If and Whether

1. The basic distinction between these two words is that *If* introduces a **condition** and *Whether* introduces a choice between **two alternatives.**

> *If it rains, bring in the tables.*
>
>> "If it rains" is the condition for bringing in the tables.
>
> *I'll pay you ten pounds if you sing.*
>
>> "If you sing" is the condition for getting ten pounds.
>
> *I'll pay you ten pounds whether you sing or not.*
>
>> Here there is no condition: you will get ten pounds in **both** cases.
>
> *Let Anna know whether you are coming to the meeting.*
>
>> There are two alternatives: **(a)** coming **(b)** not coming. In **both** cases, you must tell Anna. This is not the same as *Let Anna know if you are coming to the meeting*: here, you only tell Anna if you **are** coming, you don't need to speak to her at all if you are not coming.
>
> *Your doctor will tell you whether you need another vaccination.*
>
>> The doctor will tell you in **both** cases: **(a)** you need another vaccination **(b)** you do not. This is not the same as *Your doctor will tell you if you need another vaccination*: here, he will only contact you in case **(a)**.

2. *If* and *whether* are sometimes **interchangeable**: they can have the same function.

(i) When reporting **yes/no** questions.

> *I am not sure whether I will be going to the party.*
> *I am not sure if I will be going to the party.*
>
>> (In both of these sentences, the **yes/no** question is "Am I going to the party?")
>
> *Janice wondered whether he really loved her.*
> *Janice wondered if he really loved her.*
>
>> (In both of these sentences, the **yes/no** question is "Does he really love me?")

(ii) In **whether...or... / if...or...** constructions.

> *I would like to know whether it is a true story or invented.*
> *I would like to know if it is a true story or invented.*