



THE CONDITIONALS & IF CLAUSES

What is a conditional?

Conditionals are *if clauses*: they express a situation or condition and its possible result. They are made up of two clauses: the conditional clause and the main clause. The former usually starts with the word **if** and sets out a condition, while the latter expresses what happens when this condition is fulfilled. The main clause usually contains a modal verb such as *will* or *would*.

Examples:

If I **have** time later, I **will** help you with the presentation.

I'm sorry, if I **had** time, I **would** help you.

Technically, there are **four** types of if-clauses in English grammar: zero, first, second and third. Each one refers to a different context, although we can also construct mixed conditionals.

Now remember, this presentation needs to be great. If the client likes it, they will invest in the company.

Oh no! If I had known that, I wouldn't have volunteered!

Well, it's too late to change now. I would start practising if I were you, we need the money!



Comparing If-Clauses

For a **quick** and **handy overview** of the different types of if-clauses in English grammar, check out the table below.

TYPE	FORM	EXAMPLE	EXPLANATION
ZERO	<i>present + present</i>	If I <u>have</u> time, I <u>help</u> you.	general truth/repeated action <i>sometimes I have time</i>
FIRST	<i>present + will</i>	If I <u>have</u> time, I <u>will help</u> you.	realistic future possibility <i>I might have time later, it's unsure</i>
SECOND	<i>past simple + would</i>	If I <u>had</u> time, I <u>would help</u> you.	unreal possibility <i>I don't have time and I can't help</i>
THIRD	<i>past perfect + would have</i>	If I <u>had had</u> time, I <u>would have helped</u> you.	imagined past situation <i>I didn't have time and I couldn't help</i>

- **Zero Conditional: simple present + simple present**

ZERO CONDITIONAL if-clauses express things that always happen providing that a certain condition is met.

Examples: If you **leave** ice cream in the sun, it **melts**.
 If you **heat** water, it **boils**.

- **First Conditional: simple present + will**

THE FIRST CONDITIONAL, also known as the real conditional, talks about future actions that can only take place under certain conditions.

Examples: If the client **likes** our presentation, they **will invest** in our company.
 If the client **doesn't invest**, our boss **will be** angry.

- **Second Conditional: simple past + would**

THE SECOND CONDITIONAL talks about an unlikely or imaginary event and its result. It is therefore known as the unreal conditional.

Examples: If I **were** you, I **would start** learning.
 If she **won** the lottery, she **would buy** a beautiful house.

- **Third Conditional: past perfect + would have + past participle**

THE THIRD CONDITIONAL is also known as the impossible conditional: it looks back at past situations and their outcome and imagines them as different.

Examples: If we **had known** about the presentation sooner, we **would have prepared** more.
 I **would have been** impressed if he **had created** the plan himself.

- **Mixed Conditionals**

We can **mix** THE SECOND and THIRD CONDITIONALS to express an imagined past situation and its imagined present outcome, and vice versa.

Example: If I **had put** on suncream this morning, I **wouldn't be sunburned** now.
 If I **spoke** Russian, I **would have done** the translation myself.

- **Inverted Conditionals**

We use INVERTED CONDITIONALS in **formal** contexts. To form these clauses, we flip the order of the subject and the verb. This technique is called inversion.

Examples: **Had** we **known** about the bad reviews, we **wouldn't have made** a reservation!

- **Conditional Conjunctions**

We can use CONDITIONAL CONJUNCTIONS instead of if in conditional clauses.

Examples: **Provided that** you order by midnight, your order will arrive by Friday.

I won't leave **unless** you come with me.

- **Wish/if only**

Sentences with WISH and IF ONLY follow the same grammar patterns as if-clauses in the second and third conditional.

Examples: I **wish** I **had** more time for my hobbies.

If only I **had warned** John about the broken window.

