

# 4

## When do I use *when*, *if* and *whether*?

### 1 Tick the correct sentence in each pair.

- 1 a Many people would stop using their cars when public transport was better.  
b Many people would stop using their cars if public transport was better.
- 2 a We discussed if universities should charge tuition fees.  
b We discussed whether universities should charge tuition fees.

We use *when* to talk about an event or situation that we believe will happen:

*I plan to go travelling when I finish my studies.* (I expect to finish.)

*Give me a call when you arrive at the airport.* (We expect the person to arrive.)

We use *if* to talk about a hypothetical possibility, especially in conditional sentences:

*I would only go home if it was a real emergency.*

*Give me a call if there are any problems.* (Problems are only a possibility.)

We also use *if* in certain polite requests:

*I would appreciate it if / would be grateful if you could call me back.*

*Would you mind if I asked you a few questions about the accident?*

We use *whether* where we are considering two possibilities:

*I don't know whether to have the beef or the lamb.*

*Many students have to get part-time jobs whether or not they want to.*

We use *whether* after certain verbs (and nouns) which involve considering two options:

*They had a meeting to discuss whether they should take further action.*

*The current debate is whether immigrants should adopt local customs.*

### 2 Correct the mistake below.

The big question is that I should call him or wait for him to call me.



The big question is .....

### 3 Complete the sentences using *when*, *if* or *whether*.

- 1 I'd suggest checking ..... the person has a permit or not.
- 2 We'll probably move to a smaller house ..... the children leave home.
- 3 Why don't you come in the summer ..... the weather's better?
- 4 Some people have questioned ..... it's useful or just a waste of money.
- 5 It would be helpful ..... they could give us a breakdown of the marks.
- 6 They carried out tests to determine ..... or not he had the disease.
- 7 I'm sure they'd be really pleased ..... you were able to come.
- 8 You will need to show your driving licence ..... you collect the hire car.