

# Conditionals: Type 3

This is the third 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 third conditional.

## 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

In case you missed the last article on conditionals, here is a brief summary of the zero, first and second conditionals.

- ✓ **Zero conditional:** This form 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. Verbs in the ‘if’ and main clause are both in the present simple tense.
- ✓ **First conditional:** In this form, there is a high probability the event or situation in the ‘if’ clause will occur, but, unlike the zero conditional, it describes particular events or situations, not general ones. Verbs in the ‘if’ clause are in the present (or subjunctive) tense, while events in the main clause use ‘will’. Other modals of probability (e.g., ‘might’ or ‘may’) can also be used, although this will change the probability of the event in consequence.
- ✓ **Second conditional:** The event or situation in the ‘if’ clause is unlikely to occur. Consequently, this form is used to talk about hypothetical events or situations that take place in the present and in the future, usually based on the speaker’s imagination. The verb in the ‘if’ clause is in the past tense, while the verb in the main clause uses ‘would’. As with

the first conditional, other modals of probability can be used instead.

### Third conditional

The third conditional is like the second, in that both describe hypothetical situations or events; these are things that the speaker thinks of as ‘unreal’. The difference is that, in the third conditional, the situation or events being described are projected into the past. In other words, the speaker is imagining events in the past and describing their (imaginary) consequences.

#### For example:

If the situation hadn’t been so bad in England in 1978-79, the punk movement would not have been so powerful.

If the American media had had a smaller impact on the English language, there would be fewer Americanisms in British English today.

In these examples, the ‘if’ clause indicates **past** events or situations **that did not happen**. The main clause is also imaginary in nature; however, in the first example, the imaginary situation – that the punk movement wasn’t so powerful – is in the past, while in the second example, the situation in the main clause – that there are fewer Americanisms in British English – is describing an imaginary current situation.

This is what makes this form difficult: whereas the hypothetical (‘if’) clause is always in the past, the hypothetical consequence can be either in the past or in the present. The ‘if’ clause uses the past perfect tense.

Here is the breakdown of the form in the two instances:

	‘if’ clause in past perfect	main clause
3rd conditional: past consequence	had + past participle	would + have + past participle
3rd conditional: present consequence	had + past participle	would + infinitive

### EXERCISE 1 Complete the sentences

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

- 1/ If British people \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) fewer American movies these days, British English \_\_\_\_\_ (be) much less Americanised today.
- 2/ If earlier generations \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) fewer American movies, British English \_\_\_\_\_ (be) much less Americanised today.
- 3/ If earlier generations \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) fewer American movies, British English in the 20th century \_\_\_\_\_ (be) much less Americanised.
- 4/ If the warden's clock \_\_\_\_\_ (not break), Watchman \_\_\_\_\_ (not meet) Josiah Bent.
- 5/ If the UK \_\_\_\_\_ (change) its mind about Brexit now, the EU \_\_\_\_\_ (not know) how to react.



"Mr Crusoe, if you didn't have a 20-year gap on your resume, I would hire you in a heartbeat."

### EXERCISE 2 Correct the mistakes

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

- 1/ If President de Gaulle didn't oppose Britain's joining the European Union, the UK would have joined many years ago.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2/ If British English hadn't been such a mix of many different languages and influences, people would have been a lot more resistant to changes to the language today.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3/ If explorers hadn't discovered guano in the South Pacific Islands, Josiah Bent wouldn't have been sent to jail.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4/ If more English speakers had lived in England today, Britain's linguistic dominance wouldn't be threatened.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5/ If Bercow had been less entertaining, parliamentary session viewing ratings wouldn't have be higher than MTV in the UK.  
\_\_\_\_\_

### EXERCISE 3 Join the cause and the consequence



"If I didn't fall off the roof, I wouldn't be talking to you right now."

Each exercise has a cause (which is in the past, and purely hypothetical) and a consequence. Join them together into one sentence using the conjunction 'if'. These are all third conditionals.

**Example:** **Cause:** Strummer didn't work as a DJ for the BBC World Service. **Consequence:** People didn't know about the diversity of his musical tastes. **If Strummer hadn't worked for the BBC World Service as a DJ, people wouldn't have known about the diversity of his musical taste.**

- 1/ **Cause:** Watchman didn't stop visiting Josiah Bent. **Consequence:** Josiah Bent didn't die. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2/ **Cause:** The Irish backstop wasn't such a difficult issue to solve. **Consequence:** Britain is outside of the EU today. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3/ **Cause:** Bercow didn't realise that matters aren't simply right- or left-wing. **Consequence:** His political views didn't evolve as radically as they did. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4/ **Cause:** The government didn't oppose Bercow's views on Brexit. **Consequence:** He will retire in 2019. \_\_\_\_\_