

These expressions are used in sentences in different ways:

Examples:

- 1 Notebook computers **will definitely** be cheaper next year.
- 2 **It is (highly) probable/likely that** notebook computers will be cheaper next year.
- 3 Notebook computers **may/might** be cheaper next year.
- 4 **Perhaps** notebook computers **will** be cheaper next year.
- 5 **It is unlikely/doubtful that** notebook computers will be cheaper next year.
- 6 Notebook computers **will most probably not** be cheaper next year.
- 7 Notebook computers **will definitely not** be cheaper next year.
- 8 **It is impossible that** notebook computers will be cheaper next year.

Sometimes, predictions are made subject to certain conditions. In such cases, sentences typically have two parts: the *if-clause* and the *main clause*.

Examples:

- 1 **If** the price of notebooks fall next year, I will buy one.
- 2 **If** the system crashes, we will lose all our latest data.

When the *if-clause* comes second, there is no comma between the two clauses.

Examples:

- 1 I will buy a notebook **if** the price of notebooks fall next year.
- 2 We will lose all our latest data **if** the system crashes.

As with the simple predictions listed above, it is possible to express different levels of certainty about the likelihood of the condition (in the *if-clause*) by changing the tense of the verbs from the future and present forms to the more 'remote' past and conditional forms.

Examples:

- 1 *If the price of notebooks falls next year, I will buy one.* (The speaker thinks it is possible that the price of notebooks will fall next year and, if it does, he will buy one.)
- 2 *If the price of notebooks fell next year, I would buy one.* (The speaker thinks it is unlikely that the price of notebooks will fall next year but, if it does, he will buy one.)
- 3 *If the system crashes, we will lose all our latest data.* (The speaker thinks it is possible that the system will crash and, if it does, we will lose all our data.)
- 4 *If the system crashed, we would lose all our latest data.* (The speaker thinks it is unlikely that the system will crash but, if it did, we would lose all our data.)

The first form, as in sentences 1 and 3 – [(*If* + present) + *will*] – is known as the first conditional. The second form, as in sentences 2 and 4 – [(*If* + past) + *would*] – is known as the second conditional.

Exercise 1

Match the if-clauses (1 to 6) to the main clauses (a to f) to make complete sentences.

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|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | If you never read computer magazines... | a | ...you would be able to access our bulletin board. |
| 2 | If you never back up your hard disk... | b | ...it is unlikely that you will have a problem with computer viruses. |
| 3 | If you had a modem... | c | ...we would have a bigger range of typefaces and fonts to choose from. |
| 4 | If you don't copy pirated software... | d | ...you will miss important new products. |
| 5 | If I knew more programming languages... | e | ...I would get a better job. |
| 6 | If we bought a better printer... | f | ...you will probably lose some important files. |

Exercise 2

Complete the sentences with the words below. Are the sentences first (F) or second (S) conditionals?

- 1 ☐ If you _____ your VDU in direct sunlight, it _____ damaged.
- 2 ☐ If you _____ your screen for too long, you _____ a headache.
- 3 ☐ If you _____ to link your PCs with a mainframe, you _____ to install a network.
- 4 ☐ If the market for portable computers _____, prices _____ even more next year.
- 5 ☐ If we _____ a fax machine and e-mail facility, we _____ so many letters each day.

would not post	leave
grows	will get
will be	would need
wanted	will be reduced
look at	installed

Now make up three first conditional and three second conditional sentences of your own.