



The *third conditional* (also called *conditional type 3*) is a structure used for talking about *unreal situations* in the *past*. This page will explain how the third conditional is formed, and when to use it.

The structure of a third conditional sentence

Like the other conditionals, a third conditional sentence consists of two clauses, an "if" clause and a main clause:

<i>if</i> clause	main clause	explanation
If I had studied harder,	I would have passed the exam.	<i>I failed the exam, because I didn't study hard enough.</i>

If the "if" clause comes first, a comma is usually used. If the "if" clause comes second, there is no need for a comma:

main clause	<i>if</i> clause
I probably would have passed the exam	if I had studied harder.

We use different verb forms in each part of a third conditional:

<i>if</i> clause	<i>if</i> + subject + past perfect verb*
main clause	subject + <i>would</i> (OR <i>could</i> , OR <i>might</i>) have + past participle

*The past perfect is formed with the auxiliary verb "had", and the past participle (or third form) of the verb.

Note also that third conditional forms can be contracted:

<i>Full form</i>	If I had studied harder, I probably would have passed the exam.
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Contracted
form

If I'd studied harder, I probably would've passed the exam.

Using the third conditional

The third conditional is used to talk about things which DID NOT HAPPEN in the past. If your native language does not have a similar construction, you may find this a little strange, but it can be very useful. It is often used to express criticism or regret:

Example	Explanation
If you had driven more carefully, you would not have had an accident.	Criticism: <i>You had an accident because you didn't drive carefully enough.</i>
If we had played a little better, we could have won the game.	Regret: <i>We didn't play well, so we lost the game.</i>
If you had saved your money, you could have bought a computer.	Criticism: <i>You didn't save your money, so now you can't afford a computer.</i>
If it had snowed, we could have gone skiing.	Regret: <i>It didn't snow, so we couldn't go skiing.</i>

If you would like more information on this topic, try one of the pages below. When you are sure you understand clearly, you can click on "First exercise" to continue.

- [The Conditional Sentences](#)
 - [If Clauses/Conditional](#)
 - [Conditions](#)
 - [Conditional](#)
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