

Conditionals

Sentences with *if* are used to express possibilities.

- ✧ **Zero Conditional:** sometimes sentences with *if* express certainty rather than possibility. The **ZERO CONDITIONAL** is used to talk about something that is **ALWAYS TRUE**, or that was always true in the past:

If Clause	Main Clause
If + present simple / past simple	present simple / past simple
e.g. If you mix blue and red, you get purple. If I asked her to come with us, she always said no.	

- ✧ **First Conditional:** the **FIRST CONDITIONAL** is used to talk about the consequences of a **POSSIBLE** action:

If Clause	Main Clause
If + present simple	future tense (will + infinitive)
e.g. If I write my essay this afternoon, I will have time to go out tonight.	

- ✧ **Second Conditional:** the **SECOND CONDITIONAL** is used to talk about the consequences of a **HYPOTHETICAL** action:

If Clause	Main Clause
If + past simple	conditional tense (would/could/should/might + infinitive)
e.g. If I wrote my essay this afternoon, I would have time to go out tonight.	

- ✧ **Third Conditional:** the **THIRD CONDITIONAL** is used to talk about the possible consequences of an **IMPOSSIBLE** action, i.e. **THAT DID NOT HAPPEN**:

If Clause	Main Clause
If + past perfect	conditional perfect tense (would/could/should/might + have + past participle)
e.g. If I had written my essay this afternoon, I would have had time to go out tonight.	

MIXED CONDITIONALS

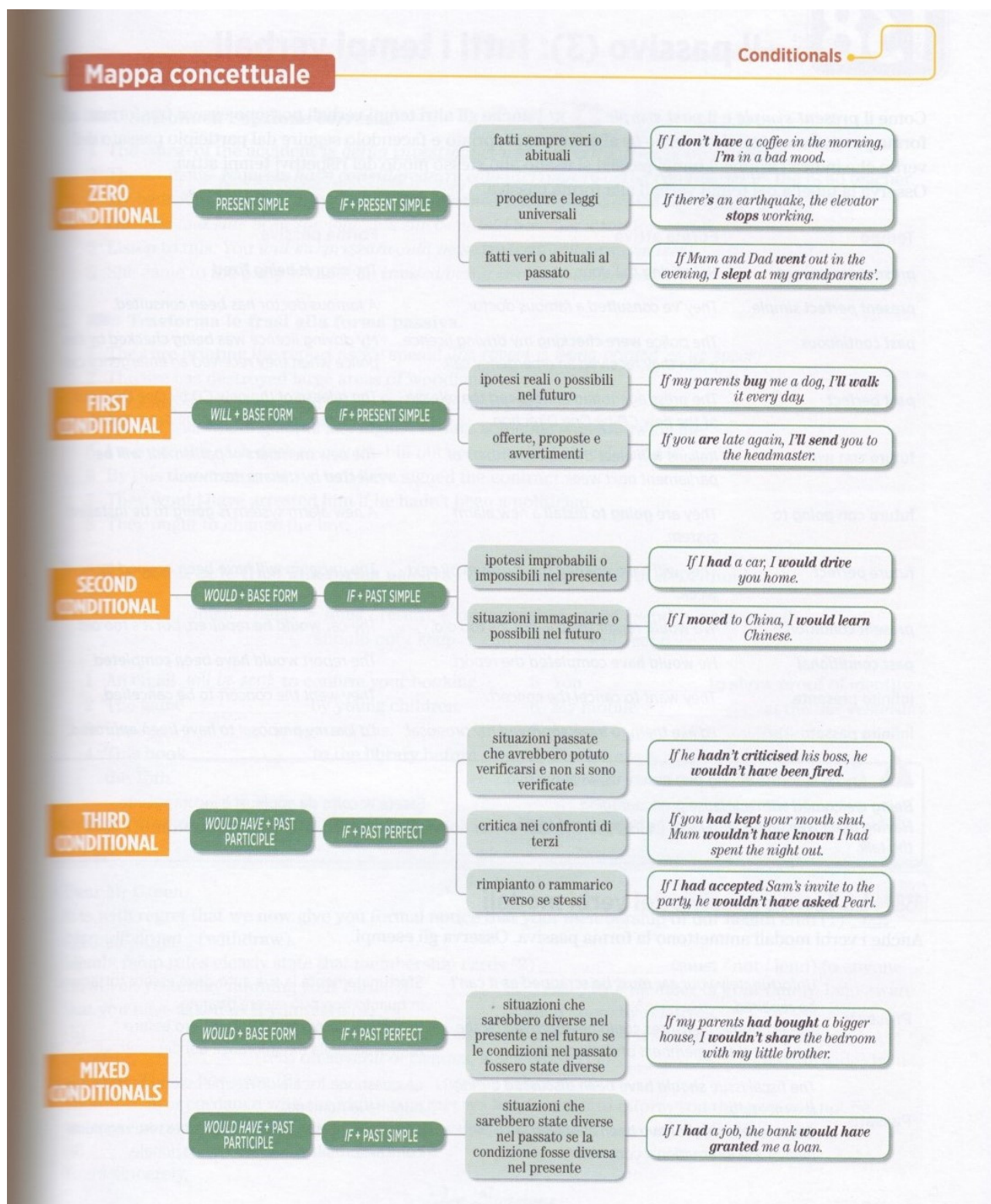
Not all sentences containing *if* follow the same patterns as those presented on the page above. The sequence of tenses depends on the meaning that has to be conveyed:

- If Robert **wasn't** so lazy, he **could have been** promoted. (He is permanently lazy which explains why he failed to get promotion).
- I'll **lend** you 1,000 euros if it'll **help** you to set up your business. (There is nothing conditional about this sentence; the advantage is the result of the gift of money. Here *if* means *if it is true that*).
- We **would be** grateful if you **would send** us your payment made out to the order of 'InfoMart'. (This is a polite request).

EXERCISE ON MIXED CONDITIONALS

✓ Read the following sentences and answer the questions about each one:

1. If he hadn't bought a second home in the country, he wouldn't be so short of money now.
a) Did he buy a second home? b) Is he short of money?
2. If he had bought a second home in the country, he would be short of money now.
a) Did he buy a second home? b) Is he short of money?
3. If she weren't so busy, she would have given you a hand.
a) Is she busy? b) Did she help?
4. If she had been busy, she wouldn't have given you a hand.
a) Was she busy? b) Did she help?



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1 meaning

Unless has a similar meaning to *if ... not*, in the sense of 'except if'.

Come tomorrow unless I phone. (= ... **if** I don't phone / **except if** I phone.)

I'll take the job unless the pay is too low. (= **if** the pay isn't too low / **except if** the pay is too low.)

I'll be back tomorrow unless there's a plane strike.

Let's have dinner out – unless you're too tired.

I'm going to dig the garden this afternoon, unless it rains.

2 when *unless* cannot be used

Unless means 'except if'. *Unless* is not used when the meaning is more like 'because ... not'. Compare:

- *OK. So we'll meet this evening at 7.00 – unless my train's late.* (= ... except if my train's late.)

My wife will be angry if I'm not home by 7.00. (NOT ~~*My wife will be angry unless I get home by 7.00.*~~ – She will be angry because I'm not home.)

- *I'll drive over and see you, unless the car breaks down.* (= ... **except if** the car breaks down.)

I'll be surprised if the car doesn't break down soon (NOT ~~*I'll be surprised unless the car breaks down soon.*~~ – I'll be surprised **because** it doesn't break down.)

3 tenses

In clauses with *unless*, we usually use present tenses to refer to the future (see 580).

I'll be in all day unless the office phones. (NOT ... ~~*unless the office will phone.*~~)