

Explanations

Real/likely situations: first conditional

- With *if*

A first conditional describes a real or likely situation. A present tense is used after *if*, but the time referred to is the future. *Will/Won't* are common in the result clause.

If you fall, I won't be able to catch you!

This means that there is a real possibility this will happen.

Going to can be used instead of *will*.

If it rains, we're going to get wet.

The modal verb *can* is also common in first conditional sentences.

If the cases are too heavy, I can help you carry them.

- *Unless, provided, as long as*

Unless means *If ... not*.

Unless you leave at once, I'll call the police.

If you don't leave at once, I'll call the police.

Provided and *as long as* can also introduce a condition.

Provided you leave now, you'll catch the train.

- With the imperative

It is common to use the imperative instead of *if*.

Get me some cigarettes, and I'll pay you later.

- With *should*

We can use *should* instead of *if* in a conditional sentence. It means *if by any chance ...* and makes the action less likely.

Should you see John, can you give him a message?

Unreal/imaginary situations: second conditional

- With *if*

A second conditional describes an unreal or imaginary situation. A past simple tense is used after *if*, but the time referred to is the future. *Would* is common in the result clause.

If you fell, you would hurt yourself.

This means that there is a small possibility that this will happen. The situation and its result are imagined.

The modal verbs *might* and *could* are common in second conditional sentences.

If you became a millionaire, you might be unhappy.

- *Were*

Were is often used instead of *was* in formal language. Note that *were* is not stressed in speech.