

The Third Conditional

Conditionals in English are sentence structures that we use to talk about **results, causes, possibilities or hypothetical situations**. They usually have two parts:

- **Condition (if-clause)** → the situation
- **Result (main clause)** → what happens because of that situation

How do we use and make the Third Conditional in English?

Use: talking about the past and imagining a different result (often for regrets or missed opportunities)

Note: Both clauses are about things in the past that did not happen.

Structure: If + past perfect, would have + past participle

For example:

- If I **had studied**, I **would have passed** the exam.
(*I did not study and I did not pass the exam.*)
- If **we had left** earlier, **we would have caught** the bus.
(*We left too late and we missed the bus.*)
- If **he'd eaten** breakfast, he **would not have been** hungry.*
(*He did not eat breakfast and then he WAS hungry.*)
- If **they'd invited** Ethel, **she'd have gone** to the party.**
- If I **hadn't seen** her, I **wouldn't have heard** the news.***
- If **it had rained**, the **game would have been** cancelled.
(*The main clause here is a passive construction.*)

* "Had" becomes "'d" in contractions. E.g. I had → I'd, he had → he'd.

** "Would" also becomes "'d" in contractions. E.g. I would → I'd, she would → she'd

*** This is how we use contractions in negative clauses: had not → hadn't, would not → wouldn't. It is possible to use constructions like "I'd not seen" (instead of "I hadn't seen") and "I'd not have heard" (instead of "I wouldn't have heard"), but these are not common in modern English.

Note: In spoken language, we can contract "would have" to "would've". However, in written language, it is only used in very informal writing, like text messages and casual emails.

You can put the main clause first if you want. We often do this if we want to emphasise the result. When we do this, we do not usually use a comma.

For example:

- **I would have passed** the exam if **I had studied**.
- **He wouldn't have been** hungry if **he'd eaten breakfast**.

Other Modal Verbs

Sometimes we can use other **modal verbs** (could, may, might) instead of "would".

For example:

- If I had studied, I **could** have passed the exam. (ability)
- If I had studied, I **may** have passed the exam. (possibility)
- We **could** have caught the bus, if we had left earlier. (ability)
- We **might** have caught the bus, if we had left earlier. (possibility)

Questions

We can use the third conditional in **questions**.

For example:

- If you had left earlier, **would you have caught** the bus?
- **Would Ethel have gone** to the party if they had invited her?
- **What would you have done** if you'd had more time?

Comparisons

The **second** and **third conditional** are both used for unreal situations, but they are used for **different times** and have **different meanings**. We use the **second conditional** to talk about **imaginary or unlikely things in the present and the future**. We use the **third conditional** to talk about **imaginary past situations** (things that did not happen).

Compare:

Second Conditional	If Frank studied, he would pass his exams.	imaginary or unlikely in the present or future
Third Conditional	If Frank had studied, he would have passed his exams.	impossible; imaginary situation in the past

Spanish and Portuguese Translations

En: If Frank had studied, he would have passed his exams.

Sp: Si Frank hubiera estudiado, habría aprobado sus exámenes.

Pt: Se Frank tivesse estudado, teria passado nos exames.