

**The Conditional Tenses**

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Conditional Tenses are not actually so complicated in English, but like everything else, when they are written down or reduced to paper, they look immensely difficult. In the future, when you meet an English man, you could ask him to tell you about the 5 Conditional Tenses. You might find that he cannot say what they are. In fact he might not even know what you mean! English people use Grammar by demonstration rather than by applying learnt phrases. Believe it or not, many English people do not learn English Grammar at school.

Grammar needs to be demonstrated rather than learnt. I would therefore recommend you practice using these tenses with a friend as soon as you can. It's important to know how to use them. They are only classified into 5 parts to enable them to be described, this does not mean you have to learn them in that way. The best way is always by speaking and practising. You can use this book as a guide.

In general there are 5 different types of conditional tenses. The first thing you need to remember is that these tenses are only used to talk about things which have not happened in reality. They are never talking about real things, they talk about suppositions, possibilities and hypothesis. It is important to remember this because sometimes these situations do look real. But in the case of real events happening, we use real tenses to describe them. This is very important because you need to know how to talk about possibility rather than reality and sometimes it's very easy to be confused between the two. Especially when the word "when" is used to form the Conditional tenses.

Conditional Tenses are usually formed with the word "**if**" and sometimes with the word "**when**".

*"If I go to my friend's house, I will call you"*

*"When I go on holiday in April, I will take my dog"*

Both are unreal (and are type 1 conditionals described below) but "**when**" is talking about a definite idea (which is still unreal) in the future. As it is associated with the future tense we sometimes refer to this as the "*future conditional*". Actually many different people call the conditional tenses different names, to try and associate them with the tense they represent, all of the conditionals are explained later in this booklet.

Sometimes the real and unreal seem to overlap. As you will see below we sometimes talk about:

*“if I was.....”*

and

*“if I had been.....”*

Sometimes people ask me the difference between the two, Well its very simple, neither are real but we still can choose to describe the unreal in either the past tense or past perfect and the same rules for these tenses apply as if the situation was real. However in the conditional world we call these *“Type 2 conditionals”* and *“Type 3 conditionals”* so we can classify them in English Grammar.

Example:

*“If I spoke Russian.... I would live in Russia”*

*“If I had learnt Russian.... I would have lived in Russia”*

Both have the same meaning more or less, but two different tenses are used to describe the difference in (unreal) time as we do in the perfect and past tenses. Both examples are unreal, because I don't speak Russian and I never did learn it.

Here are the conditional tenses with examples:

### **Zero Conditional:**

*It is formed using the present tense in both parts of the sentence:*

The Zero conditional refers to conditional sentences that express a simple general idea which is always true.

*“If you don't eat for a long time, you become hungry”.*

*“If I heat water, it boils”*

*“If it rains, the ground gets wet”*

These are not usually personal sentences but they can be if its something which is always true:

*“If I cook, people die”*

*“If I sing people cry”*

The zero form of the conditional expresses the idea that a universally known fact is being described:

*“If you touch a flame, you burn yourself”*

*“If John phones, tell him to meet me at the car park”*

*“Ask Janet if you're not sure how to get there”*

*“If you want to come, call me before I leave”*

*“Meet me here if we get separated”*

## **First Conditional**

*It is formed using the present tense in the first part of the sentence and the future tense in the second part*

*“If you make a mistake, someone will let you know”.*

*“If I oversleep I will miss the train ”*

*“If it rains today, the grass will get wet”*

This tense is the most common of the conditionals in English and expresses the likelihood of

what will almost certainly without doubt happen if the the first part of the clause happens.

You can also apply modal verbs to talk about what might happen

*“If you drop that bottle, it might smash”.*

*“I may finish that essay if I have time”.*

*“If she calls you, you should definitely go”.*

*“If you buy my clothes for me, I will be able to go to the party”.*

## **Second Conditional**

*This is formed using the past simple in the first part of the sentence and the present conditional or present continuous conditional (would)*

The "Second conditional" refers to the pattern where the condition clause (the first clause) is in the past tense, and the consequence is in the conditional ( using *would*).

*“If I liked parties, I would attend more of them”.*

*“If it were to rain tomorrow, the grass would be very wet”.*

(we sometimes use “were” instead of was )

*“If the weather wasn't so bad, we would go to the carnival”.* (But the weather is bad so we can't go.)

*“If I was the Emperor, I would give everyone a new car”.* (But I am not the Emperor.)

*“If you really loved me, you would buy me a dog”.*

## **Third Conditional**

*perfect conditional or perfect continuous conditional*

This is used to refer to hypothetical, counterfactual (or believed likely to be counterfactual) situations in the past, in type 3 conditional sentences the if clause uses the past perfect, and the main clause uses the perfect conditional.

*“If you had called me, I would have come”.*

*“If you had eaten more, you would have gotten stomach ache”.*

*“You would have earned more money, if you had worked harder”.*

In type 3 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 I had worked harder I might have passed the exam”*

*“You could have been on time if you had caught the bus”*

*“If he called you, you could go”*

*“If you bought my school supplies for me, I might be able to go to the park”*

## Mixed Conditionals

“The "Mixed conditional" usually refers to a mixture of the second and third conditionals with the part of one and a part of the other.

*If + past perfect or simple past and,  
present conditional or perfect conditional*

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 I had worked harder at university, 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”*

Here either the condition or the consequence, but not both, has a past time reference:

*“If you had done it properly, we wouldn't be in this mess now”*

*“If we were doing that job, we wouldn't have done it like that”*

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

*“if you had crashed the bus, you might be in trouble”*

*“I could be a millionaire now if I had invested in that company”*

*“If I had learned to ski, I might be on the slopes right now”*