

CONDITIONALS

first conditional

This refers to a grammar structure used to talk about the 'likely' result of something happening or not happening. The grammar structure is:

if-clause: 'if' + present tense (eats)

main clause: will or won't

If he takes these antibiotics, he'll get better quickly. If he doesn't, he won't.

Note! Certain other modal verbs (for example, might, but not would), can be used in the main clause.

second conditional

This refers to a grammar structure used to talk about an 'unreal' or 'unlikely' situation. The grammar structure is:

If-clause: 'if' + past tense (ate)

Main clause: 'would' or 'wouldn't'

If my shares went up 500% I'd sell them instantly. (but it's unlikely that they will go up 500%)

Note! Could and might can also be used in the main clause.

third conditional

This refers to a grammar structure used to imagine the impossible. It is impossible because something happened in the past and can't be changed. The grammar structure is:

If-clause: 'if' + past perfect (had eaten)

Main clause: would have + past participle (eaten)

You would have passed your exam if you had studied harder. (but you didn't study hard and you didn't pass your exam)

Note! Could have and might have can also be used in the main clause.

Another source:

<http://www.usingenglish.com/articles/english-conditionals-an-introduction.html>

MIXED CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

It is possible for the two parts of a conditional sentence to refer to different times, and the resulting sentence is a "mixed conditional" sentence. There are two types of mixed conditional sentence:

A. Present result of past condition:

1. Form

The tense in the 'if' clause is the past perfect, and the tense in the main clause is the present conditional:

'IF' CLAUSE

If + past perfect

If I had worked harder at school
If we had looked at the map

MAIN CLAUSE

Present conditional

I would have a better job now.
we wouldn't be lost.

2. Function

In these sentences, the time is **past** in the 'if' clause, and **present** in the main clause. They refer to an **unreal past condition** and its **probable result** in the **present**. They express a situation which is **contrary to reality** both in the past and in the present:

'If I had worked harder at school' is contrary to past fact - I didn't work hard at school, and 'I would have a better job now' is contrary to present fact - I haven't got a good job.
If we had looked at the map (we didn't), we wouldn't be lost (we are lost).

Examples:

- I **would be** a millionaire now if I **had taken** that job.
- If **you'd caught** that plane **you'd be dead** now.
- If **you hadn't spent** all your money on CDs, you **wouldn't be broke**.

B. Past result of present or continuing condition.

1. Form

The tense in the **If**-clause is the simple past, and the tense in the main clause is the perfect conditional:

'IF' CLAUSE

If + simple past

If I wasn't afraid of spiders
If we didn't trust him

MAIN CLAUSE

Perfect conditional

I would have picked it up.
we would have sacked him months ago.

2. Function

In these sentences the time in the **If**-clause is **now or always**, and the time in the main clause is **before now**. They refer to an unreal present situation and its probable (but unreal) past result:

- 'If I wasn't afraid of spiders' is contrary to **present** reality - I **am** afraid of spiders, and 'I would have picked it up' is contrary to **past** reality - I **didn't** pick it up.
- 'If we didn't trust him' is contrary to **present** reality - we **do** trust him, and 'we would have sacked him' is contrary to **past** reality - we **haven't** sacked him.

Examples:

- a. If she **wasn't afraid** of flying she **wouldn't have travelled** by boat.
- b. **I'd have been able** to translate the letter if my Italian **was better**.
- c. If I **was** a good cook, **I'd have invited** them to lunch.
- d. If the elephant **wasn't** in love with the mouse, **she'd have trodden** on him by now.