Unit 86: CONDITIONS

Look at this sentence: He's coming to see us if he has time.

QUESTION: Is he coming to see us?

ANSWER: We don't know. Perhaps he will have time or perhaps he will not have time.

If he has time is an example of a REAL CONDITION (section 1 in this unit).

Now look at this sentence: He would be here now if he had the time.

QUESTION: Is he here now?

ANSWER: No, because he doesn't have time.

If he had the time is an example of an UNREAL CONDITION (section 2 in this unit).

We usually begin conditions with **if.**

1 Real conditions

We do not know if the condition is, will be or was true. Here are some examples:

If it rains tomorrow, I'll stay in.

If Maria is coming to the party, you can tell her the news.

But she won't be able to come **if she's in Winnipeg now.**

I'm sure she'll come **if John has remembered to tell her.**

If they saw each other last night, she must know about it.

NOTICE: We cannot use **will** for future time in a condition:

We say **If it rains tomorrow** NOT *if it will rain*

If she's coming NOT *if she will be coming*

NOTICE: We sometimes use **unless (if…not)** at the beginning of a condition:

Unless it rains tomorrow, I'll go to the beach.

Unless she's in Winnipeg, I'm sure she'll come.

I'm sure she'll come **unless** John has forgotten to tell her about it.

2 Unreal Conditions

Always use PAST TENSE.

a   For PRESENT and FUTURE TIME the condition is not, or probably will not be, true: We use a SIMPLE or CONTINUOUS verb formation (Units 19-22):

If Maria **was coming,** you could tell her the news.   (But she isn't coming; you can't tell her.)

I would have more money **if** I **didn't smoke.**   (But I smoke; I have less money.)

I'd phone him **if** only I **could find** his number.   (But I can't find it; I can't phone him.)

If I **found** a lot of money, I'd give it to the police.   (I don't expect to find any; I'm imagining.)

NOTICE: Would you mind **if I left** early?

Would + mind + UNREAL CONDITION is a polite way to ask for permission.

b   For PAST TIME (the condition was not true), we use a PERFECT verb formation (Unit 17) in the condition:

If Maria **had come**, you could have told her the news.

(But she didn't come; you couldn't tell her.)

I'd have phoned him **if** only **I could have found** his number.

(But I couldn't find it; I didn't phone.)

If I **had found** that money, I would have given it to the police.

(I didn't find it; I'm just imagining.)

I'm sure Maria would've come **if** John **hadn't forgotten** to tell her.

(But John forgot; she didn't come.)

NOTICE: In this sentence:

If they saw each other, I'm sure they **talked** about it

the condition is real (talking about past time).

But in this sentence:

If they saw each other, they **would talk** about it

the condition is unreal (talking about future time).

NOTICE: Conditions can go before the basic sentence, If it's fine, I'll go to the beach, or after it, I'll go to the beach if it's fine. If we put the condition before the basic sentence, we use a comma.