

# If...not and unless; if and whether, etc.

if ...not and unless

A

**Unless** is used in conditional sentences with the meaning 'if...not':

- There's no chance of you getting the job **unless you apply**. (*or ...if you don't apply.*)
- You can't travel on this train **unless you have** a reservation. (*or ...if you don't have...*)

With **unless** we use present tenses when we talk about the future:

- **Unless it rains**, I'll pick you up at 6.00. (*not Unless it will rain...*)

B

In most real conditional sentences (see Unit 99), we can use either **unless** or **if...not** with a similar meaning. However, we use **if...not** but not **unless**:

- in most *unreal* conditional sentences:
  - He would be happier **if he didn't** take things so seriously. (*not ...unless he took...*)
  - **If** she hadn't gone to university, she would have gone into the police force. (*not Unless she had gone...*)
- when we talk about emotions:
  - I'll be *amazed* **if** Christie doesn't win. (*not ...unless Christie wins.*)
- in most questions:
  - **If** you don't pass the test, what will you do? (*not Unless you pass...*)

We use **unless** but not **if...not** when we introduce an afterthought.

- Without Philip to run it, the course can't continue - **unless you** want the job, of course. (*not ... - if you don't want...*)

In written English, the afterthought is often separated from the rest of the sentence by a dash.

C

if and whether

We can use **if** or **whether** to say that two possibilities have been talked about, or to say that people are not sure about something:

- They couldn't decide **whether/if** it was worth re-sitting the exam.
- I doubt **whether/if** anyone else agrees with me.

**Whether** can usually be followed directly by **or not**. Compare:

- I didn't know **if** Tom was coming **or not**. (*not ...if or not Tom was coming.*) *and*
- I didn't know **whether or not** Tom was coming. (*or ...whether Tom was coming or not.*)

D

We prefer **whether** rather than **if**:

- after the verbs **advise, consider, discuss**:
    - You should *consider* carefully **whether** the car you are interested in is good value.
  - before **to-infinitives** and after **prepositions**:
    - I couldn't decide **whether** *to buy* apples or bananas.
    - We argued *about* **whether** women are more liberated in Britain or the USA.
  - in a clause acting as a subject or complement:
    - **Whether the minister will quit over the issue** remains to be seen.
    - The first issue is **whether he knew he was committing a crime**.
  - in the pattern **noun + as to + whether** to mean 'about' or 'concerning':
    - There was some *disagreement* **as to whether** he was eligible to play for France.
- Other nouns commonly used in this pattern are **debate, discussion, doubt, question, uncertainty**.

E

These sentences include other words and phrases used to introduce conditional clauses:

- We'll have the meeting this afternoon, **provided/providing (that)** no-one objects.
- **Supposing (that)** they ask me why I resigned from my last job - what should I say?
- I'll write to you every week - **as/so long as** you promise to reply.

Whether ⇒ UNIT 40 Conditionals (1) and (2) ⇒ UNITS 99, 100

## EXERCISES

**101.1** Write a new sentence with the same meaning. Use *unless* in your answer and begin with the word given. (A)

- 1 I have to telephone Mike tonight or he'll sell the car to someone else. **Unless** I telephone Mike tonight, he'll sell the **car** to **someone** else.
- 2 The hospital must get more money or it will close. **Unless...**
- 3 You should keep medicines in the fridge only if it is necessary. **You...**
- 4 Speak to her only if she speaks to you **first**. Don't...
- 5 It must rain within the next week, or water supplies will be cut off. **Unless...**

**101.2** Underline the correct phrase. If either is possible, underline them both. (B)

- 1 Unless it had been / If it hadn't been for my friends, I wouldn't have got the job.
- 2 You'll be really sorry unless you take / if you don't take the opportunity.
- 3 Unless we cut / If we don't cut resource use and waste, we face a decline in the quality of our lives.
- 4 The workers have threatened to go on strike unless they are given / if they're not given a pay rise.
- 5 Unless we hear from you / If we don't hear from you we'll expect you around 12.30.
- 6 I must get on with my work - unless you want / if you don't want to help me.
- 7 The club will have to close unless we can attract / if we can't attract more members.
- 8 He wouldn't have failed his exams unless he had / if he hadn't been ill.
- 9 What will you do unless you go / if you don't go away for the weekend?

**101.3** Write whether or **if/whether** in these sentences. (C & D)

- 1 It was a good opportunity to ask Charles.....he shared my views.
- 2 When I saw his face I didn't know.....to laugh or cry.
- 3 There is some question as to.....the public should be told about the accident.
- 4 It was too dark to tell.....she was awake or asleep.
- 5.....they continue to work for us depends on how much we can pay.
- 6 She briefly considered.....she should call the police, but then walked away.
- 7 It remains to be seen.....he can win in a major competition.
- 8 She couldn't make up her mind about.....Jack had stolen the money.

**101.4** Complete the sentences with *as long as*, *provided*, *supposing*, or *unless*. (A & E)

- 1.....our calculations are correct, we'll make a profit within a year.
- 2.....she is injured, she should win easily.
- 3.....it was possible to go back in time, I'd like to see the pyramids being built.



Now complete these sentences with your own ideas.

- 4 Providing my neighbours don't object...
- 5 Supposing I get made redundant,...
- 6 Unless the destruction of the world's rain forests is stopped,...