
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

The second conditional



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello. Welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Rob.

Catherine

And me, Catherine. Hello. This programme is all about the second conditional.

Rob

Yes the second conditional. We'll see how to form it...

Catherine

We'll look at why and when we use it....

Rob

There'll be a very helpful pronunciation tip...

Catherine

And there'll be a second conditional quiz at the end of the show, so listen carefully!

Rob

Let's start by looking at why and when we use the second conditional. The main use of the second conditional is to talk about impossible, unlikely or imaginary situations. And here's an example to do with football. Catherine, are you a football fan?

Catherine

Err... I like to watch the big games, the internationals, the England games in particular – I do like an England game.

Rob

Yes, they haven't won for a long time...

Catherine

Not since '66, I think...

Rob

'66 was a long time ago, but maybe they'll win one day...

Catherine

Maybe!

Rob

But at the moment it's just a dream; not a strong possibility. So Mike's here: let's have a second conditional sentence about that situation Mike:

Mike

If England won the World Cup, Catherine would be so happy.

Rob

If England won the World Cup, Catherine would be so happy. Catherine, is that true?

Catherine

It is, actually, I'd be very happy. Unlikely, but, I'd be happy. So: this is a second conditional sentence and it is made of two parts. The first part starts with the word **if**, plus **a subject** and **a past simple verb**, and it describes an unlikely or imaginary situation, like this:

Mike

If England won the World Cup...

Catherine

Thanks Mike. And the second part of the sentence has the word **would** or the negative **wouldn't** with **an infinitive verb**. It describes a possible result of the unlikely or imaginary situation.

Mike

...Catherine would be so happy.

Rob

That's the result of the imaginary situation. And yes, If England won the World Cup, we would be very happy, wouldn't we, Catherine?

Catherine

We would!

Rob

Good. Now, we can change the order of the two parts, and the meaning stays the same:

Mike

We'd be so happy if England won the World Cup.

Catherine

Right, thanks Mike. Let's have some more examples.

Mike

If Sunny had more money, he'd get a better phone.
I wouldn't see you very often if I lived in the city.
Maria would have a better job if she spoke more English.
If I were you, I'd take a holiday.

Rob

Thanks: lots of examples there. And the last one is particularly interesting: **If I were you, I'd take a holiday**. And of course this isn't a real situation, because I can't be you, can I?

Catherine

You can't be anybody Rob, except yourself, just you: we're stuck with you.

Rob

You're stuck with me, yes: I'm afraid so. Anyway, we say a second conditional sentence starting with the words **If I were you** when we want to give someone some advice. And here the advice is to go on holiday.

Catherine

It's interesting that a lot of native speakers say **If I were you**, and not **if I was you**.

Rob

And if I were you, I'd go somewhere nice and hot with palm trees and sandy beaches.
Mmm.

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6 Minute Grammar, from BBC Learning English.

Rob

And we're talking about second conditionals.

Catherine

Now for a word about pronunciation. Contractions or short forms – are very common in second conditionals – but they can sometimes be difficult to hear.

Rob

Yes, that's a good point. In the last example, the two words **I** and **would** become **I'd**. **I'd** take a holiday.

Catherine

So **would** is shortened to just a /d/ sound. Listen out for the short /d/ sound in this next example:

Mike

If I knew the answer, **I'd** tell you.

Catherine

Yes, the phrase **I would tell** becomes **I'd tell**. One more time please Mike:

Mike

If I knew the answer, **I'd tell** you.

Rob

Well, wherever you are, I hope you know the answers to the quiz. It's coming up next!

Catherine

Yes, it's quiz time! Choose the correct word or phrase to fill each gap. Here's the first one. If you [beep] some money on the street, what would you do? Is the missing word a) find b) found or c) would find?

Rob

And the answer is b): If you **found** £50 on the street, what would you do?

Catherine

Another one: If you forgot your wife's birthday what [beep] she do? Is it a) does, b) will or c) would?

Rob

So the answer is c): If you forgot your wife's birthday what **would** she do? I wonder what she'd do...

Catherine

And the last one: I wouldn't eat that if I [beep] you. Is it a) am b) were or c) be?

Rob

And its b): I wouldn't eat that if I **were** you. Well done if you got all those right.

Rob

Great. So we've been talking about the second conditional. It's made of **if** plus **the past simple** tense, and **would** plus **the infinitive**. We use it to talk about imaginary situations and their results.

Catherine

There's more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again soon for more 6 Minute Grammar.

Both:

Bye.

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