

9. Conditionals

Look at the following sentence:

If Mary finishes her homework, she will go to the movies with you.

If we break it down, we see that this sentence begins with an "if" clause. "If" means "in case," "in the event that," "on condition that," "when," or "whenever." In other words, in an "if" sentence, we're saying that in order for something to happen, something else must happen. We state the condition in the "if" clause, and we state the event that will happen, if the condition is met, in the main clause.

IF can be used in two kinds of statements: **A) regular** and **B) hypothetical**.

A) Regular conditionals

1. indicate events or actions that are really possible:

If Mary finishes her homework, she'll go to the movies with you.
(There's a good chance that Mary will finish her homework, and then she will go to the movies.)

Verb Tense: When the regular conditional indicates events or actions that are really possible, the "if" clause states the present condition in the present tense, and the main clause states the resulting event in the future tense.

More Examples:

"If" Clause/present tense	Main Clause/future tense
If Jack <u>earns</u> , enough money,	he <u>will buy</u> a car.
If I <u>find</u> a better job,	I <u>will need</u> a new wardrobe.
If the ozone layer <u>deteriorates</u> ,	the climate <u>will change</u> .

2. **Regular conditionals** also express habitual or customary behavior:

If Mary finishes her homework, she watches television.
(Mary has a regular routine; whenever she finishes her homework, she almost always watches television.)

Verb Tense: When the conditional sentence expresses present habitual behavior, we use present tense verbs in both the "if" clause and the main clause.

More Examples:

“If” Clause/present tense

If the Giants lose,

If I eat too much chocolate,

If Joe drives on a sunny day,

Main Clause/present tense

Larry cries.

I get sick.

he wears prescription sunglasses.

In the above three sentences expressing habitual behavior, notice that "whenever" can be used instead of "if."

Exercise 1

Think of a main clause to add to each of the "if" clauses, and then write it in the space provided. Be sure to use future tense to indicate an action that will happen in the future if the condition is met, and present tense to indicate a customary or habitual action.

Example: If Pete moves in with Martha, _____

If Pete moves in with Martha, *he will have to adjust to her loud singing.*

Example: If (whenever) Pete lives with anyone, _____

If (whenever) Pete lives with anyone, *he does his share of the housework.*

1. If Pete gets his own apartment, _____

2. If he decides to get a roommate, _____

3. If he decides to live alone, _____

4. If he doesn't do his laundry, _____

5. If he doesn't pay his rent on time, _____

6. If his landlord raises his rent, _____

Past Regular Conditionals

If we use the past tense in the "if" clause in regular conditionals, we mean that if something happened in the past, we can infer that something else probably is happening, already happened, or will happen; we express our inference in the main clause.

We can express an inference about the present effect of a past tense condition by using present tense in the main clause:

Past Condition

Inference about the Present

If Mary went to the movies,

she is probably home now.

(We don't know if Mary went to the movies, but if she did, we infer that she is home now.)

If Pete moved in with Martha,

he is paying half of the rent.

(We don't know if Pete moved in with Martha, but if he did, we infer that they are sharing the rent.)

We can also express an inference about the past effect of a past condition by using past tense in the main clause:

Past Condition

Inference about the Past

If Mary went to the movies,

she probably saw a horror film.

(We don't know if Mary went to the movies, but if she did, we guess that she saw a horror film.)

If Pete moved in with Martha,

he adjusted to her loud singing.

(We don't know if he moved in with Martha, but if he did, he probably got used to her singing.)

Or we can express an inference about a possible future effect of a past condition by using future tense in the main clause:

Past Condition

Inference about the Future

If Mary went to the movies,

she will tell us the whole plot.

(We don't know if she went, but if she did, we assume she'll tell us the plot.)

If Pete moved in with Martha,

he will adjust to her loud singing.

(We don't know if Pete moved in, but we assume he will adjust to her singing.)

Exercise 2

The verb tenses in the "if" clauses from Exercise 1 have been changed to past tense. Write three main clauses for each "if" clause, expressing inferences about the effects of a past condition, using first present tense, then past tense, and then future tense.

Example: If Pete moved in with Martha, he is very happy.
present tense

If Pete moved in with Martha, he made friends with her cats.
past tense

If Pete moved in with Martha, he probably will move out soon.
future tense

1. If Pete got his own apartment, _____
present tense

If Pete got his own apartment, _____
past tense

If Pete got his own apartment, _____
future tense

2. If he decided to get a roommate, _____
present tense

If he decided to get a roommate, _____
past tense

If he decided to get a roommate, _____

future tense

3. If he decided to live alone, _____
present tense

If he decided to live alone, _____
past tense

If he decided to live alone, _____
future tense

4. If he didn't do his laundry, _____
present tense

If he didn't do his laundry, _____
past tense

If he didn't do his laundry, _____
future tense

5. If he didn't pay his rent on time, _____
present tense

If he didn't pay his rent on time, _____
past tense

If he didn't pay his rent on time, _____
future tense

6. If his landlord raised his rent, _____
_____ present tense

If his landlord raised his rent, _____
past tense

If his landlord raised his rent, _____
future tense

B. Hypothetical Conditionals

Read the following paragraph:

Jeff lives in San Francisco. If the weather is warm, he swims in the Bay. But if he lived in Hawaii, he would swim in the ocean all year.

What is the one known fact stated in this paragraph? _____

The second and third sentences in the paragraph both contain "if" clauses, but even though they look alike, they aren't. The first one is just like the ones you've already worked on; it names something that's really possible: *the weather might get warm*. The second "if" clause, though, is contrary to the given fact: *Jeff doesn't live in Hawaii, but in San Francisco*.

We use hypothetical "if" clauses to express something that is contrary to fact; the conditional states an improbable or unreal condition. We show that a condition is hypothetical by using a past tense form of the verb in the "if" clause.

In present hypothetical conditionals, we use the past tense in the "if" clause and *would* or *could* plus base form of the verb in the main clause:

"IF" Clause	Main Clause
<u>Past Tense</u>	<u>would or could + base form of the verb</u>
If Jeff <u>had</u> a million dollars,	he <u>would travel</u> around the world.
If Jeff <u>lived</u> in Hawaii,	he <u>could surf</u> Waimea Bay.
or: If Jeff <u>could live</u> in Hawaii,	he <u>could surf</u> Waimea Bay.

NOTE: When we form hypothetical conditionals using the verb *BE*, we use the verb *WERE*, no matter what the subject is:

If I were a millionaire,	I would buy my own jet.
If Mary were a millionaire,	she would donate her money to charity.
If we were millionaires,	my husband and I would retire.

Exercise 3

Following are beginnings of present hypothetical conditionals. The "if" clauses are correctly written in the past tense. Complete the sentences by adding a main clause to each, choosing the correct verb form: *would* or *could* + base form of a verb.

Example: If Joe had a day off from school, he would go to the beach.

If Joe had a day off from school, he could sleep all day.

1. If I had a lot of money, _____

2. If I did not have to go to work, _____

3. If the book were not full of technical terms, _____

4. If we were more physically fit, _____

5. If Christmas came in July, _____

6. If the population of my neighborhood doubled overnight, _____

7. If I were older, _____

8. If our classes were smaller, _____

Read the following paragraph:

(1) I realize that a program of regular exercise would bring me a number of benefits. (2) I would improve my cardio-vascular system, (3) which can probably stand improving, (4) and I would probably get rid of some of the fat around my waist. (5) That would be a definite benefit (6) because I am beginning to need new clothes that fit. (7) All in all, I would certainly benefit by beginning an aerobics class or jogging three or four times a week.

Now go back and circle all verbs with *would* or *could*.

The conditional verbs in clauses 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7 are all based on an unstated "if" idea or condition: *if I were to begin a program of regular exercise....*

Sometimes we write paragraphs like this one, in which the "if" idea is not stated directly, but is implied. In these paragraphs, not every verb needs to have a conditional form. For instance, the verbs in clauses 3 and 6 name situations that are actually true, so the verbs are not in conditional forms.

To avoid confusing a reader about what's real or factual and what's hypothetical, we have to choose the correct verb forms.

Exercise 4

The following passage presents a hypothetical situation along with factual material. Fill in the blanks with conditionals using *would* or *could* or with factual verb forms as appropriate.

If San Francisco had a major earthquake, the city would suffer major damage. The earthquake (destroy) _____ almost all of the older large buildings, and (damage) _____ even many of the new ones in the downtown area, for their designs (not, test) _____ in an actual major earthquake

elsewhere. Gas, electricity, and phone service (stop) _____ for weeks in many areas, and families throughout the city (not, be) _____ able to cook meals or heat their houses. Many of these houses (collapse) _____ because they (not, bolt) _____ to their foundations. Essential businesses such as food stores (close) _____ for indefinite periods, and looting and other forms of lawlessness (occur) _____ because police services (be) _____ overextended. A catastrophic fire such as the one that (happen) _____ during the 1906 earthquake (be) _____ a real danger because water mains (break) _____ throughout the city. In short, although most people (find) _____ life in San Francisco as pleasant and rewarding as it is anywhere in the world, a major earthquake (make) _____ life difficult at best.

Past Hypothetical Conditionals

We use past hypothetical conditionals to express past hypothetical conditions that would have caused a different outcome—in the past or in the present.

If we want to show how a past hypothetical condition would affect the present, we use past perfect (past before past) in the "if" clause and *would* or *could* + *main* verb in the main clause.

Past Hypothetical Condition**Present Effect**

If I had made more money last year,
(I didn't make more money.)

I could go on a trip this year.

If I had been more talented as a child,
(I wasn't talented enough.)

I would be a concert pianist now.

If Mario had known what dentistry was
 like,
*(He didn't know what dentistry
 was like.)*

he wouldn't be a dentist now.

If we want to show how a past hypothetical condition would have affected the past, we use past perfect (past-before-past) in the "if" clause and *would have* or *could have* + *the* past participle in the main clause.

Past Hypothetical Condition**Past Effect**

If I had made more money last year,

I would have gone on a vacation.
(I didn't go on vacation.)

If I had been more talented as a child,

I could have been a concert pianist.
(I'm not a concert pianist.)

If Mario had known what dentistry
 was like,

he never would have become a dentist.
(He is a dentist, but wishes he weren't.)

Exercise 5

Following are past time hypothetical "if" clauses. Complete the sentences by adding first a main clause showing a present effect, and then a main clause showing a past effect. Be sure you select the appropriate verb form to show either a hypothetical present effect or a hypothetical past effect.

Example: If I had stayed in graduate school, I would be a social worker now.
 present effect

or: If I had stayed in graduate school, I would have gotten my masters.
 past effect

1. If Frank had quit his job last year, _____
present effect
- If Frank had quit his job last year, _____
past effect
2. If my parents had not met, _____
present effect
- If my parents had not met, _____
past effect
3. If we had bought a better car, _____
present effect
- If we had bought a better car, _____
past effect
4. If I had not graduated from high school, _____
present effect
- If I had not graduated from high school, _____
past effect
5. If our team had won the World Series, _____
present effect
- If our team had won the World Series, _____
past effect

Exercise 6

The following passage presents a past hypothetical situation along with factual material. Fill in the blanks with the correct forms of the verbs provided, making sure to use conditional or factual verb forms as appropriate.

To show a present effect of a past hypothetical situation, use *would* or *could* + a main verb in the main clause:

If our team had won the game, we could be in the playoffs.

To show a past effect of a past hypothetical situation, use *would have* or *could have* + the past participle in the main clause:

If our team had won the game, I would have treated everyone to dinner.

If the South had won the American Civil War, history would have taken a different shape. The South (extend)_____its control over the areas that are now New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, and possibly even Baja California, and a second war with Mexico possibly (happen)_____

Although modern historians (agree)_____that slavery (be)_____a dying institution even in the mid-19th century, it certainly (continue)_____much longer than it did. It (be)_____

interesting to speculate on whether two separate relatively weak American nations (survive)_____into the 20th century or whether the inherently stronger North gradually (absorb)_____the Southern states back into a national union or (reconquer)_____the South by force of arms.