
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Grammar Gameshow

Second conditional

Will

Hello, and welcome to today's Grammar Gameshow! I'm your host, Will! And if we cannot do what we will, we must will what we can. And of course, let's not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie

Hello, everyone!

Will

Tonight we're going to ask you three questions about...

Leslie

The second conditional! That present-to-future construction with 'if' that's all about the unreal!

Will

OK! Now, let's meet our contestants!

Liz

Hello, all. My name's Liz.

Will

And contestant number two?

Rory

Hello, everyone. My name's Rory.

Will

Nice to see you again Liz! How are you?

Liz

I'm well, thank you. Fighting fit and ready for action.

Will

Wonderful! I hope you do really well.

Liz

That sounded... nice! No cruel jokes? No false pleasantries?

Will

No, no. It's all about self-control! I'm trying out a new nicer me. Welcome Rory! Tell me something about yourself.

Rory

I collect pencils.

Will

What a fascinating hobby! Well, I hope you do really well, both of you. OK. Let's get going and don't forget you can play along at home too. It's a double-question round so fingers on those buzzers! First question! What is the formula for a basic second conditional structure?

Rory

Is it 'if' plus a present tense and 'will' plus an infinitive?

Will

So sorry, Rory. That is the first conditional. But please, dear friend, have another go for free.

Rory

OK. Is it 'if' plus a present tense and 'will' plus an infinitive?

Will

No! That was the same answer again. You know, the old me would have killed you for that. Literally, plucked your eyes out of your skull. But Liz, why don't you give it a try?

Liz

Isn't it 'If' plus a past tense plus 'would' plus an infinitive verb?

Will

Can you give me an example?

Liz

I am eating a toffee.

Will

No, that's the present continuous.

Liz

I know, just pushing your buttons.

Will

Oh! Great! So funny!

Liz

Wow, you are doing well. The real answer is: if I had more time, I'd have a holiday.

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Well done! And onto our second question. What is the second conditional used for?

Rory

We use a second conditional after a first conditional. First and then second, see?

Will

Yes, I can see what you've done there. It's logical, but not right, I'm afraid. Liz?

Liz

It's used for a hypothetical present or future situation and its consequence.

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Correct! The second conditional structure is used for an unreal or extremely unlikely, present or future situation and its consequence. Its formula is 'If' plus the past simple or continuous, and 'would' plus an infinitive verb! For example: if I were a girl, I'd be called ...Leslita!

Will

Oh, what a lovely name! Well done Liz, six points to you. And Rory, you are very good at pushing that buzzer, aren't you? Yes. One point to you. On to our second round. Look at these two sentences. One is in the first conditional and one is in the second conditional. I want to know what the difference in meaning is:

- a) If I leave now, I will get home early.
- b) If I left now, I would get home early.

Rory

My name's Rory!

Will

Well, that's wonderful to know, good friend. Liz?

Liz

Isn't it something to do with the speaker's perception of a situation? With the first conditional, the speaker believes that something is possible and might actually happen. With the second conditional the speaker says something is unlikely or unreal.

Will

Wow. What an informative answer. Let's see if it's correct. Leslie, old friend?

Leslie

It is correct! Many ideas can be expressed in either the first or second conditional. They both talk about a present or future time, after all. The difference is that when using a first conditional the speaker believes that an event is possible or real. But if they use the second conditional, they are saying it's unlikely or impossible!

Will

Six points to you Liz!

Liz

I'm really impressed. This is like a whole new you! I like this Will!

Will

Thanks! You know, me too! I'm sleeping better, I've got more energy and I don't spend hours checking myself out in front of the mirror. Let's move on to our final round. Which of these sentences is incorrect?

- a) If I were rich, I'd buy a yacht.
- b) If you were rich, you'd buy a yacht.
- c) If he were rich, he'd buy a yacht.
- d) If they were rich, they'd buy a yacht.

Will

Rory, is this a proper answer?

Rory

Yes.

Will

Are you sure?

Rory

Yes!

Will

Well then go on, old friend! Give it a go!

Rory

I choose present perfect.

Will

Liz?

Liz

I think c) is wrong. It should be if he was...

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Sorry Liz... none of them are incorrect. In the second conditional, people commonly put the verb 'be' into the form 'were' for any pronoun... including 'I', 'he', 'she' and 'it'. It is frequent to hear both styles, though many consider the 'were' form to be more formal.

Liz

I am so silly. I knew that and forgot it.

Will

And you were doing really well. Have twenty points anyway. And to you too, Rory! Well that brings us to the end of today's Grammar Gameshow. Let's count out the points... and the winner is... both of you! You're both winners in my book!

Liz

Hang on! He didn't even answer one question right! Why does he win too?

Will

Well, I can't drop him down the pit. It wouldn't be good for the new calm me! I'm much nicer now.

Liz

But don't you miss it? The thrill of the drop...

Will

The drop?

Liz

Drop. When was the last time you...

Will

The drop. Well, it has been a while...

Liz

You must be really strong to just drop the drop

Rory

Drop the drop! Drop the drop! Drop the drop! Drop the drop! Drop the drop! Drop, drop, drop, drop!

Will

Aw heck! And bring him back up! And drop him back down! Release the clowns! It looks like we'll need another contestant. Ah... so much better. I'm back!

Liz

And my prize? I'm fine...

Will

We'll see you again next week, where you can play for another prize. Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye Leslie.

Leslie

Alavida, Leslie.

Will

See you next time.