'IN CASE' or 'IF'



A BIT OF THEORY...

Interestingly, students of all levels, even upper-intermediate ones, occasionally make errors when they have to choose between the conjunctions 'if' and 'in case' in complex sentences. Though there are sentences where they are interchangeable, in many cases only one of them makes the sentence grammatically correct. How differentiate between then? There are a few 'rules of thumb' to keep in mind:

- 'if' is a conditional conjunction and has the meaning of 'on condition that' when used in conditional sentences.
  e.g. You'll get wet if it rains. (=*On condition that it starts raining, you'll get wet*).
  e.g. I usually take a pill if I have a stomachache. (=*On condition that my stomach starts aching, I take a pill*)
  In other words, the action will not happen unless the 'if'-clause happens.
- 'in case' is often used in the meaning of precaution and is close to 'just in case'.
  The action in the main clause can happen to prevent a bad scenario in the 'in case'-clause.
  e.g. Take an umbrella in case it rains (=*Just in case it start raining, take an umbrella!*)
  e.g. I've bought some more cheese in case we need more (=*Just in case we might want to eat some more cheese, I've bought more*).
- Very often, 'if' can be used instead of 'in case' and vice versa depending on what we want to express – conditionality or precaution.

A BIT OF PRACTICE ...

COMPLETE THE GAPS WITH 'IF' OR 'IN CASE'. SOMETIMES EITHER CAN BE USED.

1) There is all evidence to believe that it won't start raining, but ..... it does, I'll put up an umbrella.
2) Can't we take a taxi ..... we miss our morning train?
3) I guess we may be late, so let's take a taxi ..... out train is delayed.
4) I've done my homework for the whole week ..... I have to miss a couple of classes.
5) I'll buy him a birthday present ..... if he passes his finals.
6) It's a good idea to insure your house ..... it accidentally burns out.
7) The rule says you must leave the house ..... you want to have a smoke.
8) The teacher said he would give us extra homework ..... our school days in May were made shorter.
9) I don't want to take part in their business ..... my parents find out and punish me.
10) ..... you might need my help, call me before 11 p.m.
11) We won't set out ..... it hails.
12) She may take a medicine ..... she can't fall asleep throughout the night.

ANSWERS:

1) In case; 2) in case/if; 3) in case/if; 4) in case; 5) if; 6) in case; 7) if; 8) in case; 9) in case; 10) in case/if; 11) if; 12) in case/if



LIVEWORKSHEETS