

English grammar

Third conditional

There are four basic types of conditional sentences in the English language. Each type has two parts - the main clause and the if clause.

Zero conditional: *I take my umbrella if it rains.*

First conditional: *I'll call you if I work late.*

Second conditional: *If the bus didn't arrive on time, I would drive you to the airport.*

Third conditional: *She wouldn't have come if I hadn't invited her.*

Third conditional

The third conditional sentences always refer to the past. We speculate about situations that happened or did not happen in the past.

If I had won a million, I would have started a business of my own. (But I didn't win anything.)

If he had met her, he would have told her. (Unfortunately, he didn't meet her.)

If we hadn't practised, we wouldn't have won the match. (But we practised and won.)

We use the past perfect in the if clause and perfect infinitive (have + past participle) in the main clause.

Other forms

Apart from the basic form of the third conditional sentences, we can use other verb forms in English.

We didn't save any money. If we had saved some money, we might have bought the house.

She wasn't there and I wasn't sitting next to her. But if she had been there, I would have been sitting next to her.

I was looking at the trees when I fell off the bike. If I hadn't been looking at the trees, I wouldn't have fallen off the bike.

Inverted conditionals

We can also make conditional sentences by changing the word order in the if clause.

Had he booked the hotel room, he wouldn't have slept at the camp. (If he had booked ...)

This form is less common, quite formal and is mostly used in writing.

Note

If is the most frequent expression in the if clauses, but other expressions are also possible. *even if, provided (that), on condition (that), in case*

I would have left even if he had not wanted to.

You could have had your birthday party provided that you had not been so naughty.

We would have sold you the bike on condition you had paid in cash.

You should have taken a dictionary with you in case you had forgotten some words.

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