



FREE RESOURCE · GRAMMAR

First conditional

The first conditional talks about a real or likely future situation and its result. Use **if + present simple** in the condition and **will + base verb** in the result: If the government raises taxes on cars, fewer people will drive. Never use **will** in the **if-clause**.

What to know

What the first conditional is for

The first conditional describes something that may well happen in the future and what will probably follow. It is a way to say cause and effect about the future. In IELTS Writing Task 2 it is very useful for predictions and solutions. In Speaking Part 3 it helps you discuss what could happen if people change their behaviour.

- *If I pass the exam, I will apply for a master's degree.* · possible condition, likely result
- *If cities build more cycle lanes, more people will cycle.* · general prediction

The pattern

The pattern is **if + present simple, will + base verb**. The **if-clause** uses the present simple even though the meaning is about the future. The result uses **will** (or a modal such as **can, may or should**).

- If you study regularly, you will improve.
- You will improve if you study regularly.
- If the weather is bad, the flight may be cancelled.

Never put will after if

The most common mistake in the first conditional is using **will** in the **if-clause**. Say **If it rains**, not **If it will rain**. The same is true after **when, as soon as, before and until**, which are explained in the future tenses article.

Other words and modals

You can replace **if** with **unless** (which means **if not**): You will miss the train unless you leave now. Do not add a second negative: **not unless you don't leave**.

First conditional or zero conditional?

Both use the present simple in the **if-clause**. The difference is in the result. The first conditional is about one possible future situation and uses **will**: If it rains tomorrow, the match will be postponed. The zero conditional is about things that are always true and uses the present simple in both parts: If you heat ice, it melts. Use the first for a particular future, and the zero for general facts.

Exercises

1. If the government _____ taxes on cars, fewer people will drive.
 - a. will raise
 - b. raises

c. raised

2. We will miss the train unless we _____ now.

a. leave

b. will leave

c. left

3. If you feel unwell, you _____ see a doctor.

a. did

b. should

c. would

4. I will lend you my notes _____ you return them tomorrow.

a. in case

b. unless

c. as long as

5. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) If I (2) will have (3) time tomorrow, (4) I will call you.

6. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) If more people (2) use public transport, (3) the air will (4) becomes cleaner.

7. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): rise, / cars. / prices / If / people / fewer / buy / would / will

8. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): the / will / problem / act / worse. / we / get / don't / Unless / now,

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

10. Correct this: *Unless you don't hurry, you will miss the bus.*

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

IELTS tip. Use one or two accurate first conditionals in Writing Task 2 to link a suggestion to a result, and in Speaking Part 3 to answer questions like What will happen if...? Always check that the if-clause has the present simple and that the result has will, may or should.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

First conditional

AIM	Learners form and use the first conditional accurately and apply it to predictions in speaking and Task 2 writing.
TIME	30 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 *If I win the lottery...* and *If it rains tomorrow...* on the board. Ask which is more likely, to draw out the idea of real and unreal futures.

Lesson steps

1. Present the pattern with three examples and elicit the verb forms in each clause.
2. Run a chain game: one learner says an if-clause, the next uses its result as a new if-clause (*If I miss the bus, I will be late. If I am late, my teacher will be angry...*).
3. Introduce *unless*, *as long as* and *provided that* with a short matching task.
4. Learners rewrite three Task 2 sentences using a first conditional with a modal in the result.
5. Pairs discuss a Part 3 style question (*What will happen if more people work from home?*) using the pattern.

Extension

Learners prepare a one-minute talk about a possible future change in their city using at least four first conditional sentences.

Answer key

1. b) *raises*. The if-clause takes the present simple even though the meaning is about the future.
2. a) *leave*. After *unless*, use the present simple, not *will*.
3. b) *should*. A modal such as *should* works in the result clause to give advice.
4. c) *as long as*. *As long as* means only if. *Unless* would reverse the meaning, and *in case* has a different meaning.
5. Part 2: *will have* → **have**. Use the present simple after if: *if I have*.
6. Part 4: *becomes cleaner*. → **become cleaner**. After *will*, use the base verb: *will become*.
7. If prices rise, fewer people will buy cars. The if-clause is in the present simple and the result takes *will* + base verb.
8. Unless we act now, the problem will get worse. *Unless already* means if not, so the verb after it is positive.

9. If I see him, I will tell him. Do not use will in the if-clause.
10. Unless you hurry, you will miss the bus. Unless means if not, so you do not add another negative.

Questions learners often ask

What is the first conditional? It is a sentence structure for real or likely future situations: if + present simple, will + base verb. An example is If it rains, we will stay home.

Can I use will in the if-clause? Not normally. After if, when, unless and similar words, use the present simple to refer to the future. A rare polite exception is if you will wait here.

What does unless mean? Unless means if not. You will fail unless you work hard means You will fail if you do not work hard.

What is the difference between the first and second conditional? The first is for possible future situations (if it rains, we will go in). The second is for unlikely or imaginary situations (if I won the lottery, I would travel).

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage, 4th edition. Oxford University Press.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006). Cambridge Grammar of English. Cambridge University Press.

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