

UNIT
99

Conditional sentences (1): verb tenses

A

Some conditional clauses beginning with **if** suggest that a situation is *real* – that is, the situation is or was true, or may have been or may become true:

- If anyone phones, tell them I'll be back at 11.00.
- If you really want to learn Italian, you need to spend some time in Italy.

Others suggest that a situation is *unreal* – that is, the situation is imaginary or untrue:

- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- If you had started out earlier, you wouldn't have been so late.

Compare:

- If I go to Berlin, I'll travel by train. (= *real* conditional) *and*
- If I went to Berlin, I'd travel by train. (= *unreal* conditional)

In the first, the speaker is thinking of going to Berlin (it is a real future possibility), but in the second, the speaker is not thinking of doing so. The second might be giving someone advice.

B

Real conditionals

In *real* conditionals we use tenses as in other kinds of sentences: we use present tenses to talk about the present or unchanging relationships, and past tenses to talk about the past:

- If you leave now, you'll be home in two hours.
- If water is frozen, it expands.
- If I made the wrong decision then I apologise.

However, when we talk about the future, we use a present tense, not **will** (see Unit 100):

- I'll give you a lift if it rains. (*not ...if it will rain...*)

C

Unreal conditionals

In *unreal* conditionals, to talk about *present* or *future* situations, we use a past tense (either simple or continuous) in the **if**-clause and **would + bare infinitive** in the main clause:

- If my grandfather was/were still alive, he would be a hundred today.
- If you were driving from London to Glasgow, which way would you go?
- I'd (=would) offer to give you a lift if I had my car here.

Notice that we sometimes use **if...were** instead of **if...was** (see Unit 100).

When we talk about something that might have happened in the *past*, but didn't, then we use **if + past perfect** and **would have + past participle** in the main clause:

- If I had known how difficult the job was, I wouldn't have taken it.
- If she hadn't been ill, she would have gone to the concert.

In *unreal* conditionals, we can also use **could/might/should (have)** instead of **would (have)**:

- If I lived out of town, I could take up gardening.
- They might have found a better hotel if they had driven a few more kilometres.

In some *unreal* conditionals we use mixed tenses. That is, a past tense in the **if**-clause and **would have + past participle** in the main clause, or a past perfect in the **if**-clause and **would + bare infinitive** in the main clause:

- If Bob wasn't so lazy, he would have passed the exam easily.
- If the doctor had been called earlier, she would still be alive today.

D

Notice that in *unreal* conditional sentences:

- we don't use the past simple or past perfect in the main clause:
 - If we were serious about pollution, we would spend more money on research. (*not ...we spent... or ...we had spent...*).
- we don't use **would** in an **if**-clause (but see Unit 100):
 - If I had a more reliable car, I'd drive to Spain rather than fly. (*not If I would have...*)

EXERCISES

99.1 Are these real or unreal conditional sentences? (A)

- 1 If we had travelled together we would have saved money. *Unreal*
- 2 If you're scared of spiders, don't go into the garden.
- 3 Where would you choose if you could live anywhere in the world?
- 4 If he recognised me, he certainly didn't show any sign of it.
- 5 She'll be furious if she finds out the truth.
- 6 You would know the answer if you had read the book.
- 7 You'll have to take a taxi home if you want to leave now.
- 8 If you had taken that job in Norway, you'd have been able to learn to ski.

99.2 Write sentences with similar meanings beginning *If...* . All the sentences you write will be unreal conditionals. (C)

- 1 I don't know enough about the machine, so I can't mend it myself.
If I knew enough about the machine I would mend it myself.
- 2 He didn't prepare for the interview, so he didn't get the job.
- 3 Not enough money is spent on cancer research, so a prevention has not been found.
- 4 Andrew wanted to ask Frank Sinatra for his autograph, but he wasn't brave enough.



Now write sentences including *..., so...* or *..., but...* with similar meanings to these unreal conditional sentences.

- 5 If you'd listened to me, we wouldn't have gone the wrong way.
You didn't listen to me, so...
- 6 If they hadn't found him in time, they wouldn't have been able to save his life.
- 7 If there were any truth in her allegations, I would resign.
- 8 If I hadn't been so busy I would have written to you earlier.

99.3 If necessary, correct these sentences. (B-D)

- 1 If Jack had been honest, he would return the money.
- 2 The video pauses if you press this button.
- 3 If she would have really wanted to see me, she would have come earlier.
- 4 If he doesn't break the window then who is responsible?
- 5 If Claire will continue to work hard, she should pass the exams easily.
- 6 Steve would have been attacked if I hadn't come along.
- 7 I'd be able to visit Jim first thing in the morning if I stay in Manchester overnight.
- 8 Speak to Jane if you want to book a room.
- 9 If you know what it was going to be like, why did you come?
- 10 You'd be surprised if I told you how much this cost.
- 11 If I had suddenly announced that the holiday was cancelled, the children had objected.
- 12 We might soon be making a profit if all will go according to plan.

UNIT
100

Conditional sentences (2)

A

In unreal conditionals we use **if...were + to-infinitive** to talk about imaginary future situations:

- If the technology **were to become** available, we would be able to expand the business.
- If he **were to have** a chance of success, he would need to move to London.

However, notice that we can't use this pattern with many verbs that describe a state, including **know, like, remember, understand**:

- If I **knew** they were honest, I'd gladly lend them the money. (*not* If I were to know...)

We sometimes use this pattern to make a suggestion sound more polite:

- If you **were to move** over, we could all sit on the sofa.

B

If the first verb in a conditional **if**-clause is **should, were, or had** (see Unit 99) we can leave out **if** and put the verb at the start of the clause. We do this particularly in formal or literary English (see also Unit 119):

- **Should** any of this cost you anything, send me the bill. (= If any of this should cost...)
- It would be embarrassing, **were** she to find out the truth. (= ...if she were to find out...)
- **Had** they not rushed Dan to hospital, he would have died. (= If they hadn't rushed Dan...)

C

We use **if it was/were not for + noun** to say that one situation is dependent on *another situation* or on *a person*. When we talk about the past we use **If it had not been for + noun**:

- If it **wasn't/weren't for Vivian**, the conference wouldn't be going ahead.
- If it **hadn't been for my parents**, I would never have gone to university.

In formal and literary language we can also use **Were it not for...** and **Had it not been for...**:

- **Were it not for Vivian...** • **Had it not been for my parents...**

We often use **but for + noun** with a similar meaning:

- **But for Jim's support**, I wouldn't have got the job. (= If it hadn't been for Jim...)

D

We don't usually use **if...will** in conditional sentences (see Unit 99). However, we can use **if...will** when we talk about a *result* of something in the main clause. Compare:

- Open a window **if it will help** you to sleep. *or* ...**if it helps** you to sleep.
(‘Helping you to sleep’ is the result of opening the window.)
- I will be angry **if it turns out** that you are wrong. *not* ‘...**if it will turn out**...’
(‘Turning out that you are wrong’ is not the result of being angry.)

2 We also use **if...will** in requests:

- If you **will** take your seats, ladies and gentlemen, we can begin the meeting.

If you want to make a request more polite, you can use **if...would**:

- If you **would** take your seats, ladies and gentlemen...

E

In a *real* conditional sentence, we use **if...happen to, if...should, or if...should happen to** to talk about something which may be possible, but is not very likely. **If...happen to** is most common in spoken English:

- If you **happen to be** in our area, drop in and see us. (*or* If you **should (happen to) be**...)

Notice that we don't usually use this pattern in *unreal* conditionals which talk about impossible states or events in the **if**-clause:

- If the North Sea **froze** in winter, you could walk from London to Oslo. (*not* If the North Sea **happened to freeze / should (happen to) freeze** in winter...)

EXERCISES

100.1 Choose from these verbs to complete the sentences, using each verb once only. If possible, use the pattern **were + to-infinitive**. If this is not correct, use the past simple form of the verb. (A)

catch fail like know win understand

- 1 If the police were to catch him, he'd spend at least five years in prison.
- 2 If they to reach their target, the order would be lost.
- 3 If I how to contact Mike, I'd get in touch with him today.
- 4 If she the next four races, she would be world champion.
- 5 If I how it worked, I'd explain it to you.
- 6 If you his first film, I'm sure you'd enjoy this one, too.

100.2 Write new sentences with similar meanings. Begin with the word(s) given. (B & C)

- 1 John lent me money. Otherwise, I would have gone out of business. **Had it not been for John lending me money I would have gone out of business.**
- 2 Return the product to the shop if you have any complaints about it. **Should...**
- 3 There would be nowhere for them to stay if they arrived today. **Were...**
- 4 I wouldn't have finished this book without Suzanne's help. **If it...**
- 5 John is giving me a lift. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to visit you. **But for...**
- 6 Megan and I both have e-mail. Without it, it would be difficult for us to keep in touch. **Were it...**

Now write some true sentences about your life beginning with:

- 7 But for... 8 If it hadn't been for... 9 Had it...

100.3 Are the underlined parts of the sentences correct? Correct the ones that are wrong. (D)

- 1 If they will get married, they'll probably move to France. If they get married...
- 2 If it will make you happy, we'll buy a dishwasher.
- 3 If you will send me a copy of your previous letter, I will reply immediately.
- 4 If some extra money will help, take this £200.
- 5 If anyone will ask for me, I'll be in the café.
- 6 If he will continue to improve, he should be out of hospital next week.

100.4 Make these requests and suggestions more polite. Begin **If you would...** (D)

- 1 Excuse me. I have to make a telephone call.
- 2 Leave your name and telephone number. I'll call you back as soon as I can.
- 3 Stay here until I return. I'd appreciate it.

100.5 If possible, rewrite the underlined parts of these sentences with **happen to**. If it is not possible, write ✗ after the sentence. (E)

- 1 If you see Ken, tell him that I'd like to see him. If you happen to see Ken...
- 2 If you are at home on Monday evening, you must see the TV programme on Korea.
- 3 If computers could think like humans, then more people would lose their jobs.
- 4 If I am in New York in December, we must meet up.
- 5 It's delicious – if you like very sweet things.
- 6 The world would be very different today if the aeroplane had been invented in 1800.

UNIT
101

If...not and unless; if and whether, etc.

A if ... not and unless

Unless is used in conditional sentences with the meaning 'if...not':

- 1 • There's no chance of you getting the job **unless you apply**. (*or ...if you don't apply.*)
- 2 • You can't travel on this train **unless you have a reservation**. (*or ...if you don't have...*)

With **unless** we use present tenses when we talk about the future:

- **Unless it rains**, I'll pick you up at 6.00. (*not Unless it will rain...*)

B

In most real conditional sentences (see Unit 99), we can use either **unless** or **if...not** with a similar meaning. However, we use **if...not** but not **unless**:

- in most *unreal* conditional sentences:
 - He would be happier **if he didn't** take things so seriously. (*not ...unless he took...*)
 - **If she hadn't** gone to university, she would have gone into the police force. (*not Unless she had gone...*)
- when we talk about emotions:
 - I'll be *amazed* **if** Christie doesn't win. (*not ...unless Christie wins.*)
- in most questions:
 - **If you don't** pass the test, what will you do? (*not Unless you pass...*)

We use **unless** but not **if...not** when we introduce an afterthought.

- Without Philip to run it, the course can't continue – **unless you** want the job, of course. (*not ... – if you don't want...*)

In written English, the afterthought is often separated from the rest of the sentence by a dash.

C

if and whether

We can use **if** or **whether** to say that two possibilities have been talked about, or to say that people are not sure about something:

- They couldn't decide **whether/if** it was worth re-sitting the exam.
- I doubt **whether/if** anyone else agrees with me.

Whether can usually be followed directly by **or not**. Compare:

- 2 • I didn't know **if** Tom was coming **or not**. (*not ...if or not Tom was coming.*) *and*
- I didn't know **whether or not** Tom was coming. (*or ...whether Tom was coming or not.*)

D

We prefer **whether** rather than **if**:

- after the verbs **advise, consider, discuss**:
 - You should *consider* carefully **whether** the car you are interested in is good value.
- before **to-infinitives** and after **prepositions**:
 - I couldn't decide **whether to buy** apples or bananas.
 - We argued *about* **whether** women are more liberated in Britain or the USA.
- in a clause acting as a subject or complement:
 - **Whether the minister will quit over the issue** remains to be seen.
 - The first issue is **whether he knew he was committing a crime**.
- in the pattern **noun + as to + whether** to mean 'about' or 'concerning':
 - There was some *disagreement as to whether* he was eligible to play for France.

Other nouns commonly used in this pattern are **debate, discussion, doubt, question, uncertainty**.

E

These sentences include other words and phrases used to introduce conditional clauses:

- 3 • We'll have the meeting this afternoon, **provided/providing (that)** no-one objects.
- **Supposing (that)** they ask me why I resigned from my last job – what should I say?
- I'll write to you every week – **as/so long as** you promise to reply.

EXERCISES

101.1 Write a new sentence with the same meaning. Use **unless** in your answer and begin with the word given. (A)

- 1 I have to telephone Mike tonight or he'll sell the car to someone else. **Unless I telephone Mike tonight, he'll sell the car to someone else.**
- 2 The hospital must get more money or it will close. **Unless...**
- 3 You should keep medicines in the fridge only if it is necessary. **You...**
- 4 Speak to her only if she speaks to you first. **Don't...**
- 5 It must rain within the next week, or water supplies will be cut off. **Unless...**

101.2 Underline the correct phrase. If either is possible, underline them both. (B)

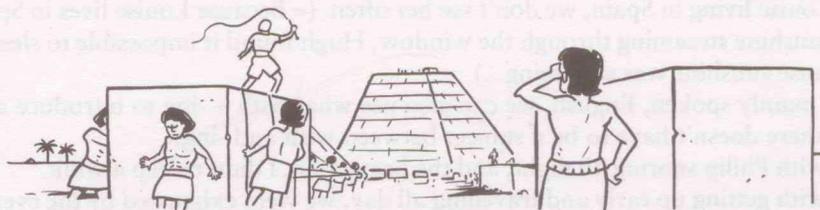
- 1 Unless it had been / If it hadn't been for my friends, I wouldn't have got the job.
- 2 You'll be really sorry unless you take / if you don't take the opportunity.
- 3 Unless we cut / If we don't cut resource use and waste, we face a decline in the quality of our lives.
- 4 The workers have threatened to go on strike unless they are given / if they're not given a pay rise.
- 5 Unless we hear from you / If we don't hear from you we'll expect you around 12.30.
- 6 I must get on with my work – unless you want / if you don't want to help me.
- 7 The club will have to close unless we can attract / if we can't attract more members.
- 8 He wouldn't have failed his exams unless he had / if he hadn't been ill.
- 9 What will you do unless you go / if you don't go away for the weekend?

101.3 Write **whether** or **if/whether** in these sentences. (C & D)

- 1 It was a good opportunity to ask Charles he shared my views.
- 2 When I saw his face I didn't know to laugh or cry.
- 3 There is some question as to the public should be told about the accident.
- 4 It was too dark to tell she was awake or asleep.
- 5 they continue to work for us depends on how much we can pay.
- 6 She briefly considered she should call the police, but then walked away.
- 7 It remains to be seen he can win in a major competition.
- 8 She couldn't make up her mind about Jack had stolen the money.

101.4 Complete the sentences with **as long as**, **provided**, **supposing**, or **unless**. (A & E)

- 1 our calculations are correct, we'll make a profit within a year.
- 2 she is injured, she should win easily.
- 3 it was possible to go back in time, I'd like to see the pyramids being built.



Now complete these sentences with your own ideas.

- 4 Providing my neighbours don't object...
- 5 Supposing I get made redundant,...
- 6 Unless the destruction of the world's rain forests is stopped,...