

## Use

- 1 *May, might, and could* all express a future possibility.

It	may might could	rain later.
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- 2 *May* can be more formal.

*The government **may** increase income tax.*

- 3 *Could* suggests something less definite.

*I **could** be a champion if I trained hard.  
The house is nice, but it **could** be beautiful.*

## Unit 9

### 9.1 Conditionals

There are different ways of making sentences with *if*. It is important to understand the difference between sentences that express:

possible conditions = first conditional

improbable or impossible conditions = second conditional

impossible past conditions = third conditional

no condition = zero conditional

#### Possible conditions

*If I see Dave, I'll tell him to call you.*

This is a sentence about reality.

*If I see Dave ... = a real possibility  
... I'll tell him to call you. = the result of a possible situation*

#### Improbable or impossible conditions

*If I had the money, I'd buy a Mercedes.*

This is a sentence which is different to reality.

*If I had the money ... = not impossible, but the reality is I don't have the money.  
... I'd buy a Mercedes. = the result of an improbable situation*

Some situations that are different to reality are impossible to change.

*If I had longer legs, I'd be able to run really fast.  
If I had longer legs ... = impossible. The reality is I don't have long legs and I can't change that.*

#### Impossible past conditions

*If I'd known you were coming, I'd have cooked you a meal.*

This is a sentence about an impossible past situation. It didn't happen, and now it's too late to change the result.

*If I had known ... = impossible, because I didn't know  
... I'd have cooked = the result of an impossible past situation*

#### No conditions

*If I get a headache, I take an aspirin.  
If metal is heated, it expands.*

These are sentences that are always true. They refer to 'all time', and are called zero conditionals. *If* here means *when* or *whenever*.

### 9.2 Second conditional: improbable or impossible conditions

#### Form

*if* + Past simple, *would* + verb

#### Positive

*If I **won** some money, I'd **go** around the world.  
My father **would kill** me **if** he **could** see me now.*

#### Negative

*I **wouldn't give up** my job **if** I **won** the lottery.  
If I **saw** a ghost, I **wouldn't talk** to it.*

#### Question

*What **would** you **do** if you **saw** someone shoplifting?  
If you **needed** help, who **would** you **ask**?*

*Was* can change to *were* in the condition clause.

If I If he	were rich,	I he	wouldn't have to work.
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Other modal verbs are possible in the result clause.

*I **could** buy some new clothes if I had some money.  
If I saved a little every week, I **might** be able to buy a car.*

#### Use

- 1 We use the second conditional to express an unreal situation and its probable result. The situation or condition is improbable, impossible, imaginary, or different to known facts.

*If I **were** the president of my country, I'd **increase** taxes.  
(But it's not very likely that I will ever be the president.)  
If my mother **was** still alive, she'd **be** very proud.  
(But it's impossible because she's not alive.)*

- 2 *If I were you, I'd ...* is used to give advice.

*If I **were** you, I'd **refuse**.  
I'd take it easy for a while **if I were** you.*

- 3 When the condition is understood, it is common to find the result clause on its own.

*What would you do if you had lots of money?  
I'd **travel**. I'd **give** it all **away**.  
I'd **buy** my mum and dad a nice house. They'd **love** that!*

- 4 *Would* can express preference, especially with *rather*.

*I'd love a cup of tea.  
I'd rather have coffee, please.  
What **would** you rather do, stay in or go out?*

- 5 *Would* can express a request.

***Would** you open the door for me?  
**Would** you mind lending me a hand?*

### 9.3 First or second conditional?

Both conditionals refer to the present and future. The difference is about probability and possibility, not time. First conditional sentences are real and possible. Second conditional sentences express situations that will probably never happen, or are impossible.

*If I **lose** my job, I'll ...* (My company is doing badly. There is a strong possibility of being made redundant.)  
*If I **lost** my job, I'd ...* (I probably won't lose my job. I'm just imagining.)  
*If there **is** a nuclear war, we'll all ...* (Said by a pessimist.)  
*If there **was** a nuclear war, we'd ...* (But I don't think it will happen.)  
*If the world **had** only 100 people in it, 26 of them **would** be children.* (But it would be impossible for there to be only 100 people in the world.)