movies.

Explanation: The third conditional mood expresses a situation that could have only happened in the past if a certain condition had been met. That's why we use the modal auxiliary verb + have + the past participle.

Exceptions and Special Cases When Using Conditional Sentences

As with most topics in the English language, conditional sentences often present special cases in which unique rules must be applied.

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!

Here's the skinny:

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.

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