

Zero conditional: facts and habits

CEFR A2-B1 • 20 questions • A4 / US Letter

When the result is always true, both halves of the sentence take the present simple. If and when mean the same thing here.

The rule

The pattern

- If plus present simple in the condition, present simple in the result: "If it rains, the streets get wet."
- The order can change without changing the meaning: "The streets get wet if it rains."
- When the if-clause comes first, add a comma. When it comes second, no comma is needed.
- Both halves stay in the present simple, even when the truth is timeless.

What the zero conditional does

- Scientific facts and natural laws: "If you mix red and blue, you get purple."
- Personal habits: "If I drink coffee after six, I cannot sleep."
- Rules and instructions: "If the alarm rings, leave the building."
- General truths about people and places: "If the sea is warm, swimmers stay longer."

If, when and unless

- If and when are both possible for general truths: "If the bus is late, I walk", "When the bus is late, I walk."
- When is better when the situation happens regularly and you expect it.
- Unless means if not: "Unless the weather changes, we play tennis."
- The main clause can also take an imperative: "If you see Ana, tell her the news."

Zero or first conditional?

- The zero conditional is about what always happens: "If it rains, I stay inside."
- The first conditional is about one real possibility in the future: "If it rains tomorrow, I will stay inside."
- Will never appears in the if-clause, even in the first conditional: "If it will rain" is wrong.
- Use the zero conditional for rules and routines, and the first for a single future event.

Small details that matter

- Do not use will or would in the if-clause of a zero conditional.
- An imperative in the result clause changes the job of the sentence to an instruction, and the pattern still works.
- With unless, the main clause stays positive: "Unless it rains, we walk."
- Use the present simple, not the present continuous, for eternal truths.

Questions

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

1. If you heat ice, it ____.

2. If I ____ coffee after six, I cannot sleep.

3. When it snows, the roads ____ dangerous.

4. If the alarm rings, ____ the building.

5. Plants die if they ____ no light.

6. Unless you hurry, you ____ the train.

7. If you press this button, the machine ____.

8. If water ____ 100 degrees, it boils.

9. My brother always ____ if the film is funny.

10. If it ____ tomorrow, we will stay at home.

11. If the children are quiet, something ____ wrong.

12. If you do not water plants, they ____.

13. When the sun sets, it ___ dark.

14. If my sister ___ , I always answer quickly.

15. Unless it rains, we ___ outside.

16. If you mix red and blue, you ___ purple.

17. If the bus ___ late, I walk to work.

18. If you drop a glass on the floor, it ___ .

19. If I ___ late, I skip breakfast.

20. If you see Ana, ___ her the news.

Answer key

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1. **melts** — The zero conditional keeps the present simple in both halves for this general fact.
2. **drink** — A habit uses if plus the present simple in the zero conditional.
3. **get** — When and if both take the present simple for an always-true result.
4. **leave** — An instruction can use the imperative in the result clause of the zero conditional.
5. **get** — The general fact keeps the present simple in the if-clause.
6. **miss** — Unless keeps the zero conditional pattern with the present simple for a general result.
7. **stops** — This describes what always happens, so both halves use the present simple.
8. **reaches** — A scientific fact takes the present simple after if.
9. **laughs** — The zero conditional result describes a repeated habit in the present simple.
10. **rains** — This is the first conditional, so the if-clause still takes the present simple.
11. **is** — A general truth uses the present simple in both halves of the zero conditional.
12. **die** — The sentence states a general fact, so the zero conditional keeps the present simple.
13. **gets** — When introduces a general truth, and the result uses the present simple.
14. **calls** — The habit takes the present simple in the if-clause of the zero conditional.
15. **play** — Unless plus a general result keeps the zero conditional present simple.
16. **get** — A mixing fact takes the present simple in the result clause.
17. **is** — The repeated habit uses the present simple after if in the zero conditional.
18. **breaks** — The result is always true, so the present simple breaks is correct.
19. **wake up** — A personal habit keeps the present simple in the zero conditional if-clause.
20. **tell** — An instruction uses the imperative in the main clause of the zero conditional.