

Conditionals

Conditional sentences can be classified according to POSSIBILITY (or certainty that something can happen) in the following way:

1- First Conditional

It is used when what we talk about is most likely to take place

<i>If I study a lot, I'll (will) pass my exams</i>	
IF-CLAUSE	RESULT
Present Simple ⇒ Future Simple	

- 'If' can be substituted by 'when', with a similar meaning (taking the meaning of the Spanish subjunctive 'Cuando estudie, aprobaré')
- 'Unless' means 'if not' and would turn the sentence round:

<i>I won't (will not) pass my exams, unless I study a lot</i>	
RESULT	IF-CLAUSE
Future Simple ⇒ Present Simple	

- There are also other sentences, meaning ABSOLUTE certainty, which could be included in this first conditional:

<i>If</i>	<i>I study a lot, I pass my exams</i>
<i>When</i>	<i>You heat water up to 100°C, it boils</i>
	IF-CLAUSE RESULT
	Present Simple ⇒ Present Simple

though they may not always be considered conditional sentences.

2- Second Conditional

It has a lower possibility. We imagine the situation:

<i>If I studied a lot, I'd (would) pass my exams</i>	
IF-CLAUSE	RESULT
Past Simple	⇒ Simple Conditional
(would + INFINITIVE)	

'When' and 'Unless' are not used with this type.

Note that with the verb TO BE all persons are formed with 'were' (and not 'was' for the 3rd person singular). This type may also be used to give advice.

<i>If I were you, I'd (would) study a lot</i>	
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3- Third Conditional

It is used when we know it is late for something to take place:

<i>If I had studied a lot, I'd (would) have passed my exams</i>	
IF-CLAUSE	RESULT
Past Perfect ⇒ Conditional + Present Perfect	

'When' and 'Unless' are not used with this type, either.

4- Mixed conditionals

Sometimes the effect of past actions has an influence in the present situation.

In these cases, mixed conditionals are used

IF-CLAUSE (3 RD)		
<i>If electromagnetism had not (hadn't) been discovered,</i>	<i>some devices would not (wouldn't) have been developed</i>	MIXED (3 RD)
	<i>some devices would not (wouldn't) exist</i>	2 ND

Something did not happen in the past and that has influenced the present

IF-CLAUSE (2 ND)		
<i>If electromagnetism were unknown</i>	<i>some devices would not (wouldn't) exist</i>	2 ND
	<i>some devices would not (wouldn't) have been developed</i>	MIXED (3 RD)

If something had not taken place in the past, the present would be different from what it is

PROVIDED (THAT) = if and only if – we'll go to the beach tomorrow, provided (that) it doesn't rain = AS LONG AS

IN CASE (THAT) = we should take an umbrella, in case (that) it rains

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Whether this happens (or not)

Depending on whether they're pure metals (or alloys)

If ≈ whether (whether can always be substituted by "if", but not vice versa)

If I win the lottery, I'll buy a car

I'm going/need to buy a car, whether I win the lottery or not

