

CONDITIONAL SENTENCES (*if* clauses)

Conditional sentences are statements, which commonly appear in factual discussion or explanatory essays, and hypothetical or imaginary contexts or situations.

Whether predicting, speculating, advising, stating general truths and others, conditional structures are important for these kinds of expressions.

STUDY TIPS

Remember to use a variety of sentences in your language, and in particular complex *if-clauses*.

Conditional clauses are useful and relevant in Part 3 of the IELTS Speaking test, when **speculating** about the future or expressing your **opinion** is important.

A conditional sentence is a complex sentence, which consists of an *if*-clause.

The *if*-clause is the dependent clause expressing a **condition** for a result (independent clause) to happen, for instance:

If interest rates rise, company profits will fall.
condition *result*

There are four common types of conditional sentences depending on whether the time is **present**, **past** or **future**, and the **degree of possibility and certainty**.

FOUR TYPES OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

1. ZERO CONDITIONAL

<i>If</i> clause (dependent) condition	Independent clause result
If + present simple, continuous,	(then) + present simple
Example: If students study systematically, they usually get good grades.	
Meaning: the condition indicates facts or things are always true; the time is not specific; if has the same meaning as when or whenever , for example When students study systematically, they get good grades.	

2. FIRST CONDITIONAL

<i>If</i> clause (dependent) condition	Independent clause result
If + present simple, continuous,	(then) + future tense with <i>will</i> or modal verbs <i>may/can/might/should</i> + infinitive
Example: If the students score at least 85% on the exam, they will be eligible for an exemption.	
Meaning: expresses a possible condition in the future with a reasonably likely result.	

3. SECOND CONDITIONAL

If clause (dependent) condition	Independent clause result
If + simple past, continuous,	(then) + would/might/could + infinitive
Example: If I knew the student well, I would advise him not to take the exam in February.	
Meaning: refers to imaginary, hypothetical situations; talking about a possible event in the future, but results are only remotely likely to happen; often used to give advice.	

4. THIRD CONDITIONAL

If clause (dependent) condition	Independent clause result
If + past perfect,	(then)+ would could have + past participle might
Example: If the students had studied harder, they could have passed the final exam.	
Meaning: refers to an imaginary past situation and speculates what might have been; if what happened was negative, then the opposite - the positive form would be used, and conversely, if what happened was positive, the negative form would be used; this conditional is used to express past mistakes, past wishes or to apologise.	

FIXED PHRASES

Conditionals are also used in set phrases, for example:

- to give advice – **if I were you...**
If I were you, I would build my vocabulary and practise my spelling.
- to express a regret – **if only...**
If only I had followed her advice, I could have passed the exam.
- to make a request – **if you don't mind...**
If you don't mind, I would prefer the exam to be scheduled for Friday.
- to make a suggestion – **what if...**
What if the students sat the exam on Friday?