

Language for Situational Interviews

In situational interviews, you are asked a hypothetical question. In answering such a hypothetical, you will typically use one of two specific sequences of verb forms. This worksheet reviews those sequences.

EXAMPLE: *Suppose you don't see eye to eye with your supervisor on how to deal with a problem? How would you handle the situation?*

- a. If I didn't see eye-to-eye with my supervisor on how to deal with a problem, I would...
- b. If this were to happen, I would...
- c. Were this to happen, I would...

These are all equivalent forms of the 2nd conditional, used to talk about a hypothetical event in the future or present. The “were” form in (b) is more elegant than the basic form in (a). The inverted form in (c) is again more elegant.

The tense sequence is: simple past (except “were” for the verb “be”) in the “If” clause, past modal (would, could, might) in the result clause.

EXAMPLE: *You are introducing a new policy into the team or group. You are facing a bit of opposition. How would you handle it?*

- a. If I had introduced a new policy and was facing opposition, I would...
- b. Had I introduced a new policy that was facing opposition, I would...

These are both equivalent forms of the so-called “mixed” conditional – where you are expressing a hypothetical past and its impact on the present. Form (a) is the basic form, while form (b) inverts the subject “I” with the first element of the verb phrase “had” to create a more formal tone.

The tense sequence is: past perfect in the “If” clause, past modal (would, could, might) in the result clause.

These are specific instances of English conditional tense sequences. You'll find more materials in the reading packets.