

Conditionals: Type 2

This is the second edition of a three-part Grammar Point covering conditionals types 0, 1, 2 and 3 (also known as zero, first, second and third conditionals). Today, we will be looking at the difference between the first and second conditionals.

What is a conditional? And why are there many types?

A conditional is a grammatical construction with two clauses, connected by a conjunction (very often 'if', but not always), wherein there is a relation of cause and effect between the two clauses.

The type of conditional you will employ in a sentence will depend on several different factors, including:

- ✓ whether or not the speaker considers the situation to be real or hypothetical (imaginary and unreal)
- ✓ whether you are describing a situation which is always true (e.g., a scientific law or typical behaviour), which happened in the past or will happen in the future.

Recap: Zero conditional

In case you missed the last article on conditionals, here is a brief summary of the zero conditional: it describes rules and typical behaviour. The relationship between the events or situations in the two clauses is, from the speaker's point of view, unchangeable and permanent.

For example:

When a murder occurs, the police investigate it.
If British people use sarcasm, Americans usually don't understand it.

Recap: First conditional

The first conditional (type 1), on the other hand, is used when the relationship between the events or situations in each clause is not completely certain. Nonetheless, the speaker believes that the events being described are possible; in other words, he or she thinks that they could take place in the real world.

For example:

If Michael Lang succeeds in organising another Woodstock festival this summer, I will go.
If you come to my house tonight, I'll make you avocado toast and a green bowl.

In the above sentence, the 'if' clause goes first, and is followed by the main clause. In all the conditional forms, however, the order of the clauses can be reversed. The only rule to keep in mind is that when the main clause goes first, you don't put a comma between the clauses.

Second conditional

The second conditional is similar to the first in that the relationship between the events in the two clauses is uncertain. The difference is that, with the second conditional, the events are also imaginary; the speaker doesn't believe that it is possible for them to happen in the real world.

For example:

If Jimi Hendrix gave another concert today, everyone I know would forget all their commitments and go.
If they gave me a job on an investigative journalism podcast, I would investigate local crime in my neighbourhood.

In these examples, the 'if' clause describes a situation or event that could not happen in the real world; the main clause describes the imaginary consequence of this imaginary situation. We use this conditional form to describe hypothetical situations in the present or the future.

In the second conditional, the conjunction that is used to join the two clauses is usually 'if', whereas we can use either 'if' or 'when' in the first conditional.

Here is a breakdown of the verb forms used in each of the clauses of these conditionals:

	'if' clause	main clause	conjunction
1st conditional	present simple	'will' + infinitive	'if' or 'when'
2nd conditional	past simple	'would' + infinitive	'if'

EXERCISE 1 Complete the sentences

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the verb in brackets. You will need to decide between the first and the second conditional.



“If you drink that potion, you would become the CEO of the company.”

- 1/ If Jimi Hendrix _____ (do not) drugs, he _____ still _____ (be) alive today.
- 2/ I _____ (wear) bell-bottoms if I _____ (live) in the 70s.
- 3/ There are lots of hippie restaurants in this neighborhood. If we _____ (find) a cheap one, I _____ (buy) you dinner.
- 4/ If they _____ (stop) raising livestock in the United States, they _____ (save) millions of gallons of water.
- 5/ If you _____ (bring) the pot, I _____ (bring) the brown rice. It'll be an awesome party, man!

EXERCISE 2 Correct the mistakes

Correct the mistakes in the sentences below. One of the sentences is correct.

- 1/ If Jimi Hendrix is here, I would ask him all about Woodstock.

- 2/ I would choose to live in the sixties if I can go back in time.

- 3/ If you were given the choice, would you rather meet Bob Dylan or Joan Baez?

- 4/ Would you buy Joan Baez's next album when it comes out?

- 5/ Ryan Alexander Duke would be free today if podcasts like 'Up and Vanished' don't exist.



EXERCISE 3 Join the cause and the consequence

Each example below has a cause and a consequence. Join them together into one sentence using the conjunction 'if'. You must decide if you should use the 1st or the 2nd conditional.

- 1/ **Cause:** I travel to the Isle of Wight during my holiday this summer. **Consequence:** I visit the site where the Isle of Wight Festival took place.

- 2/ **Cause:** I become a crime-fighting podcaster. **Consequence:** Investigate crimes in the most exotic and beautiful places in the world.

- 3/ **Cause:** BON APPETIT magazine claims another dish is revolutionary and new. **Consequence:** I don't believe it.

- 4/ **Cause:** I am British. **Consequence:** Maybe I finally understand British humour.

- 5/ **Cause:** Investigative journalists are given as many resources as police departments. **Consequence:** There is a huge reduction in unsolved crimes.
