

USE THE ZERO CONDITIONAL, FIRST CONDITIONAL, AND IF CLAUSES WITH MAY OR MIGHT

Do you know how to use the zero, first and second conditionals?

Test what you know with interactive exercises and read the explanation to help you.

Look at these examples to see how zero, first and second conditionals are used.

If you freeze water, it becomes solid.

If it rains tomorrow, I'll take the car.

If I lived closer to the cinema, I would go more often.

Try this exercise to test your grammar.

Grammar explanation

Conditionals describe the result of a certain condition. The *if* clause tells you the condition (*If you study hard*) and the main clause tells you the result (*you will pass your exams*). The order of the clauses does not change the meaning.

If you study hard, you will pass your exams.

You will pass your exams if you study hard.

Conditional sentences are often divided into different types:

- **Zero conditional**

We use the zero conditional to talk about things that are generally true, especially for laws and rules.

If I drink too much coffee, I can't sleep at night.

Ice melts if you heat it.

When the sun goes down, it gets dark.

The structure is:

if/when + present simple >> present simple.

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- **First conditional**

We use the first conditional when we talk about future situations we believe are real or possible.

If it doesn't rain tomorrow, we'll go to the beach.

Arsenal will be top of the league if they win.

When I finish work, I'll call you.

In first conditional sentences, the structure is usually:

if when + present simple >> will + infinitive.

It is also common to use this structure with *unless*, *as long as*, *as soon as* or *in case* instead of *if*.

I'll leave as soon as the babysitter arrives.

I don't want to stay in London unless I get a well-paid job.

I'll give you a key in case I'm not at home.

You can go to the party, as long as you're back by midnight.

- **Second conditional**

The second conditional is used to imagine present or future situations that are impossible or unlikely in reality.

If we had a garden, we could have a cat.

If I won a lot of money, I'd buy a big house in the country.

I wouldn't worry if I were you.

The structure is usually:

if + past simple >> + would + infinitive.

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When *if* is followed by the verb *be*, it is grammatically correct to say *if I were*, *if he were*, *if she were* and *if it were*. However, it is also common to hear these structures with *was*, especially in the *he/she* form.

If I were you, I wouldn't mention it.

If she was prime minister, she would invest more money in schools.

He would travel more if he was younger.

Reference:

British Council. (2025) Conditionals: zero, first and second. British Council-LearnEnglish. Recovered from:
<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/grammar/b1-b2-grammar/conditionals-zero-first-second>