

The second conditional



If I **had** enough money, I'd buy that diamond necklace.

Definition

The second conditional refers to events that are not likely to happen in the future or to conditions that are not possible in the present.

Construction

Construction	Time reference	Example
1. 'if' + past, + 'would/could' + bare infinitive	1. future condition + future result 2. present condition + present result 3. present condition + future result	If I won the lottery, I would buy that car. If I were rich, I could buy that car. If I were rich, I would buy that car.
2. 'if' + 'were to' + infinitive, + would/could + bare infinitive		If I were to win the lottery, I would buy that car.

Note that

1. Continuous tenses are also possible.

If I **weren't working** today, I'd be **enjoying** the sunshine.

2. As with all conditionals the 'if' clause can come first or second. When it comes first, it is followed by a comma.

Uses

Second conditional sentences have several uses. Here are some examples:

Use	Examples
Hypothesis	If I lost my job, it would be hard to find another one. This is a hypothetical situation and the speaker has no reason to be concerned. Contrast this with a first conditional sentence: 'If I lose my job, it will be hard to find another one.' In this case the speaker feels that there is a real risk that he will lose his job.
Contingency	What would you do if you had to choose another career?
Suggesting	I think it would be better if we sent a small sample to the customers.
Advising	If I were you , I'd apply for a promotion.
Criticism	If this were my office, I'd tidy it up.
Polite request	Would it be all right, if I brought a friend with me?

Formality

It is considered grammatically correct to use 'were' for all forms of 'be' in conditional sentences, but in spoken English you will often hear 'was' for I, he, she and it.

If I **was** rich, I **would buy** a boat.

If he wasn't so busy, he could have a holiday.

We would go to the park, if it wasn't raining.

In written English and certainly for any test situation, use 'were' for all forms of 'be'.



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