

The Conditional

The Zero Conditional

We can make a zero conditional sentence with two **present simple** verbs (one in the 'if clause' and one in the 'main clause'):

- If + present simple, present simple.

This conditional is used when the result will always happen. So, if water reaches 100 degrees, it always boils. It's a fact. I'm talking in general, not about one particular situation. The result of the 'if clause' is always the main clause.

The 'if' in this conditional can usually be replaced by 'when' without changing the meaning.

For example: If water **reaches** 100 degrees, it **boils**. (It is always true, there can't be a different result sometimes). If I **eat** peanuts, I **am** sick. (This is true only for me, maybe, not for everyone, but it's still true that I'm sick every time I eat peanuts)

Here are some more examples:

- If people **eat** too much, they **get** fat.
- If you **touch** a fire, you **get** burned.
- People **die** if they **don't eat**.
- You **get** water if you **mix** hydrogen and oxygen.
- Snakes **bite** if they **are** scared
- If babies **are** hungry, they **cry**

The First Conditional

The first conditional has the **present simple** after 'if', then the **future simple** in the other clause:

- if + present simple, ... will + infinitive

It's used to talk about things, which might happen in the future. Of course, we can't know what will happen in the future, but this describes possible things, which could easily come true.

- If it **rains**, I **won't go** to the park.
- If I **study** today, I **ll go** to the party tonight.
- If I **have** enough money, I **ll buy** some new shoes.
- She **ll be** late if the train **is** delayed.
- She **ll miss** the bus if she **doesn't leave** soon.
- If I **see** her, I **ll tell** her.

First vs. Zero Conditional:

The first conditional describes a *particular* situation, whereas the **zero conditional** describes what happens *in general*.

For example (zero conditional): if you sit in the sun, you get burned (here I'm talking about every time a person sits in the sun - the burning is a natural consequence of the sitting)

But (first conditional): if you sit in the sun, you'll get burned (here I'm talking about what will happen today, another day might be different)

First vs. Second Conditional:

The first conditional describes things that I think are likely to happen in the future, whereas the second conditional talks about things that I don't think will really happen. It's subjective; it depends on my point of view.

For example (first conditional): If she studies harder, she'll pass the exam (I think it's possible she will study harder and so she'll pass)

But (second conditional): If she studied harder, she would pass the exam (I think that she won't study harder, or it's very unlikely, and so she won't pass)

The Second Conditional

The second conditional uses the **past simple** after if, then 'would' and the infinitive:

- if + past simple, ...would + infinitive

(We can use 'were' instead of 'was' with 'I' and 'he/she/it'. This is mostly done in formal writing).

It has two uses.

First, we can use it to talk about things in the future that are probably not going to be true. Maybe I'm imagining some dream for example.

- If I **won** the lottery, I **would buy** a big house. (I probably won't win the lottery)
- If I **met** the Queen of England, I **would say** hello.
- She **would travel** all over the world if she **were** rich.
- She **would pass** the exam if she ever **studied**. (She never studies, so this won't happen)

Second, we can use it to talk about something in the present which is impossible, because it's not true. Is that clear? Have a look at the examples:

- If I **had** his number, I **would call** him. (I don't have his number now, so it's impossible for me to call him).
- If I **were** you, I **wouldn't go** out with that man.

How is this different from the first conditional?

This kind of conditional sentence is different from the first conditional because this is a lot more unlikely.

For example (second conditional): If I had enough money I would buy a house with twenty bedrooms and a swimming pool (I'm probably not going to have this much money, it's just a dream, not very real)

But (first conditional): If I have enough money, I'll buy some new shoes (It's much more likely that I'll have enough money to buy some shoes)

The Third Conditional

We make the third conditional by using the **past perfect** after 'if' and then 'would have' and the **past participle** in the second part of the sentence:

- if + past perfect, ...would + have + past participle

It talks about the past. It's used to describe a situation that didn't happen, and to imagine the result of this situation.

- If she **had studied**, she **would have passed** the exam (but, really we know she didn't study and so she didn't pass)
- If I **hadn't eaten** so much, I **wouldn't have felt** sick (but I did eat a lot, and so I did feel sick).
- If we **had taken** a taxi, we **wouldn't have missed** the plane
- She **wouldn't have been** tired if she **had gone** to bed earlier
- She **would have become** a teacher if she **had gone** to university
- He **would have been** on time for the interview if he **had left** the house at nine

MIXED CONDITIONAL

It is possible for the two parts of a conditional sentence to refer to different times, and the resulting sentence is a "mixed conditional" sentence. There are two types of mixed conditional sentence.

PRESENT RESULT OF A PAST CONDITION

FORM

In this type of mixed conditional sentence, the tense in the 'if' clause is the past perfect, and the tense in the main clause is the present conditional.

| If clause (condition) | Main clause (result) |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| If + past perfect | present conditional |
| If this thing had happened | that thing would happen. |

As in all conditional sentences, the order of the clauses is not fixed. You may have to rearrange the pronouns and adjust punctuation when you change the order of the clauses, but the meaning is identical.

EXAMPLES

- If I had worked harder at school, I would have a better job now.
- I would have a better job now if I had worked harder at school.
- If we had looked at the map we wouldn't be lost.
- We wouldn't be lost if we had looked at the map.
- If you had caught that plane you would be dead now.
- You would be dead now if you had caught that plane.

FUNCTION

This type of mixed conditional refers to an unreal past condition and its probable result in the present. These sentences express a situation which is contrary to reality both in the past and in the present. In these mixed conditional sentences, the time is the **past** in the "if" clause and in the **present** in the main clause.

EXAMPLES

- If I had studied I would have my driving license. (but I didn't study and now I don't have my license)
- I would be a millionaire now if I had taken that job. (but I didn't take the job and I'm not a millionaire)
- If you had spent all your money, you wouldn't buy this jacket. (but you didn't spend all your money and now you can buy this jacket)

In these mixed conditional sentences, you can also use modals in the main clause instead of *would* to express the degree of certainty, permission, or a recommendation about the outcome.

EXAMPLES

- If you had crashed the car, you might be in trouble.
- I could be a millionaire now if I had invested in ABC Plumbing.
- If I had learned to ski, I might be on the slopes right now.

PAST RESULT OF PRESENT OR CONTINUING CONDITION

FORM

In this second type of mixed conditional sentence, the tense in the 'if' clause is the simple past, and the tense in the main clause is the perfect conditional.

| If clause (condition) | Main clause (result) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| If + simple past | perfect conditional |
| If this thing happened | that thing would have happened. |

As in all conditional sentences, the order of the clauses is not fixed. You may have to rearrange the pronouns and adjust punctuation when you change the order of the clauses, but the meaning is identical.

EXAMPLES

- If I weren't afraid of spiders, I would have picked it up.
- I would have picked it up if I weren't afraid of spiders.
- If we didn't trust him we would have sacked him months ago.
- We would have sacked him months ago if we didn't trust him.
- If I wasn't in the middle of another meeting, I would have been happy to help you.
- I would have been happy to help you if I wasn't in the middle of another meeting.

FUNCTION

These mixed conditional sentences refer to an unreal present situation and its probable (but unreal) past result. In these mixed conditional sentences, the time in the if clause is **now or always** and the time in the main clause is **before now**. For example, "If I wasn't afraid of spiders" is contrary to present reality. I am afraid of spiders. "I would have picked it up" is contrary to past reality. I didn't pick it up.

EXAMPLES

- If she weren't afraid of flying she wouldn't have traveled by boat.
- I'd have been able to translate the letter if my Italian was better.
- If I were a good cook, I'd have invited them to lunch.
- If the elephant weren't in love with the mouse, she'd have trodden on him by now.

***If* - conjunction**

***If*: conditions**

We often use *if* to introduce possible or impossible situations or conditions and their results. The situations or conditions can be real, imagined or uncertain:

*I usually make a sandwich to take to work **if** I have enough time.* (real)

***If** you don't book now, you won't get good tickets.* (real)

*They'd have got the job done quicker **if** they'd had more people working on it.* (imagined)

*Will you bring my glasses down **if** you go upstairs?* (uncertain)

If possible, if necessary

We can sometimes leave words out after *if* to form fixed expressions:

*Check the temperature of your meat with a meat thermometer **if possible**.* (if it's possible or if that's possible)

*Interest rates would have to rise **if necessary** to protect the pound, Mr John Smith, Shadow Chancellor, indicated yesterday on BBC TV's Money Programme.*

If so, if not

We use *so* or *not* after *if* when it is obvious what we are referring to:

[from a job advertisement]

*Are you looking for part-time work? Do you want to work from home? **If so**, read on.* (if you are looking for part-time work or if you want to work from home)

*You should all have received your booklist for the course by now. **If not**, please email the office.* (if you haven't received your booklist for the course by now)

*I'll see you soon, definitely at the wedding, **if not** before.* (if I don't see you before the wedding)

Even if

We can use *even if* to mean *if* when talking about surprising or extreme situations:

*You're still going to be cold **even if** you put on two or three jumpers.*

***If*: reporting questions**

We use *if* to introduce reported yes-no questions and questions with *or*.

Compare

| direct question | indirect question |
|---|--|
| <i>Do you like dogs?</i> | <i>I asked if she liked dogs.</i> |
| <i>Are you leaving now or are you staying for a bit longer?</i> | <i>He asked if I was leaving now or staying for a bit longer.</i> |

Conditionals: other expressions (*unless, should, as long as*)

Unless

Conditional clauses can begin with *unless*. *Unless* means something similar to 'if ... not' or 'except if'.

The verb forms in the examples are similar to sentences with *if*: we use the present simple in the *unless*-clause and *shall, should, will, would, can, could, may* or *might* in the main clause:

Unless I **phone** you, you **can** assume the train's on time. (If I do not phone you /except if I phone you, you can assume the train is on time.)

We'll have to cancel the show **unless** we **sell** more tickets at the last minute. (We'll have to cancel the show if we do not sell more tickets/except if we sell more tickets at the last minute.)

Warning:

We don't use *unless* for impossible conditions:

*If the government had **not** raised food prices, there would not have been so many protests.*

Not: ~~Unless the government had raised food prices ...~~

Warning:

We don't use *unless* and *if* together:

*We'll go to the coast tomorrow **unless** it rains.*

Not: ~~We'll go to the coast tomorrow unless if it rains.~~

More on unless

We use the conjunction *unless* to mean 'except if'. The clause, which follows *unless* is a subordinate clause (sc): it needs a main clause (mc) to make a complete sentence.

When *unless* comes before the main clause, we use a comma:

Unless [SC] *it rains*, [MC] *we'll go for a picnic by the river tomorrow*. (We'll go for a picnic by the river tomorrow if it doesn't rain.)

When the main clause comes first, we don't need a comma:

[MC] *They won't come* **unless** [SC] *you invite them*.

Unless is a conditional word (like *if*), so we don't use *will* or *would* in the subordinate clause:

Unless *I hear from you*, *I'll see you at two o'clock*.

Not: ~~Unless I'll hear from you ...~~

Unless and if ... not

Unless and if ... not both mean 'except if':

*We could eat at Siam Smile **unless** they're closed on a Monday. (or We could eat at Siam Smile **if** they're **not** closed on a Monday.)*

*I'll make dinner **unless** somebody else wants to. (or I'll make dinner **if nobody** else wants to.)*

*Can you turn the radio off **unless** you're listening to it? (or Can you turn the radio off **if** you're **not** listening to it?)*

We don't use *unless* for things that we know to be true:

*You won't be able to get a ticket for the match **unless** you're prepared to pay a lot of money for it. (The speaker doesn't know if you're prepared to pay a lot of money for a ticket.)*

*I don't know what we would have done **if** we **hadn't** seen you. (We did see you.)*

Not: ~~I don't know what we would have done unless we'd seen you.~~

Warning:

In speaking, we use *unless* to introduce an extra thought or piece of information:

*He didn't even know about the crash – **unless** he'd heard about it on the radio.*

A: *Oh look. Neil next door's got a new car.*

B: ***Unless** they've got a visitor.*

Typical errors

- We don't use *unless* when we mean *if*:
*Pete will drive **if** Alex can't.*
Not: ~~Pete will drive unless Alex can't.~~
- We don't use *will* or *would* in the clause after *unless*:
***Unless** you pay now, we can't guarantee you a ticket.*
Not: ~~Unless you'll pay now ...~~

Should you (Should with inversion)

In formal situations, we can use *should* + subject (s) + verb (v) instead of *if*:

***Should you** wish to cancel your order, please contact our customer service department on 02317 6658932. (or If you should wish to cancel your order ...)*

***Should your child** become anxious or nervous about any activity, it is a good idea to inform the team-leader. (or If your child should become ...)*

Had you (Had with inversion)

In formal situations, we can use *had* + subject + verb instead of *if* in third conditional sentences:

Had I known you were waiting outside, I would have invited you to come in. (If I had known you were waiting outside ...)

Had Margaret realized she would be traveling alone, she would never have agreed to go.

If + were to

In formal situations, we can use *if* + *were to* when we talk about things that might happen but which we think are unlikely:

If the Prime Minister were to resign, there would have to be a general election within 30 days.

In even more formal styles, we use *were* + subject-verb inversion + *to*-infinitive:

[V] **Were [S] we** [to -INF] **to give up** the fight now, it would mean the end of democracy in our country. (If we gave up the fight now ...)

[V] **Were [S] the economy** [to -INF] **to slow down** too quickly, there would be major problems. (If the economy slowed down too quickly ...)

As long as, so long as, providing, etc.

Sometimes we need to impose specific conditions or set limits on a situation. In these cases, conditional clauses can begin with phrases such as *as long as*, *so long as*, *only if*, *on condition that*, *providing (that)*, *provided (that)*.

As long as is more common in speaking; *so long as* and *on condition that* are more formal and more common in writing:

[to a group of children]

You can play in the living room **as long as** you don't make a mess.

So long as a tiger stands still, it is invisible in the jungle.

The bank lent the company 100,000 pounds **on condition that** they repaid the money within six months.

Providing (that) is more common in speaking; *provided (that)* is more formal and more common in written language:

[talking about rail travel in the UK]

You can get a senior citizen's reduction **providing** you've got a railcard.

They may do whatever they like **provided that** it is within the law.

Or and otherwise

We often use *or* and *otherwise* with conditional meanings:

*You've got to start studying, **or** you'll fail all those exams.* (If you don't start studying, you will fail the exams.)

[talking about sending a package by mail]

*We'd better send it express, **otherwise** it'll take days.* (If we do not send it express, it will take days.)

Supposing

Supposing may be used with a conditional meaning. It can be used in first, second or third conditional sentences. The speaker invites the listener to imagine a situation:

Supposing *I don't arrive till after midnight, will the guest-house still be open?* (Imagine if I don't arrive till after midnight ...)

Supposing *you lost your passport, you'd have to go to the embassy, wouldn't you?*

Supposing *he hadn't recognized us – he might never have spoken to us.*

Suppose, supposing and what if

Suggestions

We use *suppose*, *supposing* and *what if* + present verb form to make suggestions about what might happen:

A: *What time shall we meet?*

B: **Suppose** *we meet in the offices downstairs at four o'clock?*

A: *That's perfect. I'll let the others know.*

Supposing *I don't bring my car and you and I travel together. That would save us half the cost of petrol and parking.*

A: *The electricity has gone. There must be a power cut.*

B: **What if** *we find the candles and put them around the room?*

A: *Okay. Good idea. Do you know where they are?*

Possibility

When we are less certain, we use *suppose*, *supposing* and *what if* + past form to talk about future possibility:

Suppose *we asked Mary to baby-sit? Do you think she'd do it?* (not as certain as *Suppose we ask Mary to baby-sit?*)

Supposing *someone else wrote the essay. How would we know?* (not as certain as *Supposing someone else writes the essay ...*)

A: *What if I gave up working full-time. I'd love that.*

B: *You're joking surely!!*

When we refer to something that did not happen (something hypothetical), we use the past perfect:

Suppose *we hadn't brought our umbrellas.* (We did bring our umbrellas.)

Supposing *they had closed the road. Would that have been a good idea?* (They didn't close the road.)

What if I had *accidentally told Maria about the party! That would have ruined the surprise.* (I didn't tell Maria about the party.)

Warning:

We use *be supposed to* to talk about obligations and arrangements, not suggestions.

*You **are supposed to** put money in the parking meter!*

If only

We use *if only* to express a strong wish that things could be different. It means the same as *I wish* but is stronger. We use it to talk about past, present and future unreal conditions.

We use *if only* + past verb forms to talk about a wish for the present:

If only *he knew the truth.* (he doesn't know the truth, but he wishes he did)

Not: ~~If only he knows the truth.~~

If only *there was something she could do or say to help.*

Not: ~~If only there is something she could do or say to help.~~

We sometimes use *were* instead of *was* in more formal situations:

If only *she weren't so tired.* (If only she wasn't so tired.)

To talk about a wish for the future or to show a contrast between how things are and how we would like them to be, we use *if only* + *would* + infinitive without *to*:

If only *someone would buy the house.*

If only *they would talk to each other.*

We use *if only* + past perfect to talk about a wish to change something that has already happened:

If only *he had listened to what his friends had been telling him.* (He didn't listen.)

If only *Anna had been able to come.* (Anna wasn't able to come.)

In case (of)

In case is a conjunction or adverb. *In case of* is a preposition.

In case

We use *in case* to talk about things we should do in order to be prepared for possible future situations:

*Shall I keep some chicken salad for your brother **in case** he's hungry when he gets here?* (conjunction)

***In case** I forget later, here are the keys to the garage.* (conjunction)

*She knows she's passed the oral exam, but she doesn't want to say anything just **in case**.* (adverb)

We don't use *in case* to mean 'if'.

Compare

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>Let's take our swimming costumes in case there's a pool at the hotel.</i> | We don't know if there is a pool there. |
| <i>Let's take our swimming costumes if there's a pool in the hotel.</i> | We will wait until we know about the pool before we decide. |

*I'll take cash **in case** we need it on the ferry.* (we don't know if we will need cash on the ferry)

In case of

We use *in case of* + noun to mean 'if and when something happens':

[notice in a lift]

***In case of** breakdown, please press the alarm button and call this number.* (if and when the lift breaks down, ...)

Wish + to-infinitive

When we use *wish* followed by a verb in the *to*-infinitive form, *wish* means the same as *want*, but it is more formal. We do not normally use *wish* in the continuous form when we use it with a *to*-infinitive:

*I **wish to speak** to Mr Hennessy, please.*

Not: ~~I'm wishing to speak to ...~~

We don't use a *that*-clause after *wish* when it is a more formal version of *want*:

*I **wish to visit** you in the summer, if possible.*

Not: ~~I wish (that) I visit you in the summer ...~~

We can use an object (underlined), before the *to*-infinitive:

*I did not **wish** my family **to know** about Sara, so I told them nothing.*

When we use an object after *wish*, we must also use a verb in the *to*-infinitive form. Alternatively, we can say *want* or (more politely) *would like*:

*We **wish to have** a table near the window, please. (or We **would like** a table near the window, please.)*

Not: ~~We wish a table near the window ...~~

Wish + indirect object + direct object

We use *wish* with two objects, an indirect object + a direct object (underlined), for expressions of good wishes and hopes that good things will happen to people:

(io = indirect object; do = direct object)

*I **wish** [IO]you [DO]success in your new job.*

*I've got my driving test tomorrow. **Wish** [IO]me [DO]luck!*

*We **wish** [IO]you [DO]a long and happy life together.*

Wish + that-clause

We use *wish* with a *that*-clause when we regret or are sorry that things are not different. We imagine a different past or present:

*I just **wish** that everything could be as it used to be.*

In informal situations, we usually omit *that*:

*I **wish** I had his mobile phone number; we could tell him the good news. (I don't have his mobile phone number; it would be good if I had it.)*

*I **wish** you hadn't told me how the film ends. You've spoilt it for me. (You told me how the film ends; it would have been better if you had not told me.)*

Wish + verb forms in the that-clause

The verb forms we use in *that*-clauses after *wish* are similar to the verb forms in conditional clauses after *if*. We use a past verb form for present and future meanings.

Compare

| <i>if</i> | <i>wish</i> |
|---|--|
| <i>It would be good if we had a bigger car.</i> | <i>I wish we had a bigger car.</i> |
| <i>It would be good if I knew how to use this DVD player.</i> | <i>I wish I knew how to use this DVD player.</i> |

When we wish something about the past, we use the past perfect after *wish*:

*I **wish** I **had known** Charlie was coming. I would have invited Jane.* (I didn't know it and did not invite Jane.)

*I **wish** I **hadn't said** that. I can see I've upset you. Sorry.* (I did say it; it would have been better if I had not said it.)

Wish + would

We can use *wish* + *would* if we are annoyed about something that is or is not happening, or about something that will or will not happen:

*I **wish** you'd stop making so much noise!* (You are making a noise; it would be better if you didn't.)

*I **wish** you **wouldn't** come through the kitchen with your dirty boots on.* (You do come through the kitchen; it would be better if you didn't.)

In informal situations, we can use *wish* in the continuous form like this:

*He's embarrassing everyone. I'm just **wishing** he would go away!*

Warning:

We use *hope*, not *wish*, when we want something to happen in the future or when we want something to have happened in the past:

*I **hope** the weather's fine tomorrow.*

Not: ~~I wish the weather's fine tomorrow.~~

*I **hope** they didn't miss their flight.*

Not: ~~I wish they didn't miss their flight.~~