CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

Because they express the conditions under which a certain action will take place, if-clauses are called conditional clauses. In a conditional sentence, the (dependent) if-clause describes the condition that will allow the action in the main (independent) clause to occur. There are three different types of conditional sentences, depending on how likely it is that the proposed action will occur.

• If it is very likely that the action will occur, the if-clause uses the simple **present tense**, and the main clause uses the **future tense**. The if-clause can come before or after the main clause.

  *If Connie seduces the gamekeeper, Clifford will be angry.* [Connie has her eyes on the gamekeeper, so she will probably do it]
  *If the Monkey jumps out of the window, Portnoy will feel guilty.* [the Monkey seems unstable, so she will probably jump]
  *Dr. Frankenstein will regret it if he assembles a mate for his monster.* [he is seriously thinking about doing it, though]

• If it is rather unlikely—but still possible—that the action will occur, the if-clause uses the simple **past tense**, and the main clause uses **would** before the verb.

  *If Connie seduced the gamekeeper, Clifford would be angry.* [there’s a possibility that she will do it, but she’s having second thoughts]
  *If the Monkey jumped out of the window, Portnoy would feel guilty.* [however, she’s probably going to be sensible and not jump]
  *Dr. Frankenstein would regret it if he assembled a mate for his monster.* [but it seems unlikely that he will do it]

• If it is impossible that the action will occur because the opportunity has passed, the if-clause uses the **past perfect tense**, and the main clause uses the future **perfect conditional tense**: **would have** + past participle of the verb.

  *If Connie had seduced the gamekeeper, Clifford would have been angry.* [but, alas, she remained faithful to her Clifford]
  *If the Monkey had jumped out of the window, Portnoy would have felt guilty.* [but thankfully, the Monkey did not jump and Portnoy does not need to blame himself]
  *Dr. Frankenstein would have regretted it if he had assembled a mate for his monster.* [but he had the good sense to stop himself in time]

🎉 Whatever you do, never put “if” and “would” in the same clause!

► Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.