

Conditional Clauses

Conditionals are composed of two clauses, the conditional clause (beginning with *if*-) and a main clause (then-). There are two types of conditional clauses:

Real conditional clauses

These clauses suggest that a situation is or was true, or may have been or become true. There are two types of the real conditional clauses:

- a) Those that talk about the past use the past tense in both the *if*-clause and the main clause.
 - *Whenever she asked me, I helped her out.*
- b) Those that refer to the present or future just take present tense in the conditional clause, (not “will”) in the conditional clause. The main clause can take present, future, or imperative
 - *When I go to Berlin, I travel by train.*
 - *If anyone calls, tell them I'll/I will be back at 4pm. (not “will call”)*
 - *If you leave now, you will/I'll be home in three hours.*
 - *I'll give you a lift if it rains (now...if it will rain...)*

Unreal conditional clauses

These clauses suggest that a situation is unreal – that it is imaginary, untrue, or impossible. For present or future situations, we use the past tense (simple or continuous) in the *if*-clause and “would” + bare infinitive in the main clause. We can also use *could/might/should* (have) instead of *would* (have). We don't use the past simple or past perfect in the main clause

- *If I went to Berlin, I would travel by train.*
- *We might have found a better hotel if we'd driven a few more blocks.*

Notice that sometimes we use *if...were* instead of *if...was*

- *I'd offer you a ride if my car were here.*

When we talk about something that might have happened in the past, but didn't, then we use *if + past perfect* and *would have + past participle* in the main clause:

- *If had known how difficult the job would be, I wouldn't have taken it.*

In unreal conditionals we use *if...were + to-infinitive* to talk about imaginary future situations:

- *If the technology were to become available, we would be able to expand the business.*
- *If he were to have a chance of success, he would need to move to London.*

Exercises

In each sentence, identify the "if-clause," the main clause, and the type of conditional (real or unreal). If necessary, correct the sentences.

1. If Jeremy had been ethical, he would return the money.
2. If Sasha would have really wanted to see me, he would have come earlier.
3. If she doesn't break the vase then who is responsible?
4. If Stephanie will continue to work hard, she should get a good grade in the course.
5. Ahmad would have been robbed if Kelly hadn't come along.
6. I'd be able to go to court first thing in the morning if I stay in town overnight.
7. Call the operator if you want to place a call.
8. You'd be amazed if I told you how much this cost.
9. If I had suddenly announced that school was cancelled, the children had celebrated.
10. We might soon be rolling in dough soon if all will go according to plan.

Sources and Further Reading/Practice:

Hewings, Martin. *Advanced Grammar in Use: A self study reference and practice book for advance learners of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 (198-201).