

Second conditional

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

If plus the past simple, would plus the base verb: the present that is not real.

The rule

The form

- Pattern: if plus past simple, plus would plus the base verb. "If I had more time, I would learn the piano."
- With be, careful English uses were for every person: "If I were rich", "If she were here".
- Negative: "If I did not have to work, I would not be so tired."
- Question: "What would you do if you won the lottery?"
- Would never goes in the if-clause in this pattern: "If I had", not "If I would have".

Imaginary present and unlikely future

- Use it when the situation is not true now: "If I spoke Japanese, I would work in Tokyo." I do not speak Japanese.
- Use it when the future situation is imagined or very unlikely: "If I won the lottery, I would buy a house."
- The past tense in the if-clause signals distance from reality, not past time.
- The first conditional keeps the situation real; the second sets it aside as imaginary.

Advice with "If I were you"

- "If I were you, I would apologise." This is the standard pattern for advice.
- The listener is not you, so the situation is imaginary, which is exactly why were appears.
- You can also give advice with should: "You should apologise." The if I were you version sounds softer.
- The same pattern works for other people: "If I were her, I would take the job."

Polite requests and softening

- The second conditional makes requests gentler: "Would you mind if I opened the window?"
- It also softens opinions: "I would say the blue one suits you better."
- Would like, would prefer and would rather follow the same softening idea.
- The listener is not obliged to agree, which is what makes the form polite.

Could, might and the first conditional

- The result clause can use could for ability or possibility: "If I had a car, I could drive you."
- Might shows an uncertain result: "If we left now, we might catch the early train."
- The first conditional is for real possibilities: "If it rains, we will stay in." The second is for unreal ones: "If it rained every day, we would move."

- Mixed conditionals combine a past condition with a present result: "If I had studied medicine, I would be a doctor now."

Questions

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

1. If I ___ more time, I would learn the piano.

2. If I ___ you, I would apologise.

3. She would travel more if she ___ enough money.

4. If we lived by the sea, we ___ swimming every day.

5. What ___ you do if you won the lottery?

6. If he ___ harder, he would get better marks.

7. I would buy that car if it ___ cheaper.

8. If you ___ the answer, what would you say?

9. They would come to the party if they ___ free.

10. If she ___ her phone, she would call you.

11. If it ___ tomorrow, we would stay at home.

12. He would be happier if he ___ his job.

13. If I did not have to work, I ___ to the concert.

14. Would you help me if I ___ you?

15. If we ___ the map, we would not be lost.

16. If only I ___ how to fix it!

17. What would she do if she ___ the truth?

18. I would not do that if I ___ you.

19. If they ___ closer, we would visit more often.

20. If you ___ more, you would sleep better.

Answer key

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1. **had** — The imaginary present takes the past simple in the if-clause: if I had more time.
2. **were** — The advice pattern uses were for every person: If I were you.
3. **had** — The unreal condition takes the past simple: if she had enough money.
4. **would go** — The result of an imaginary condition takes would plus the base verb: would go.
5. **would** — The second conditional question uses would in the main clause: What would you do?
6. **studied** — The if-clause of the second conditional takes the past simple: if he studied.
7. **were** — Careful English uses were with be in the second conditional: if it were cheaper.
8. **knew** — The past simple knew signals that the knowledge is imagined, not real.
9. **were** — The second conditional with be uses were: if they were free.
10. **had** — The imaginary condition takes the past simple: if she had her phone.
11. **rained** — The unlikely future condition takes the past form rained, the second conditional pattern.
12. **changed** — The imaginary change takes the past simple in the if-clause: if he changed.
13. **would go** — The result clause of the second conditional takes would: would go.
14. **asked** — The polite imaginary condition takes the past simple: if I asked you.
15. **had** — The imaginary present situation takes the past simple: if we had the map.
16. **knew** — If only expresses an unreal wish, so it takes the second conditional past form: knew.
17. **learned** — The imaginary condition takes the past simple: if she learned the truth.
18. **were** — The advice pattern uses were: if I were you.
19. **lived** — The imaginary condition takes the past simple: if they lived closer.
20. **exercised** — The past form exercised signals an unreal present habit in the second conditional.