Conditionals

Conditional sentences have two parts: the if-clause (condition clause) and the main clause. There are three kinds of conditional sentences. Each kind contains a different pair of tenses. With each type, certain variations are possible.

###### Type I

Type I conditional sentences refer to present and future probability, showing that the action is real to take place.

The verb in the if-clause is the present tense.

The main clause contains *will + infinitive* construction. Instead of *will*, another modal verb may appear (*can*, *may* etc.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| IF CLAUSE | MAIN CLAUSE |
| Present tense | will + infinitive |
| If we leave now | we will catch the bus |
| If we don’t leave now | we may miss the bus (possibility) |
| If your documents are in order | you may/can leave at once (permission) |
| If you want to lose weight | you must/should eat less bread (advice, request or command) |

Instead of Present Simple in the if-clause, it is possible to have

a) Present Continuous

*If you are waiting for a bus, you’d better join the queue.*

b) Present Perfect

*If you have finished dinner, I’ll ask the waiter for the bill.*

*Zero conditional*, on the other hand, contains present tense in both clauses. It is used to express automatic or habitual results:

*If you heat ice, it turns into water.*

*If there is a shortage of any product, prices of that product go up.*

###### Type II

Type II conditional sentences also refer to present and future probability. However, the action expressed by type II conditional sentences is not very likely to happen. In other words, type II conditional sentences indicate unreality.

The verb in the if-clause is in the past tense.

The verb in the main clause contains the *would + infinitive* construction.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| IF CLAUSE | MAIN CLAUSE |
| Past tense | would + infinitive |
| If I lived near my office | I would be in the time for work |
| If I were you | I would plant some tress round the house |
| If he left his bicycle outside | someone would steal it |

Instead of *would*, it is also possible to use *might* or *could* may:

*If you tried again, you would succeed*. (certain result)

*If you tried again, you might succeed*. (possible result)

*If I knew her number, I could ring her up*. (ability)

*If he had a permit, he could get a job*. (ability or permission)

Instead of Past Simple in the if clause, it is possible to have Past Continuous:

*If my car was working, I would/could drive you to the station.*

###### Type III

Type III conditional sentences refer to past probability, expressing that a past action was completely unreal.

The verb in the if-clause is in the past perfect tense.

In the main clause, the construction *would + perfect infinitive* is used.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| IF CLAUSE | MAIN CLAUSE |
| Past perfect tense | would + perfect infinitive |
| If I had known that you were coming | I would have met you at the airport |
| If he had tried to leave the country | he would have been stopped at the frontier |

Instead of *would*, it is also possible to use *could* or *might* may:

*If we had found him earlier, we could have saved his life*. (ability)

*If we had found him earlier, we might have saved his life*. (possibility)

*If our documents had been in order, we could have left at once*. (ability or permission)

Instead of Past Perfect Simple in the “if clause”, it is possible to use Past Perfect Continuous:

*If I hadn’t been wearing a seat belt, I would have been seriously injured.*

A combination of types II and III is possible:

*If you had taken the map, we wouldn’t be lost now.*

*If he had taken my advice, he would be a rich man now.*

*If I had worked harder at school, I would be sitting in a comfortable office now.*

Instead of “if”, it is possible to use the following conjunctions:

a) *unless* (= if not)

*Unless you start at once, you’ll be late.*

*Unless you had a permit, you couldn’t get a job.*

b) *provided (that)*

*You can camp here provided you leave no mass.*

c) *suppose/supposing*

*Suppose the plane is late, what will you do?*