

Everyday Grammar: Introducing Conditionals

VOA Learning English

4-5 minutes

In this week's episode of Everyday Grammar, we are going to talk about **conditionals**. We use conditionals to show that something is true only when something else is true. Conditionals offer endless possibilities for creative and **imaginative** expression.

Present real conditional

The present real conditional is the most **basic** kind of conditional. Basically, *when A happens, B happens*.

Here's an example of a present real conditional:

"If it rains, I bring an umbrella."

Conditionals have two parts: the *if clause*: "if it rains," and the *result clause*: "I bring an umbrella." You could also say "I bring an umbrella if it rains."

Poets and songwriters often use conditionals in their work. Listen for the present real conditional in this song by American songwriter Bob Dylan.

"If you see her, say hello. She might be in Tangier"

Notice that the verbs *see* and *say* are both in the present **tense** for the present real conditional.

Present unreal conditional

The next conditional that we're going to talk about is the present **unreal** conditional. Use the present unreal conditional to talk about what you would do in an unreal, or imaginary situation. *If A happened, B would happen*. For example, "If I were you, I would take the job." The key word is *would*; it makes the conditional unreal. *Would* can only be used in the *result clause* of the sentence. Here's an example from American singer Johnny Cash.

"If I were a carpenter
And you were a lady
Would you marry me anyway?
Would you have my baby?"

To form a present unreal conditional, use a simple past verb in the *if clause*. In the *result clause*, use *would* followed by a simple present verb.

Use the verb *were* for all nouns in the *if clause* of the sentence. For example, "If she *were* an animal, she would be a cat." In informal speech, people might say, "If she *was* an animal, she would be a cat." But you should avoid this in formal writing.

Future real conditional

Now let's talk about the future real conditional. *If A happens, B will happen.* To make a future real conditional, use *will* in the result clause. For example, "If your plane is late, I *will* wait in the car." Use the future real conditional to talk about possible situations in the future.

Speakers sometimes use the future real conditional to threaten others. Listen to actor Liam Neeson in the 2013 movie *Taken*. In this scene of the movie, Neeson's character is on the phone threatening the man who kidnapped his daughter.

"If you let my daughter go now, that'll be the end of it. I will not look for you. I will not pursue you. But if you don't, I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you."

This is only a quick introduction to conditionals. In a future episode of Everyday Grammar, we will talk about past and mixed conditionals. Until then, we will leave you with country music stars Johnny Cash and June Carter.

"If you were a carpenter
And I were a lady
I'd marry you anyway
I'd have your baby"

I'm Jonathan Evans.

Adam Brock wrote this story for VOA Learning English. Jill Robbins and Ashley Thompson were the editors.

REFERENCE – Three common conditionals (incomplete list)

	If clause	Result clause
Present Real	If you see her, <i>Simple present</i>	say hello. <i>Simple present</i>
Present Unreal	If I were you, <i>Simple past</i>	I would leave. <i>Would + simple present</i>
Future Real	If your plane is late, I will wait for you. <i>Simple present</i>	<i>Simple future</i>

Words in This Story

conditional - *n.* a word, clause, or sentence that shows that something is true or happens only if something else is true or happens

imaginative - *adj.* having or showing an ability to think of new and interesting ideas : having or showing imagination

basic - *adj.* forming or relating to the first or easiest part of something

clause - *n. grammar:* a part of a sentence that has its own subject and verb

tense - *n.* a form of a verb that is used to show when an action happened

unreal - *adj.* not real; not true

Now it's your turn. Do you like to use conditionals? If you write a sentence with a conditional in the comments section, we will let you know if it is correct. (Or tell us which kind of conditional is in the previous sentence.)