

# English Grammar: “if” vs “whether”

The words “if” and “whether” are almost synonymous, but can’t always be interchanged.

## 1. “If”

### a) For conditions:

- **If** I had a lot of money, then I would buy a Jaguar.
- **If** I were you, I would stop smoking.
- **If** you study every day, then your English will improve more quickly.

### b) We use ‘if’ for many possibilities:

- I don’t know **if** Brazil, England, Germany or Spain will win the world cup.
- Do you know **if** it’s small, medium or large?
- I haven’t decided yet **if** I’ll travel to Europe, the USA, the Far East or Australia.

## 2. “Whether”

When there are **only two** possibilities, it’s more common to use ‘*whether*’.

- I don’t know **whether** I should go or stay at home.
- Do you know **whether** the baby is a boy or a girl?
- I don’t know **whether** to order red or white wine.
- I’m so confused! I don’t know **whether** I’m coming or going!
- **Whether** it’s good or bad, that is my decision.
- **Whether** you agree or disagree, I have made my decision.
- We are not sure **whether** to go by car or by taxi.
- I want to learn English, **whether** it’s American or British.
- You are going to school, **whether** by choice or by force!

It is frequently used with ‘or not’:

- Do you know **whether** you will go to university **or not**?
- I don’t know **whether** I will cook **or not**.
- I don’t know **whether** he speaks English **or not**.
- He doesn’t know **whether** Jane is at home **or not**.
- I’m going **whether** you like it **or not**!

The words ‘or not’ can be implicit:

- Do you know **whether** you will go to university?
- I don’t know **whether** he speaks English.
- He doesn’t know **whether** Jane is at home.
- Do you know **whether** she’s coming?
- I don’t know **whether** to tell him.
- He doesn’t know **whether** to accept the job.

We can’t use ‘if’ directly before verbs:

- I don’t know **whether to tell** him or not.  
~~I don’t know if to tell him or not.~~  
(Alternative: I don’t know if I should tell him or not.)
- I don’t know **whether to cook** or not.  
~~I don’t know if to cook or not.~~  
(Alternative: I don’t know if I will cook or not.)
- I don’t know **whether to accept** the job or not.  
~~I don’t know if to accept the job or not.~~  
(Alternative: I don’t know if I’m going to accept the job or not.)
- He doesn’t know **whether to call** her or not.  
~~He doesn’t know if to call her or not.~~  
(Alternative: He doesn’t know if he should call her or not.)

We can only use 'whether' after prepositions:

- It all depends **on whether** I need the car. (~~It all depends on if I need the car.~~)
- I can't decide **on whether** to go or not.
- Independently **of whether** you agree or not, I'm going to accept the job.
- I need to think **about whether** to participate or not.

More info: <https://www.englishgrammar.org/whether-or/>  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/grammar/british-grammar/if-or-whether>

Video: <https://english.insl.com.br/files/videos/Whether.mp4> (short)

**Exercise.** Complete the following with 'if' or 'whether' (sometimes both are possible):

1. \_\_\_\_\_ you are not quiet, you will have to leave!
2. I haven't decided yet \_\_\_\_\_ to have a party or not.
3. Do you know \_\_\_\_\_ Jane has been accepted by London University?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ you buy three, you only pay for two.
5. He's thinking about \_\_\_\_\_ he should drive or walk.
6. It isn't really important \_\_\_\_\_ we order pizza, Chinese food, or McDonald's.
7. He doesn't know yet \_\_\_\_\_ he will go to university.
8. We should consider carefully \_\_\_\_\_ to send Charlie to a private school or to a public school.
9. I don't know \_\_\_\_\_ it will rain today.
10. Look! \_\_\_\_\_ he said you can go, you can go!
11. \_\_\_\_\_ you accept the job or not, I will stay with you.
12. You don't need to worry about \_\_\_\_\_ you need an umbrella or not, it won't rain today.