

Lesson 7 – Unreal Conditionals

Yesterday's lesson focused on **real conditionals**:

- **Zero Conditional:**
If I have a day off from work, I usually go to the park.
(a regular event; a real daily situation)
- **First Conditional:**
If you study, you'll pass the test tomorrow.
(a real possibility for the future)

Today we'll learn about **unreal conditionals**, which are used to talk about imaginary, unlikely, or impossible situations in the present and past:

- **Second Conditional:**
If I owned a car, I would drive to work.
(imagining things are different in the present)
- **Third Conditional:**
If I had studied harder, I would have passed last week's test.
(imagining things were different in the past)
- **Mixed Conditional:**
If I had finished my work yesterday, I wouldn't be so stressed out today.
(mix of times - imagining something different in the past having a different result in the present)



Second Conditional - Imagining the *present* were different

One simple way to imagine that things in the present were different is to use **wish + simple past**:

- I live near the beach, but I **wish I lived** near the mountains.
- I **wish** my mother **knew** how to use a computer, but she doesn't.

- My boyfriend is so busy that he has no time for me. I **wish** he **didn't work** so much.
- Getting a visa to travel to the U.S. is difficult. I **wish** the process **wasn't** so complicated.

Put it into practice!

What are three things about your current life or present situation that you wish were different? Respond with **I wish + simple past**:

1. I wish...
2. I wish...
3. I wish...

Now we'll take those wishes one step further and imagine the result; imagine what would happen **if** they were currently true. This is the second conditional:

- **If I lived** near the mountains, **I would go** hiking every weekend.
- **If my mother knew** how to use a computer, **she could e-mail me** instead of calling.
- **If my boyfriend didn't work** so much, **we'd go** out more often.
- **If it wasn't** so complicated to get a visa to the U.S., **I'd take** my whole family there on vacation.



Like all conditional sentences, there are two parts: the **condition** and the **result**. Take a look at these examples and identify which verb tense is used in the condition, and which verb tense is used in the result:

CONDITION	RESULT
If he exercised more,	he would be thinner.

If I were taller,	I could play professional basketball.
If the teacher spoke more slowly,	we'd understand her better.
If your company went bankrupt,	what would you do?

The verb in the condition is in the **simple past**. Then, in the result, we use **would**, **might**, or **could**:

CONDITION: if + subject + past simple

RESULT: subject + would/might/could + verb

With **would**, it's common to use the contractions:

I'd, you'd, he'd, she'd, we'd, they'd

We use **would** when the result is more definite or certain:

If Peter asked Karen out, she **would** say yes.

(in this case, we are certain because we know that Karen wants to go out with Peter. Maybe she has said that she is interested in him)

We use **might** when the result may or may not happen:

If Peter asked Karen out, she **might** say yes... but she **might** not.

(in this case, we aren't sure if Karen is interested in Peter or not)

We use **could** to talk about possibilities or abilities, without commenting on whether or not they are likely to come true:

If I had a million dollars, I **could** buy my own helicopter, I **could** live in a mansion, I **could** quit my job...

(emphasizes the opening of possibilities – all the things that become possible with the wealth)

If I had a million dollars, I **would** quit my job and move to a tropical island.

(I would definitely do these things if I were rich)



Put it into practice!

What would you do if you had a billion dollars? Be creative and let your imagination run wild! You can use **I could...** **I would...** and **I might...** in your answer.

- If I had a billion dollars, I would... (or wouldn't)...
- If I had a billion dollars, I could...
- If I had a billion dollars, I might...

One final note on the second conditional: Which is correct?

- If I **was** rich, I'd buy a boat.
- If I **were** rich, I'd buy a boat.
- If Dana **was** here right now, she'd agree.
- If Dana **were** here right now, she'd agree.

Technically the correct answer is **were** in both cases... even though the subject is singular, we use **were** when talking about hypothetical situations.

However, informally, more and more people are saying sentences like these with **was** when the subject is singular. It's not correct, but it is common. To be on the safe side, it's best to stick with **were**!

One very common phrase for giving advice is in the second conditional:

- "If I were you, I'd..."

Third Conditional – Imagining that the *past* had been different

The second conditional is used for imagining that things in the *present* were different. The third conditional is used for imagining that things in the *past* had been different.

Let's start off by imagining a different past using **wish**. For hypothetical past situations, use **wish + past perfect**:

- I was late for work today. I **wish I had woken** up 15 minutes earlier.
- I **wish I hadn't eaten** that seafood stew yesterday – it made me sick.
- Oh, hi – I wasn't expecting you. I **wish you'd called** before coming over.



This is used to express regret (such as for eating that seafood stew) or past situations you wanted to be different (such as wishing your friend had called before arriving at your house).

Put it into practice!

What are three things you wish had/hadn't happened in the past? Respond with **I wish + past perfect**:

1. I wish...
2. I wish...
3. I wish...

Now we'll take those wishes one step further – imagining the result, in the past, if that past situation had been different:

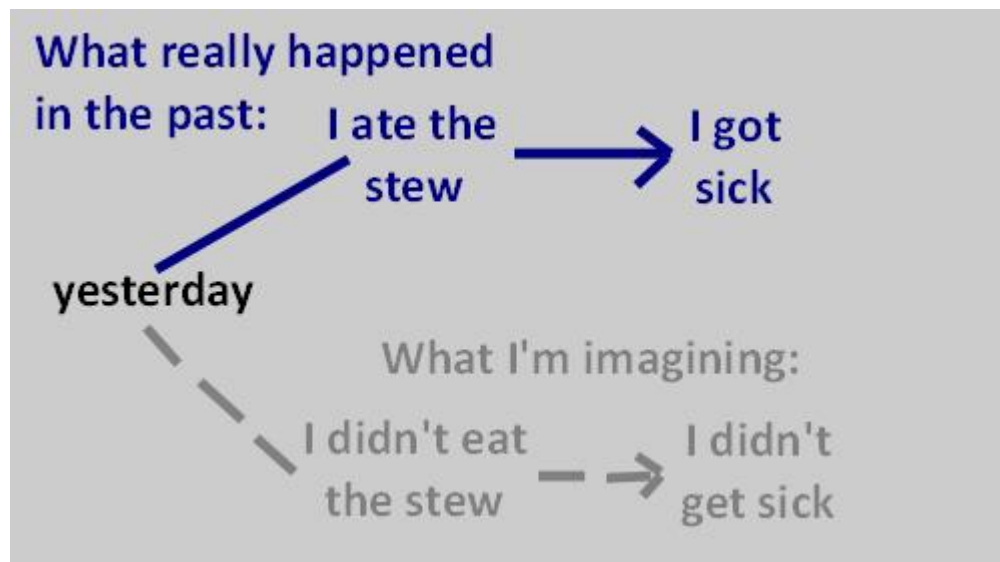
- If I **had woken** up 15 minutes earlier, I **would have arrived** on time.
- If I **hadn't eaten** that seafood stew yesterday, I **wouldn't have gotten** sick.
- If **you'd called** before coming over, I **could have prepared** some food.

This structure is called the **third conditional**. As you can see, it contains a CONDITION and a RESULT:

- Condition: If + past perfect
“**If I had woken** up 15 minutes earlier...”
- Result: would/could/might + have + past participle
“...I **would have arrived** on time.”

Like the other conditionals, you can reverse the condition and result: “I would have arrived on time if I’d woken up 15 minutes earlier.”

Sometimes it’s helpful to see an illustration of the two possible paths. The top path is what really happened, and the bottom path is the imaginary situation we are thinking and talking about:



Here are two examples from my own life:

- Real past: I came to Brazil and met my husband.
Imaginary past: If I **hadn't come** to Brazil, I **wouldn't have met** my husband.
- Real past: I did not go to graduate school. I did not get my Ph.D.
Imaginary past: If I **had gone** to graduate school, I **would have gotten** my Ph.D.

Put it into practice!

Think about three significant events or experiences in your past which have changed the course of your life. Now, try to imagine what would have happened if they had been different.

Use the third conditional to express them:

If I had/hadn't... **would have / wouldn't have + past participle**

1. If I had/hadn't...
2. If I had/hadn't...
3. If I had/hadn't...

Mixed Conditionals

In mixed conditionals, we are imagining that a situation was different, but the situation is a mix of two times. There are multiple possible combinations, but I will show you the three most common types here.

Past condition, present result:

(when an action in the past has affected the present)

- If I **hadn't drunk** so much last night, I **wouldn't feel** so awful this morning!
- If you **had saved** more money when you were younger, you **would be** financially secure now.



You can see that the first half of the sentence follows the third conditional rules: **if + past perfect**

A normal third conditional sentence would continue with **would have + past participle**. But the second half of this sentence does not – instead, it follows the second conditional rules: **would + base form of the verb**. That's why we call this a mixed conditional!

Put it into Practice!

Think about one past action that has affected your present reality:

- **What really happened:**

I lost a lot of weight last year, and now I play a lot of sports.

Now, transform it into a conditional sentence - imagine that the past action was different, thus causing your present reality to be different:

- **Imagining it was different:**

If I hadn't lost so much weight last year, I probably wouldn't play sports today.

Your sentence: If I had / hadn't _____, I would _____ now.

Present condition, past result:

When a present/general condition affected a past situation. For example, my son is 5 years old. Yesterday we went to an amusement park and he wasn't old enough to ride the roller coaster.

If he were older,	he could have ridden that roller coaster yesterday.
<i>present / general condition</i>	<i>different result in the past</i>
<i>Second conditional</i>	<i>Third conditional</i>

Here are some more examples:

- If I **knew** how to repair things, I **would have helped** you when your oven broke last week.
- If I **were** white, that police officer **wouldn't have questioned** me.
- If I **spoke** Spanish, it **would have been** easier to communicate on my trip to Mexico last month.

Put it into practice!

Think about one present reality (it can be a possession, a personality trait, or an ability) that affected a past action:

- **What really happened:**
I don't own a car, so I didn't give you a ride yesterday.

Now transform it into a conditional sentence - imagine that your present reality was different, thus causing the past action to be different:

- **Imagining it was different:**
If I **owned** a car, I **would have given** you a ride yesterday.

Your sentence: If I _____, I would/wouldn't have _____.

Future condition, past result:

This form is used when having established future plans made some past action possible or impossible:

- If we **weren't moving** to another state next month, we **would have signed** up for the local sports league.
- If my parents **were coming** over tonight, I **would have cleaned** my apartment.

You get a pass on putting this one into practice - this is one of the most difficult structures to create a sentence, because it's not always the case that our future plans make us choose to do or not do things in the past.

Summary

- Use **I wish + simple past** to desire that *present situations* were different (I wish I were rich)
- Use the **second conditional** to imagine the results if *present situations* were different (If I were rich, I'd live in a mansion)
- Use **I wish + past perfect** to desire that *past situations* had been different (I wish I had woken up earlier)

- Use the **third conditional** to imagine the past results if *past situations* had been different (If I had woken up earlier, I would have gotten to work on time)
- Use a **mixed conditional** to imagine conditions and results when these are in different times (present/past, past/present, future/past)

You've finished Lesson 7! This concludes our series on conditionals. Now take the quiz and do the practice exercises to be sure that you've mastered the structures of unreal conditionals.

Writing Task

Think about one or two of those significant decisions or turning points you have experienced, which have affected the course of your life.

Tell me about it – describe the situation and how it turned out – and also imagine how your life would have been different if things had gone differently. Of course, it's impossible to know *exactly* what would have happened – but try to imagine!

E-mail me your text at shayna@espressoenglish.net – and I'll review it and send you my feedback.

Quiz – Lesson 7 – Unreal Conditionals

Exercise 1: Second conditional

Complete the sentences with the verbs in the correct tenses. Pay careful attention to which part of the sentence is the condition, and which part is the result! When possible, abbreviate “would” to ‘d.

Condition: *If + simple past | Result: would + base form*

Ex) He _____ (get) promoted if only he _____ (show up) to work on time.
He’d get promoted if only he **showed up** to work on time.

1. If you _____ (have) to start over, what _____ (you do) differently?
2. The world _____ (be) a much better place if people _____ (be) more generous.
3. If she _____ (not be) so stubborn, her co-workers _____ (like) her more.
4. If you _____ (eat) a healthy breakfast, you _____ (have) more energy.
5. I _____ (call) him if I _____ (have) his number.
6. If he _____ (be) more organized, he _____ (not forget) so many things.
7. We _____ (go) with you if we _____ (not have) other plans.
8. She's very honest; she _____ (not say) that if she _____ (not mean) it.
9. How long _____ (it take) if we _____ (hire) someone to do this work?
10. If they _____ (not buy) so much stuff, they _____ (have) more money to travel.

Exercise 2: Third Conditional

Complete the sentences with the verbs in the correct tenses. Pay careful attention to which part of the sentence is the condition, and which part is the result! When possible, abbreviate "had" to 'd.

Condition: *If + past perfect (had + past participle)*

Result: *would have + past participle*

Ex) We _____ (go) to the party if we _____ (be) invited.

We **would have gone** to the party if we **'d been** invited.

1. My son _____ (not clean) his room if I _____ (not ask) him.
2. If he _____ (not step) in and stopped the argument, a fight _____ (break) out.
3. If I _____ (wait) any longer to see a doctor, I _____ (end) up needing surgery.
4. I never _____ (develop) a love for learning if I _____ (not have) such great teachers.
5. Do you think you _____ (be) happier if you _____ (marry) your ex?
6. I _____ (not have) to rush if I _____ (start) the assignment earlier.
7. We _____ (buy) more DVDs if they _____ (be) on sale.
8. If I _____ (know) about the problem, I _____ (help).
9. If the manager _____ (give) better instructions, everyone _____ (understand) the task.
10. They _____ (learn) more about the city if they _____ (take) a guided tour.

Exercise 3: Mixed Conditionals

Unscramble the words to make sentences:

1. _____
years / I'd / invested / now! / 15 / If / in / be / Apple / rich / ago, / I'd
2. If she _____, she
_____ to the funeral!
have / of / miniskirt / a / had / decency / wouldn't / worn / sense / any
3. _____ these days.
job / more / he'd / have / he'd / If / college / finished / opportunities
4. I _____ if only I _____
nuts / that / had / would / cake / a / to / weren't / allergic / piece / have / of
5. I'd _____ right now if I _____
painting / money / already / that / buy / all / my / spent / hadn't
6. If _____ I sent you, then _____
the / what / article / you'd / know / read / talking / I'm / you'd / about
7. If _____, he _____ he met at the
park.
so / weren't / that / have / out / girl / shy / Tim / asked / would
8. If she _____, she

understood / their / offended / wouldn't / have / better / the / visitors / culture
9. I _____ if I _____
a / have / joined / would / knew / to / play / musical / band / a / how / instrument
10. If he _____, then
_____ today.
did / wouldn't / for / still / be / what / he / friends / we / apologized / hadn't

Answers – Lesson 7 – Unreal Conditionals

Exercise 1: Second conditional

1. If you **had** to start over, what **would you do** differently?
2. The world **would be** a much better place if people **were** more generous.
3. If she **weren't** so stubborn, her co-workers **would like** her more.
4. If you **ate** a healthy breakfast, you **'d have** more energy.
5. **I'd call** him if I **had** his number.
6. If he **were** more organized, he **wouldn't forget** so many things.
7. We **'d go** with you if we **didn't have** other plans.
8. She's very honest; she **wouldn't say** that if she **didn't mean** it.
9. How long **would it take** if we **hired** someone to do this work?
10. If they **didn't buy** so much stuff, they **'d have** more money to travel.

Exercise 2: Third Conditional

1. My son **wouldn't have cleaned** his room if I **hadn't asked** him.
2. If he **hadn't stepped** in and stopped the argument, a fight **would have broken** out.
3. If **I'd waited** any longer to see a doctor, I **would have ended** up needing surgery.
4. I never **would have developed** a love for learning if I **hadn't had** such great teachers.
5. Do you think you **would have been** happier if you **'d married** your ex?
6. I **wouldn't have had** to rush if **I'd started** the assignment earlier.
7. We **would have bought** more DVDs if they **'d been** on sale.
8. If **I'd known** about the problem, I **would have helped**.
9. If the manager **had given** better instructions, everyone **would have understood** the task.

10. They **would have learned** more about the city if they **'d taken** a guided tour.

Exercise 3: Mixed Conditionals

Unscramble the words to make sentences:

1. If I'd invested in Apple 15 years ago, I'd be rich now!
2. If she had any sense of decency, she wouldn't have worn a miniskirt to the funeral!
3. If he'd finished college, he'd have more job opportunities these days.
4. I would have had a piece of that cake if only I weren't allergic to nuts.
5. I'd buy that painting right now if I hadn't spent all my money already.
6. If you'd read the article I sent you, then you'd know what I'm talking about.
7. If Tim weren't so shy, he would have asked out that girl he met at the park.
8. If she understood their culture better, she wouldn't have offended the visitors.
9. I would have joined a band if I knew how to play a musical instrument.
10. If he hadn't apologized for what he did, then we wouldn't still be friends today.