

ENGS 028: ESL

Grammar 3

Summary of basic verb forms
and meaning in sentences
with “if” clauses

Contents

- This presentation addresses the following aspects of conditional sentences.
 - ◆ Uses
 - ◆ Meaning
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USES



There are 5 basic uses of “if” clauses in English

- They are the same as those outlined in our textbook, but presented here in a slightly different way.
- The terms “real conditions of fact” and “real conditions of prediction” used here are taken from Raimes, *How English Works*.
 - ◆ She is also the author of our textbook.

Uses of “if” clauses

- 1. To express real conditions of fact in the present or future.
 - ◆ This refers to conditions that exist or are likely.

Examples of real conditions of fact in the present or future

- If water freezes, it turns to ice.
- If people don't get enough sleep, they are dangerous drivers.
- If I don't eat breakfast, I get hungry during class.

Uses of “if” clauses

- 2. To express real conditions of fact in the past.
 - ◆ This refers to conditions that existed or were likely.

Examples of real conditions of fact in the past

- If she was in class, she definitely took notes.
- If he left before 9:00 a.m., he'll be here for lunch.
- If Fred went to the party last night, he didn't study for the test.

Note

- Uses 1, “real conditions of fact in the present or future” and 2, “real conditions of fact in the past” are the same as “real” conditions mentioned in our textbook.

Uses of “if” clauses

- 3. To express real conditions of prediction.
 - ◆ This refers to conditions that exist or are likely.
 - ◆ This is the same as conditions of “future prediction” in our book.

Examples of real conditions of prediction

- If you study hard, you will be prepared for the quiz.
- If you buy that car, you'll be sorry.
- If I don't finish this project, the boss will be mad.

Uses of “if” clauses

- 4. To express conditions that are not true—in other words they are ‘contrary to fact’-- in the present or expected future. Our textbook calls these “speculation about the present or future.”

Examples of conditions that are not true in the present or future

- If I had enough money, I would take a trip to Hawaii.
- If Fred knew French, he could get a job in Montreal.
- If I were you, I wouldn't do that.

Uses of “if” clauses

- 5. To express conditions that were not true in the past. Our textbook calls these “speculation about the past.”

Examples of conditions that were not true in the past

- If I had studied more, I would have done better on the test.
- If I had been born in Mexico, I would have learned Spanish as a child.
- If I had had time, I would have watched the news last night.
- If I had not had to study for a test, I could have gone to Bill's party last weekend.

MEANING



Meaning: real conditions of fact in the present/future

- Events or situations in the present or future:
 - ◆ If I have enough money, I will buy a new calculator.
 - ◆ Right now, I don't know if I have enough money or not, but it's possible. I'll check and if I do, I'll buy a new calculator.
 - ◆ If I see Mary, I'll tell her about the party.
 - ◆ I don't know if I'll see her, but it's possible. If I do, I'll tell her about the party.

Sometimes “should” is used in this type of sentence

- “Should” adds a little more doubt as to whether or not the condition will exist.
- If Bill should call while I’m gone, tell him that I’ll call him back later tonight.
 - ◆ I don’t know if Bill will call--probably not--, but if he does....

Meaning: real conditions of fact in the present/future

- Events or situations in the general or extended present:
 - ◆ If the temperature goes below 32 degrees, the streets get slick. (Normally, the streets get slick anytime the temperature falls below 32 degrees.)
 - ◆ If enough students don't enroll in a course, it must be canceled.

Meaning: real conditions of fact in the past.

- I thought that if I had enough money, I would buy a new calculator.
 - ◆ At that time I didn't know if I had enough money. When I checked I would know if I had enough to buy the calculator.
- We had a cold winter in 1992, and if the temperature went below 32 degrees, the streets got slick.
 - ◆ Normally, when that condition happened, slick streets were the result.

Conditions that are not true in the present or future: hypothetical or contrary-to-fact “if” clauses

■ Examples

- ◆ If I had enough money, I would buy a new calculator. (Right now, I know that I don't have enough money.)
- ◆ If the temperature went below 32 degrees, the streets would get slick. (Now, or in the immediate future, the temperature isn't expected to go that low.)

Conditions that were not true in the past: hypothetical or contrary-to-fact “if” clauses.

■ Examples

- ◆ If I had had enough money, I would have bought a new calculator.
 - ◆ At sometime in the past I didn't have enough money, so I didn't buy a calculator
- ◆ If the temperature had gone below 32 degrees, the streets would have gotten slick.
 - ◆ At that time, the temperature didn't go that low, so the streets didn't get slick.

FORMS



Verb forms in neutral “if” clauses— present or future.

- The verb of the “if” clause is usually in the simple present, the verb of the result clause is usually in the simple present or future.
 - ◆ If I **have** time, I usually **eat** breakfast before class.
 - ◆ If Congress **passes** the new tax law, many people **will be** confused.

Verb forms in neutral “if” clauses— past.

- The verb of the “if” clause is in any appropriate past, and the verb of the result clause is in any appropriate past.
 - ◆ If Fred **went** to the party last night, he probably **didn't do** his homework.
 - ◆ If the book **was** published in 1994, the author **had** probably **finished** the research before that.

Verb forms in contrary-to-fact “if” clauses in the present or future.

- The verb of the “if” clause is in the simple past; the verb of the result clause is composed of *would/could/might* + the base form of verb.
 - ◆ If I **knew** the answer, I **would tell** you.
 - ◆ If Twin Falls **were** a large city, we **would have** better public transportation.

Verb forms in contrary-to-fact “if” clauses in the past.

- The verb of the “if” clause is in the past perfect; the verb of the result clause is composed of *would/could/might* have + past participle.
 - ◆ If Napoleon **had won** at Waterloo, the history of Europe **would have been** much different.
 - ◆ If my parents **had had** more children, I **would have had** to share my room with a brother.

THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR



Similar forms

- The form of neutral “if” clauses in the past is the same as the form for contrary-to-fact “if” clauses in the present.
 - ◆ Context and the verb form used in the result clause will indicate whether the sentence is neutral or contrary-to-fact.
 - ◆ Examples:
 - ◆ If she knew the answer, she didn’t tell me.
 - Past
 - ◆ If she knew the answer, she would tell me.
 - Present

Were

- Whenever a form of “be” is the main verb in a contrary to fact “if” clause in the present, the correct form to use is “were.”
 - ◆ If I were you, I would study if clauses more.
 - ◆ If the weather were nicer, we could go to the park for a picnic.
 - ◆ If I were rich, I would travel around the world.

Would have in the “if clause”

- In informal spoken English, many people use “would have” in both the “if” clause and the result clause of conditional sentences referring to contrary to fact conditions in the past.
 - ◆ Example: If I would have known about the quiz, I would have studied more.
 - ◆ This is not appropriate for academic uses.
 - The correct form is: If I had known about the quiz, I would have studied more.

Spelling issues.

- Normal contractions are usually used in all but the most formal writing.
 - ◆ If you don't wear a coat, you'll catch cold.
 - ◆ *Don't* is a normal contraction for *do not*, and *you'll* is a normal contraction for *you will*.
 - ◆ If I finish my homework, I'll go to the party.
 - ◆ *I'll* is a normal contraction for *I will*.
 - ◆ If I'd known about the party, I could've gone.
 - ◆ *I'd* is a normal contraction for *I had*, and *could've* is a normal contraction for *could have*.

More spelling issues

- Many forms that are reduced in normal speaking do NOT have accepted contracted forms.
 - ◆ If it snows, my **friends will** go skiing this weekend.
 - ◆ *Friends will* is normally reduced to *friends'll* in speaking, but this is not an accepted contraction for *friends will*.

Pronunciation issues.

- Normal reductions are usually used in all but very formal public speaking.
 - ◆ However, unless there is an accepted contraction for the reduced forms, they must be spelled out completely in academic writing.

Example

- If Mary had had some money, she might have bought the dress.
 - ◆ Normal pronunciation: If Mary'd had some money, she might've (or even 'mighta') bought the dress.

The End

