

Unit 9: CONDITIONALS

Conditionals, also known as *if clauses*, are sentences that describe the result of something that might happen in the present or future or might have happened in the past, but didn't. They are made up from two clauses - the *main clause* and the *if clause*.

There are four main types of conditionals:

- The Zero Conditional
- The First Conditional
- The Second Conditional
- The Third Conditional

THE ZERO CONDITIONAL

We can make a zero conditional sentence with two *Present Simple* verbs (both in the main clause and in the if clause).

This conditional is used when we are talking about facts or actions that will always happen, so we are talking in general, not about one particular situation. Because of this, *if* can be replaced by *when* without changing the meaning.

- If you **touch** a fire, you **get** burned.
- People **die** if they **don't eat**.

THE FIRST CONDITIONAL

In the first conditional, we use *Future Simple* or *will Future* in the *main clause* and *Present Simple* in the *if clause*. The first conditional is used to talk about things which might happen in the future. Because we can't know what will happen in the future, this describes possible things.

- If I **have** enough money, I'll **buy** some new shoes.
- She'll **be** late if the train **is delayed**.
- She'll **miss** the bus if she **doesn't leave** soon.

The first conditional describes a particular situation, whereas the zero conditional describes what happens in general. For example

- zero conditional:

If you sit in the sun, you get burned.

(here I'm talking about every time a person sits in the sun - the burning is a natural consequence of the sitting)

- first conditional:

If you sit in the sun, you'll get burned.

(here I'm talking about what will happen today, another day might be different)

THE SECOND CONDITIONAL

The second conditional uses the *Past Simple* after *if*, then *would* + *the infinitive* in the main clause. We can use *were* instead of *was* with *I* and *he / she / it*.

It has two uses. First, we can use it to talk about things in the future that are probably not going to be true, like imagining or dreaming.

- If I **won** the lottery, I **would buy** a big house. (I probably won't win the lottery)
- If I **met** the Queen of England, I **would say** hello.

Second, we can use it to talk about something in the present which is impossible, because it's not true.

- If I **had** his number, I **would call** him.
(I don't have his number now, so it's impossible for me to call him).
- If I **were** you, I **wouldn't go** out with that man.

FIRST VS. SECOND CONDITIONAL:

The first conditional describes things that I think are likely to happen in the future, whereas the second conditional talks about things that I don't think will really happen. It's subjective; it depends on my point of view. For example

- (first conditional):
If she studies harder, she'll pass the exam.
(I think it's possible she will study harder and so she'll pass)
- (second conditional):
If she studied harder, she would pass the exam.
(I think that she won't study harder, or it's very unlikely, and so she won't pass)

THE THIRD CONDITIONAL

We make the third conditional by using the *Past Perfect* after *if* and then *would have* and the *past participle* in the main clause.

It talks about the past. It's used to describe a situation that didn't happen, and to imagine the result of this situation.

- If she **had studied**, she **would have passed** the exam.
(but, really we know she didn't study and so she didn't pass)
- If I **hadn't eaten** so much, I **wouldn't have felt** sick. (but I did eat a lot, and so I did feel sick).
- If we **had taken** a taxi, we **wouldn't have missed** the plane.
- She **wouldn't have been** tired if she **had gone** to bed earlier.

TIME CLAUSES

In time clauses with words like *when*, *after* and *until*, we often use present tense forms to talk about the future. We do not normally use *will* in time clauses.

- I'll come home when I finish work.
- You must wait here until your father comes.
- They are coming after they have had dinner.
- I'll come home when I finish work. (NOT will finish work)

We can use *will* if it means *want to* or *be willing to*:

- I will be very happy if you will come to my party.
- We should finish the job early if George will help us.