

CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

WHAT IS A CONDITIONAL SENTENCE?

Conditional sentences have two parts or clauses that give a condition in the dependent clause and a result in the independent clause. The condition clause usually contains an *if* statement. There are several different forms of conditional sentences that allow the writer to express various meanings using different tenses.

- Condition (if) clause + result clause

ZERO CONDITIONAL

The zero conditional uses the present tense in both clauses and is used to talk about something that is always or generally true. The present tense signifies that these actions are both possible and typical.

Form: If + simple present, simple present

Example 1: If it rains, I take an umbrella with me to work.

Example 2: If I wake up early, I always read in bed.

FIRST CONDITIONAL

The first conditional uses the present tense in the *if* clause and the future tense in the result clause. This form is used to talk about something that is a probable future result of a condition.

Form: If + simple present, will + base verb

Example 1: If I see you later, I will say hello.

Example 2: If I don't see you later, I won't be able to say hello.

SECOND CONDITIONAL

The second conditional uses the past tense in the *if* clause and a modal and base verb in the result clause. This form is used to talk about a hypothetical situation that cannot happen or is unlikely to happen.

Form: If + simple past, modal + base verb

Example 1: If I had a million dollars, I would buy a large vacation home.

Example 2: If I were you, I wouldn't wait to study for the test.

Note: The condition and the result are not taking place in the past, but the past tense is used to indicate the unreal nature of the situation.

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THIRD CONDITIONAL

The third conditional uses the past perfect in the *if* clause and a modal and present perfect in the result clause. This form is used to talk about a hypothetical situation in the past that did not happen – typically with an outcome that did not happen and is perhaps the opposite of what did happen.

Form: If + past perfect, modal + present perfect

Example 1: If it had rained last week, the plants would not have died.

Example 2: If I had finished college, I would have become a doctor.

MIXED CONDITIONAL

Mixed conditionals combine the second and third conditionals to present both an unreal condition either in the past or the present and an unreal result either in the past or the present.

The first form presents an unreal condition in the past that changes an unreal outcome in the present (the past changes the present).

Form 1: If + past perfect, modal + base

Example 1: If I had finished college, I would be a doctor now.

Example 2: If it had rained last week, the plants would be alive now.

The second form presents an unreal condition in the present that changes an unreal outcome in the past (the present changes the past).

Form 2: If + simple past, would/could + present perfect

Example 1: If I spoke louder, you would have heard me before.

Example 2: If you were nicer, you could have had more friends when you were younger.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON CONDITIONALS

There are a few aspects of conditionals that should be noted in order to make their use easier and clearer.

- Conditionals can be categorized as *real* and *unreal*. You can think of this as meaning possible or impossible. Zero and first conditionals are possible as they deal with things that are generally true or that could be true in the future. Second, third, and mixed conditionals are impossible because they are either hypothetical or concerned with events in the past that we cannot change.
 - Real Conditionals: Zero and First
 - Unreal Conditionals: Second, Third, and Mixed
- In the second conditional, the simple past is used in the condition clause. If the *be* verb is being used, it is typical to use *were* in more formal contexts. If you're speaking informally though, *was* is more usual.
 - Formal: If I *were* you, I would drink more water.
 - Informal: If I *was* you, I wouldn't stay out so late.