

General

Conditionals are sentences with 'if' in them, which talk about possible situations. You use different grammar in each of the 5 conditionals to show first, how possible you think the situation is; second, the time you are talking about,

Present/future

There are three main versions;

0

Use this to talk about a situation that you think is very possible, or indeed a fact.

1st

Use this to talk about a situation that you think is quite possible.

2nd

Use this to talk about a situation that you think is not very possible, even impossible. It's a bit confusing because you use a past tense to show this, yet you mean the present/future.

Examples

Look at some examples to see how the idea of possibility changes. Also note how the word order can change¹.

Past

There are two main versions;

3rd

Use this to talk about a situation that you know is impossible because it is in the past, which you can't change. It gives a past result².

Mixed

As above in 3rd. It gives a present result³ [mixing the 3rd and 2nd conditionals].

Progression

Think about using a variety of tenses; eg simple/continuous⁴/perfect.

Think about using modals⁵ eg 'could' instead of 'will' and 'would'.

PRESENT/FUTURE

Situation	Type	Grammar	
very possible ↓ not very possible/ impossible	0	<i>if + present</i>	<i>present</i>
		If I meet the sales target this month..	..I receive a bonus.
	1st	<i>if + present</i>	<i>future</i>
		If I meet the sales target this month..	..I will receive a bonus.
	2nd	<i>if + past</i>	<i>would + verb</i>
		If I met the sales target this month..	..I would receive a bonus.

Examples

If interest rates rise, mortgage rates also rise. [0]

If interest rates rise, it will encourage people to save more. [1st]

If interest rates rose to over 10%, many people would lose their homes. [2nd] or...

Many people would lose their homes if interest rates rose to over 10%¹. [2nd]

PAST

Situation	Type	Grammar	
impossible ↑ impossible	3rd	<i>if + past perfect</i>	<i>would have + past participle</i>
		If I had met the sales target last month..	..I would have received a bonus ² .
		[real situation – I did not meet the target..]	[..I did not receive bonus.]
	Mixed	<i>if + past perfect</i>	<i>would + verb</i>
		If I had met the sales target last month..	..I would now be manager ³ .
		[real situation – I did not meet the target..]	[..I am not manager.]

Examples

If interest rates had been lower in 1995, I would have bought a house. [3rd]

I would have bought a house if interest rates had been lower in 1995. [3rd]

If interest rates had been lower in 1995, now I would own a house. [Mixed]

Progression

If interest rates are rising⁴, it means banks are worried about inflation.

If interest rates rise, it might⁵ encourage people to save more.

If interest rates had been lower in 1995, I could⁵ have bought a house.