

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

Construction	Time reference	Example
'if' + present, + present	any time condition + any time result	If the sun shines , people are happier.

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

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 8.00, I arrive at work at 9.00.

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.

If you **go** to Paris, **visit** the Louvre.

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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