

31 Conditional sentences overview

31.1 TYPES OF CONDITIONAL

The zero conditional is used to talk about situations that will always happen. It is used to talk about general truths.

PRESENT SIMPLE
If you play the violin out of tune, it sounds terrible.
PRESENT SIMPLE



The second conditional is used to talk about hypothetical situations that are very unlikely to happen, but are usually still possible.

PAST SIMPLE
If I practiced more, that song would sound better.
"WOULD" + BASE FORM



31.2 USING COMMAS IN CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

When the action comes before the result, a comma separates the two clauses of the conditional sentence. However, when the result comes first, no comma is used.

When **you freeze water**, **ice forms**.

A comma is used if the action comes first.

Ice forms when **you freeze water**.

The result can come at the beginning of the sentence.

"If" or "when" can sit between the action and result, without a comma.

There are four types of conditional sentences. The zero conditional refers to real situations, but the first, second, and third conditionals all refer to hypothetical situations.

See also:

Present simple **1** Past simple **7**

Past perfect simple **13** Modal verbs **56**

The first conditional

is used to talk about hypothetical situations that are likely to happen.

PRESENT SIMPLE

If I practice really hard, this song will sound great.

"WILL" + BASE FORM



The third conditional

is used to talk about hypothetical situations that definitely will not happen. The result is no longer possible because of the imaginary cause in the past.

PAST PERFECT

If I had practiced more, I would have sounded better.

"WOULD" + "HAVE" + PAST PARTICIPLE



COMMON MISTAKES USING OTHER TENSES IN CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

"Will," "would," and "would have" should not be used in the "if" clause when forming conditional sentences.

If I **will** work really hard, this piece will sound great. ❌

"Will" doesn't go in the "if" clause.

If I **would** practice more, that piece would sound better. ❌

"Would" doesn't go in the "if" clause.

If I **would have** practiced more, I would have sounded better. ❌

"Would have" doesn't go in the "if" clause.