

Study Guide: English Conditional Sentences

What Are Conditionals:

Conditionals are sentences that describe a condition and its result. They often contain the word "if" and are used to talk about possibilities, hypotheticals, and facts.

1. Zero Conditional

Use:

- ✓ General truths, facts, and laws of nature
- ✓ Things that are always true when the condition is met

Structure:

- ✓ If + present simple, present simple

Example:

- ✓ If you heat water to 100 °C, it boils.
- ✓ If it rains, the grass gets wet.

Tip:

- ✓ Both parts use present simple tense.

2. First Conditional

Use:

- ✓ Real or likely future situations
- ✓ What will happen if a condition is met

Structure:

- ✓ If + present simple, will + base verb

Example:

- ✓ If she studies hard, she will pass the exam.

- ✓ If it rains tomorrow, we will cancel the trip.

Tip:

- ✓ Use for real, possible future events.

3. Second Conditional

Use:

- ✓ Unreal, imaginary, or unlikely situations in the present or future

Structure:

- ✓ If + past simple, would + base verb

Example:

- ✓ If I had a million dollars, I would travel the world.
- ✓ If he were taller, he would play basketball.

Tip:

- ✓ Use "were" for all subjects (If I were, not "was").

4. Third Conditional

Use:

- ✓ To express regrets or unreal situations in the past
- ✓ Something didn't happen, and you're imagining what could have happened

Structure:

- ✓ If + past perfect, would have + past participle

Example:

- ✓ If she had studied, she would have passed the exam.
- ✓ If I had known, I would have called you.

Tip:

- ✓ Perfect for "what if" regrets and missed chances.

5. Mixed Conditionals

Uses:

- ✓ When the time in the if-clause and result-clause don't match
- ✓ Often combine second and third conditionals

Common Structures:**A. Past condition > present result:**

- ✓ If + **past perfect**, **would** + **base verb**
- ✓ If I had studied medicine, I would be a doctor.

B. Present condition > past result:

- ✓ If + **past simple**, **would have** + **past participle**
- ✓ If I were more careful, I wouldn't have broken it.

6. Inverted Conditionals (Advanced Style)

Use:

- ✓ Formal or literary alternatives to "if" conditionals
- ✓ Begin with auxiliary verbs like had, were, or should

Examples:

- ✓ Had I known, I would have told you. (= If I had known...)
- ✓ Were I you, I would apologize. (= If I were you...)
- ✓ Should it rain, we'll stay inside. (= if it rains...)

Comparison Table:

Type	Use	Structure
Zero	Facts, laws	If + present , present
First	Likely future	If + present , will + verb
Second	Unreal now/future	If + past , would + verb

Third	Unreal past	If + past perfect, would have + V3
Mixed	Unreal past + present OR vice versa	Mixed tenses