

Presentation

a Zero conditional

We can talk about general facts or things that are always true using an *if* sentence. This kind of sentence has the present tense in both parts:

<i>If</i> + present tense	Present tense
<i>If the price of a product falls,</i>	<i>demand for it usually rises.</i>

In statements like this, *if* means the same as *when* or *every time*. This is sometimes called the 'zero conditional'.

b First conditional

When we talk about the results of future events that are reasonably likely, we can use an *if* sentence. The *if* clause states the condition, and the other clause states the result.

Condition	Result
<i>If</i> + present tenses	<i>will</i> + bare infinitive
<i>If you give me an extra day's holiday,</i>	<i>I'll work this weekend.</i>

The *if* clause can come in the first part of the sentence or the second:

If the government raises taxes in the next budget, consumer spending will fall.
Consumer spending will fall if the government raises taxes in the next budget.

Common mistakes: We do not use *will* in the *if* part of the sentence:

wrong: **If the shipment will arrive tomorrow, I will collect it.*

right: *If the shipment arrives tomorrow, I will collect it.*

c If or when?

When we talk about events that will take place in the future, we can use *if* or *when*, but there is an important difference in meaning.

I'm flying to the States today. I'll give you a ring if I get in at a reasonable time.
 (The speaker is not sure if he will get in at a reasonable time or not.)

I'm flying to the States tonight. I'll give you a ring when I get there.
 (The speaker has no doubt that the plane will arrive safely.)

d Variations

We can use the imperative, or a modal verb (see Units 23–6), instead of *will* + infinitive:

Imperative: *If you hear from Susan today, tell her to ring me.*
If Mr Duval comes in, get him to sign that contract.

Modal: *If the traffic is bad, I may get home late.*
If we sign the contract today, we can start production at the end of next month.

We can use the present continuous or the present perfect in the *if* clause:

Present continuous: *If they are still considering Peru, I shall suggest Lima.*

Present perfect: *If you have placed the order, the goods will arrive in ten days.*

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a *If and unless*

Unless means the same as *if ... not*. It always refers to the conditional part of the sentence and not the result part of the sentence:

<i>If sales don't improve soon,</i>	<i>we'll have to cut production.</i>
(condition)	(result)
<i>Unless sales improve soon,</i>	<i>we'll have to cut production.</i>
(condition)	(result)

We often use **not + unless**, which means **only ... if**, when we want to emphasize a condition:

*The bank will **only** lend me the money **if** I can give them some kind of security.*

*The bank **won't** lend me the money **unless** I can give them some kind of security.*

b *In case and so that*

We use **in case** to talk about precautions and safety measures we will take *before* a problem happens. These precautions, however, will not prevent the problem from happening.

*I'll reserve the meeting room from 3.00–9.00 **in case** the meeting goes on a long time.*

(I'll reserve the room for 6 hours to be on the safe side – the meeting may or may not go on for a long time.)

We use **so that** to talk about the purpose of a decision or a safety measure. Usually these safety measures are designed to achieve a benefit of some kind or to prevent a problem from happening in the first place.

*I'll reserve the room from 3.00–5.00 **so that** the meeting doesn't go on for a long time.*

(We will only have the room for 2 hours. That will prevent the meeting from going on for a long time – we will have to stop at 5.00.)

c *Provided that, as long as, etc.*

We can use **provided that/providing, as long as**, and **so long as** when we want to emphasize a condition. These mean **if** and **only if**.

*I will sign this contract **provided that** you guarantee me a commission rate of 15%.*

(I will not sign it if you do not give me this guarantee).

*The strike will be successful **as long as** we all stay together.*

(It will only succeed if we all stay together.)

Providing and **so long as** mean the same as **provided that** and **as long as**, but they are a little less formal. Note that we use the same sentence pattern as with other **if** sentences.

Presentation

a Form

The second conditional is formed by using **if** + past tense and **would ('d)** + bare infinitive:

If + past tense **would/'d** + infinitive

If I had his mobile number, I'd phone him.

Common mistakes:

We do not use *would* in the **if** part of the sentence:

wrong: **If trains would be more reliable, more people would use them.*

right: *If trains were more reliable, more people would use them.*

The **if** clause can come in the first part of the sentence, or the second:

If I had his mobile number, I'd phone him.

I'd phone him if I had his mobile number.

b Imaginary situations

We can use the second conditional to refer to an imaginary situation now or in the future.

1 *If Anna was here, she'd know what to do.*

(But she is not here at the moment, so she cannot help).

2 *If I lost my job tomorrow, I'd move to London to find another one.*

(I don't think I will lose my job, but I understand the possible consequences.)

In 1 we are talking about the present, and imagining a situation that is different from reality. In 2 we are talking about a possible event in the future; however, by using the second conditional we make it clear that we do not really think it will happen.

c Variations

It is also possible to use **might** and **could** instead of **would**:

If we had the finance, we could expand much more rapidly.

If the terms of the contract were different, we might accept it.

In the **if** clause, we can use **were** instead of **was** for the verb *to be*. This is very common when we give advice using the expression **If I were you ...**

If I were you, I would call the technical support helpline.

d First or second?

If we think that a future event is reasonably likely, we use the first conditional:

If my investments grow at 6% a year, they will be worth £20,000 in ten years.

(This is reasonably likely and realistic.)

If we are talking about something that is unlikely or impossible, we use the second conditional:

If the stock market grew by 500% over the next two years, I'd be able to retire.

(But this is extremely unlikely.)

Presentation

a Form

Read the following information about a past action and its result:

He went to the casino. He lost all of his money.

This is what actually happened. But we can imagine a different past action and a different result:

if + had (not) done would (not) + have done

If he had not gone to the casino, he would not have lost all his money.

This is the 3rd conditional. In speech, these forms are often abbreviated:

A: *What would've happened if he hadn't gone to the casino?*

B: *If he hadn't gone to the casino, he wouldn't've lost all his money.*

The *if* clause can come in the first part of the sentence (as above) or the second:

He wouldn't have lost all his money if he hadn't gone to the casino.

b Positives and negatives

When we use the 3rd conditional we are imagining a situation that is the opposite of what happened. If what actually happened was negative, we use a positive form. If what actually happened was positive, we use a negative form:

what happened: *We (neg) didn't put up our prices, so we (pos) kept our market share.*

3rd conditional: *If we (pos) had put up our prices, we (neg) wouldn't have kept our market share.*

Common mistakes:

We do not use *would* in the *if* clause:

wrong: * *If I would have known you were at the office I would have called in.*

right: *If I had known you were at the office I would have called in.*

c Variations

We can use *could* or *might* instead of *would*:

If we had followed his advice, we could have lost a great deal of money. (but we didn't)

If we had offered large quantity discounts, we might have won the order. (but we didn't)

d Mixed conditionals

The examples in **c** are about two actions in the past. However, if we talk about a past action and its result in the present we use *if* + past perfect and *would* (not) + infinitive:

past action: *He did well on the training course.*

present result: *He is head of department now.*

mixed conditional: *If he hadn't done well on the training course, he wouldn't be head of department now. (not: *wouldn't have been)*