

Conditional sentences

- D** We can use conditional sentences in a number of different ways: not only to give information but also, for example, when we request, advise, criticize, and so on.

Use	Example
Requesting:	<i>If you're going into town, could you post this letter for me, please?</i>
Advising:	<i>If your headache persists, you should see a doctor.</i>
Criticizing:	<i>If you'd remembered your passport, we wouldn't be in such a rush.</i>
Suggesting:	<i>We can go for a walk if you like.</i>
Offering:	<i>If you'd like a sandwich, just help yourself.</i>
Warning:	<i>If you don't save the information to disk, you risk losing it.</i>
Threatening:	<i>If you don't leave immediately, I'll call the police.</i>

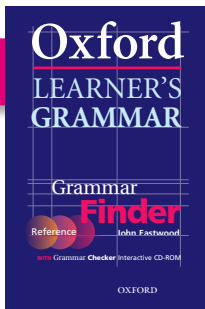
244 Type 0 conditionals

- A** The pattern is *if ... + present ... + present*.
If the doorbell rings, the dog barks.
*If you **add** twelve and fifteen, what **do** you **get**?*
*The batteries **take** over if the mains supply **fails**.*
This pattern means that one thing always follows automatically from another.
We can use *when* instead of *if* when the meaning is 'each time'.
If/When I reverse the car, it makes a funny noise.
(= Each time I reverse the car, ...)
For more about *if* and *when*, > 249A.

- B** We can also use Type 0 for the automatic result of a possible future action.
*If the team **win** tomorrow, they **get** promotion to a higher league.*
We could also use a Type 1 conditional with *they will get*.

245 Type 1 conditionals

- A** This is a very common type. The basic pattern is *if ... + present ... + will*.
*If it rains, the reception **will take** place indoors.*
*If we **don't** hurry, we **won't** get there in time.*
*If we **want** to ask questions, **will** we **be** allowed to?*
*The milk **will** go off if you **leave** it by the radiator.*
The *if*-clause expresses an open condition. In the first example, *if it rains* leaves open the question of whether it will rain or not. The present simple (*rains*) expresses future time. For more examples of the present used in this way, e.g. *Let's wait until everyone arrives*, > 59.



245 Type 1 conditionals

We do not normally use *will* in the if-clause.

(NOT *If it will rain, ...*)

But we can use *will* in the if-clause to talk about something that is further in the future than the action of the main clause.

If this medicine does me/will do me good, I'll take it.

For *will* in the if-clause expressing willingness, > 245D.

NOTE

We can use *shall* instead of *will* after *I/we*. > 54A

If you don't hurry, we will/shall miss the train.

B As well as the present simple, we can use the present continuous or perfect.

If we're having a party, we'll have to invite the neighbours.

If I've finished my work by ten, I'll probably watch a film on TV.

As well as *will*, we can use other modal verbs and similar expressions in the main clause.

If someone sees me, how can I explain what I'm doing?

If you change the time of your flight, you may be charged a fee.

I'm going to look silly if I can't answer any of the questions.

We can also use the imperative in the main clause.

If you've got a problem, ring our Helpline.

If you make a mistake, don't panic.

C A present tense in the if-clause can refer to the present.

If you think modelling is glamorous, think again.

If it's raining already, I'm definitely not going out.

D We can use *will* in the if-clause for willingness and *won't* for a refusal.

If all of you will lend a hand, we'll soon get the job done.

If the car won't start, I'll have to ring the garage.

For more about this meaning of *will* and *won't*, > 54D.

We can use *will* in the if-clause for a request.

If you'll take a seat, someone will be with you in a moment.

If you'll just sign here, please. Thank you.

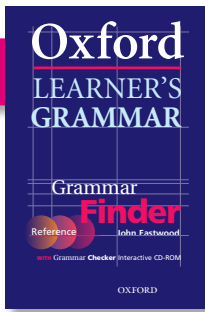
E Instead of a Type 1 conditional with *If you* + simple present, we can use this pattern with *and* and *or* in informal speech.

Touch me and I'll scream.

(= If you touch me, I'll scream.)

Go away or I'll scream.

(= If you don't go away, I'll scream.)



Conditional sentences

246 Type 2 conditionals

- A** The basic pattern is *if ... + past ... + would*.
If I had lots of money, I would travel round the world.
I'd tell you the answer if I knew what it was.
If we didn't think the plane was safe, we wouldn't fly it.

Here the past tense expresses an unreal condition. In the first example, *if I had lots of money* means that really I haven't got lots of money; I am only imagining a situation where I have. For more examples of the past used in this way, > 230.

We do not normally use *would* in the if-clause.

(NOT *If I would have lots of money, ...*)

NOTE

- a We can use *should* instead of *would* after *I/we*.
If I had lots of money, I would/should travel round the world.
Would is more usual. *Should* is rather literary here.
- b In informal American speech *would* is sometimes used to express an unreal condition.
If those people would get a nuclear bomb, it would be a great threat to us.
But this is not acceptable in writing, so you should avoid it.
- c We sometimes use *were* instead of *was* in an if-clause. > 231C
If I was/were a billionaire, I would travel round the world.

- B** We also use the Type 2 pattern for a theoretical possibility in the future.
If we caught the early train tomorrow, we'd be in York by lunch time.
If you lost the video, you would have to pay for a new one.

Here the past tense refers to a possible future action such as catching the early train tomorrow.

Compare Types 1 and 2.

Type 1: *If we stay in a hotel, it will be expensive.*

Type 2: *If we stayed in a hotel, it would be expensive.*

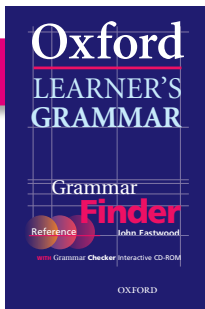
Type 1 expresses the action as an open possibility – we may or may not stay in a hotel. Type 2 expresses the action as a theoretical possibility only, something more distant from reality.

Sometimes it can be more polite to use Type 2 rather than Type 1, for example when making a request.

Would it be all right if I brought a friend? ~ Yes, of course.

Here Type 1 would be more direct and less tentative.

- C** You might occasionally see a mixture of Types 1 and 2.
If England win against Germany tonight, it would be a miracle.
However, this is unusual. Normally we do not mix Types 1 and 2.
(NOT *If I've got lots of money, I would travel round the world.*)



247 Type 3 conditionals

TIP

Do not mix Types 1 and 2.

Say *If you break it, you will have to pay for it.*

OR *If you broke it, you would have to pay for it.*

NOT *If you break it, you would have to pay for it.*

and NOT *If you broke it, you will have to pay for it.*

NOTE

a We can use a mixture of the past tense and *will* when we combine a past condition with a future result.

*If they **posted** the parcel yesterday, it **won't get** here before Friday.*

b A Type 2 pattern can be the past of a Type 1, for example in reported speech.

Type 1: *Don't go. If you **accept** the invitation, you **will regret** it.*

Type 2: *I told you that if you **accepted** the invitation, you **would regret** it.*

D As well as the past simple, we can use the past continuous or *could* in the if-clause.

*If the sun **was shining**, everything **would be perfect**.*

*If I **could have** my child looked after, I **would go out** to work.*

As well as *would*, we can use other modal verbs such as *could* or *might* in the main clause.

*If I had a light, I **could see** what I'm doing.*

*If we **could re-start** the computer, that **might solve** the problem.*

We can also use continuous forms.

*If Shakespeare **was alive** today, he **would be writing** for television.*

E We can use *would* in the if-clause for a request.

*If you **wouldn't mind** holding the line, I'll try to put you through.*

*If you'd just **sign** here, please. Thank you.*

We can also use *would like*.

*If you'd **like** to see the exhibition, it **would be nice** to go together.*

247 Type 3 conditionals

A The basic pattern is *if ... + past perfect ... + would + perfect*.

*If you **had taken** a taxi, you **would have got** here in time.*

*I **would have bought** that guitar yesterday if I'd **had** enough money.*

*My brother **would have been promoted** if he'd **stayed** in his job.*

*We'd **have gone** to the talk if we'd **known** about it.*

(= We would have gone if we had known.)

Here the verb forms refer to something unreal, to an imaginary past action. In the first example, *if you had taken a taxi* means that really you didn't take a taxi; I am only imagining a situation where you did. For more examples of the past perfect used in this way, > 230C.