



Lesson 16. Mastering the verbs 16

Conditionals 1

Conditional sentences are relatively easy to understand, but hard to master.

What is a condition?

A condition in grammar is like a prerequisite.

For “A” to happen, “B” must happen first. “B” is the pre-requisite or condition.

This idea expressed in a sentence is what we called a “conditional”.

So conditional structures are always made using two clauses; one clause expresses the pre-requisite and the other expresses the consequence of that pre-requisite.

Example:

- If you come late (prerequisite), you won't be able to get in (result). *Si llegas tarde, no podrás entrar.*

Notice that the order of these two sentences doesn't affect the meaning, so I could also say: “You won't be able to get in if you come late.”

How many types of conditional sentences are there?

There are three main types of conditional sentences, although some grammarians talk about four because they also include the “zero conditional”. That is a conditional where there isn't really a condition.

Let's see an example.

If water reaches 100°C, it boils. *Si el agua alcanza los 100°C, hierve.*

Structure: If + subject + simple present tense + object + subject + simple present tense.

As you can observe, in this case if one thing occurs the other always occurs too so there are no prerequisites.

How can you memorise the zero conditional?

It is actually very easy to memorise because it's the same structure in Spanish.

Fita (From Intermediate to advanced) Course by Monica Stocker

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Suppose you think in Spanish:

- *Si no comes, adelgazas.*

That would be:

- If you don't eat, you lose weight.

As you can see, both sentences go in the simple present tense. Notice that the zero condition is frequently used to describe natural phenomena or general truths.

Conditional sentences are categorized according to the possibility that the condition will be fulfilled.

Therefore, we have:

The First conditional

It's quite likely that this condition will be fulfilled.

Example:

- If you work harder, you will earn more money- *Si trabajas más duro, ganarás más dinero.*

Structure: If + subject + verb in present tense + object + subject + will + verb in the infinitive + object

As you can see, the difference in structure with the zero conditional is that the second sentence is with "will".

How can you memorise the first conditional?

Just as with the zero condition, this type of conditional is easy to memorise because it is the same in Spanish.

Please note that this type of conditional is much more common than the zero conditional because we use it to describe everyday situations.

Think of a sentence in Spanish:

- *Si ellos vienen a casa, los invitaré a cenar.*



- If they come round, I will invite them for dinner.

The Second conditional

It's not quite as likely that this condition will be fulfilled.

Example:

- If you worked harder, you would earn more money. *Si trabajases más duro, ganarías más dinero.*

Structure: If + subject + verb in past tense + object + subject + would (*)+ verb in the infinitive + subject +object.

(*) In the place of “would”, we can also find “could”, “should”, “might”, or “may”.

Example: If you came here, you **could** help me.

How can you memorise the second conditional?

Remember this rule: when we use the “subjunctive” in Spanish after “if”, in English we use the past tense.

For example:

- Si yo comiera/comiese- If I ate
- Si él fuera/ fuese- If he went
- Si ellos viniesen- If they came

What about the “verb to be”?

In this case use “were”, even if it is the first or third person.

So, it is:

- If I were young- Not if I ~~was~~ young
- If he were here- Not if he ~~was~~ here.

For the second part of the structure, you have to remember that if we place a verb ending in **-ía** in Spanish, then in English we have to use “would”. Also, “could”, “should”, “might”, or “may”, can be used depending on what the condition is exactly.

Examples:

- *Si él estuviera aquí, yo se lo contaría.*
- If he were here, I **would** tell him.
- *Si lo vieras, deberías decírselo.*
- If you saw him, you **should** tell him.

The Third conditional

It is not possible to fulfil this condition.

This type of conditional is also called past conditional because it refers to something that took place in the past and that now cannot be changed.

Example:

- If you **had worked** harder, you **would have earned** more money. *Si hubieses trabajado más duro, habrías ganado más dinero.*

Structure: If + subject + past perfect+ object + subject + would+ have+ pp. of the main verb +object.

As the third conditional is the most difficult to grasp, we will study the zero, the first and the second conditional in this lesson and leave the third conditional and mixed conditionals for the next lesson.

Other conditional terms

Apart from “if”, we can find other terms that are conditional. These are some examples:

In case (of)

- **In case** she has done it, I will call her. *En el caso de que lo haya hecho, la llamaré.*

As soon as

- I'll go there **as soon as** he tells me. *Iré en cuanto me lo diga.*

Provided (that)

- They'll buy it, **provided** there is money. *Ellos lo comprarán, siempre y cuando haya dinero.*

When

- **When** he comes, we will go out. *Cuando él venga, saldremos.*

Unless. It is used in negative condition.

- I won't do it unless he pays. *No lo haré a menos que él pague.*

When to use commas with conditional sentences?

Use comma if the “if clause” is at the beginning of the sentence.

Example:

- If he comes, tell him to call me.

Don't use a comma if the “if clause” is at the end of the sentence.

Example:

- Tell him to call me if he comes.

Mastering conditionals: zero, first and second

One of the pre-requisites of mastering the conditional sentences is to master the modal verbs, the past participle of the verbs and the past perfect. Therefore, it is important that at this point you are more or less comfortable with all these aspects of the English language and, more specifically, that you know the past participles of the verbs.

I have listed the zero, first and second conditionals that can be found in chapters 5 to 19 of the audiobook.

Please, listen to them and repeat them aloud.

Spanish	English	Phonetics	Approximate Pronunciation
Si ese caballero es rico, no hay razón para que no se case con él.	If that gentleman is rich, there is no reason not to marry him (Chap. 5)	ɪf ðæt ˈdʒentlmən z rɪtʃ ðə z nəʊ ˈriːzən nɒt tə ˈmæri ɪm	If dat yéntelman iss rich der iss nóu rísson not tu méri him
Si lo vieras (a él), pensarías que es la persona más maravillosa del mundo.	If you saw him, you would think he were the most marvellous person in the world. (Chap. 5)	ɪf ju ˈsɔːr ɪm ju wʊd ˈθ ɪŋk hi wə ðə məʊst ˈmɑːvləs ˈpɜːsn, ɪn ðə wɜːld	If iu so him iu wud zink hi wuer de móust márvelos pérson in de wuórld

Si alguna vez te hace daño, lo mataré, dijo el muchacho.	If he ever hurts you, I will kill him, said the young man (Chap. 5)	ɪf hi 'evə hɜ:ts ju 'aɪ wɪl kɪl ɪm 'sed ðə jʌŋ mæn	If hi éver herts iu ai wuil hil him, sed de íang man
Si uno no habla de ellos, no han ocurrido	If one doesn't speak about them, they haven't happened (Chap. 9)	ɪf wʌn 'dʌznt spi:k ə 'bɑ:ʊt ðəm 'ðeɪ 'hævnt t 'hæpənd	If wuan dássent sspik ábaut dem, déi hávent hápend
Si usted intenta verlo, nunca volveré a hablarle mientras viva.	If you try to look at it, I will never speak to you as long as I live (Chap 9)	ɪf ju traɪ tə lʊk ət ɪt 'aɪ wɪl 'nevə spi:k tə ju əz 'lɒŋ əz 'aɪ 'laɪv	If iu trai tu luk at it ai wuil never sspik tu iu ass long ass ai liv
Pero ahora no sé si le conozco a usted de verdad. Para obtener una respuesta necesitaría ver su alma.	I don't know if I really know you. To get an answer I would need to see your soul. (Chap. 11)	'aɪ dəʊnt nəʊ ɪf 'aɪ 'rɪəli nəʊ ju tə 'get ən 'ɑ:nsə 'aɪ wʊd ni:d tə 'si: jə səʊl	Ai dóunt nóu ɪf ai ríli nóu iu. Tu get an ánser ai wud nid tu sí íor sóul
He escrito una carta y si usted no me ayuda, la enviaré.	I have written a letter and if you don't help me, I will send it (Chap. 13)	'aɪ hæv 'rɪtn ə 'letər ənd ɪf ju dəʊnt help mi: 'aɪ wɪl send ɪt	Ái háv rítn a leter and ɪf iu dóun help mi ai wuil séndit
Si se mueve usted, le dispararé.	If you move, I'll shoot (Chap. 15)	ɪf ju mu:v aɪl ʃu:t	If iu muv áil shut
Sería mejor que vaya a casa y guarde esa pistola.	It would be best if you went home and put away that pistol (Chap. 15)	ɪt wʊd bi best ɪf ju 'went həʊm ənd 'pʊt ə 'weɪ ðət 'pɪstl	It wud bi bes ɪf iu wuent houm and put ówuei dat pístol
Si él se ha escondido, no es asunto mío.	If he has hidden himself, it's none of my business. (Chap. 18)	ɪf hi hɜz 'hɪdn hɪm'self ɪts nʌn əv maɪ 'bɪznəs	If hi hass híden him'self its non of mái bíssnes
Si él ha muerto no quiero pensar en ello.	If he has died, I don't want to think about it (Chap. 18)	ɪf hi hɜz daɪd 'aɪ dəʊnt wɒnt tə 'θ ɪŋk ə 'bɑ:ʊt ɪt	If hí ház daid ái dóunt wuánt tú zínk áboutit
¿Qué diría si le confesara que he asesinado a Basil?	What would you say if I confessed that I killed Basil? (Chap. 18)	'wɒt wʊd ju 'seɪ ɪf 'aɪ kən'fest ðət 'aɪ kɪld 'bæz	Wuát wud iu sei ɪf ai kon'fest dat ai kild bássel?
Si usted lo supiera, usted se iría.	If you knew, you would go (Chap. 18)	ɪf ju nju: ju wʊd gəʊ 	If iu nú, iu wud góu

To sum up:

There are four types of conditional sentences: zero, first, second and third conditional.

They are categorized according to the possibility that the condition will be fulfilled.

-Zero conditional: No condition. Example: If you freeze water, it becomes ice

-First conditional: Quite likely to happen. Example: If they send an email, I will answer them.

-Second conditional: Not very likely to happen. Example: If he sold it, I would buy it.

-Third conditional: Impossible. Example: If he had sold it, I would have bought it.

Try to memorise them thinking about the equivalences between the Spanish and the English structure. For example: if in Spanish the verb after “if” is in the subjunctive mood, in English we use the Simple Past Tense. **Remember:** *Si ella no viniese* (subjunctive)- If she didn’t come (simple past tense).

Homework

Look for conditionals sentences in chapters 1 to 4. Try to find conditional sentences with “when”, “unless”, “in case (of)”, “provided” also. When you find them, listen to them and say them aloud.

Translate the following sentences

1. Si yo tuviese que ir no iría
2. Le daré (a ella) este sobre en caso de que (ella) venga
3. Si no lo dejas claro, él se marchará
4. (Él) Lo aceptará siempre y cuando tú cedas
5. No vendrá a menos que la llames
6. Si (ella) llamase diciendo que está enferma, le diría que fuese al médico
7. Yo no querría ir si yo estuviese en su lugar (de él).
8. ¿Confesaría si yo te lo pidiera?
9. ¿Vendrán si las llamas?
10. Si es fácil, hazlo.

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Answers:

1. If I had to go, I wouldn’t go.
2. I will give her this envelope in case she comes
3. If you don’t make it clear, he will leave (also: go away)
4. He will accept it provided you give in
5. She won’t come unless you call her
6. If she called in sick, I would tell her to go to the doctor.
7. I wouldn’t want to go if I were in his place (in his shoes).
8. Would you confess if I asked you (to)?
9. Will they come if you call them?
10. If it is easy, do it.