

248 Should, were, had, and inversion

The following types of clause are rather formal.

- A We can use *should* in an if-clause to talk about something that might possibly happen.

If you should fall ill, the company will pay your hospital expenses.
If I should be chosen as your representative, I would do my best for you.
More neutral would be *If you fall ill, ...* and *If I was chosen ...*

We can also use *happen to*.

If you (should) happen to fall ill, the company will pay your hospital expenses.

- B Sometimes we use *were* instead of *was*. > 231C

If the picture ~~was~~ were genuine, it would be worth a million pounds.

We can also use *were to* for a theoretical possibility.

If the decision were to go against us, we would appeal.

If the government were to ban zoos, it would put captive breeding programme at risk.
→ imaginary future situation

- C In a condition with *should* or *were*, we can invert the subject and verb and leave out *if*.

Should you fall ill, the company will pay your hospital expenses.
Should we not succeed, the consequences would be disastrous.
Were the picture genuine, it would be worth a million pounds.
Were the decision to go against us, we would appeal.

We cannot do this with *was*.

If the picture was genuine, it would be worth a million pounds.
(NOT *Was the picture genuine, it would be worth a million pounds.*)

We can also use inversion with the past perfect (Type 3, > 247).

Had you taken a taxi, you would have got here on time.
Had I not carried out the order, I would have been sacked.

But an if-clause (*If you had taken a taxi*) is more common, especially in informal English.

- D Look at these examples with *if ... not for*.

You saved my life. If it hadn't been for you, I'd have drowned.
(= Without you, I'd have drowned.)
I'd give up teaching if it wasn't/weren't for the holidays.

If it were not for zoos, most people would never see wild animals.
(formal context)

We can also use *but for*. > 251B
But for you, I'd have drowned.

249 More details about if

- A When and if

When we talk about the future, we use *when* for something that will happen and *if* for something that might happen.

When the doctor comes, can you let her in? (The doctor will come.)
If the doctor comes, can you let her in? (The doctor might come.)

We use *if* (not *when*) for an unreal condition.

If I had a credit card, I would spend even more money.
(I don't have a credit card.)

In some contexts either *when* or *if* is possible. > 244A

I always feel guilty when/if I use my credit card.

To talk about repeated, predictable situation, event (whenever)

- B Then → both can be used. *If/when you had seen it, you would wonder.*

After an if-clause we can use *then* in the main clause.

If the figures don't add up, then you must have made a mistake.
If no one else has requested the book, then you can keep it for another three weeks.

Here *then* is not an adverb of time. It emphasizes the link between the condition (e.g. *no one else has requested the book*) and the result of the condition being met (e.g. *you can keep it*). We cannot use *so* in this way.
(NOT *If the figures don't add up, so you must have made a mistake.*)

- C Short clauses

We can sometimes use a short clause with *if* leaving out the subject and the verb.

I'd like a room with a view of the sea if (that is) possible.
If (you are) in difficulty, ring this number.

We can do this when the meaning is still clear without the missing words.

For *if so* and *if not*, > 28D.

- D What if

We can use *what if* to ask someone to imagine a situation.

What if the tickets don't arrive in time?

What if you'd had an accident?

We can also use it to make a suggestion.

What if we all meet in London at the weekend?

Suppose and *supposing* are used in the same way as *what if*. > 230

Supposing the tickets don't arrive in time?

- E Even if

We use *even if* to express both a condition and a contrast.

I'm going to finish this report even if it takes all night.

(This report may or may not take all night, but I'm going to finish it.)

We cannot use *even* on its own as a conjunction.

NOT *I'm going to finish this report even it takes all night.*

Compare *even if* and *even though*.

Even if the rumour is untrue, people will still believe it.

(The rumour may or may not be untrue.)

Even though the rumour is untrue, people will still believe it.

(The rumour is untrue.)

- F Politeness

If-clauses are also used to tell/ask people to do things in a polite way

If I could just have your attention for a moment...

250 Unless

- A Unless with a positive verb is equivalent to *if* with a negative verb.

The club will go bankrupt unless it finds a new backer soon.

(= ... if it doesn't find a new backer soon.)

Unless I get up when I wake, I feel tired all day.

(= If I don't get up when I wake, ...)

We're going to have a picnic - unless it rains, of course.

(= if it doesn't rain, of course.)

In these examples, the main clause is negative.

You can't get your money back unless you've got a receipt.

(= You can get your money back only if you've got a receipt.)

Won't you join us? - Not unless you apologize first.

(= I'll join you only if you apologize first.)

- B We do not normally use *unless* meaning *if ... not* to express an unreal condition. (rather than "except if")

If you didn't talk so much, you'd get more work done.

If the horse hadn't fallen, it would have won the race.

(NOT *Unless the horse had fallen, it would have won the race.*)

- C We do not use *unless* to talk about a feeling which would result from something not happening.

Laura will be upset if you don't come to her party.

I'll be very surprised if you don't get the job.

(NOT *I'll be very surprised unless you get the job.*)

- * *"If we didn't have zoos, most people would never see ..."*

- C We use *if ... not* when in the main clause we say that an event or action in the if-clause is unexpected

If we don't get permission, I'll be surprised.

- * in questions

How will they learn about wild animals if they don't see them?

CONDITIONAL

CLAUSES

→ D Sometimes we leave out subject

+ be after -if-

→ in common expressions

I'll work late tonight if necessary.

There is little if any good evidence...

I'm not angry. If anything, I feel disappointed.

He seldom if ever travels abroad.

If in doubt, ask for help.