

# Grammar Reference

## Conditionals review

### Meaning and use

Conditional sentences express a connection between two actions or states. One thing happens because of another. These connections can be general, specific, likely, unlikely, real or imagined.

Although there are quite a few different ways of forming conditional sentences there are common patterns known as zero, first, second and third conditionals.

#### Zero conditionals

Used to refer to general truths, scientific facts and the predictable results of particular actions. One thing happens and because of this something else happens. In zero conditionals **if** and **when** have the same meaning.

*If you heat water enough, it boils.*

*When he scores, he celebrates by making a heart shape with his hands.*

*When it's raining, he stays indoors.*

#### First conditionals

Used when we want to talk about something that is **likely** to happen in the future after a specific set of circumstances, the condition. **If** is used when the condition is possible and **when** is used when the condition is certain to happen.

*If I go to the shops, I'll get some bread. (I might not go to the shops)*

*When I go to the shops, I'll get some bread. (I'm definitely going to the shops)*

*If you've finished your homework by six, you can go out and play.*

*When you're having your party, please keep the noise down!*

#### Second conditionals

Refer to an imagined present result of an unlikely or impossible present condition.

*If I had the money, I'd travel around the world. (I don't have the money)*

*If I were you, I'd think about leaving him. (I'm not you)*

#### Third conditionals

Refer to an imagined past result of something that didn't happen in the past.

*If I had known you were coming, I wouldn't have prepared the cheese dish.  
(I didn't know you were coming. I prepared a cheese dish.)*

*If I had known then what I know now, I wouldn't have wasted so much time at university.  
(I didn't know then what I know now. I did waste a lot of time at university.)*

### Form

Conditional sentences usually have two parts. There is the **if clause** (sometimes called the **conditional clause**) and the **result clause** (sometimes called the **main clause**). The clauses can come in any order.

If the **if clause** is first, the two clauses are separated by a comma.

There is no comma if the **result clause** is first.

#### Zero conditional

If clause:

**if/when + present simple**

Result clause:

**present simple**

*When I turn it on, it makes a funny noise.*

*If you multiply ten by twelve, what do you get?*

*Milk goes bad if you leave it out too long.*

#### First conditional

If clause:

**if/when + present simple**

Result clause:

**will / 'll + infinitive without to / imperative**

*If it rains, you'll get wet.*

*If it rains, put your coat on.*

*If you're leading at half time, I'll let your dad know.*

*If you've won, give me a call as soon as possible.*

### Second conditional

If clause:

**if + past simple** (exception: verb **'to be'** takes **'were'** in 1st and 2nd person)

Result clause:

**would / 'd + infinitive without to**

*If I knew what was wrong, I'd fix it myself.*

*I'd be out on my bike if it weren't raining so hard.*

### Third conditional

If clause:

**if + past perfect**

Main clause:

**would / 'd + have / 've + past participle**

*If I'd known it'd break, I wouldn't have tried to pick it up.*

*If you hadn't insisted on changing your shirt we wouldn't've missed the bus.*

### Take note: modals

Most first, second and third conditional clauses commonly use **will** or **would** but it is possible to use other modal auxiliaries instead. For example:

#### First conditional

*If you go to the shops, **can** you get some bread, please?*

*If you go to the shops, **could** you get some bread, please?*

*If I go to the beach at the weekend, I **might** try out my new wet suit.*

*If I get a phone call this afternoon, it **may** be good news.*

*When we go on holiday this year, we **should** book a nicer hotel.*

#### Second conditional

*If I had enough money, I **could** travel around the world.*

*If I were elected, I **might** be able to do some good.*

#### Third conditional

*If you'd told me earlier, I **could've** done something about it.*

*If we had caught the right bus, we **might've been** on time.*

### Take note: mixed conditionals

**Mixed conditionals** combine the structure of type 2 and type 3 conditionals when the time (past, present and future) referred to in the if and result clauses are not the same.

**Mixed conditionals** can refer to:

something that didn't happen in the past and the result of that condition in the present

*If you hadn't left the map at home, we wouldn't be lost.*  
(You left the map at home in the past. We are lost now.)

something that won't happen in the future and the result of that condition on the past

*If I weren't going on holiday next week, I could have accepted that offer of work.*  
(I am going on holiday in the future which is why I didn't accept the offer of work in the past.)

