

## Conditionals in English

If conditionals in English were simple, those who study this language would use them constantly. The first conditional is usually learned easily and is not too difficult to master, but the second and third usually are more confusing, and students often prefer to try to avoid them. It is not a bad strategy, although it sometimes makes it difficult to say exactly what you want to say.

Students can use conditionals to talk about the future, about possibility, about preferences or about what did not happen at a given moment.

It is common to hear teachers (and students) mention three conditionals, but in fact, there are more types. Some people prefer to number them (0, 1, 2, 3 and mixed), while others prefer to talk about "real" or "non-real" conditionals, which can be a useful distinction, as it helps understand a little more which one is appropriate in each case.

To talk about real situations in the present we can use the zero conditional (referring to facts and things that are always true) or the first conditional (to talk about how these situations will affect the future). We can use the second conditional for situations that are not real (although perhaps we would like them to be), and the third to imagine how the past could have been different.

The following table shows how the different conditionals are formed in English:

Type of situa	Type of conditional	Proposition with "if",	... main proposition
REAL	<b>Zero conditional</b>	<i>If</i> + subject + verb in present,  <b><i>If you sleep badly,</i></b> (Si duermes mal,	... subject + verb in present or imperatif  <b><i>you feel tired.</i></b> te sientes cansado).
	<b>First conditional</b>	<i>If</i> + subject + verb in present ( <i>present simple, present continuous, present perfect</i> ),  <b><i>If it rains tomorrow,</i></b> (Si mañana llueve,	... subject + <i>will</i> + basic form of the verb  <b><i>I'll take an umbrella.</i></b> me llevaré un paraguas).

UNREAL	<b>Second conditional</b>	<p><i>If + subject + verb in past (past simple, past continuous)</i></p> <p><b><i>If I had more money,</i></b> (Si tuviera más dinero,</p>	<p>... subject + <i>would</i> + basic form of the verb</p> <p><b><i>I'd buy a new car.</i></b> me compraría un coche nuevo).</p>
	<b>Third conditional</b>	<p><i>If + subject + past perfect</i></p> <p><b><i>If I had studied in the USA,</i></b> (Si hubiera estudiado en EE. UU.,</p>	<p>... subject + <i>would</i> + <i>have</i> + past participle</p> <p><b><i>my English would have improved.</i></b> mi inglés habría mejorado).</p>
	<b>Mixed conditionals</b>	<p><i>If + subject + past perfect</i></p> <p><b><i>If I had listened to you,</i></b> (Si te hubiera escuchado,</p>	<p>... subject + <i>would</i> + main verb</p> <p><b><i>I would have got lost.</i></b> me habría perdido).</p>
<p><i>If + subject + past simple</i></p> <p><b><i>If I knew him,</i></b> (Si lo conociera,</p>		<p>... subject + <i>would</i> + <i>have</i> + past perfect</p> <p><b><i>I would have invited him to my party.</i></b> le habría invitado a mi fiesta).</p>	

**Source:** Cath McLellan - British Council