

Third conditional

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

If plus had and the past participle, would have plus the past participle: the past that cannot change.

The rule

The form

- Pattern: if plus had plus the past participle, plus would have plus the past participle.
- "If she had left earlier, she would have caught the train."
- Negative: "If I had not forgotten my passport, we would not have missed the flight."
- Question: "Would you have come if I had asked you?"
- The short forms are I'd have or I would've in speech. Write would have in exams.

An imagined, impossible past

- The real past cannot change, so the condition is impossible by definition.
- Use it for regrets: "If I had known, I would have helped."
- Use it for criticism: "If you had told me the truth, this would not have happened."
- Use it for explanations after the event: "If the train had been on time, we would have arrived by noon."

Would have, could have, might have

- Would have states the imagined result with confidence: "I would have passed."
- Could have shows an unrealised ability or opportunity: "I could have helped if you had called."
- Might have shows an uncertain imagined result: "We might have won if the referee had seen the foul."
- All three use have plus the past participle. Never would of in writing.

Mixed conditionals

- A past condition with a present result: if plus had plus participle, would plus base verb. "If I had studied medicine, I would be a doctor now."
- A present condition with a past result is rarer: if plus past simple, would have plus participle. "If I were braver, I would have spoken up."
- The mixing works because the two halves describe different times, and the grammar follows each time separately.
- Keep the pattern clear in each half and the mixed sentence stays easy to read.

Past participles and the if-clause

- The third conditional needs the third form of the verb: gone, seen, written, taken, been.
- The commonest error is using the past simple instead: "If I had went" is wrong; use "If I had gone".

- Never put would have in the if-clause: "If I would have known" is wrong; use "If I had known".
- In informal speech, some native speakers put would have in the if-clause. In writing and exams, the had pattern is expected.

Questions

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

1. If I had studied, I ___ the exam.

2. If she ___ earlier, she would have caught the train.

3. If we had taken a map, we ___ lost.

4. He would have come if you ___ him.

5. If they had known, they ___ differently.

6. I would have said hello if I ___ you.

7. If it had not rained, the match ___ .

8. What ___ you have done in my place?

9. If you had told me, I ___ helped.

10. She would have been angry if she ___ the truth.

11. If he had run faster, he ___ the race.

12. We would have arrived on time if the train ___ .

13. If I ___ born earlier, I would have seen the concert.

14. They ___ us if they had had time.

15. If the shop had been open, I ___ the milk.

16. Would you have come if I ___ you?

17. If we had not missed the bus, we ___ earlier.

18. He would not have failed if he ___ .

19. If I had known about the traffic, I ___ earlier.

20. If she ___ the news, she would have called.

Answer key

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1. **would have passed** — The third conditional result uses would have plus the past participle: would have passed.
2. **had left** — The if-clause of the third conditional uses had plus the participle: had left.
3. **would not have got** — The negative imagined result is would not have plus the participle: would not have got.
4. **had invited** — The if-clause takes the past perfect: if you had invited him.
5. **would have acted** — The imagined result takes would have plus the participle: would have acted.
6. **had seen** — The unreal past condition uses had seen.
7. **would have continued** — The third conditional result is would have continued.
8. **would** — The question about an imagined past uses would: What would you have done?
9. **would have** — The result clause needs would have plus the participle: would have helped.
10. **had known** — The if-clause takes had known, the past perfect form.
11. **would have won** — The imagined result of the past condition is would have won.
12. **had not been delayed** — The passive past perfect fits the if-clause: if the train had not been delayed.
13. **had been** — The unreal past of be is had been in the if-clause.
14. **would have visited** — The result clause takes would have plus the participle: would have visited.
15. **would have bought** — The imagined past result is would have bought.
16. **had asked** — The if-clause of the third conditional takes had asked.
17. **would have arrived** — The result clause is would have arrived, looking back at the imagined past.
18. **had studied** — The if-clause takes the past perfect: if he had studied.
19. **would have left** — The third conditional result is would have left.
20. **had heard** — The unreal past condition uses had heard.