

# Conditionals

## WHAT DO YOU KNOW?



How many combinations of verb tenses are possible in conditional sentences?

a. fewer than 5

b. between 5-20

c. more than 20

(answer at the bottom of the page)

### A. Choose the correct answers.

- I promise to call you the minute I ..... any news.  
a. heard                                      b. will hear                                      c. hear
- If metal ..... it expands.  
a. is heated                                      b. was heated                                      c. will be heated
- The medicine won't have the same effect if it ..... on an empty stomach.  
a. was taken                                      b. is taken                                      c. will be taken
- If we want to be on form tomorrow, we ..... an early night.  
a. ought to get                                      b. would get                                      c. can get
- Terry would take a day off if he ..... so much work to do.  
a. wouldn't have                                      b. hadn't had                                      c. didn't have
- If they were to offer you the part, ..... it?  
a. were you accepting                                      b. would you accept                                      c. did you accept
- If you have read this book, ..... it to the library.  
a. return                                      b. returns                                      c. returning
- I would never have remembered all the details if I ..... notes during the meeting.  
a. didn't take                                      b. hadn't taken                                      c. wouldn't have taken
- We should take snow chains in case the road ..... dangerous to drive on.  
a. is                                      b. will be                                      c. would be
- If we hadn't been browsing round the bookshop, I ..... into Leslie.  
a. wouldn't have bumped                                      b. hadn't bumped                                      c. wouldn't have been bumping
- Supposing you lost your job, what ..... ?  
a. will you do                                      b. would you do                                      c. would you have done
- If you ..... me, I'll take you to the managing director's office.  
a. followed                                      b. will follow                                      c. were to follow

### B. Match each sentence with the most appropriate ending.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. You can go out as long as                          | ..... a. would you put in a good word for me?      |
| 2. Unless you hurry up,                               | ..... b. I wouldn't let you go out.                |
| 3. If you're finding the course difficult,            | ..... c. you would have asked for a better salary. |
| 4. If you've answered all the questions on the paper, | ..... d. you tell me where you're going.           |
| 5. If you happen to hear of a suitable vacancy,       | ..... e. we'd be having a great time.              |
| 6. If it weren't for the weather,                     | ..... f. you can leave the exam room.              |
| 7. If you were more assertive,                        | ..... g. you can ask your tutor for help.          |
| 8. If you hadn't finished all your schoolwork,        | ..... h. we're going to be late.                   |

Answer to Quick Quiz: (c)  
Almost any combination of tenses is possible, logic allowing.

Score: ..... / 20

# RULES

Conditional sentences have two parts: the **conditional clause** and the main (result) clause.

## Conditional Clause Main (result) Clause

### ZERO CONDITIONAL – true in the present

<i>If + present tense / modal</i>	<b>Present Simple / modal</b>	facts, truths, habitual results in the present	<b>If I work</b> in the garden, I <b>get</b> backache. She <b>can get</b> sick if she <b>eats</b> tomatoes.
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### FIRST CONDITIONAL – possible in the present / future

<i>If + Present Simple</i>	<b>future</b>	real situations with possible outcomes in present and future	<b>If she keeps</b> calm, she'll <b>pass</b> the test. Paul <b>won't win</b> if he <b>doesn't train</b> .
<i>If + Present Simple</i>	<b>modal</b>	ability, possibility, advice (depending on the meaning of the modal)	<b>If we arrive</b> early, we <b>can have</b> lunch. <b>If you need</b> to lose weight, you <b>must eat</b> less bread.
<i>If + present tense</i>	<b>imperative</b>	emphasising different things depending on choice of tense	<b>If you need</b> any help, just <b>phone</b> me. ( <i>instructions</i> ) <b>If you have read</b> the book, <b>give</b> it back to me. ( <i>emphasising completion</i> )
<i>If + present tense</i>	<b>future</b>		<b>If you're coming</b> tonight, <b>will</b> John <b>be coming</b> too? ( <i>checking intention / plan</i> ) <b>If you are looking for</b> June, you'll <b>find</b> her in her office. ( <i>talking about the present</i> )

### SECOND CONDITIONAL – unlikely / improbable in the present / future

<i>If + Past Simple / Past Continuous</i> <i>Be</i> often takes the form <i>were</i> for all persons; <i>was</i> is more informal.	<b>would / could / might</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hypothetical, unreal situations</li> <li>hopes / regrets</li> <li>advice</li> </ul>	<b>If I had</b> her number, I'd <b>phone</b> her. <b>If I were invited</b> for dinner I <b>might bring</b> Alan along. <b>If I were</b> taller, I <b>could become</b> a model. <b>If we didn't have to finish</b> this today, we <b>could go out</b> . <b>If I were</b> you, I <b>would marry</b> him.
<i>If + were to + bare infinitive</i>	<b>would / could / might</b>	emphasising that the situation is unlikely (formal English)	<b>If he were to apologise</b> , <b>would</b> you <b>forgive</b> him? (= <i>if he apologised</i> )
<i>If + Past Simple / Past Continuous</i>	<b>Past Simple</b>	true or habitual actions in the past	<b>If he ate</b> chocolate, he <b>got</b> stomach ache.

### THIRD CONDITIONAL – impossible in the past

<i>If + Past Perfect Simple / Past Continuous</i>	<b>would have / could have / might have</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unfulfilled condition in the past</li> <li>satisfaction / regret over past action</li> </ul>	<b>If I hadn't been waiting</b> for that flight, I'd <b>never have met</b> Tom. ( <i>but I was waiting and we did meet</i> ) <b>If we hadn't arrived</b> so late, we <b>might have got</b> tickets.
<i>If + Modal Perfect</i>	<b>Modal Perfect</b>	hypothetical situation in the past	<b>If you could have stayed</b> another day, I <b>would have taken</b> you to the sea. ( <i>but you couldn't stay</i> )

### MIXED CONDITIONALS

<i>If + Past Simple / Past Continuous</i> (second conditional)	<b>would have</b> (third conditional)	hypothetical present connected with hypothetical past result	<b>If Jane were</b> slightly taller, the model agency <b>would have accepted</b> her.
<i>If + Past Perfect</i> (third conditional)	<b>would / could / might</b> (second conditional)	hypothetical past with hypothetical present result	If the patient <b>hadn't been vaccinated</b> as a child, his life <b>would be</b> in danger now.

### TEMPORAL CLAUSES – time word + present + future

Clauses that begin with certain time expressions and carry a future meaning use similar structures to the first conditional. Time words include: *when, until, till, as soon / long as, the moment (that), after, before, once, by the time*.

**As soon as we arrive**, we'll call you.

They **will sit** in the garden **until it gets dark**.

## STYLE AND REGISTER

When the *if* clause precedes the main clause, it is followed by a comma. When the main clause begins the sentence, a comma is not required.

**Unless** can often replace *if ... not*. *Unless* is followed by a positive verb.

*If ... , then* is sometimes used to suggest that one action is dependent on another.

*If + will / won't* is used in polite / formal requests (refers to willingness or refusal).

*If + would* is also possible (even more formal)

**Should** can be used with *I* and *we* instead of *would* in the second conditional (considered formal).

**AmE Would** is commonly used in both clauses in informal American English.

*If + adjective* sometimes replaces *if + subject + be* in the first conditional.

*If in doubt* is used in formal language and written instructions.

*If so / If not* are shortened forms of conditional clauses and refer to previous statements.

*If + any / anything / ever*, etc. is used in questions or negative sentences and expresses doubt about the truth of something.

**Happen to / should happen to** shows chance / possibility.

**Were not for / had not been for** are used to show that one action depends on another.

**But for + noun / pronoun** is a shorter way of saying *were it not for / had it not been for* in formal English.

If you leave early, you will catch that train.  
You'll catch that train if you leave early.

You'll miss the train **unless** you **leave** at once. (= *if you don't leave*)  
She wouldn't come **unless** you **gave** her a lift.

If Tom can't visit us, **then** we'll have to visit him.

If you **will come** this way, please, I'll show you to your room.  
If you **won't be** quiet, I'll have to ask you to leave.  
If you **would like** to wait here, I'll call the manager.

If I lived abroad, I **should miss** my home terribly.

It **would be** better if they **would give** everyone an exact appointment.

If **possible**, let me know by Friday. (= *if it is possible*)  
If **necessary**, repeat the treatment two or three times.  
(= *if it is necessary*)

If **in doubt**, consult a doctor. (= *if you are in doubt*)

Are you coming to the party? **If so**, I'll give you a lift. (= *if you are coming*) **If not**, I'll see you next week.

There's little chance, **if any**, that he will recover. (= *if there is any chance at all ... which I doubt*)  
We're not doing anything special to celebrate. **If anything**, we may go out for dinner. (= *if we do anything at all*)

If you **happen to see** John, give him my regards.

If it **were not for** you, he wouldn't have his diploma.  
If it **hadn't been for** Sue, the company would have failed.

**But for** Sue, the company would have failed.

## INVERSION IN CONDITIONALS

We can make conditionals more formal by omitting *if* and starting the conditional clause with *should*, *were* or *had*.

First conditional	<b>Should you hear</b> anything, let me know.
Second conditional	<b>Were you to sign</b> the contract now, you could start working again.
Third conditional	<b>Had you made</b> him an offer, he might have accepted.

## CONDITIONAL SENTENCES WITHOUT *if*

- **Suppose / Supposing (that)** means *what if* and is followed by a question in the main clause.

First conditional	<b>Suppose he arrives</b> early, what will we do?
Second conditional	<b>Supposing he suddenly turned up</b> , what would you do?
Third conditional	<b>Supposing that he had come</b> by train, would he have arrived any earlier?

- **Otherwise** means *if not* and comes instead of a conditional clause.

We really must hurry. **Otherwise**, we'll miss our flight. (= *if we don't hurry*)

- **As long as / so long as / on condition (that) / providing (that) / provided (that)** express an idea of strong limitation.

You can take the car **as long as** you're back by midnight. He would come **on condition that** we gave him a lift.

- **In case** refers to conditions that may or may not happen. The **in case** clause can give the reason for the main clause. It can also refer to things we do in order to be ready for a future situation.

The policeman took a gun **in case** things got dangerous. Take a warm sweater **in case** it turns cold.

- **In case of** + noun is more formal and often used in instructions. It means *if there is*.

**In case of** fire, make for the nearest exit.

# PRACTICE

A. Complete the text using the most suitable tense of one of the verbs below. One verb may be used twice.

guess • have • work • recognise • erupt • stop • seem • miss • go

Dear Nicola,

How are you? Thanks a lot for the photos – your sister has grown up so much that I (1) ..... her if you hadn't told me which one she was.

I've been really busy at college all day and working at the café most nights. I know I'd have more time to study if I (2) ....., but then I (3) ..... enough money to go on the field trip next month. We're going to Sicily and we'll be able to go up Mt Etna if it (4) ..... in the meantime. If we're lucky, we (5) ..... time for some shopping and sunbathing in between completing our projects on the local geology. Our department is really good about organising trips like this. If I'd done geography (my first choice), I (6) ..... anywhere this year. And if I didn't have the trip to look forward to, it (7) ..... a very long term, I can tell you.

What else? Well, Phil's so-called surprise party was great fun. He (8) ..... never ..... what we were up to, but we had to tell him because he was planning to go home for the weekend, so he (9) ..... the whole thing!

Anyway, I'd better not waffle on anymore – I'll miss my next lecture if I (10) ..... writing now!

Love,

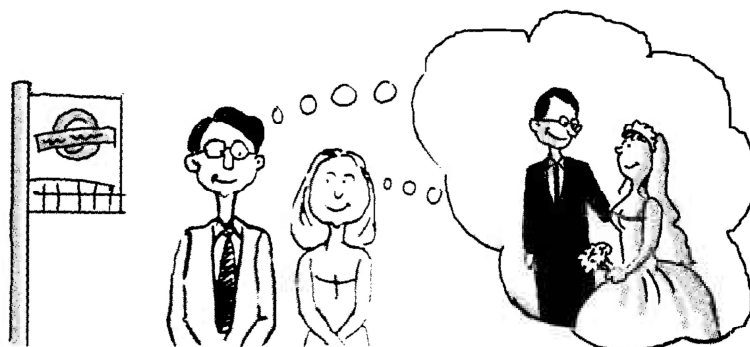
Gail

B. Match each phrase in colour with the phrase that best describes its function.

- |  |       |   |
|--|-------|---|
| 1. If you've ever worked as a waitress, you'll know what I mean.       | ..... | a. chance possibility   |
| 2. If I were you, I'd get the car seen to before going on holiday.     | ..... | b. emphasising that something is unlikely                       |
| 3. If I were to emigrate to Australia, would I find work?              | ..... | c. giving advice  |
| 4. If you would like to join us, you'd be very welcome.                | ...1. | d. emphasising experience                                       |
| 5. If it hadn't been for the driver, we wouldn't have made it on time. | ..... | e. making a polite offer  |
| 6. If you happen to find their website, will you let me know?          | ..... | f. showing that one action depended on another action or person |

C. MIXED CONDITIONALS Write one conditional sentence for each situation below, beginning as shown. Each situation will require mixed tenses.

- Elizabeth is making a fortune now because she invested her money at the right time.  
If Elizabeth .....
- Simon is still ill. Otherwise, he would already have sent the invitations.  
If Simon .....
- Janice must be clever. She solved the puzzle so quickly.  
If Janice .....
- I was standing at that bus stop when I met Pete. Now we're married.  
I wouldn't .....



D. Complete the sentences with the correct word or phrase below.

if ~~so~~ • if not • were to • if correct otherwise provided that  
 in case • were not for happen to but for



- Are you looking for a hotel off the beaten track? ..... if so ..... Pine Forest Lodge is the place for you.
- ..... our tour guide, we would have got dreadfully lost in the big city.
- Will you be using the car tonight? ..... , would you mind if I borrow it?
- We'd better set off early ..... we encounter traffic on the motorway.
- If it ..... breeding programmes in zoos, some species would already be extinct.
- He agreed to star in the movie ..... he received a percentage of the profits.
- What would happen to low-lying cities like London if the sea level ..... rise dramatically?
- Please let me know if you ..... see my address book lying around somewhere.
- Send your competition entry to the address below. .... , you could win a brand new car.
- It's important that students complete their coursework independently. .... , fair assessment becomes impossible.

E. Rewrite the following sentences without the word *if*, beginning as shown.

- If the wound becomes infected, you'll need to take antibiotics.  
Should .....
- If I were to be chosen as team captain, I'd do my best to get everyone training together.  
Were .....
- I might have got the scholarship if I'd applied for it.  
Had .....
- Unemployment would be reduced if the government were to reduce taxes on small businesses.  
Were .....
- Please give Jenny my regards if you happen to see her.  
Should .....
- We shouldn't have tried to fix the machinery ourselves because the repairs cost more in the end.  
Had .....

F. Rewrite the following sentences in two different ways, beginning as shown.

- We will only be willing to take part in the conference if our expenses are paid.  
As .....  
We won't be .....
- I could have finished sooner with a little help from you.  
I would have been .....  
Had .....
- If Tracy insists on eating junk food, she can't expect to have clear skin.  
Unless .....  
If Tracy .....
- If you ever get the chance to come to Greece, you can stay with us.  
Should .....  
If you happen .....
- Would you take freelance work if it was offered to you?  
Supposing .....  
Were you .....
- The driver's quick reaction prevented a tragedy.  
If it .....  
But .....