

Subordinating Conjunctions (Conditionals)

What is a subordinating conjunction?

A subordinating conjunction is a word or phrase that links a dependent clause to an independent clause.

Unless, if, as long as, so long as, provided (that), providing (that), supposing, or and **otherwise** are subordinating conjunctions which can be used to connect conditions and results.

i. **Unless**

Conditional clauses can begin with *unless*. *Unless* means something similar to 'if ... not' or 'except if'.

The verb forms in the examples are similar to sentences with *if*: we use the present simple in the *unless*-clause and *shall, should, will, would, can, could, may* or *might* in the main clause:

- **Unless I phone you, you can assume the train's on time.** (If I do not phone you /except if I phone you, you can assume the train is on time.)
- **We'll have to cancel the show unless we sell more tickets at the last minute.** (We'll have to cancel the show if we do not sell more tickets/except if we sell more tickets at the last minute.)

ii. **As long as, so long as, providing, etc.**

Sometimes we need to impose specific conditions or set limits on a situation. In these cases, conditional clauses can begin with phrases such as *as long as, so long as, only if, on condition that, providing (that), provided (that)*.

As long as is more common in speaking; *so long as* and *on condition that* are more formal and more common in writing:

[to a group of children]

- *You can play in the living room **as long as** you don't make a mess*
- **So long as** a tiger stands still, it is invisible in the jungle.
- *The bank lent the company 100,000 pounds **on condition that** they repaid the money within six months.*

Providing (that) is more common in speaking; *provided (that)* is more formal and more common in written language:

[talking about rail travel in the UK]

- *You can get a senior citizen's reduction **providing** you've got a railcard.*
- *They may do whatever they like **provided that** it is within the law.*



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iii. Or and otherwise

We often use *or* and *otherwise* with conditional meanings:

- *You've got to start studying, or you'll fail all those exams.* (If you don't start studying, you will fail the exams.)

[talking about sending a package by mail]

- *We'd better send it express, otherwise it'll take days.* (If we do not send it express, it will take days.)

iv. Supposing

Supposing may be used with a conditional meaning. It can be used in first, second or third conditional sentences. The speaker invites the listener to imagine a situation:

- **Supposing** *I don't arrive till after midnight, will the guest-house still be open?* (Imagine if I don't arrive till after midnight ...)
- **Supposing** *you lost your passport, you'd have to go to the embassy, wouldn't you?*
- **Supposing he hadn't recognised us – he might never have spoken to us.**

v. If + were to

In formal situations, we can use *if + were to* when we talk about things that might happen but which we think are unlikely:

- **If the Prime Minister were to resign, there would have to be a general election within 30 days.**

In even more formal styles, we use *were + subject-verb inversion + to-infinitive*:

- [V]**Were** [S]**we** [to -INF]**to give up** *the fight now, it would mean the end of democracy in our country.* (If we gave up the fight now ...)
- [V]**Were** [S]**the economy** [to -INF]**to slow down** *too quickly, there would be major problems.* (If the economy slowed down too quickly ...)

Inverted Conditionals

i. Should you (Should with inversion)

In formal situations, we can use *should + subject (s) + verb (v)* instead of *if*:

- **Should you wish to cancel your order, please contact our customer service department on 02317 6658932.** (or *If you should wish to cancel your order ...*)
- **Should your child become anxious or nervous about any activity, it is a good idea to inform the team-leader.** (or *If your child should become ...*)



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ii. Had you (Had with inversion)

In formal situations, we can use *had* + subject + verb instead of *if* in third conditional sentences:

- **Had I** known you were waiting outside, I would have invited you to come in. (If I had known you were waiting outside ...)
- **Had Margaret** realised she would be travelling alone, she would never have agreed to go.

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