

Conditionals: if you go...

a) Zero conditional

We can talk about general facts or things that are always true using an if sentence.

This kind of sentence has the present tense in both parts:

If + **present tense**

present tense

If the price of a product falls,

demand for it usually rises.

In statements like this, **if means the same as when or every time**. This is sometimes called the '**zero conditional**'.

b) First conditional

When we talk about the results of future events that are reasonably likely, we can use an if sentence. The if clause states the condition, and the other clause states the result.

Condition

Result

If + present tenses

will + bare infinitive

If you give me an extra day's holiday, I will work this weekend.

The if clause can come in the first part of the sentence or the second (attention: comma rules):

If the government raises taxes in the next budget, consumer spending will fail.

Consumer spending will fail if the government raises taxes in the next budget.

Common mistakes: **We do not use will in the if part of the sentence:**

wrong: *If the shipment ~~will arrive~~ tomorrow, I will collect it.

right: If the shipment arrives tomorrow, I will collect it.

c) If or when?

When we talk about events that will take place in the future, we can use if or when, but there is an important difference in meaning.

I am flying to Australia today. I will give you a ring if I get in at a reasonable time. (The speaker is not sure if he will get in at a reasonable time or not.)

I am flying to Australia tonight. I will give you a ring when I get there. (The speaker has no doubt that the plane will arrive safely.)

c) Variations

We can use the imperative, or a modal verb instead of will + infinitive:

Imperative: If you hear from Liv today, tell her to ring me.
If Bengt comes in, get him to sign that contract.

Modal: If the traffic is bad, I may get home late.
If we sign the contract today, we can start production at the end of next month.

We can use the present continuous or the present perfect in the if clause:

Present continuous: If they are still considering Germany, I shall suggest Recklinghausen.

Present perfect: If you have placed the order, the goods will arrive in ten days.