

Conditionals (1)

If introduces a *condition* – something may or may not happen depending on the circumstances. Conditional sentences have a number of uses.

1 Stating a general rule

If can be used to say what generally happens when something else happens. Both verbs in this type of sentence are in the present simple tense:

If you **order** in bulk you usually **get** a discount.

If the paperwork **is** incomplete the goods **are** often held up.

2 Speculating about the future

If can also be used to speculate about the future consequences of a specific event. In this case, the verb in the second part of the sentence is preceded by *will*.

If I **do** an MBA I'll **improve** my job prospects.

If we **break into** the Indian market, our turnover **will increase** substantially.

If our main competitor **goes** bankrupt, we'll **increase** our market share.

The use of the present tense in the first part of the sentence indicates that the situation is *possible*; doing an MBA is feasible, breaking into the Indian market is seen as quite likely, the competitor may well go bankrupt.

Note that it is incorrect to use *will* with the first verb:

NOT *If I will do an MBA ...

3 *if* and *unless*

Unless often replaces *if ... + negative expression*:

If you don't wear a suit and tie you won't be allowed into the club.

You won't be allowed into the club **unless** you wear a suit and tie.

We'll stop the meeting now **if** there is nothing else to discuss.

We'll stop the meeting now **unless** there is something else to discuss.

4 Promising and threatening

Conditional statements can function as either promises, warnings or threats. (But note that *unless* cannot be used to make a promise.)

If you order now you'll get a free gift. (promise)

We **won't** be able to do business with you **unless** you comply with our ethical policy. (warning)

Unless we receive payment by the end of the week we **will** be forced to consider legal action. (threat)

Practice

A It's generally the case

Match the sentence halves.

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 If the government lowers interest rates, | a) it loses market share. |
| 2 if you want to play golf well, | b) people tend not to save. |
| 3 If inflation is high, | c) it is more difficult to export. |
| 4 If the national currency is strong, | d) you get monkeys. |
| 5 If you have an offshore bank account, | e) you have to practise regularly. |
| 6 If you pay people peanuts, | f) it makes borrowing easier. |
| 7 If a firm doesn't advertise, | g) you don't pay income tax. |

B Future consequences

Write what you will or may do in the following situations.

- 1 if your car is stolen
- 2 if a close colleague gets married
- 3 if you are offered a better-paid job abroad
- 4 if your firm is taken over by a competitor
- 5 if you have to give a presentation in English
- 6 if your computer is infected with a virus

C *if / unless*

Complete each sentence with either *if* or *unless*.

- 1 you don't have persistence, you can't be a good salesman.
- 2 We don't employ people they're flexible and keen to work hard.
- 3 you do business abroad, it's a good idea to learn about the local culture.
- 4 you encounter any problems with your mobile phone, we will provide a complete repair service.
- 5 you call to tell me you're not coming, I'll see you tomorrow afternoon.
- 6 Don't promise anything you're completely sure.
- 7 Your presentation will be better you make good eye contact with the audience.
- 8 you increase sales by over 20%, the company will pay you a performance bonus.

Conditionals (2)

5 Imagining

If + past simple is used to refer to less probable situations. *Would / should / could / might* precede the verb in the subordinate clause:

If every piece of mail **was** personalised with your company logo or message, your customers **might** be very impressed.

Imagine what **would** happen **if** all the world's stock exchanges **crashed**.

If we **hired** a factoring agency we **could** recover our debts more easily.

It is possible to use *if I were* or *if I was* in both formal and informal styles:

If I **was** rich I **would buy** a Ferrari.

6 Bargaining

It is common to make hypothetical statements in negotiations. Compare:

a) If you **give** us a 5% discount **we'll** make a firm order of 5,000 units. (this is almost a promise)

b) If you **gave** us a 5% discount **we'd** make a firm order of 5,000 units. (this is a more tentative offer)

You may therefore want to use *if* + past verb + *would* as an opening move in a negotiation, in order to test the ground.

7 *Provided (that) / so long as / on condition (that)*

When stating a condition it is also possible to use *provided (that)*, *so long as* or *on condition (that)*.

It is not necessary to say or write *that*:

Provided (that) they **don't go** back on their offer, we'll sign the agreement next week.

We'll be happy to work with you **so long as** you pay half of the advertising costs.

We might be able to reduce the number of hours worked **on condition (that)** there is an increase in productivity.

Practice

A Imagining

Imagine what would happen in the following (unlikely) situations.

- 1 If the world was governed by a Communist superpower ...
- 2 If your husband or wife was offered a good position in Iceland ...
- 3 If you stood for the presidential elections ...
- 4 If the sale of alcohol was banned in Europe ...
- 5 If you were accused of selling your country's military secrets ...

B Bargaining

Change the verbs in the brackets as in the example.

- 1 If you (give) me 90 days to pay I (buy) right now.
If you give me 90 days to pay, I'll buy right now...
- 2 If you (give) me a special price I (put in) a bigger order.
- 3 I (take) last year's stock if you (take off) 15%.
- 4 I (purchase) the equipment if you (throw in) the accessories.
- 5 How long (you hold) your prices if we (order) today?
- 6 If I (pay) cash how much discount (you allow)?

C Negotiating positions

Expand the prompts to make conditional sentences as in the example.

- 1 firm orders in advance for one year reduce the price by 10%?
If I gave you firm orders in advance for one year, would you reduce the price by 10%?
- 2 make a firm order agree to split the transport costs 50-50?
- 3 ensure free maintenance buy a new photocopier from us?
- 4 buy the turbo-diesel model install air conditioning and a CD-player free of charge?

D provided (that), so long as, on condition (that)

Complete the following sentences, using *provided (that)*, *so long as* or *on condition (that)*.

- 1 I agree to work seven days a week ...
- 2 I agree to take a cut in salary ...
- 3 We agree to make a special delivery ...

Conditionals (3)

8 Speculating about the past

When talking about things which did not happen in the past (and the consequences if they had happened) we use *if* + past perfect together with *would* / *could* / *might* + *have* + past participle:

If the price / earnings ratio **had been** higher, I **would have bought** some shares.

If we **had anticipated** the crash, we **wouldn't have lost** so much money.

The merger **could have succeeded** if the management styles **hadn't been** so different.

The presentation **might have been** better if she **had felt** more confident.

Note that in American English *would have* is possible in both clauses:

I **would have told** you if I **would have known** earlier.

9 Mixed conditionals

Not all sentences containing *if* follow the same patterns as those presented on this page and on pages 34 and 36. The sequence of tenses depends on the meaning that has to be conveyed.

If Robert **wasn't** so lazy he **could have been** promoted. (he is permanently lazy which explains why he failed to get promotion)

If you **had set** off earlier you **would be** there by now. (this is true at the moment of speaking; the second part of the sentence does not refer to the past so *would have been* is incorrect)

If you **will come** this way I'll **show** you to Mrs Harvey's office. (*will* can be used after *if* in polite requests)

I'll **lend** you 1,000 euros if it'll **help** you set up your business. (there is nothing conditional about this sentence; the advantage is the result of the gift of money. Here *if* means *if it is true that*)

We **would** be grateful if you **would** send us your payment made out to the order of 'InfoMart'. (a polite request)

If the red light **comes on** then **turn off** the machine immediately.

If Mrs Olsen **calls**, **tell** her I'm in a meeting.

If you **need** it, **ask** for help. (the verbs in both parts of the sentence are in the present simple tense when giving a warning or instruction or when making an invitation)

Practice

A A negotiation breakdown

Read the following story and indicate how you would have reacted if you had been in John Dee's or Mrs Han's position.

John Dee imports microwave ovens from Korea and has been working satisfactorily with the same supplier for five years. Recently he travelled to Korea to meet the supplier and negotiate a reimbursement for a shipment of appliances that John's customers had sent back because of a serious manufacturing defect.

He met the Korean company's representative Mrs Han who insisted she could not compensate John financially but would replace the defective appliances. John refused this offer, saying that this gesture would not in itself be sufficient to restore his reputation with his customers.

John was booked on a plane leaving that afternoon and could see little point in continuing the discussion. He was getting more impatient with the apparent lack of progress and stood up angrily and walked out of the discussion. Mrs Han was embarrassed and did not wish to lose face by asking him to return to the room.

John Dee now buys his microwaves from Taiwan at a higher unit price.

B Sola-Soda

Read the text and say if you had been director-general of Sola-Soda Enterprises what would you have done to restore consumer confidence.

In June 1999 more than 100 people in Spain and two in Italy complained of headaches, dizziness and stomach upsets after drinking canned soft drinks manufactured by Sola-Soda.

Subsequently, the authorities in Spain and Italy ordered Sola-Soda products to be withdrawn as a precaution.

C Mixed conditionals

Look at the following pairs of sentences and answer the questions about each one.

- 1 If he hadn't bought a second home in the country he wouldn't be so short of money now.
- 2 If he had bought a second home in the country he would be short of money now.
 - a) Did he buy a second home?
 - b) Is he short of money?
- 3 If she weren't so busy she would have given you a hand.
- 4 If she had been busy she wouldn't have given you a hand.
 - c) Is she busy?
 - d) Did she help?