

**STATING NECESSARY CONDITIONS
WARNING ABOUT CONSEQUENCES
USING UNLESS**

Unless means **if not**.

Example:

They're going to go bankrupt **if** they **don't** restructure.
They're going to go bankrupt **unless** they restructure.

Unless introduces the **only** condition that can change the actions or events stated in the main clause. Their restructuring is a necessary condition if they hope to avoid going bankrupt.

In terms of grammar –

- the main clause (*subject + verb*)
- will be the inevitable **consequence**
- if the subordinate action (**unless** + *subject + verb*)
- is not taken.

Example:

He won't advance in that company **if he doesn't improve** his English.
He won't advance in that company **unless he improves** his English.

NOTE: Do not use **unless** when the main clause is in the simple present or simple past. **Unless** always has future tension.

- Use the *future tense* or a modal auxiliary such as *can't*, *shouldn't*, or *wouldn't* in the *main clause*.
- Use the **simple present tense** after **unless**.¹

Incorrect - He doesn't advance in that company unless he improves his English.
He didn't advance in that company unless he improved his English.

Correct - He **won't** advance **unless he improves** his English. – or –
He **can't** advance **unless he improves** his English.

¹ Even though *unless* has future tension – and describes future *time* – you cannot use “will” after unless. This is due to the overriding rule in English grammar that allows *will* in the **main clause** only. Another example of this usage is – “I will tell him when I see him.” (will tell = main clause; *when* introduces a subordinate clause, which requires the use of “see” in the present tense, even though the *time* is future.)

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Exercises

Directions: Express the consequences in each sentence using *unless*.

1. He won't be promoted if doesn't work harder.

2. My client won't go for such a risky deal if the other parties don't agree to binding arbitration.

3. You can't drive a car in most states in the US. if you don't have insurance.

4. We'll never make it on time if we don't leave now.

5. Some law firms won't hire corporate lawyers if they are not CPAs.²

6. She can't go back to school if she doesn't have the money.

7. You can't be successful at that firm³

8. A company can't be successful in my country. . . .

² CPA = Certified Public Accountant

³ In exercise numbers 7 and 8, test your own responses. Some *possible* answers are on the answer sheet.

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Answers to Exercises

Directions: Express the consequences in each sentence using *unless*.

1. He won't be promoted if doesn't work harder.

He won't be promoted unless he works harder.

2. My client won't go for such a risky deal if the other parties don't agree to binding arbitration.

My client won't go for such a risky deal unless the other parties agree to binding arbitration.

3. You can't drive a car in most states in the US. if you don't have insurance.

You can't drive a car in most states unless you have insurance.

4. We'll never make it on time if we don't leave now.

We'll never make it on time unless we leave now.

5. Some law firms won't hire corporate lawyers if they are not CPAs.

Some law firms won't hire corporate lawyers unless they are CPAs.

6. She can't go back to school if she doesn't have the money.

She can't go back to school unless she has the money.

7. You can't be successful at that law firm. . . .

**You can't be successful at that firm unless ...
you bill 2,500 or more hours each year.
you bring in a lot of new business.**

8. A company can't be successful in my country. . . .

A company can't be successful in my country unless (it works closely with the government).