

GRAMMAR EXPLANATION

What is the second conditional?

The second conditional, also sometimes called type two conditionals, is a structure to describe unreal or unlikely events in the future. For example:

If I won the lottery, I would give some money to charity.

If he went to class more often, he would pass the tests.

What is the sentence structure?

The second conditional consist of two clauses, an if-clause and a main clause.

IF-CLAUSE: If | subject | past tense verb | object/complement

If | Kate | won | the lottery

If | he | went | to class more often

If | I | quit | my job

MAIN CLAUSE: subject | would | main verb | object/complement

She | would | quit | her job.

He | would | pass | the tests.

I | would | travel | around the world.

Put the if-clause and the main clause together, and you have a second conditional sentence. Notice there is a comma between the IF-CLAUSE and MAIN CLAUSE:

If Kate won the lottery, she *would* quit her job.

If he went to class more often, he *would* pass the tests.

The clauses may be inverted (MAIN CLAUSE + IF-CLAUSE). There is no comma then. For example:

Kate *would* quit her job *if* she won the lottery.

He *would* pass the tests *if* he went to class more often.

How are second conditionals used?

Second conditionals describe an unreal or very unlikely future. Because the condition (if-clause) isn't real, the outcome (main clause) will never occur. For example:

Skill Builders: Grammar – Second Conditionals

Upper-Intermediate

A: What *would* you do *if* you quit your job?

B: *If* I quit my job, I *would* travel around the world for a year.

It's unlikely that I will quit my job. Perhaps I can't afford to quit. Perhaps I have no immediate plans to quit. Perhaps I don't want to quit because I like where I work. Whatever the reason, the opportunity to travel around the world won't happen as long as I continue to go to the office. At least for the present, the answer describes an impossible future. Here are a few more examples:

If Angelina Jolie met me, she would instantly fall in love with me.

If the US attacked Russia, it would be the end of the world.

I would probably get a lot of speeding tickets if I owned a Ferrari.

Is there additional information on the second conditional?

Yes, there are a two points. First, other modals may be used in lieu of *would*. In particular, *could*, *might*, and *should* may be used, which adds an element of speculation or possibility to the sentences.

If the US attacked Russia, it *might* be the end of the world.

If I quit my job, I *could* travel around the world.

In addition, the simple past of *be* is always *were* when using the second conditional. For example:

If I were rich, I would own fifty-two cars. I would drive a different car each week!

If I was rich, I would own fifty-two cars.

ACTIVITY

Here are a two sentences to practice using the second conditional correctly.

Answer the questions with the second conditional.

What would you do if you had \$100,000,000?

If I had \$100,000,000, I would buy a private island in the Caribbean.

1. What would you do if you spoke English fluently?

_____ .

2. What would you do if you were the leader of your country?

_____ .