GRAMMAR 7

Conditionals

Explanations

Real/likely situations: first conditional

- With *if*

A first conditional describes a real or likely situation. A present tense is used after *if*, but the time referred to is the future. *Will/Won't* are common in the result clause.

If you ***fall, I won't be able to*** *catch you!*

This means that there is a real possibility this will happen.

Going to can be used instead of *will.*

If it rains, we're ***going to*** *get wet.*

The modal verb *can* is also common in first conditional sentences.

If the cases ***are*** *too heavy, I* ***can*** *help you carry them.*

- *Unless, provided, as long as*

Unless means *If... not.*

Unless *you* ***leave*** *at once,* ***I'll call*** *the police.*

If *you* ***don't leave*** *at once,* ***I'll call*** *the police.*

Provided and *as long as* can also introduce a condition.

Provided *you leave now, you'll catch the train.*

- With the imperative

It is common to use the imperative instead of *if.*

Get *me some cigarettes, and I'll* ***pay*** *you later.*

- With *should*

We can use *should* instead of if in a conditional sentence. It means *if by any chance ...* and makes the action less likely.

Should *you see John, can you give him a message?*

Unreal/imaginary situations: second conditional

- With *if*

A second conditional describes an unreal or imaginary situation. A past simple tense is used after *if*, but the time referred to is the future. *Would* is common in the result clause.

If you ***fell,*** *you* ***would hurt*** *yourself.*

This means that there is a small possibility that this will happen. The situation and its result are imagined.

The modal verbs *might* and *could* are common in second conditional sentences.

If you ***became*** *a millionaire, you* ***might be*** *unhappy.*

- *Were*

Were is often used instead of *was* in formal language. Note that *were* is not stressed in speech.

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If I ***were*** *taller,* ***I'd join*** *the basketball team.*
If ***I were*** *you,* ***I'd leave*** *now.* (***I*** and *you* are stressed in speech)

- *Were to*

Were to is another way of expressing a second conditional sentence.
If they ***were to offer*** *me the job,* ***I'd turn*** *it down.*

Unreal/imaginary past **situations: third conditional**

- With *if*

A third conditional describes an unreal or imaginary situation in the past. A past perfect tense is used after *if. Would* + *have* + past participle is used in the result clause.
If John ***had studied*** *more, he* ***would have got*** *better marks.*
This means that John didn't study more. A past situation, different to the one that really happened, is imagined.
The modal verbs *might* and *could* are common in this kind of sentence.
If you ***had tried*** *harder, you* ***might have succeeded.***

- Mixed conditions

For past events which have a result continuing in the present, it is possible to use the form of a third conditional in the if-clause, and the form of a second conditional in the result clause.
If you ***had saved*** *some money, you* ***wouldn't be*** *so hard up.*

Other *if* **sentences**

If can mean *when* in the sense of *whenever.*
If/When/Whenever it ***rains, we play*** *football indoors instead.*
In this type of sentence we use the present simple in both the if-clause and the result clause.
If can also mean *if it is true that.*
If (it is true that) you ***have*** *a job like that, you* ***are*** *very lucky.*
If (it is true that) nothing ***happened,*** *you* ***were*** *lucky.*
If+ past simple can be used for past events with a real possibility, or that we know are true. This type of sentence does not have any special grammar rules.
If *you* ***missed*** *the TV programme last night, you can borrow my recording.*
If the police ***arrested*** *him, they must suspect him.*

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Practice

Underline the most suitable verb forms in each sentence.

a) If the machine *stops/will stop,* you *press/will press* this button.
b) I can't understand what he sees in her! If anyone *treats/will treat/treated* me like that, I *am/will be/would be* extremely angry!
c) If you *help/helped* me with this exercise, I *will/would* do the same for you one day.
d) According to the timetable, if the train *leaves/left* on time, we *will/would* arrive at 5.30.
e) If it *is/will be* fine tomorrow, we *go/will go* to the coast.
f) If we *find/found* a taxi, we *will get/would get* there before the play starts.
g) It's quite simple really. If you *take/will take/took* these tablets every day, then you *lose/will lose/lost/would lose* weight.
h) I don't like this flat. I think *I am/I will be/I'd be* happier if I *live/will live/would live/lived* in a house in the country.
i) I don't know how to play baseball, but I'm sure that if I *will do/did,* I *play/will play/would play* a lot better than anyone in this awful team!
j) If I *phone/will phone/phoned* you tonight, *are you/will you be/would you be* in?

2 Underline the most suitable verb forms in each sentence.

a) Why didn't you tell me? If you *told/had told* me, I *had helped/would have helped* you.
b) If Bill *didn't steal/hadn't stolen* the car, he *wasn't/wouldn't be/hadn't been* in prison now.
c) If Ann *wasn't driving/didn't drive/hadn't driven* so fast, her car *didn't crash/wouldn't crash/wouldn't have crashed* into a tree.
d) Let me give you some advice. If you *smoked/would smoke/had smoked* less, you *didn't feel/wouldn't feel/wouldn't have felt* so tired.
e) What bad luck! If Alan *didn't fall/hadn't fallen/wouldn't fall* over, he *won/would win/would have won* the race.
f) If you *invited/had invited* me last week, I *was able/had been able/would have been able* to come.
g) I'm sure your letter hasn't arrived yet. If it *came/had come* I'm sure I *noticed/had noticed/would have noticed* it.
h) We have a suggestion to make. How *do you feel/would you feel* if we *offered/would offer/had offered* you the job of assistant manager?
i) If you *lent/had lent* us the money, we *paid/would pay/had paid* you back next week.
j) Terry never catches anything when he goes fishing. And if he *catches/caught/had caught* a fish, he *throws/would throw* it back!

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3 Put each verb in brackets into a suitable verb form.

a) Why didn't you phone? If I (know) ....*had known*.....you were coming, I (meet).....you at the airport.

b) It's a pity you missed the party. If you (come).....,
you (meet).....my friends from Hungary.

c) If we (have).....some tools, we (be able)
.....to repair the car, but we haven't got any with us.

d) If you (not help).....me, I (not pass)
.....the exam.

e) It's a beautiful house, and I (buy).....it if I (have)
.....the money, but I can't afford it.

f) I can't imagine what I (do).....with the money if I (win).....the lottery.

g) If Mark (train).....harder, he (be)
.....a good runner.

h) If Claire (listen).....to her mother, she (not marry)
.....David in the first place.

4 Rewrite each sentence, beginning as shown. Do not change the meaning.

a) I didn't have an umbrella with me and so I got wet.
I wouldn't *have got wet if I'd had an umbrella with me.* . . . . . .

b) I'll call the police if you don't leave me alone!
Unless.....

c) In the snowy weather we don't go to school.
If.....

d) Without Jack's help, I wouldn't have been able to move the table.
If.....

e) Make me some coffee, and I'll give you one of my biscuits.
If.....

f) If you hadn't told me about Sue's hair, I wouldn't have noticed.
Unless.....

g) If you see Peter, tell him to be here at 8.00.
Should.....

h) I wouldn't accept if you asked me to marry you!
If you were.....

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5 Choose the most appropriate description for each picture.

a)

1) If she falls, she'll land in the safety net.
2) If she fell, she'd land in the safety net.
3) If she had fallen, she would have landed in the safety net.

b)

1) It's worse if we order soup.
2) It would be worse if we ordered soup.
3) It would have been worse if we'd ordered soup.

c)

1) If I own a dog like that, I'll keep it on a lead.
2) If I owned a dog like that, I'd keep it on a lead.
3) If I had owned a dog like that, I'd have kept it on a lead.

d)

1) I like it more if it looks like someone I know.
2) I'd like it more if it looked like someone I knew.
3) I'd have liked it more if it had looked like someone I knew.

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6 Rewrite each sentence. Use contracted forms.

a) If I had known, I would have told you.
..If I'd known, I'd have told you...

b) Tony would not have crashed if he had been more careful.

c) If I had my credit card with me, I would have bought the coat.

d) You would not have got lost if you had taken the map.

e) If Graham had not lost his watch, he would not have missed the plane.

f) If you had not told me her name, I would have found out from someone else.

g) If I were you, I would try getting up earlier.

Key points

1 The present tense form in first conditional sentences does not refer to present time. It refers to future time.

2 The past tense form in second conditional sentences does not refer to past time. It refers to future time.

3 The difference between first and second conditional sentences can depend on the attitude of the speaker. The future situation might have a high possibility of happening (first conditional) or a low possibility (second conditional).

If she falls, she'll land in the safety net.

(This means that there is a real possibility that she will fall.)

If she fell she would land in the safety net.

(I am commenting on an imaginary situation, and I do not think she is likely to fall.)

4 *Might* and *could* are common in conditional sentences when we are uncertain about our predictions.

*If you leave now, you **might** catch the train.*
*If you asked him nicely, he **might** agree.*
*If you'd continued driving in that way, you **could** have **hit** another car.*

5 Mixed conditional forms are possible, especially where a past event has a present result.

*If Brenda **hadn't stolen** the money, she **wouldn't** be in prison.*

6 *Unless, provided,* and *as long as* can introduce conditions.

SEE ALSO

Grammar 10: Consolidation 2
Grammar 17: Modal verbs: past
Grammar 18: Functions 1

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