Grammar Reference

1) The third conditional

We use the third conditional to talk about imagined past events: things that might have happened in the past, but didn't happen.

If I'd known it was your birthday, I'd have bought you a present.
If the taxi had arrived on time, he wouldn't have missed the plane.

A conditional sentence has two parts. In the third conditional, the **if** part is the imaginary situation in the past, and the **main** part is what could have happened (but didn't happen) as a result. We make the third conditional with **if + past perfect**, and **would have + past participle**.

If I'd known *it was your birthday*… (This is the imaginary situation in the past)

I'd have bought *you a present.* (This is the imaginary result of the situation in the past)

The two parts can come in any order. When we write, we put a comma between the **if** part and the **result** part. You don't use a comma when the **result** part comes first.

> *If I'd known it was your birthday**,** I'd have bought you a present.*
> *I'd have bought you a present if I'd known it was your birthday.*
> *If the taxi had arrived on time, Jack wouldn't have missed the plane.*
> *Jack wouldn't have missed the plane if the taxi had arrived on time.*

We use the past perfect in the **if** part to show the situation is imaginary and didn't actually happen. The **result** part of the sentence tells us the imaginary result of this situation.

If there had been *any snow,* ***we'd have gone*** *skiing.* (There wasn't any snow; we didn't go skiing.)

If it hadn't been *raining,* ***we'd have had*** *a picnic.* (It was raining; we didn't have a picnic.)

Form

Positive
If you'd asked me to marry you, ***I'd have said*** *no.*
We'd have been *in trouble* ***if we'd missed*** *the last train.*

Negative
She wouldn't have become *ill* ***if she'd taken*** *the medicine.*
It would have been *better* ***if they hadn't come*** *to the party.*
If you hadn't been *so friendly,* ***I wouldn't have talked*** *to you.*

Question
What would they have done if they'd lost *their jobs?*
If I'd told *him the truth,* ***how would he have felt?***

Short answer
In short answers, you use **would/wouldn't**.
If you'd needed *help,* ***would you have asked*** *me?*
Yes, I ***would****. / No, I* ***wouldn't****.*

Take note: past continuous

We can use **the past continuous** in the **if** part of the sentence.

If he'd been driving *more carefully,* ***he wouldn't have had*** *an accident.*
I wouldn't have met *my girlfriend* ***if I'd been living*** *abroad.*

Take note: modals

We can use other modal verbs in the result part, for example **might**. **Might** shows we are less certain than when we use **will**.

We might have been *happier if we'd bought the other house.*
If he hadn't got up so late, ***he might not have missed*** *the train.*

Take note: 'I wish …'and 'If only …'

We use **I wish** or **If only** with the past perfect when we are sorry about something that happened in the past, and we imagine doing things differently.

I wish I'd stayed *in bed this morning.* (I'm having a bad day today.)

If only I'd stayed *in bed this morning.*

I wish I'd picked *the other horse!* (My horse didn't win the race.)

If only I'd picked the other horse!

Spoken English

In the third conditional, we usually use a short form of **had** and **had not** when we speak: I had = **I'd**, I had not = **I hadn't**. We also use a short form of **would** and **would not**: I would = **I'd**, he would = **he'd,** I would not = I **wouldn't,** etc.

We'd have been unhappy if we'd lost the game.

*We **wouldn't** have been happy if we **hadn't** won the game.*

The third conditional is sometimes confusing because **I'd** can mean both **I had** and **I would** – so listen carefully! And remember that **I'd** in the if part is **I had**, and **I'd** in the result part is **I would**.

2) Double contractions

In spoken English, people often use contractions like this: I will becomes I'll and you would becomes you'd. Double contractions are when we shorten three words, like this:

I would have -> I'd've

could not have -> couldn't've

might not have -> mightn't've

must not have -> mustn't've

cannot have -> can't've

you would have -> you'd've

he would have -> he'd've

she would have -> she'd've

we would have -> we'd've

they would have -> they'd've