

A BRIEF ENGLISH LESSON: OCTOBER

This month's lesson looks at **conditional sentences** (or "**if-sentences**") in English. There are 3 main types of conditional sentences – the 1st, 2nd and 3rd conditionals – and one more, the "*general conditional*" (which is not a real "if-sentence, as the "if" can be replaced by "when"). N.B. You can replace "if not" with "unless".

A conditional sentence has *two halves* – the "if" half, which expresses the condition and the main half, which expresses what will (would, could, might etc.) happen when the condition is fulfilled. As you will see, *each half has a different time form* (except for the general conditional, which has the present simple in each half). Study the table below, looking carefully at both the *form* and *meaning* of each conditional. Then try the exercise.

Name(s):	The 1st Conditional	"Probable Conditional"
Example:	<i>If it rains on Sunday, If you work hard,</i>	<i>I'll stay at home. you'll pass the exam.</i>
Time forms used:	Present Simple	Future with "will"
Explanation(s):	The chances of the condition being fulfilled are probable (50/50)	It refers to the future.

Name(s):	The 2nd Conditional	"Unreal or Improbable Conditional"
Example:	<i>If I lived in Greece, If he ran, If she had more money,</i>	<i>I would learn Greek He would catch the train. She would buy a big villa.</i>
Time forms used:	Past Simple	"would" + infinitive
Explanation(s):	The chances of the condition being fulfilled are improbable or the condition is unreal or purely hypothetical.	It refers to an "unreal" present or an unlikely future.

Name(s):	The 3rd Conditional	"Impossible Conditional"
Example:	<i>If I had known, If he had left earlier,</i>	<i>I would have told him. He wouldn't have missed the train.</i>
Time forms used:	Past perfect	"would" + perfect infinitive
Explanation(s):	The chances of the condition being fulfilled are nil as it is in the past and, therefore, too late!	It refers to the past.

Name(s):	The general conditional	"Whenever"
Example:	<i>If /when the temperature drops below zero degrees, If/when share prices go up,</i>	<i>water freezes. she feels happy.</i>
Time forms used:	Present Simple	Present Simple
Explanation(s):	This is not a true conditional sentence. "If" can be replaced with "when" meaning "whenever". Whenever the condition is fulfilled, the result follows. It expresses "eternal truths".	It is "timeless".

READY TO TEST YOURSELF?

Put the verb in brackets into the correct form and write down what kind of conditional sentence it is – 1st, 2nd, 3rd or general.

1. When the sun shines, people (FEEL) happy.
..... conditional
2. If I had more time, I (LEARN) another language.
..... conditional.
3. Al Gore would have become president, if more people (VOTE) for him.
..... conditional

4. If we have a lot of snow this winter, people who work in tourism (BE) happy.
..... conditional.
5. There wouldn't be so many overweight people, if they (EAT) less and
(TAKE) more exercise.
..... conditional
6. If I hadn't come to Switzerland, I (not LEARN) Swiss German.
..... conditional
7. He'll help you, if you (ASK) him nicely.
..... conditional
8. Dogs do not have behavioural problems, if you (TREAT) them properly.
..... conditional.
9. Unless she gets a share of the profits, she (not BE) interested.
..... conditional.
10. He would be more motivated if you (GIVE) him more positive feedback.
..... conditional.

AND THE ANSWERS?

1. When the sun shines, people **feel** happy.
general conditional
2. If I had more time, I **would learn** another language.
2nd conditional.
3. Al Gore would have become president, if more people **had voted** for him.
3rd conditional.
4. If we have a lot of snow this winter, people who work in tourism **will be** happy.
1st conditional.
5. There wouldn't be so many overweight people, if they **ate** less and **took** more exercise.
2nd conditional.
6. If I hadn't come to Switzerland, I **wouldn't have learned** Swiss German.
3rd conditional.
7. He'll help you, if you **ask** him nicely.
1st conditional.
8. Dogs do not have behavioural problems, if you **treat** them properly.
general conditional.
9. Unless she gets a share of the profits, she **won't be** interested.
1st conditional.
10. He would be more motivated if you **gave** him more positive feedback.
2nd conditional.