

Third conditional

Introduction



If I **had taken** an earlier train, I **would not have been** late for my meeting.

Definition

The third conditional refers to hypothetical events in the past. The condition is impossible to fulfil or the speaker does not know if it was fulfilled.






Construction

Construction	Time reference	Example
If + past perfect, +modal* + 'have' + past participle * see note below	past condition +past result	If the sun had shone , people would have been happier.

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

Uses and examples

Use	Examples
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<p>Blame</p> 	<p>I wouldn't have crashed the car if it hadn't been snowing.</p>
<p>Criticism and praise</p> 	<p>If the team hadn't worked so well together, we wouldn't have met the deadline.</p>
<p>Regret</p> 	<p>My first job was so boring. If I'd studied harder at college, I'd have had a more interesting one.</p>
<p>Thanks</p> 	<p>Hey - thanks for mentioning the sales. If you hadn't told me, I'd never have found all these great bargains.</p>
<p>Deduction and reasoning</p> 	<p>If he had gone on holiday, he would have taken his suitcase. But his suitcase is there on top of the wardrobe so he can't have gone, can he?</p>

Alternatives to 'if' + past tense

The conditional clause can be a 'had' clause, rather than an 'if' clause.

Examples

'If' clause	'Had' Clause
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If I **hadn't** seen George...
If she **had studied** harder...
If the interest rate **had not increased**...
If they **had known** about it...

Had I not seen George...
Had she studied harder...
Had the interest rate not increased...
Had they known about it...

Choice of modal verb

As well as 'would', other modals are possible.

'Might' in the main clause expresses a possibility.

If you **hadn't warned** me, I **might have made** a terrible mistake,

'Could' refers to ability.

If our supplier **had delivered** on time, we **could have met** our deadline.

'Should' refers to probability or the right thing.

If he'd **had** all the information, he **should have written** the report.

We don't know if he had the information or not or if the report has been written. Writing the report would have been the right thing for him to do given all the information.

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