

When a dependent or subordinate clause is introduced by words such as “**if**,” “**when**,” or “**unless**,” the complete sentence expresses a condition. The dependent or subordinate clause states a condition or cause and is joined with an independent clause, which states the result or effect. Conditional sentences can be **factual**, **predictive**, or **speculative**, which determines the form of the condition and the choice of verb tenses.

## **TYPES OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES**

### **Factual**

In a factual conditional sentence, the relationship between the dependent or subordinate clause and the independent clause describes a condition that is or was habitually true: if the condition applies, the independent clause states the result or effect. Both clauses use simple verb forms either in present or past tense.

**If** you find a blue and white sweater, it belongs to me.

**When** he plays his music too loud, the neighbors complain.

**Unless** there is a question, the class is dismissed.

### **Predictive**

In a predictive conditional sentence, the relationship between the two clauses is promised or possible but not certain. Use a present-tense verb in the dependent or subordinate clause, and in the independent clause use modal auxiliaries “**will**,” “**can**,” “**may**,” “**should**,” or “**might**” with the base form of the verb.

If the weather **is** good tomorrow, we **will go** to the park.

If your roommate **decides** not to come with us, we **can go** by ourselves.

When the lease on the apartment **ends**, we **may want** to move to another building.

When she **misses** one of the meetings, she **should notify** her supervisor.

Unless he **remains** part of the study group, he **might fail** the exam.

It is important to note that a dependent or subordinate clause does not have to precede the independent clause but can be joined as follows:

We **will go** to the park if the weather is good.

We **can go** by ourselves if your roommate **decides** not to come with us.

We **may want** to move to another building when the lease on the apartment **ends**.

She **should notify** her supervisor when she **misses** one of the meetings.

He **might fail** the exam unless he **remains** part of the study group.

## Speculative

In a speculative conditional sentence, the relationship between the two clauses has several variations: unlikely possibilities, conditions contrary to fact, and events that did not happen.

- **Unlikely possibilities**

If the condition is possible but unlikely in the present or future, use the past tense in the dependent or subordinate clause, and in the independent clause use “**would**,” “**could**,” or “**might**” plus the base form of the verb.

If she **listened** to her parents, she **would be** a wealthy woman.

If we **continued** to practice, we **could win** the competition.

If she **invested** wisely, she **might regain** her earlier losses.

- **Contrary to fact**

If the condition presents something unreal or one that contradicts what is true or factual, use the past-tense verb “**were**” in the dependent or subordinate clause.

If I **were** in charge, I would ask for her resignation.

If he **were** rich, he wouldn’t have to work.

- **Hypothetical event**

If the condition speculates about something that did not happen in the past but could have, would have, or should have under other circumstances, the dependent or subordinate clause uses the perfect form (**had** + “**-ed/-en**”) and the independent or result clause uses a special modal form (**modal** + **have** + “**-ed/-en**”).

If you **had asked** me, I **would have rejected** the idea.

If I had started my own business, I **could have worked** from home.

If he had been more talented, he **might have established** a successful career.