

Conditional Sentences

Conditional sentences indicate that a certain action can/could be performed only if a certain condition is/was true. The following are different types of English conditional sentences.

1) Present Habitual Conditional Sentences

This type of sentence is about something that I generally do if a certain condition is true:

If I **feel** tired in the afternoon, I usually **take** a nap.

Note that in this type of sentence, we use the simple present tense in both “clauses” (A “clause” is a group of words that is like a sentence in that it includes a subject and a verb).

2) Future Conditional Sentences

This type of sentence is about something that I will do in the future if a certain condition is true. I can use the word **will** or other modal verbs, like **can/may/might/must/should**:

If I **save** enough money, I **will take** a trip to my native country this summer.

If I **get** a job, I **might move** to a new apartment.

Note that in this type of sentence, we use the simple present tense in the “if-clause” and a modal verb in the other clause.

3) Present/Future “Unreal” Conditional Sentences

This type of sentence is about something that I can’t do because the condition is not true. I can use the word **would** or other modal verbs, like **could** or **might**:

If I **had** a lot of money, I **would buy** a car.

If I **didn’t have** so much work to do, I **could go out** with my friends more often.

If I **had** more free time, I **might take** guitar lessons.

If Jean **were** a rich man, he **would buy** a house for his family.

I **would study** harder for this test if I **were** you.

If Yelena **were** in her native country, she **would visit** her family.

Note that in this type of sentence, we use the simple past tense in the “if-clause” and a modal verb in the other clause, although we are not talking about the past, so this is a special use of the past tense. Note also that we do not use the “third person singular” form **was** in this type of sentence, but we always use the word **were**.

4) Past “Unreal” Conditional Sentences

This type of sentence is about something that I couldn’t do in the past because the condition was not true. I can use the word **would** or other modal verbs, like **could** or **might**, then the word **have**, then the **past participle** of a verb:

If I **had had** a lot of money last year, I **would have bought** a car.
If I **hadn’t had** so much work to do last night, I **could have gone** out with my friends.
If I **had had** more free time last summer, I **might have taken** guitar lessons.

Jean **would have bought** a house for his family last year if he **had had** enough money.

I **would have gotten** a better mark on that test if I **had studied** harder.
I **would have spent** a lot of time with my family last summer if I **had been able** to go to my native country.

Note that that in this type of sentence, we use the “past perfect tense” in the “if-clause,” although this is not the normal meaning of the past perfect tense, because we are not talking about a “past action that occurs before another past action or time.” In the other clause, we use a “past modal verb form” (past modal, plus have, plus a past participle of a verb). Note also that in saying this type of sentence, we often use “contractions” or shortened forms of verbs, as in the following example:

If I’d had a lot of money last year, I’d’ve bought a new car.
(If I **had had** a lot of money last year, I **would have bought** a new car.)

The verb “wish”

After the verb **wish**, we use the **past** or **past perfect tense** in the same way as in the “if-clause” of the above conditional sentences, as in the following examples:

I wish I **had** a lot of money.
I wish I **could** play the piano.

I wish I **had studied** harder for this test.
I wish I **hadn’t stayed up** so late last night.

Grammar Observation Exercise

Notice the use of verbs in the following conditional sentences (These are not errors, but examples of correct use of grammar by students):

1. Even if women didn't love their husbands, they couldn't get away from them.
2. I said it would be so hard for me if I lost the dog again.
3. I wonder what kind of father I would be if I were born as a boy.
4. If I were a father, I would buy my son or daughter a bike and teach him or her how to ride it.
5. The girl said, "Even if I could play the piano, I would never go on TV!"
6. If we look at "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid, we can see how the mother is being overprotective.
7. If the daughter were in China, she would have to listen to her mother.
8. People cannot come back if they take a wrong path.
9. If I had a sister, I would not feel lonely at home.
10. If parents want to have a good relationship with their children, they must communicate with and listen to them.
11. If my mother didn't work, our family wouldn't have enough money.
12. If I were ever to lose my sister, I would go crazy.
13. Parents will have trouble with their children if they try to force them to do what they don't want to do.
14. If Jing Mei's mother had not tried to force her to be a prodigy, she would have had a better relationship with her daughter.
15. If fathers do not spend enough time at home, they will not have a good relationship with their children.
16. If my father had not worked so hard, my family would not have been able to immigrate to the U.S. to try to find a better life.
17. If women want to have children, they should stay home and take care of the children, at least when they are very young.
18. Women would not have the rights that they have today if women long ago had not fought for women's liberation.
19. If my parents had not had a second child, I would have gotten more attention from them while I was growing up.
20. If a man and woman love each other, they can solve any problems in their relationship.

PART I. Circle the best answer to complete each sentence.

1. If you _____ to sign up for the course, you'll need to fill out this form.
a. want
b. wanted
c. would want
d. had wanted
2. If Rosa had been more careful, she _____ have passed the driving test.
a. will
b. could
c. may
d. must
3. Michael would _____ the class if he had handed in his paper on time.
a. pass
b. passed
c. have passed
d. had passed
4. What would you do if the company _____ offer you a job?
a. doesn't
b. will not
c. would not
d. didn't
5. Andrea now wishes that she _____ to her father's advice.
a. has listened
b. had listened
c. listened
d. listens
6. If the weather is okay, we _____ lunch outside.
a. have
b. will have
c. would have
d. do have

PART II. Fill in the blank with the correct form of the verb shown in parentheses.

7. If a drop of oil is placed in a glass of water, it _____ (float) to the top.
8. The car _____ (survive) the storm, if it had been parked in a garage.
9. If interest rates _____ (lower), more couples would be able to buy a new home.
10. If I _____ (be) you, I'd save my money.
11. If she _____ (go) to a place where there are lots of people, she panics.

12. If electric cars didn't cost so much, they _____ (become) popular.
13. If I _____ (fail) the driver's test, I would have a driver's license.
14. If I _____ (play) piano, I would have majored in music.

PART III. Rewrite the sentences using if clauses and contrary-to-fact result clauses.

15. She didn't go to the concert yesterday because she didn't have time.

16. I didn't read your email because I hadn't checked my computer.

17. They didn't know about the party, so they didn't go.

18. I didn't call you because I didn't have your number.

19. You didn't listen to your father's advice, and you were sorry.

20. He spent his time playing video games, so didn't hand in the assignment on time.

PART IV. Write a wish statement using the phrases given and the subject and time frame indicated. (Every statement will use the subject in parenthesis with the verb 'wish'.)

21. Ordered the fish...order pizza. (she)

PAST

22. ...have an apartment to myself (I)

PRESENT

23. ... buy a motorcycle (my brother) FUTURE

24. ... saw the Eifel Tower when we visited Paris (we) PAST

25. ... the semester is over (I) PRESENT

PART V. There are five errors in conditional usage in the following paragraph. Find them (5 points) and correct them (5 points).

He may have been forced to resign as chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland, but there was one thing Sir Fred Goodwin would not say. Sir Fred said he will not choose to leave under the current circumstances, but declined invitations to apologize for his bank's failure. Asked if he will like to apologize, Sir Fred said: "I was not the cause of this. We will be having a lot of these difficulties and the world will still be in a financial crisis even if I were not in charge."

PART I. Circle the best answer to complete each sentence.

1. If Geoffrey _____ his job, he'll look for a new one.
 - a. lost
 - b. will lose
 - c. loses
 - d. has lost
2. We _____ have gone for a hike if the weather had not been so bad.
 - a. will
 - b. would
 - c. may
 - d. must
3. Leo _____ us if he had more time.
 - a. would visit
 - b. would have visited
 - c. will visit
 - d. visited
4. If Tanya _____ more exercise, she could lose weight.
 - a. gets
 - b. will get
 - c. got
 - d. would get
5. Faisal would not have pulled a muscle if he _____ more careful moving the sofa.
 - a. would have been
 - b. would be
 - c. were
 - d. had been
6. When I finish I good book, I always _____ satisfied.
 - a. will feel
 - b. feel
 - c. would feel
 - d. felt

PART II. Fill in the blank with the correct form of the verb shown in parentheses.

7. My dad would answer the phone if he _____ (cook, not) dinner right now.
8. Had things gone differently, there _____ (be) no "Challenger speech," and no call for Mr. Gorbachev to "tear down this wall."
9. If the new leader _____ (fulfill, not) people's expectations, he won't be smiling this time next year.
10. If she _____ (be) here, she'd tell you not to go.
11. If your enrollment is approved, the department _____ (add) the course to your schedule.
12. This wouldn't be so much of a problem if the recession hadn't hit and banks _____ (fail, not).

13. If I hadn't eaten so much, then I _____ (get) a stomachache.
14. If I _____ (sing), I would have joined the choir.
15. If the weather is okay, we _____ (have) lunch outside.
16. If the radius r is 1, the circle _____ (call) a unit circle.
17. If you _____ (leave, not) the cage open, the bird wouldn't have flown away.
18. If only you _____ (tell) me sooner, I could have volunteered!

PART III. Change the statements into conditional sentences.

19. Wendy didn't work hard in high school, so she isn't going to college. But...

20. Paula couldn't finish the marathon because she twisted her ankle. But...

21. I didn't finish the report because my computer isn't working. But...

22. I didn't call your sister because I didn't have her number. But...

23. I didn't answer the phone because I was in the shower. But....

24. He missed his flight because he overslept. But...

PART IV. Write a wish statement using the phrases given and the subject (and possibly object) in parentheses, for the time frame indicated.

25. ...finish high school (my father)

PAST

26. ...not have to take my sister to the movies (I) PRESENT

27. ... go to Costa Rica (my cousin) FUTURE

28. ... have a computer lab (she...her high school) PAST

29. ... not gamble (Maria...her husband) PRESENT

30. ... visit his homeland again (Dae-Hwa) FUTURE

PART V. Find the error in each sentence and correct it.

31. If I wasn't so broke, I'd help you out.

32. If you're not enjoying this music, then I would turn it off.

33. I enjoy working here, even if they didn't pay me.

34. He planned to drive to New York, even if there's a storm.

35. You could come, but only if you agree to leave your cell phone at home.

36. If only the travelers would have listening to the radio last night.

37. I wish she'd had warned me about the problem.

38. If they took better precautions, would they have avoided the problem?

39. Don't you wish you could live in a warmer climate?

40. If he had time, he would have helped you last night.

PART VI. There are five errors in conditional usage in the following paragraph. Find them (5 points) and correct them (5 points).

Even if Lehman Brothers were saved, another financial institution will have failed and set off the same global economic crisis that has plagued international markets for the last year, the European Central Bank President told CNBC.

“Lehman was a trigger, but you could have another trigger. Lehman could have been saved then AIG wouldn't have been saved, and then you would have had exactly the same thing,” said the bank's president Jean-Claude Trichet. “Even if Lehman and AIG would have been saved, there would have been a new entity that would have problems.”