

# The first conditional



If you **win** this game you **will play** in the championship match.

## Definition

The first conditional refers to events that are likely to happen in the future.

The result is not definite but is, at least, possible.

## Construction

Construction	Time reference	Example
'If' + present, + future	future condition + future result	If the sun <b>shines</b> , people <b>will be</b> happier.

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

**Note that** we do not normally use 'will' in the 'if' clause even though it refers to the future, but see the paragraph below on 'using modal verbs' for some exceptions.

'Will' is not the only future form that can be used. Here are some more examples:

Main Clause	Example
Future using 'will'/'shall'	If it <b>rains</b> , I'll <b>take</b> an umbrella If it <b>rains</b> , shall we <b>go</b> to the cinema? If it <b>rains</b> , we <b>won't go</b> to the park.
Future using 'be going to'	If you <b>don't leave</b> now, you're <b>going to be</b> late. If it <b>rains</b> , where <b>are we going to have</b> our picnic? If I <b>see</b> John, I'm <b>not going to tell</b> him we lost the contract.

<b>Future continuous</b>	If you <b>don't arrive before 10.00</b> , we'll be waiting to <b>start</b> the meeting. If Akira <b>gets</b> the 3:30 flight, he'll be arriving at the same time as John.
<b>Future perfect</b>	If you <b>don't arrive until 10.00</b> , we'll have finished the meeting. If you <b>get to London before 4.00</b> , the rush hour <b>won't have started</b> .
<b>Imperative</b>	If the children <b>are</b> asleep, <b>don't make</b> a noise. If you <b>need</b> any help, please <b>ask</b> . If there <b>are</b> no chairs, <b>sit on</b> the floor.
<b>Using other modals</b>	If I <b>don't leave</b> at 8.00, I <b>may</b> be late for work. If I <b>start</b> work now, <b>can</b> I finish early? If it <b>rains</b> , I <b>can</b> take an umbrella. If you <b>don't leave</b> soon, you <b>might</b> be late.

And there are also alternatives to the present simple:

'if' clause	Example
<b>Present continuous</b>	If you're <b>working</b> , I'll <b>come</b> back later. If he's <b>playing</b> football, he'll be out all afternoon.
<b>Present perfect</b>	If you've <b>finished</b> the report, <b>could</b> you <b>fax</b> me a <b>copy</b> ? If I've <b>finished</b> it on time, I'll <b>send</b> it in the morning.

## Uses

Use	Examples
<b>Prediction</b> 	If the train <b>is</b> delayed, I'm <b>going to be late</b> for my meeting.

<b>Plans</b> 	We're having a barbecue on Sunday, if it doesn't rain.
<b>Logical conclusion</b> 	If a customer calls, the phone will ring.
<b>Exchange</b> 	If you get me to the airport quickly, I'll give you a big tip.
<b>Offers</b> 	If your car isn't working, I'll help you.
<b>Contingency</b> 	If it rains, we'll go to the cinema instead.

## Using modal verbs in 'if' clauses

As previously mentioned, the future is not normally used in the 'if' clause. However, we do use 'will' and other modals in the 'if' clause when the meaning is not to indicate the future.

Using 'will' to express exchange or persistence [See also **will/would** for repeated actions.]

If you'll take the food, I'll take the wine. [exchange]

If you **will** insist on leaving the windows open, we're going to have a huge heating bill.

[persistence - in this case the word 'will' is stressed]

## Using 'can' to express ability

If I **can** find the time, I'll come to the party.

If you **can** type quickly and accurately, you're not going to have problems finding a job.

## Using 'must' to express a feeling of necessity

If you **must** eat so quickly, you'll get indigestion.

If she **must** be there so early, she'll have to leave before the rush hour.

## Zero or first conditional?

The first conditional is used for specific 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]

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Last update: 2023/02/14 14:21