Zero Conditional – for scientific facts or general truth

Introduction

The *zero conditional* is a structure used for talking about general truths — things which always happen under certain conditions. This page will explain how the zero conditional is formed, and when to use it.

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1. The structure of a zero conditional sentence

A zero conditional sentence consists of two clauses, an "if" clause and a main clause (In most zero conditional sentences you can use **when** or **if** and the meaning will stay the same.):

"if" clause	**main clause**
If you heat water to 100 degrees,	it boils.
When you heat water to 100 degrees,	it boils

If the "if" clause comes first, a comma is usually used. If the "if" clause comes second, there is no need for a comma:

main clause	**"if" clause**
Water boils	if you heat it to 100 degrees,

We use the same verb form in each part of a zero conditional: the simple present tense:

"if" clause **if** + subject + simple present verb
main clause subject + simple present verb

2. Using the zero conditional

The zero conditional is used to talk about things which are always true — such as scientific facts and general truths:

Example	**Explanation**
If you cross an international date line, the time changes.	This always happens — every time you cross a date line.
If it rains, the grass gets wet.	This is basically always true — the rain makes the grass wet.
Wood doesn't burn if there is no air.	This is a scientific fact — wood needs air in order to burn. No air = no fire.

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First Conditional- possible situation in the future

We use the First Conditional to talk **about future events that are likely to happen.**

- If we take John, he'll be really pleased.
- If you give me some money, I'll pay you back tomorrow.
- If they tell us they want it, we'll have to give it to them.
- If Mary comes, she'll want to drive.

The 'if' clause can be used with **different present forms.**

- If I go to New York again, I'll buy you a souvenir from the Empire State Building.
- If he's feeling better, he'll come.
- If she hasn't heard the bad news yet, I'll tell her.

The "**future clause" can contain 'going to' or the future perfect as well as 'will'**.

- If I see him, I'm going to tell him exactly how angry I am.
- If we don't get the contract, we'll have wasted a lot of time and money.

The **"future clause" can also contain other modal verbs such as 'can' and 'must'**.

- If you go to New York, you must have the cheesecake in Lindy's.
- If he comes, you can get a lift home with him.

Second Conditional-

The Second Conditional is used **to talk about 'impossible' situations- I see them quite impossible in the FUTURE**

IF+SUBJECT+ PAST SIMPLE……SOG. WOULD+ INFINITIVE (without to)

- If we were in London today, we would be able to go to the concert in Hyde Park.
- If I had millions dollars, I'd give a lot to charity.
- If there were no hungry people in this world, it would be a much better place.
- If everyone had clean water to drink, there would be a lot less disease.

Note that after I / he/ she /it we often use the **subjunctive form 'were'** and not 'was'. (Some people think that 'were' is the only 'correct' form but other people think 'was' is equally 'correct' .)

- If she were happy in her job, she wouldn't be looking for another one.
- If I lived in Japan, I'd have sushi every day.
- If they were to enter our market, we'd have big problems.

Note the form **'If I were you' which is often used to give advice.**

- If I were you, I'd look for a new place to live.
- If I were you, I'd go back to school and get more qualifications.

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The Second Conditional is also used to talk about 'unlikely' situations.

- If I went to China, I'd visit the Great Wall.
- If I was the President, I'd reduce taxes.
- If you were in my position, you'd understand.

Note that the choice between the first and the second conditional is often a question of the speaker's attitude rather than of facts.

Compare these examples. Otto thinks these things are possible, Peter doesn't.

- Otto – If I win the lottery, I'll buy a big house.
- Peter – If I won the lottery, I'd buy a big house.
- Otto – If I get promoted, I'll throw a big party.
- Peter – If I got promoted, I'd throw a big party.
- Otto – If my team win the Cup, I'll buy champagne for everybody.
- Peter – If my team won the Cup, I'd buy champagne for everybody.

Note that the 'If clause' can contain the past simple or the past continuous.

- If I was still working in Brighton, I would commute by train.
- If she were coming, she would be here by now.
- If they were thinking of selling, I would want to buy.

Note that the **main clause can contain 'would' 'could' or 'might.**

- If I had the chance to do it again, I would do it differently.
- If we met up for lunch, we could go to that new restaurant.
- If I spoke to him directly, I might be able to persuade him.

Also note that sometimes the 'if clause' is implied rather than spoken.

- What would I do without you? ("if you weren't here")
- Where would I get one at this time of night? ("if I wanted one")
- He wouldn't agree. ("if I asked him")

Third Conditional- for no possibility

If I had won the lottery, I would have bought a car.

The first conditional and second conditionals talk about the future. With the **third conditional we talk about the PAST.** We **talk about a condition in the past that did not happen**. That is why there is no possibility for this condition. The **third conditional is also like a dream, but with no possibility of the dream coming true.**

Last week you bought a lottery ticket. But you did not win. :-(

if **condition** **result**

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Past Perfect ***would have + past participle***

If I *had won* the lottery, I *would have bought* a car.

Notice that we are thinking about an impossible past condition. You did not win the lottery. So the condition was not true, and that particular condition can never be true because it is finished. We use the **Past Perfect** tense to talk about the impossible past condition. We use ***would have + past participle*** to talk about the impossible past result. The important thing about the third conditional is that **both the condition and result are impossible** now.

Look at these example senteces:

if **condition**	**result**
Past Perfect	***would have + past participle***
If I had seen Mary,	I would have told her.
If Tara had been free yesterday,	I would have invited her.
If they had not passed their exam,	their teacher would have been sad.
If it had rained yesterday,	would you have stayed at home?
If it had rained yesterday,	what would you have done?

result	***if*** **condition**
would have + past participle	**Past Perfect**
I would have told Mary	if I had seen her.
I would have invited Tara	if she had been free yesterday.
Their teacher would have been sad	if they had not passed their exam.
Would you have stayed at home	if it had rained yesterday?
What would you have done	if it had rained yesterday?

Sometimes, we use ***should have, could have, might have*** instead of ***would have***, for example: *If you had bought a lottery ticket, you* ***might have*** *won.*

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