

Grammar Reference

First conditional

Meaning and use

We use the first conditional to talk about possible future situations (or 'conditions') and their results. We use **if** for things we think are likely to happen, and **when** for things we think are certain to happen.

If I visit London, I'll stay with friends.

It isn't certain that I will go to London.

When I visit London, I'll stay with friends.

It's certain that I will go to London.

Form

A conditional sentence usually has two parts: the **if/when** part and the result (**main**) part. For the first conditional we use the present simple in the **if/when** part, and **will + infinitive** (without 'to') in the main part.

Conditional clause (if/when part) + Main clause (main part)

If/When + present simple - will + infinitive without to

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

If I visit London, I'll stay with my friends.

I'll stay with my friends if I visit London.

When she gets home tonight, she'll give you a call.

She'll give you a call when she gets home tonight.

Positive

If you're late, we'll wait for you.

When I get home, I'll call you.

They'll go to the beach if it's sunny.

Negative

When I get home, I won't watch TV.

If we don't hurry, we'll miss the train.

They won't go to the beach if it isn't sunny.

Question

When you finish school, what will you do?

How will he feel if he doesn't get the job?

If you pass your exams, will you go to university?

Short answer Yes, I will. / No, I won't.

Take Note: modals

We can use modals such as **may**, **might**, **can** or **should** in first conditional sentences. **May** and **might** show we are less certain than when we use **will**.

*We **might** be late if the shops are busy.*

*If I feel unwell tomorrow, I **may** stay at home.*

*You **shouldn't** use the kettle if it isn't working properly.*

*If you **can't** finish your homework tonight, you **can't** go out tomorrow.*

*When you **can** smell the cake, you'll know that it's cooked.*

Take note: going to and present continuous with future meaning

We can use **going to** or the **present continuous** with future meaning in the if/when part or the main part.

If we don't leave right now, we're going to be late.

If you're playing tennis later, you'll need to take your racket.

Take note: as long as and unless

We can use **as long as** and **unless** with the same meaning as **if** and **if not**:

As long as *we leave now, we won't be late.* (= If we leave now, we won't be late.)

Unless *we leave now, we'll be late.* (= If we don't leave now, we'll be late.)

Spoken English

The **will** in the first conditional can be shortened to **'ll** in both speaking and informal writing. In the negative form, **will not** can be shortened to **won't**.

If I lose my umbrella, I'll buy another one.

*We **won't** be pleased if we miss our flight.*

It is sometimes difficult to hear the shortened form **'ll** before the infinitive. But it's important to remember it!