

CONDITIONALS

“Come on, come on, you’re late for class!”

“I’m sorry. I had to call my mother.”

“Well, if you hadn’t called your mother you would have got here on time.”

“Yes, but you don’t know my mother. If I didn’t call her once a week, she would kill me. Don’t you ever call your mother?”

“If I have time then I call her, but I have to admit, that isn’t very often.”

“If you want to, you can go and call her right now.”

“No, no. If I call her from work she’ll think that something has happened to me.”

“Have you noticed something?”

“What would that be?”

“There were an amazing numbers of ‘ifs’ in our opening dialogue.”

“Really? How convenient. It might help us in our lesson today. Are you any good at science?”

“Well, I did a bit at school.”

“Perfect. Okay, I have a question.”

“Ooooh, a quiz! I love quizzes, me.”

“Yes, well... Okay, first question. If I heat water to 100 degrees Celsius. What happens to it?”

“That one’s easy. It boils!”

“Correct. Question 2. If plants get only electric light, not sunlight, what happens to them?”

“I know! I know! They die!”

“Right again. You’re not as stupid as you look!”

“Hey, thanks. Third question please!”

“If iron is left out in the rain, what happens to it?”

“It rusts!”

“Can you be a little more scientific?”

“It oxidizes!”

“Four syllables - and it was the correct answer. Well done.”

“Hey, I thought you were training me to be an English teacher. Surely we shouldn’t be messing around with quizzes, however fun they are.”

“There is method in my madness, oh stupid one.”

“I guess I’ll have to wait and find out what it is.”

“No you won’t. We’ve already done the first one.”

“Done one what? Quiz?”

“Conditional form. We looked at the **zero conditional**.”

“The what?”

“The zero conditional. We often use this when we talk about cause and effect. If X happens, Y is the result.”

“What, you mean like in the quiz:

***If I heat water to 100 degrees Celsius, it boils!**”*

‘Exactly. I recommend you use that sentence as a model sentence.’

‘Good ideat.’

‘Okay, now in your model sentence. **If I heat water to 100 degrees Celsius, it boils!** Are we talking about a particular kettle or saucepan full of water?’

‘No. We’re talking about water in general, nothing specific.’

‘Right. That’s an important part of the zero conditional. Not a specific time or place.’

‘If I call my sister a wally, she thumps me.’

‘Excellent!’

‘No it’s not. It bloody hurts!’

‘But a good example of the zero conditional. Just checking, I presume it is a fairly common or likely event?’

‘Daily.’

‘Thompson.’

‘What?’

‘Never mind. I was just making a little joke. It’s time to move on. Now, I’ve just moved into new house. There is a garden at the back and frankly I’m a useless gardener. Could you give me some tips?’

‘Sure, I’ve got some flowers in my back garden. What’s your problem?’

‘Well, I’ve got some marvellous marigolds, some dazzling daisies and some beautiful buttercups...’

‘Great alliteration, oh great master.’

‘Thank you. Anyway. I have been given conflicting advice by my neighbours and frankly, I’m at a loss as to what to do.’

‘So what did they tell you?’

‘Mr Aardvark told me to put manure around my flowers. Mr Baboon told me to give them all a good dose of cyanide. Mr Cabbage suggested that I pour concrete over my whole garden. Now what do you think? You’re the expert.’

‘Well, Mr Aardvark clearly knows what he’s talking about. If you put manure around your flowers, they will grow twice as fast.’

‘Really? My marigolds, my daisies and my buttercups?’

‘Yes, your flowers. But Mr Baboon’s cyanide is not such a good idea.’

‘No?’

‘No. If you put cyanide on your flowers, they’ll be dead in a couple of days.’

‘You mean the flowers in my back garden, those specific flowers.’

‘Yes, those specific flowers.’

‘Just checking.’

‘As for Mr Cabbage, well, I don’t know where he studied gardening! If you pour concrete over your flowers, they will die!’

‘Die ?!’

‘Yes, if you cover them with concrete, they won’t be able to get the sunlight they need.’

‘Wow, you’re a real green-fingered expert!’

‘Yes, well, once again you’ve led me astray.’

‘Not at all.’

‘What do you mean, not at all. I’m here to learn how to teach English and instead of teaching me, you pick my brain for gardening tips!’

‘There is method in my madness...’

‘... oh stupid one. Ha ha. I was hoping there might be.’

‘We were talking about my options for the future.’

‘The options for your marvellous marigolds and... the others.’

‘Exactly. We are looking at possible situations in the future, but with an element of conditionality about them.’

‘You mean, there’s an ‘if’ in the sentence.’

‘Often, but not always. But our model sentence, fortunately, has one.’

‘So which one is our model sentence?’

‘You can choose!’

‘Well, Mr Aardvark gave the most sensible advice, but I don’t find sensible things easy to remember.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes. So my model sentence will be:

If you pour concrete over your flowers, they will die!

Now what was this form called?’

*‘This is the **First conditional.**’*

‘First conditional. I must write that down. If I don’t write it down, I’ll forget it!’

‘Excellent. You’ve definitely got the hang of this one pretty quickly. So, what are your plans for this afternoon?’

‘I’m not sure. It depends on the weather. I might go swimming in the sea.’

‘Only might?’

‘It depends on the weather.’

‘You mean, that you want to go swimming, but only on the condition that the weather is good.’

‘Correct. If it’s sunny, I’ll go swimming. If it’s pouring with rain, I’ll stay at home and study English grammar.’

‘Perfect. Can I just point out something interesting?’

‘If you want to.’

‘If it’s sunny...’

‘Is that interesting?’

‘You are talking about this afternoon, but you don’t use ‘will’ in that part of the sentence.’

‘If it will be sunny...? But that sounds pretty stupid.’

‘To you it might sound stupid but it sounds perfectly natural to the millions of learners of English.’

‘The Great Unwashed!’

‘Hey, don’t forget who’s going to be paying your future salary!’

‘You mean, ‘Don’t bite the hand that feeds you!’’

‘Exactly. If you bite the hand that feeds you, it won’t feed you any more.’

‘All right, I take your point. I’ll treat my pupils with greater respect in future. Can we move on?’

‘Sure, but before we do, I think you should make a table.’

‘But I haven’t got any wood, nails, glue...’

‘Not that sort of table. A table showing the two structures we have looked at so far.’

‘Okay, If you want me to, I’ll have a go.’

NAME	CONSTRUCTION	USE	MODEL SENTENCE
Zero Conditional	If+present tense + present tense	general statements about the present	If I heat water to 100 degrees Celsius, it boils .
First Conditional	If+present tense + will future.	conditional statements about the future	If you pour concrete over your flowers, they will die .

‘So, what do you think?’

‘I’m lost for words. I couldn’t have done a better one myself.’

‘But you didn’t even try!’

‘True, but, anyway. We’ve got to move on. Are you familiar with the term ‘Doppelganger?’

‘Sure!’

‘You are?’

‘Yeah, I had one for lunch. A doppelganger with fries and a banana milkshake.’

‘Well, perhaps you did, but there is another meaning of the word ‘doppelganger’. It means someone who looks like you. and I’d like to tell you that you have a doppelganger.’

‘Really? Who is it?’

‘His name’s Chris Evans...’

‘Chris Evans? You mean that wally on TV?’

‘Exactly! When I first saw you, I thought, I know that face. I was actually really surprised to find out that your name isn’t Chris Evans.’

‘But I don’t look anything like Chris Evans!’

‘Oh you do, your hair, your teeth, your face, your voice...’

‘What a load of bollards! If I looked like Chris Evans I would shoot myself.’

‘But your hair...’

‘If I had hair like Chris Evans I would shave it all off.’

‘And your teeth...’

‘If I had teeth like Chris Evans, I would pull them all out.’

‘And your face...’

‘If I had a face like Chris Evans’s I would ask a cosmetic surgeon to do a lot of work.’

‘And your voice...’

‘If I spoke like Chris Evans I would go to a speech therapist.’

‘Can I tell you something?’

‘What?’

‘I was only joking.’

‘WHAT!’

‘I was doing a bit of subtle eliciting.’

‘You were?’

‘I was. Now let’s look at some very interesting things you said: Now, my first question is, do you, at this moment in time, look remotely like Chris Evans?’

‘NO !!!’

‘So we are talking about something purely hypothetical, or at least, very unlikely.’

‘Correct.’

‘Okay, now let’s look at your next model sentence. I referred to your, I now admit, totally untrue similarity to Chris Evans. Your reply was, and I quote: What a load of bollards! **If I looked like Chris Evans I would shoot myself.**’

‘Too true.’

‘This is the **Second Conditional.**’

‘It is?’

‘Yes, it is. We use the second conditional when we’re talking about a situation in the present that is plainly untrue, or very unlikely.’

‘Okay, but if I were you, I wouldn’t tell people that they look like Chris Evans. They could get angry and punch you on the nose.’

‘Are you me?’

‘Am I you? No! I was just saying that If I were you... Oh I get you, another case of the second conditional.’

‘You have to admit that it is pretty unlikely that you will ever be me.’

‘Thank goodness!’

‘Don’t be so cheeky. You’re lucky that you wear glasses.’

‘Why’s that?’

‘Well, if you didn’t wear glasses, I’d punch you on the nose!’

‘I thought you didn’t approve of violence.’

‘Okay, If I approved of violence and if you didn’t wear glasses, I’d punch you on the nose!’

‘Did you see what I did?’

‘What did you do?’

‘I elicited two examples of the second conditional out of you.’

‘Well done. You are learning. Did you notice that in the second conditional the verb form after the ‘If’ is in the past tense?’

‘If I looked...’

‘Exactly. But we are not talking about the past. We’re talking about now. But simply a situation that is...

‘... in the present but is plainly untrue, or very unlikely - the second conditional!’

‘Exactly. A lot of foreign students have problems with that.’

‘The Great...People who pay my wages.’

‘Exactly.’

‘One quick question. We’ve looked at the zero, first and second conditional forms. How many are there exactly?’

‘Well, nobody knows exactly...’

‘Nobody knows? You mean, no one has actually researched something as fundamental as conditional forms?’

‘They’re actually very complicated. Far more complicated than the average textbook lets on.’

‘So, go on, how many are there? Six? Ten?’

‘I heard of a researcher who found two hundred and fifty six different conditional forms.’

*‘Two hundred and fifty *◆**■* six!!!!’*

‘It’s quite a lot, isn’t it? Most textbooks will tell students that there are only three or four.’

‘Ah, that sounds better.’

‘Yes, but that is not the real world. Penny (TEFL guru) Ur did a bit of research and found 100 cases of conditional forms in her Sunday paper. Only 27% conformed to the four most commonly taught forms.’

‘Well, teachers and textbook writers are clearly teaching the wrong ones!’

‘True, a lot more has to be done to make students aware that there is more to conditionality than the four basic forms.’

‘So are we going to do 256 different ones today?’

‘Er, no. Today, I’m going to teach you about the four basic forms. It is then up to you to go out and find out about the other 252!’

‘Gee thanks. If I had known how difficult English grammar was, I wouldn’t have come on this bloody course.’

‘But you’re on it now.’

‘Very observant of you, glasshopper!’

‘So you were talking about a hypothetical situation, like the second conditional, only this time, it is an event which occurred in the past and therefore cannot be changed.’

‘Fancy language but I think the facts were right.’

‘So you were expressing regret.’

‘Yep. My sister’s in Torremelinos at the moment. If I hadn’t come on this course I would have flown out with her.’

‘But you didn’t fly out with her.’

‘No, I just told you that, dickhead.’

‘I was just asking a checking question.’

‘Oh, I’m sorry. If I had known you were asking me a checking question I wouldn’t have called you a dickhead.’

‘Brilliant!’

‘What was?’

*‘Yet another example of the **third conditional!**’*

‘So what is my model sentence for the third conditional?’

‘I think your first one:

If I had known how difficult English grammar was, I wouldn't have come on this bloody course."

"Very true."

"Okay, I think it's time for another table"

NAME	CONSTRUCTION	USE	MODEL SENTENCE
Second Conditional	If+past tense + would + present tense	a situation in the present that is plainly untrue, or very unlikely.	If I looked like Chris Evans I would shoot myself.
Third Conditional	If+had+past participle + would +have + past participle	talking about what you could/should/would have done in a past situation.	If I had known how difficult English grammar was, I wouldn't have come on this bloody course.

"I speak English but I don't know it. The more I study it the more I find out that I don't know. I just feel overwhelmed by all this continuous present perfect passive zero conditional... why can't we all speak Esperanto? Now if everybody spoke Esperanto..."

"You and I would be out of a job."

"Point taken. So about this third conditional..."

In the first 11 lines of this lesson there were different conditional forms. Can you a) underline them? b) name them?

The 4 sentence-building worksheets should reinforce your understanding of the four basic conditionals. If it doesn't...

Summary

0 If I **heat** water to 100 degrees Celsius, it **boils**!

1 If you **pour** concrete over your flowers, they **will die**!

2 If I **looked** like Chris Evans I **would shoot** myself.

3 If I **had known** how difficult English grammar was, I **wouldn't have come** on this bloody course.

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