

Conditional sentences rules

What's the conditional in English?

We use the conditional in English to talk about something that might happen if something else were to happen. It can be a possibility real or imaginary:

- If I have enough money, I will go to Japan.

To make a conditional sentence in English you must use 'if'.

How to form the conditional in English

There are four types of conditionals in English:

The 'zero' conditional

Both parts of the sentence are at the present simple:

If + simple present + simple present

It is often used to tell general truths:

- If you heat ice, it melts.
- If you mix red and yellow, you get orange.

It is also used to give instructions, with the imperative in the second part of the sentence:

- If Paul phones, tell him to meet me at the bar.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask Kevin.

The type 1 conditional

The first part of the sentence with 'if' is in the present simple, and the second part is in the future simple:

If + simple present + Simple future

- If it rains, you will get wet.
- If you don't hurry, we will miss the train.

Here, we are talking about the present or the future and the situation is real. We're talking about things that have a probable outcome.

The type 2 conditional

The first part of the sentence with 'if' is in the simple past, and the second part is in the present conditional:

If + simple past + Present conditional

- If **it rained**, you **would get** wet.
- If **you went** to bed earlier, you **wouldn't be** so tired.
- If **I knew** her name, I **would tell** you.

With the type 2 conditional, we are talking about things that could have happened and their probable consequences.

The type 3 conditional

The first part of the sentence in 'if' is past perfect, and the second part is perfect conditional:

If + **past perfect** + **Perfect conditional**

- If **it had rained**, you **would have got** wet
- If **you had worked** harder, you **would have passed** the exam.

We are talking about something that could have happened in the past, and its probable outcome in the past.

⚠ REMEMBER!

There is a last type of conditional in "if" where types two and three are mixed: the first part of the sentence in "if" is in past perfect, and the second part is in present conditional:

If + **past perfect** + **present conditional**

- If **I had worked** harder at school, I **would have** a better job now.
- If **we had looked** at the map, we **wouldn't be** lost.

In the latter case, we are talking about something that could have happened in the past and would have had a probable consequence now.

⚠ 'If I was' or 'If I were' ?

Take a look at the following examples:

- If I was rich, I would buy a house.

OR

- If I were rich, I would buy a house.

"*If I were*" is the correct way to say it. However, 'If I was' is commonly used in spoken English.

So, if in doubt (for example, when speaking during an oral exam for example), use '*If I were*...' !