

English Grammar – The Third Conditional (Hypothetical or Imaginary Past)

We use the **third conditional** to talk about the **past**. We talk about something in the past that did not happen. We **imagine** an **alternative** past. It can be used to express **regret** or **advice**.

Example: Last week I bought a lottery ticket, but I didn't win. :(
If I **had won** the lottery, I **would have bought** a car.

Format:

IF	hypothesis	hypothetical result
	past perfect	conditional perfect
If	I had won the lottery, (then)	I would have bought a car.
If	I hadn't been impatient, (then)	he wouldn't have gotten irritated.

More examples:

- If I **had studied** more, (then) I **would have passed** the test.
- If the film **had had** subtitles, (then) I **would have understood** it.
- If he **hadn't been** so violent, (then) she **wouldn't have divorced** him.

The words "**would have**" imply certainty. We can use "**could have**" or "**might have**" to imply possibility.

Examples:

- If I **had watched** that film, I **would have cried**. (*certainty*)
- If he **had come** to my house last night, he **could have watched** the film with us. (*possibility*)
- If I **had bought** a lottery ticket, I **might have won**. (*possibility*)
- If everybody **had spoken** English, it **would have been** a better meeting. (*certainty*)

We can also invert the two clauses:

Examples:

- I **would have cried** if I **had watched** that film.
- He **could have watched** the film with us if he **had come** to my house last night.
- I **might have won** the lottery if I **had bought** a ticket.
- It **would have been** a better meeting if everybody **had spoken** English.

We can also use words like '**possibly**', '**probably**', '**certainly**' and '**definitely**' for emphasis:

- If I had watched that film, I **possibly** would have cried.
- If I had watched that film, I **probably** would have cried.
- If I had watched that film, I **certainly** would have cried.
- If I had watched that film, I **definitely** would have cried.

Native speakers often use contractions. For example:

Full words: If I had watched that film, I would have cried.

With contractions: If I'd watched that film, I'd have cried.

or: If I'd watched that film, I'd've cried. (*often spoken, but rarely written*)

Full words: If I had studied more, I would have passed the test.

With contractions: If I'd studied more, I'd have passed the test.

Recommended video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdZRfwQc5Aw> (2 mins)

Funny video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjiHe1R2cXA> (2 mins)

(*first conditional: from 00:20 to 00:48, third conditional: from 00:53 to 01:23*)

Exercise 1. Complete the following sentences using the given verbs.

1. If we hadn't left early, then we _____ (*miss*) our flight.
2. If I had driven more slowly, I _____ (*not lose*) control of the car!
3. If she _____ (*pay*) more attention, she wouldn't have crashed her car.
4. I _____ (*buy*) more wine if I had known that it was so cheap!
5. I _____ (*win*) the game if I hadn't made so many mistakes.
6. If Pauline had known about the test, she _____ (*go*) to the class.
7. I _____ (*finish*) the test if I had had more time.
8. I'm sorry. I _____ (*make*) dinner, if I had known that you were coming.

Exercise 2. Use your imagination to complete the following sentences.

1. If he had paid attention in class, then _____.
2. If she _____, then she wouldn't have gotten sick.
3. If my father hadn't met my mother, _____.
4. It would have been a perfect day if _____.