

CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

Sentences with *if* are called conditionals. The *if*... is the condition and the other part of the sentence is the result. Here are four types of conditionals, used for talking about checking in at the airport for a flight:

- a) If you arrive early, you get a better seat.
- b) If you arrive early, you'll get a better seat.
- c) If you arrived early, you'd get a better seat.
- d) If you had arrived early, you would have got a better seat.

Sentence a) is talking generally about something that is always true: Zero conditional.

Sentence b) is talking about something that is likely to happen in the future: First conditional.

Sentence c) is talking about something that is unlikely to happen in the future, or an imaginary situation: Second conditional.

Sentence d) is talking about something that is imaginary in the past: Third conditional.

Zero conditional, *if* + present simple, ..present simple

This type of sentence describes things that are always generally true. We can use *when* or *if* to introduce the sentence.

*It's a tropical country, and so if **it rains** hard, everyone **stays** indoors.*

When it rains hard everyone, ***stays*** indoors.

There can be an imperative structure in the result clause, just the bare infinitive with no subject.

*If you feel the dizzy, **stop** taking the tablets.*

*If you change your mind, **give** me a ring.*

First conditional: *if* + present simple, ... will/won't

This type of sentence describes future events that will happen, or at least are likely to happen. It is a real possibility in the speakers' mind, not imaginary.

*If we **walk** so slowly, we **will be** late.*

*If we **run**, we **won't be** late.*

*If we **don't run**, we **will be** late.*

In the condition clause it is possible to use other present tenses, not just the present simple.

If you **are driving**, I'll come with you (Present continuous)

If I **'ve seen** the film before, I'll let you know! (Present perfect)

Second conditional: if + past simple, ...would/ wouldn't

This type of sentence describes future events that are imaginary, unlikely or impossible.

*If I **had** a helicopter, I'**d fly** to school.*

*If I **flew** to school, I **wouldn't be** late*

Would is usually contracted in speech.

I'd become famous = I would become famous.

Note that the past simple is used in the condition clause, but the time reference is the future.

The regular past simple of *to be* is *I was and he/ she was*. We can use this form in second conditionals, or alternatively we can use *if I were* and *if he/she were*. The *were* form is more formal.

If I was/were an astronaut, I'd enjoy being weightless.

Unless

Unless means if not. Compare the sentences which have the same meaning.

We'll go out for a walk if it doesn't rain. We'll go out for a walk unless it rains.

Third conditional: If + past perfect, ...would/wouldn't + have + past participle

This type of sentence describes a past event that is different to what really happened.

*If you **had arrived** earlier, he **wouldn't have missed** his train.*

*If you **hadn't warned** me about the sun, I **would have got** sunburnt.*

Modal verbs in conditional sentences.

We can use modal verbs like *can, could, may, might, must and should*.

*If you ever come to Istanbul, I **can** show you around the city.*

If you ever come to Istanbul, you must phone me.

We often use *might* and *could* in conditional sentences when we want to say that we are not certain about the results. Compare:

*If you **carry** too many bags, you **will drop** the eggs (certain result)*

*If you **carry** too many bags, you **might drop** the eggs. (uncertain result.)*

*If anyone **believed** my story, I would become famous (certain result)*

*If anyone **believed** my story I could become famous (uncertain result.)*

in third conditional sentences we use *could have done* or *might have done*.

*If I **had brought** some money with me, I **could have taken** a taxi.*

Imagine/ Supposing

In everyday speech we can use *imagine* or *supposing* in place of *if*.

Supposing you owned a helicopter, what would you use it for?

If I were you

We can give advice by using a second conditional sentence beginning *if I were you*.

If I were you, I'd spend more time on your written work.

If I were you, I wouldn't eat so much chocolate.

It's also possible to put the *if*-clause at the end.

I'd be more careful, if I were you.

Mixed conditionals

If + Past Perfect -- Would

If I hadn't studied, I wouldn't be in the advanced course.

It is a combination of Conditional Type 2 (if+Past Perfect) and Conditional Type 1 (would+infinitive)

We use it when we refer to a past event that could have had a direct result on a present situation if it had been different.

If + Simple Past --- Would have+ Past Participle

If I were tall, I would have enrolled in the army

It is a combination of Conditional Type 2 (if+Past Simple) and Conditional Type 3 (would have+ past participle)

We use it when we refer to a present event that could have changed a past situation.

ALTERNATIVES TO IF

Even if

This adds extra emphasis to if.

Even if I earn a lot of money, I'm going to carry on living where I live now.

Whether+subject+verb // Whether or not+ subject+ verb

I'm not going to sell the car whether you agree with me or not.

You won't be very happy whether or not I do what you want.

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

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 realised she would be travelling 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*:

[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 ...)

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 recognised us – he might never have spoken to us.

n 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)