Conditional sentences (2)

A In unreal conditionals we use **if...were + to-infinitive** to talk about imaginary future situations:
- If the technology **were to become** available, we would be able to expand the business.
- If he **were to have** a chance of success, he would need to move to London.

However, notice that we can't use this pattern with many verbs that describe a state, including **know, like, remember, understand:**
- If I **knew** they were honest, I'd gladly lend them the money. (*not* If I were to know...)

We sometimes use this pattern to make a suggestion sound more polite:
- If you **were to** move over, we could all sit on the sofa.

B If the first verb in a conditional if-clause is **should, were,** or **had** (see Unit 99) we can leave out **if** and put the verb at the start of the clause. We do this particularly in formal or literary English (see also Unit 119):
- **Should** any of this **cost** you anything, send me the bill. (= If any of this should **cost**...)
- It would be embarrassing, **were** she **to find out** the truth. (= ...if she were to **find out**...)
- **Had** they **not rushed** Dan to hospital, he would have died. (= If they **hadn't rushed** Dan...)

C We use **if it was/were not for + noun** to say that one situation is dependent on *another situation* or on *a person*. When we talk about the past we use **If it had not been for + noun:**
- If it **wasn't/weren't for** *Vivian*, the conference wouldn't be going ahead.
- If it **hadn't been for** *my parents*, I would never have gone to university.

In formal and literary language we can also use **Were it not for...** and **Had it not been for...:**
- **Were it not for** Vivian...   • **Had it not been for** my parents...

We often use **but for + noun** with a similar meaning:
- **But for** Jim's support, I wouldn't have got the job. (= If it hadn't been for Jim...)

D We don't usually use **if...will** in conditional sentences (see Unit 99). However, we can use **if...will** when we talk about a *result* of something in the main clause. Compare:
- Open a window **if** it **will help** you to sleep.   *or*   ...**if** it **helps** you to sleep.
  ('Helping you to sleep' is the result of opening the window.)
- I will be angry **if** it **turns out** that you are wrong.   *not*   '...if it will turn out...'
  ('Turning out that you are wrong' is not the result of being angry.)

We also use **if...will** in requests:
- If you **will** take your seats, ladies and gentlemen, we can begin the meeting.

If you want to make a request more polite, you can use **if...would:**
- If you **would** take your seats, ladies and gentlemen...

E In a *real* conditional sentence, we use **if...happen to, if...should,** or **if...should happen to** to talk about something which may be possible, but is not very likely. **If...happen to** is most common in spoken English:
- If you **happen to** be in our area, drop in and see us. (*or* If you **should** (**happen to**) be...)

Notice that we don't usually use this pattern in *unreal* conditionals which talk about impossible states or events in the if-clause:
- If the North Sea **froze** in winter, you could walk from London to Oslo. (*not* If the North Sea happened to freeze / should (happen to) freeze in winter...)

EXERCISES

100.1 *Choose from these verbs to complete the sentences, using each verb once only. If possible, use the pattern* **were + to-infinitive**. *If this is not correct, use the past simple form of the verb. (A)*

~~catch~~   fail   like   know   win   understand

1 If the police ...*were to catch*... him, he'd spend at least five years in prison.
2 If they .... to reach their target, the order would be lost.
3 If I .... how to contact Mike, I'd get in touch with him today.
4 If she .... the next four races, she would be world champion.
5 If I .... how it worked, I'd explain it to you.
6 If you .... his first film, I'm sure you'd enjoy this one, too.

100.2 *Write new sentences with similar meanings. Begin with the word(s) given. (B & C)*

1 John lent me money. Otherwise, I would have gone out of business. **Had it not been for John lending me money I would have gone out of business.**
2 Return the product to the shop if you have any complaints about it. **Should**...
3 There would be nowhere for them to stay if they arrived today. **Were**...
4 I wouldn't have finished this book without Suzanne's help. **If it**...
5 John is giving me a lift. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to visit you. **But for**...
6 Megan and I both have e-mail. Without it, it would be difficult for us to keep in touch. **Were it**...

Now write some true sentences about your life beginning with:

7 But for...   8 If it hadn't been for...   9 Had it...

100.3 *Are the underlined parts of the sentences correct? Correct the ones that are wrong. (D)*

1 <u>If they will get married</u>, they'll probably move to France. **If they get married**...
2 <u>If it will make</u> you happy, we'll buy a dishwasher.
3 <u>If you will send</u> me a copy of your previous letter, I will reply immediately.
4 <u>If some extra money will help</u>, take this £200.
5 <u>If anyone will ask</u> for me, I'll be in the café.
6 <u>If he will continue to improve</u>, he should be out of hospital next week.

100.4 *Make these requests and suggestions more polite. Begin* **If you would... . (D)**

1 Excuse me. I have to make a telephone call.
2 Leave your name and telephone number. I'll call you back as soon as I can.
3 Stay here until I return. I'd appreciate it.

100.5 *If possible, rewrite the underlined parts of these sentences with* **happen to**. *If it is not possible, write* ✗ *after the sentence. (E)*

1 <u>If you see Ken</u>, tell him that I'd like to see him. **If you happen to see Ken**...
2 <u>If you are at home on Monday evening</u>, you must see the TV programme on Korea.
3 <u>If computers could think like humans</u>, then more people would lose their jobs.
4 <u>If I am in New York in December</u>, we must meet up.
5 It's delicious – <u>if you like very sweet things</u>.
6 The world would be very different today <u>if the aeroplane had been invented</u> in 1800.