

# English grammar

## 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.)

*If I needed your help, I'd call you.* (It is not very probable that I will need your help.)

Sometimes we must use either the first or the second conditional, because it is clear that the situation is real or unreal.

*If you get up late, you will miss your bus.* (a real situation)

*If I came from your country, I would understand your problems.* (an unreal situation - I am not from your country.)

## 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, ... )*