

conditional sentences

- **Conditional sentences type 1: probable**

Conditional type 1 is a **real conditional** and is usually used to talk about the future. The verb in the **if**-clause is in the present tense and the verb in the main clause is in the future simple. This structure means that the action in the **if**-clause is quite probable.

FORM:

condition: **if + Present Simple**, result: **will + infinitive**

If you leave now, you will catch them.

Either clause can be used first but pay attention to punctuation.

The dog will bite you if you poke him with a stick.

If you poke him with a stick, the dog will bite you.

Note that even though the meaning may refer to the present or to the future, the verb in the **if**-clause is always in the present, not in the future tense.

- **Conditional sentences type 2: hypothetical**

Conditional type 2 is an **unreal conditional** and can be used to talk about the present or the future.

FORM:

condition: **if + Past Simple**, result: **would + infinitive**

The past tense in the **if**-clause is a past subjunctive which means that the action is unreal, improbable or imaginary.

If I had more money, I would lend you some. (But I don't have more money. The meaning here is present and it indicates unreality.)

If someone stole my second-hand car, I would buy a better one. (But I don't expect that anyone will even try to steal my car. The meaning here is future and it indicates improbability.)

If I had wings, I would fly. (The meaning is present or future and refers to an imaginary situation.)

- **Conditional sentences type 3**

Conditional type 3 refers to an imaginary or unreal situation in the past. The verb in the **if**-

clause is in the past perfect tense and the main verb is in the perfect conditional. The meaning is that the condition cannot be completed as the action in the **if**-clause didn't happen.

FORM:

condition: **if + Past Perfect**, result: **would + have + past participle**

If I had known my ex was coming the party, I wouldn't have come. (But I didn't know and went to the party where I met her.)

If he had studied more, he would have passed the course. (But he didn't and he failed.)

Could and **might** can replace **would** to show ability or possibility:

*If they had found him earlier, they **could** have helped him.* (ability)

*If they had found him earlier, they **might** have helped him.* (possibility)

Had can be placed first and then we can omit **if**:

Had I known it, I wouldn't have even tried.

We can use a **continuous form** in the main clause instead of the perfect conditional:

I was sitting in the back of the car because Jack took his girlfriend with us.

If she hadn't come with us, I would have been sitting in the front.

We can also use the **past perfect continuous** in the **if**-clause:

I was playing with my new car stereo.

If I hadn't been playing with my new car stereo, I would have seen the dog.

A **mixed conditional** (a combination of type 2 and 3) is possible, especially when the past event has a result in the present.

If he hadn't set fire to the warehouse, he wouldn't be in prison now.

- **Conditional sentences type 0**

Conditional type 0 refers to things that are generally or always true (e.g. scientific facts).

FORM:

condition: **if + present tense**, result: **Present Simple**

If you freeze water, it turns into ice.

When can replace **if** to mean **whenever** or to stress the certainty.

When it rains, we don't go out. (whenever)

If you are in Paris, visit the Eiffel Tower.

When you are in Paris visit the Eiffel Tower.

The tense in the **if**-clause can be any present tense but the result clause can only take the form of Present Simple or the imperative.

If you are ready, pack your belongings.

If I'm driving, I always listen to the radio.

If you have finished, go for a walk.

References:

- Thomson, A. J. and A.V. Martinet. 2003. *A Practical English Grammar*, Oxford University Press.
- Michael Vince. 2007. *First Certificate Language Practice*, Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- Martin Hewings. 2005. *Advanced Grammar in Use*, Cambridge University Press.