

In case vs if

CEFR B1-B2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

If says what must happen first; in case says do something now because something might happen later.

The rule

If: the condition comes first

- If introduces a real condition: "If you finish early, we can go out."
- The result depends on the condition, so the order of events is clear.
- After if for the future, use the present simple, not will: "If it rains, we will stay in."
- If comes in zero, first, second and third conditionals with different verb forms.

In case: the precaution comes first

- In case means because something might happen later: "Take a map in case you get lost."
- The main action is the preparation; the in case clause is only a possibility.
- "Take an umbrella in case it rains" does not mean you will use it. It means you want to be ready.
- Put in case after the main action, not before it: "Take a coat in case it is cold."

In case never takes will

- Use the present simple after in case, even for the future: "in case she calls", not "in case she will call".
- The same rule applies to if in first conditional sentences: "if she calls", not "if she will call".
- Can, might and should can follow in case when they express a real possibility: "in case she should call".
- Do not confuse in case with if. "If she calls, tell me" and "Tell me her number in case she calls" are different plans.

In case of: the formal pattern

- In case of + noun is the formal version for notices and signs: "In case of fire, use the stairs."
- In case of cannot take a full clause: "In case of it rains" is wrong.
- Compare: in case of fire (noun) and in case a fire starts (clause).
- The expression in no case means never, and in any case means whatever happens; both use different grammar again.

If or in case: choosing by meaning

- Ask yourself: does the action depend on the event, or prepare for it? Depend uses if; prepare uses in case.
- "I will take a taxi if the bus is late" means the bus decides.
- "I will take some cash in case the shop does not take cards" means the cash is ready before you know.

- Both can appear in one sentence: "If you go out, take a key in case I am asleep."

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. Take some money ___ the cafe does not accept cards.

2. I will call you ___ the train is late.

3. ___ you finish early, we can go to the park.

4. Write down her number ___ you forget it.

5. ___ of fire, leave the building by the stairs.

6. I will stay at home ___ it rains.

7. Bring a charger ___ your phone dies.

8. Take a jacket ___ it gets cold later.

9. We will cancel the picnic ___ it rains.

10. I will not call you ___ there is a problem.

11. Leave the key with the neighbour ___ we are not at home.

12. ___ it rains, the match will be moved inside.

13. Keep your passport in your bag ___ someone asks to see it.

14. I will take a taxi ___ the bus is late.

15. Bring an umbrella ___ it rains during the walk.

16. ___ you see him, tell him about the meeting.

17. I will save the file now ___ the computer crashes.

18. They took food with them ___ they got hungry.

19. We will stay inside ___ the weather is bad.

20. Take the spare key ___ I am out when you arrive.

Answer key

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1. **in case** — The money is a precaution taken before a possible event, so in case fits.
2. **if** — The call depends on the delay, so if introduces the condition.
3. **If** — The outing depends on finishing, so if is the condition word.
4. **in case** — Writing the number now prepares for a possible later forgetting, so in case fits.
5. **In case** — In case of takes a noun in formal notices, here the noun fire.
6. **if** — Staying at home depends on the rain, so the condition word is if.
7. **in case** — The charger is packed before the possible event, so in case is right.
8. **in case** — The jacket is a precaution for a possible later change, so in case fits.
9. **if** — The cancellation depends on the rain, so if joins the condition.
10. **unless** — Unless means if not, so no call happens without a problem.
11. **in case** — The key is left before the possible absence, so in case is the precaution.
12. **If** — Moving the match depends on the rain, so the condition needs if.
13. **in case** — Keeping the passport ready is a precaution, so in case fits.
14. **if** — The taxi depends on the bus being late, so if marks the condition.
15. **in case** — The umbrella travels with you before the possible rain, so in case is correct.
16. **If** — Telling him depends on seeing him, so if introduces the condition.
17. **in case** — The save happens before a possible crash, so in case is the precaution.
18. **in case** — The food was packed before any hunger, so in case fits the precaution.
19. **if** — Staying inside depends on the weather, so if is the condition word.
20. **in case** — The key is left as preparation for a possible absence, so in case is right.