

# English grammar

## Conditional tense

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### 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, *might* 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 not 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.)