

# 13

## GRAMMAR

### Conditionals 1

#### General truths: *If/When + present simple + present simple*

This form is often referred to as the 'zero conditional'.

- What always happens as the result of an action. This is a generalization, rather than a description of what will happen in a particular situation:

*If/When you increase the prices too much, people don't buy the goods.*

#### Real conditions: *If + present simple + will/won't (do)*

This form is often referred to as the 'first conditional'.

- What will really happen as the result of a possible action:

*If fishing continues, this species will soon become extinct.*

*If governments don't take action, the effects of global warming will be disastrous.*

#### General truth or real condition?

- The choice depends on the attitude of the user.

This is what happens all the time – a generalization:

*Choosing the right price for your goods is an important part of successful selling. If you increase the prices too much, fewer people buy the goods.*

This is what will happen in a particular situation we are discussing:

*We need to generate more income this year, but we must be careful not to overprice our goods. If we increase the prices too much, nobody will buy them.*

#### Other variants

General truths and real conditions can contain modals *can, could, might, should*, etc.

See Grammar 16 and 17.

- General truth

*When it rains heavily, this area can suffer from flooding.*

*If the weather changes now, that could cause problems.*

- Real condition

*If fishing continues, this species may/might well become extinct.*

#### Unreal conditions: *If + past simple + would (do)*

This form is often referred to as the 'second conditional'.

- An imaginary present result which follows from an imaginary present situation:

*If the Earth didn't have a Moon, there wouldn't be any tides.*

*If I knew the answer I'd tell you. But I don't know it, I'm afraid!*

- The past simple form does not refer to past time. In formal speech or writing we use *were* rather than *was*:

*If the walls were stronger, they would take a heavier load.*

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- *Could, might, etc* are also possible in the second clause:  
*If the walls **were** stronger, they **might take** a heavier load.*

### Would

- We can use *would* to describe imaginary situations with the *if* understood but unstated:

*What **would** you do in that case? I'd resign, I think.*

### Real or unreal?

The difference between real and unreal conditions may be a matter of speaker choice and context. The meaning communicated may be the same.

- The following is a real possibility. You are about to travel – perhaps we are at the station:

*If you **take** the 2.30 train, you'll get there before 5.00.*

- In the following sentence, we are only discussing your options. Your journey is in the future, or may not happen:

*If you **took** the 2.30 train, you'd get there before 5.00.*

### Unless

- *Unless* means 'only if not', and is used when we say that if something does not happen, something else will happen (or be true) as a result:

*If the government **does not help** the banks, they **will not survive**.*

*The banks **will not survive unless** the government **helps** them.*

→ SEE ALSO

Grammar 14: Conditionals 2