

Zero conditional

When we talk about things that are generally or always true, we can use:

If/When/Unless plus a present form + present simple or imperative

- If he gets there before me, ask him to wait.
- When you fly budget airline, you have to pay for your drinks and snacks.
- Unless you need more space, a small car is big enough for one person.

Note that we are not talking about a specific event but something which is generally true.

In the condition clause, we can use a variety of present forms. In the result clause, there can only be the present simple or imperative.

- If you visit London, go on the London Eye.
- If unemployment is rising, people tend to stay in their present jobs.
- If you've done that, go and have a coffee.
- When you go on holiday, take plenty of sun cream. It'll be very hot.
- When I'm concentrating, please don't make so much noise.
- When I've finished an article, I always ask Kate to read it through.

Notice that 'unless' means the same as 'if not'.

- Unless he asks you politely, refuse to do any more work on the project.
- Unless prices are rising, it's not a good investment.
- Unless you've been there yourself, you don't really understand how fantastic it is.

The first conditional

We use the First Conditional to talk about future events that are likely to happen.

- If we take John, he'll be really pleased.
- If you give me some money, I'll pay you back tomorrow.
- If they tell us they want it, we'll have to give it to them.
- If Mary comes, she'll want to drive.

The 'if' clause can be used with different present forms.

- If I go to New York again, I'll buy you a souvenir from the Empire State Building.
- If he's feeling better, he'll come.
- If she hasn't heard the bad news yet, I'll tell her.

The "future clause" can contain 'going to' or the future perfect as well as 'will'.

- If I see him, I'm going to tell him exactly how angry I am.
- If we don't get the contract, we'll have wasted a lot of time and money.

The "future clause" can also contain other modal verbs such as 'can' and 'must'.

- If you go to New York, you must have the cheesecake in Lindy's.
- If he comes, you can get a lift home with him.

Second conditional

The Second Conditional is used to talk about 'impossible' situations. Contrary fact

When I was here,----

If I were here

- If we were in London today, we would be able to go to the concert in Hyde Park.
- If I owned million dollars, I would give a lot to charity.
- If there were no hungry people in this world, it would be a much better place.
- If everyone had clean water to drink, there would be a lot less disease.

Note that after I / he/ she /it we often use the(subjunctive form) 'were' and not 'was'. (Some people think that 'were' is the only 'correct' form but other people think 'was' is equally 'correct'.)

- If she were happy in her job, she wouldn't be looking for another one.
- If I lived in Japan, I would eat sushi every day.
- If they were to enter our market, we'd have big problems. Note the form 'If I were you' which is often used to give advice.
- If I were you, I'd look for a new place to live.
- If I were you, I'd go back to school and get more qualifications.

The Second Conditional is also used to talk about 'unlikely' situations.

- If I went to China, I would visit the Great Wall.
- If I were the President, I would reduce taxes.
- If you were in my position, you would understand.

Note that the choice between the first and the second conditional is often a question of the speaker's attitude rather than of facts. Compare these examples. TOM thinks these things are possible, Peter doesn't.

- Tom – If I win the lottery, I'll buy a big house.
- Peter – If I won the lottery, I would buy a big house.
- Tom – If I get promoted, I'll throw a big party.
- Peter – If I got promoted, I would throw a big party.
- Tom– If my team win the Cup, I'll buy champagne for everybody.
- Peter – If my team won the Cup, I would buy champagne for everybody.

Note that the 'If clause' can contain the past simple or the past continuous.

- If I were still working in Brighton, I would commute by train.
- If she were coming, she would be here by now.
- If they were thinking of selling, I would want to buy.

Note that the main clause can contain 'would' 'could' or 'might'.

- If I had the chance to do it again, I would do it differently.
- If we met up for lunch, we could go to that new restaurant.
- If I spoke to him directly, I might be able to persuade him.

Also note that sometimes the 'if clause' is implied rather than spoken.

- What would I do without you? ("if you weren't here")
- Where would I get one at this time of night? ("if I wanted one")
- He wouldn't agree. ("if I asked him")

Third conditional

We can use the Third Conditional to talk about 'impossible' conditions, impossible because they are in the past and we cannot change what has happened.

- If I had worked harder at school, I would have got better grades.
- If I had had time, I would have gone to see him. But I didn't have time.
- If we had bought that house, we would have had to rebuild the kitchen.
- If we had caught the earlier train, we would have got there on time but we were late.

Notice that the main clause can contain 'would', 'could' or 'might'.

- If I had seen him at the meeting, I would have asked him. (But he wasn't there so I didn't.)
- If I had seen him at the meeting, I could have asked him. (But he wasn't there so it wasn't possible.)
- If I had seen him at the meeting, I might have asked him. (But I'm not sure. Perhaps if the opportunity had arisen.)
- If I had paid more attention in class, I would have understood the lesson. Also notice that sometimes the 'if clause' is implied rather than spoken.
- I'd have done it. ("if you had asked me but you didn't.")
- I wouldn't have said that. ("if I'd been there.")
- He wouldn't have let him get away with that. ("if he had tried that with me.")

Wish

Let's start off with the easy part. 'I wish to' can mean the same as 'I want to' but it is much, much more formal and much, much less common.

- I wish to make a complaint.

- I wish to see the manager. You can also use 'wish' with a noun to 'offer good wishes'.
- I wish you all the best in your new job.
- We wish you a merry Christmas.

Notice that when you want to offer good wishes using a verb, you must use 'hope ' and not 'wish'.

- We wish you the best of luck.
- We hope you have the best of luck.
- I wish you a safe and pleasant journey.
- I hope you have a safe and pleasant journey.

However, the main use of 'wish' is to say that we would like things to be different from what they are, that we have regrets about the present situation.

- I wish I were rich.
- He wishes he lived in Paris.
- They wish they'd chosen a different leader.

Notice that the verb tense which follows 'I wish' is 'more in the past' than the tense corresponding to its meaning.

- I'm too fat. I wish I was thin.
- I never get invited to parties. I wish I got invited to parties.
- It's raining. I wish it wasn't raining.
- I went to see the latest Star Wars film. I wish I hadn't gone.
- I've eaten too much. I wish I hadn't eaten so much.
- I'm going to visit her later. I wish I wasn't going to visit her later.

In the case of 'will' , where 'will' means 'show willingness' we use 'would'.

- He won't help me. I wish he would help me.
- You're making too much noise. I wish you would be quiet.
- You keep interrupting me. I wish you wouldn't do that.

Where 'will' means a future event, we cannot use 'wish' and must use 'hope'.

- There's a strike tomorrow. I hope some buses will still be running.
- I hope everything will be fine in your new job.

In more formal English, we use the subjunctive form 'were' and not 'was' after 'wish'.

- I wish I were taller.
- I wish it were Saturday today.
- I wish he were here.