

Conditional Sentences

This is not a complete list of conditional sentence patterns!

The Zero Conditional

Both clauses: Always true - generalizations or facts

"If I don't eat breakfast, I'm hungry before noon."

"Babies cry if they're hungry."

"If you smoke your chances of cancer increase." (Generally true for all people)

"Any dog might bite if it feels threatened." (Notice the modal)

"If I have time I like to cook at home. I usually buy take-out if I'm in a hurry."

"Water freezes if it gets cold."

IF-Clause Tense:

Independent Clause Tense:

The First Conditional

If-clause: Possibly true in present or future

Independent Clause: Possibly true in present or future

"If I skip breakfast now I'll be hungry before lunch. I'd better eat something."

"Babies will cry if they're hungry. If Sophie's hungry, she'll cry loudly." (Focus is on the possible cause of present or future crying)

"If you quit smoking now your chances of cancer will decrease." (Advice to one person)

"Even my dog will bite if he feels threatened."

"The nurse will help if you have questions."

"If I have time, I will cook at home. If I come home late, I'll have to buy a burrito."

In spoken English you may use 'going to': "If we lose this game I'm going to quit playing!"

IF-Clause Tense:

Independent Clause Tense:

The Second Conditional

If-clause: Not true in present or future – 'hypothetical'

Independent Clause: Not true in present or future, but possibly true

"If I had enough time I would eat breakfast." (I can't eat breakfast today.)

"I'm glad you gave Sophie her bottle. If she was hungry she'd be crying."

"If you quit smoking today your chance of cancer would decrease." (Advice to a smoker)

"If I were you, I would ..."

"were" – the SUBJUNCTIVE form

IF-Clause Tense: include any needed modals!

Independent Clause Tense:

The Third Conditional

If-Clause: Not true in past

Independent Clause: Not true in past

"If I had eaten breakfast I would not have missed the bus." (Actually I missed the bus)

"If Sophie had had a bottle she would have slept quietly." (In fact she cried all morning)

"If you hadn't quit smoking last year, your insurance rates would have increased."

"I think that Rex would have bitten you if you hadn't met him before."

"I would have cooked fresh food if I had known you would visit tonight!"

"If you had called earlier, we could have eaten something delicious." (But you didn't.)

(Simple past: bit, know, ate. Past participle: bitten, known, eaten.)

IF-Clause Tense: include any needed modals!

Independent Clause Tense:

The Third Conditional (present result)

If-clause: Not true in past

Independent Clause: present result

"If I had eaten breakfast I wouldn't be hungry now."

"If Sophie had had a bottle she would be sleeping quietly." (She's crying now.)

"If you had called earlier we could be eating something delicious."

"If Rex had heard you come in, he'd be barking like a maniac."

IF-Clause Tense: include any needed modals!

Independent Clause Tense/Modal:

Part 2: Four Conditional Types

The “Zero Conditional” has these tenses: If _____, _____

It is used for:

Examples include:

The “First Conditional” has these tenses: If _____, _____

It is used for:

Examples include:

The “Second Conditional” has these tenses: If _____, _____

Special note about “be:” _____

It is used for:

Examples include:

The “Third Conditional” has two different patterns.

If we are discussing the past, we use these tenses:

If _____, _____

It is used for:

Examples include:

If we are discussing the past and a present result, we use these tenses:

If _____, _____

It is used for:

Examples include:

Hope and Wish

The verb “wish” is related to unreal situations, just like the Conditional, so it’s not surprising to learn that “wish” uses similar grammar. “Hope” is often mixed up with “wish” – so this is a good place to review it.

Compare “wish” and “hope” in present, past and future.

Present:

wish	I wish I were you. I wish I were in Hawaii now. I wish money grew on trees. I wish the sun were shining now. I wish I could sing.	use “were” instead of “was” simple past OK past progressive OK “could” + verb OK
hope	I hope you’re having a good time.	Usually present progressive

Past:

wish	I wish we had bought a new car instead of a used car. I wish I could have gone to your birthday party.	past perfect tense OK “could” + present perfect tenses OK
hope	I hope you had a great trip. I hope Dad was buying a new car. I hope you weren’t too busy this morning. We hope you have been recovering quickly.	Simple past OK Past progressive OK Present perfect tenses OK

Future:

wish	I wish people would recycle more. I wish it would stop raining.	“would” (It probably won’t stop raining)
hope	He hopes you’ll call back right away. I hope it stops raining soon.	Present OK Future OK (It probably WILL stop raining)

Practice. Write a Conditional sentence, a “wish” sentence, and a “hope” sentence for the given situation.

I asked a stranger for directions to the airport, and they gave me the wrong directions. I got lost and missed my flight.