30 Other conditional sentences

English allows for some variations in conditional sentence structures. These give more information about the context of the conditional.

See also:
Future with "will" **18**
Modal verbs **56**

30.1 CONDITIONAL SENTENCES WITH MODAL VERBS

First, second, and third conditional sentences can use different modal verbs in their "result" clauses. These can be used to express uncertainty, possibility, or obligation, amongst other things.

FIRST CONDITIONAL

In the first conditional, "will" can be replaced by a variety of modal verbs to talk about different ideas.

If I save enough money, I will buy a new car.

If I save enough money, I can buy a new car.

Different modal verbs can go here.

SECOND CONDITIONAL

In the second conditional, "would" can be replaced by "could" or "might" to express ability, possibility, or uncertainty.

If I saved enough money, I would buy a new car.

If I saved enough money, I { could might } buy a new car.
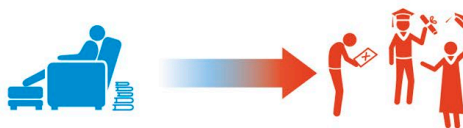
THIRD CONDITIONAL

In the third conditional, "would" can be replaced by "could" or "might" to express ability, possibility, or uncertainty.

If I had saved enough money, I would have bought a new car.

If I had saved enough money, I { could might } have bought a new car.

30.2 FIRST CONDITIONAL WITH "UNLESS"

"Unless" can be used instead of "if" in conditional sentences. "Unless" means "if... not," so the future result depends on the suggested action not happening.

If you don't
Unless you
} study hard, you will fail your exams.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

If you don't
Unless you
} get up now, you'll be late for work.

I'll be angry
{ if he doesn't turn
unless he turns
} that music down.

30.3 FORMAL THIRD CONDITIONAL

The third conditional can be made more formal by swapping "had" with the subject and dropping "if."

If you had attended the meeting, you would have met the manager.

Had you attended the meeting, you would have met the manager.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

Had I worked harder at school,
I could have studied medicine.

Had she woken up earlier,
she wouldn't have been late.

Had you listened to the directions,
we would have arrived on time.

Had we bought that house,
we couldn't have afforded this trip.