



FREE RESOURCE · GRAMMAR

Conditionals

Conditional sentences state a condition and its result, usually with if. English has four main types, numbered zero to three, plus mixed conditionals. The type you choose depends on whether the situation is always true, a real future possibility, an unreal present, or an unreal past.

What to know

The big picture

Every conditional sentence has two clauses: the if clause, which gives the condition, and the main clause, which gives the result. The tense in each clause tells the listener how real the situation is.

Zero conditional: always true

Form: if + present simple, present simple. Use it for facts, rules and habits: If you heat ice, it melts. If the page does not load, refresh the browser. In this pattern, when can replace if.

First conditional: real future possibility

Form: if + present simple, will + base verb. Use it for a real possibility in the future: If it rains tomorrow, we will stay at home. If the government raises taxes, spending will fall.

Second conditional: unreal present or future

Form: if + past simple, would + base verb. Use it for unlikely or imaginary situations and for advice: If I lived by the sea, I would swim every day. If I were you, I would take the job.

Third conditional: unreal past

Form: if + past perfect, would have + past participle. Use it for regrets and for how the past could have been different: If she had left earlier, she would have caught the train.

Exercises

1. If you freeze water, it _____ ice.
 - a. became
 - b. becomes
 - c. would become
2. If it rains tomorrow, we _____ the match.
 - a. will cancel
 - b. would cancel
 - c. cancelled
3. If I lived by the sea, I _____ a boat.
 - a. bought
 - b. would buy

c. will buy

4. If she had accepted the job, she _____ in Dublin now.

a. will be living

b. had been living

c. would be living

5. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) If I (2) would have (3) more time, (4) I would read more.

6. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) If the bus (2) won't come, (3) we will walk.

7. Begin with If. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): If it / rains, / stay inside. / would / we will

8. Correct this: *If I will see him, I will tell him.*

9. Unless you _____ now, you will miss the train.

a. will leave

b. do not leave

c. leave

10. If I had left earlier yesterday, I _____ late for the meeting.

a. would not have been

b. will not be

c. would not be

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/conditionals/practice/

IELTS tip. In Speaking Part 3, a conditional answer lets you explore a situation in one sentence, such as If cities had more green space, people would be healthier. In Writing Task 2, use one or two conditionals in your solution or discussion paragraphs, and check the verb forms in both clauses.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

Conditionals

AIM	Learners see how the four conditionals and mixed conditionals fit together and choose the right one for a situation.
TIME	35 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Write four situations on the board (water freezing, tomorrow's weather, winning a lottery, a missed train) and ask learners to say a sentence with if about each.

Lesson steps

1. Group the learners' sentences by tense and name each type, using the real or imaginary and past, present or future questions.
2. Give a chart of the four forms with blanks. Learners fill it in with their own examples.
3. Run a card game: each card has a situation; learners decide which conditional fits and say the sentence.
4. Introduce one mixed conditional and show how it joins the third and second forms.

Extension

Learners write a short Task 2 paragraph that uses one first conditional and one second conditional, and swap with a partner for checking.

Answer key

1. b) becomes. This is a general fact, so both clauses use the present simple.
2. a) will cancel. This is a real future possibility, so the result clause uses will.
3. b) would buy. The past simple in the if clause signals an unreal situation, so the result uses would.
4. c) would be living. This mixed conditional links a past condition to a present result.
5. Part 2: *would have* → **had**. In the second conditional, the if clause uses the past simple: had.
6. Part 2: *won't come*, → **doesn't come**. After if we use the present simple, not will, even for the future.
7. If it rains, we will stay inside. The first conditional uses the present simple in the if clause and will in the result.
8. If I see him, I will tell him. The if clause uses the present simple.
9. c) leave. Unless already means if not, so the verb is positive.

10. a) would not have been. This is the third conditional, so the result uses would have plus the past participle.

Questions learners often ask

How many conditionals are there in English? Teachers usually describe four main types, numbered zero to three, and then mixed conditionals. Learn the four main types first.

Which conditional is most useful for IELTS? The first and second conditionals are very useful for speaking and writing, since they let you discuss real and imaginary situations.

Can I use when instead of if? In the zero conditional, yes. In the first conditional, when means you are sure it will happen, and if means it is only possible.

Do I always need a comma? Use a comma after the if clause when it comes first. Do not use a comma when the main clause comes first.

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Murphy, R. (2019). English Grammar in Use (5th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Written by Will Salisbury · IELTS Laboratory · ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/conditionals · Free to copy for classroom use.