

Zero conditional

Introduction



If you heat water in a kettle, it boils.

Definition

The zero conditional refers to real events. The result of the condition is always the same.

Construction

'If' + present + present

Uses

Zero conditional sentences are used to talk about general truths and facts, not about individual, specific situations.

| Use | Examples |
|------------------------------|---|
| Scientific facts | If you add salt to water, it boils more quickly. |
| Universal truths | People put on weight if they eat too much. |
| Things that happen regularly | If I leave home at 8 o' clock, I arrive at work at 9 o'clock. |

Note that because the result is always the same, we can use 'when' as an alternative to 'if'. We also sometimes use 'whenever', especially for things that happen regularly:

If/when people don't drink, they get thirsty.

If/when/whenever he's late for work, his boss gets angry.

Present continuous

We can also use the present continuous:

If it's raining, people carry umbrellas.

If people are carrying umbrellas, it's probably raining.

Imperative

Whenever you're tired, take a break.

When I'm working, don't disturb me.

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Modals

Some modal verbs might be used in the main clause.

If you go to another country, you should try to speak the language.

You can get a refund if the plane is delayed.

Zero or first conditional?

The first conditional is used for real, likely events. Compare these two sentences:

If I leave home at 8.00, I arrive at 9.00. [this refers to every time I leave at 8.00]

If I leave home at 8.00, I'll arrive at 9.00. [this refers to a specific occasion in the future]

Examples



The alarm goes off if there's a fire.



Only children go in the garden if it's raining.



When you work with people from other countries, you might have to do things differently.



If she's eating then she's getting better.



If you visit London, don't miss the Beefeaters at the Tower of London.



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