# English grammar: Conditional tense

## Present conditional tense

### Form

Statement: *I would practise*
Negative: *He would not practise*
Question: *Would you practise?*
Neg. question: *Would she not practise?*
Short forms: *I'd practise, He wouldn't practise, Wouldn't we practise?*

### Use

We use the **present conditional tense** in English to speculate about **present** or **future** situations that could theoretically happen. This tense is used when the action is either impossible (unreal) or when we do not think that the action will happen.
*He would sign it.* (But he can't. It is not possible.)
*I would travel by plane.* (If I wanted to go on holiday. But I do not want to go.)

In the first person singular and plural *should* instead of *would* is also possible. But it is not very common in modern English.
*I should/would be really glad.* (If you could help me). *We should/would send the fax.* (But we do not know how to do it).

*Should*, however, can also express a recommendation or advice. In this respect, it is similar to *ought to*.
*I should study tonight. I ought to study tonight.* (Or I will fail the exam tomorrow.)
*He should drive carefully. He ought to drive carefully.* (Or he will crash one day.)
*You should speak loudly. You ought to speak loudly.* (I can't hear you.)

*Could* and *might* are conditional forms of *can* and *may*. They are used to speculate about the present or future. *Could* indicates theoretical possibility, m*ight* indicates possibility + uncertainty.
*She could come with us tomorrow.* (It is possible. She will be free.)
*She might come with us tomorrow.* (We hope that it is possible, but we are not sure.)

*Could* is also the past form of *can* and expresses possibility, ability or permission in the **past**.
Possibility: *She could travel in our car.* (It was possible because we had a free seat for her.)
Ability: *She could play again in the last match.* (She was able to play because she was not ill anymore.)
Permission: *She could come with us last weekend.* (Her father allowed her to go.)

## Perfect conditional tense

### Form

Statement: *I would have practised*
Negative: *He would not have given*
Question: *Would you have practised?*
Neg. question: *Would she not have written?*
Short forms: *I'd have practised, He wouldn't have given, Wouldn't we have written?*

We make the perfect conditional tense with *would* and the perfect infinitive (*have* + past participle).
In the first person singular and plural *should* instead of *would* is also possible. But it is not very common in modern English.

**Use**

We use the **perfect conditional tense** in English to speculate about the past situations which were theoretically possible, but did not happen in fact.
*I would have learnt it.* (But I didn't learn it). *I would have told her.* (But she didn't want to listen.) *She wouldn't have married me.* (Because she didn't like me.)

**Compare the present and perfect conditionals**

Present conditional: *She would lend me some money now.* (She is willing to lend me the money. I will ask her.)
Perfect conditional: *She would have lent me some money last year.* (She was willing to lend me the money, but I didn't ask her.)

Similarly: *I would do it. Will you help me?* x *I would have done it. But you didn't help me.*

*Should*, *could* and *might* are used in the same way.
*You should finish it soon*. x *You should have finished it. Why did you give up?*
*We might have dinner. I am hungry.* x *We might have had dinner. But we didn't eat anything.*
*They could fly tomorrow*. x *They could have flown last week. But they stayed at home.*

*Should* + perfect infinitive (*should have finished*) is used to express regrets or recommendations concerning the past.
*He shouldn't have refused it. It was a good offer.* (It is a pity that he refused it.)

*Might* + perfect infinitive (*might have had*) and *could* + perfect infinitive *(could have flown)* are used to speculate about the past. We say that something was possible, but we know that it did not happen.
*He might/could have died. But they rescued him.*
*He might/could have won. But he didn't buy a lottery ticket.*

**Compare**

In English we can also speculate about the past with *may* + perfect infinitive (it is not the conditional tense, however). In this case we do knot know if the action really happened or not.
*He may have died.* (It is possible that he died. But maybe he is still alive.)
*He may have won.* (It is possible that he won. But maybe he lost.)