

Third and mixed conditionals

English B2

What this topic teaches

B1's second conditional imagines a different **present**: *If I were rich, I would travel*. B2 adds the imagined **past** – the **third conditional** – and the **mixed conditional**, where an imagined past changes the present.

- Third: *If I **had left** earlier, I **would have caught** the bus*. (I didn't leave early. The bus is gone. We are both sad.)
- Mixed: *If I **had slept** more, I **wouldn't be tired** now*. (Imagined past → imagined present.)
- Memory hook: the third conditional is the **time machine** of regret. The *had* row rewinds; the *would have* row replays.
- Chinese keeps the verbs calm: . English rewinds both verbs.

The third conditional: rewinding the past

If + past perfect (had + participle), would have + participle.

If-side (the imagined past)	Result side (the imagined past result)
If I had studied harder	I would have passed the test.
If you had left at eight	you would have caught the bus.
If we had brought an umbrella	we wouldn't have got wet.

- △ The *if* side takes *had + participle*; the result side takes *would have + participle*. Never swap: “*If I would have studied*” × – *would* lives on the result side, the same rule as B1.
- Short forms: *I'd have, you'd have, we wouldn't have*. Speech compresses them to “*If I'd known...*”.
- This tense is the official language of regret: *If I had known, I would have come*. Every farewell party speaks it.

The mixed conditional: the past changes the present

If + past perfect, would + base verb (the result is **now**).

Imagined past	Imagined present
If I had slept more	I wouldn't be tired now.
If she had learned to cook	she wouldn't order noodles every night.
If we had bought tickets	we would be at the concert tonight.

- The if-side rewinds the past; the result side lands in the present. Compare: *If I had slept more, I wouldn't have been tired **yesterday*** (third) vs ...*I wouldn't be tired **now*** (mixed).
- The time words carry the meaning: *now, today, tonight* signal the mixed result.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **The costume is two steps back**. The imagined past wears the past perfect. “*If I had knew*” × – *had* + participle: *had **known***. *had* is the engine; the participle is the costume.
- △ **would never enters the if-side**. “*If I would have known*” ×. The rule from B1 has not changed: one *would*, result side only.
- △ **Don't mix silently**. “*If I had slept more, I wouldn't have been tired now*” – *now* demands the mixed form: *wouldn't be tired*. Choose the result's time, then its form.
- △ **Regret has a tense; learn from it anyway**. → *If I had studied harder, I would have passed*. Then go study. The time machine only travels in sentences.

Say it aloud

Confess three regrets, then mix one into the present.

- If I had studied harder, I would have passed the maths test. (The maths test sends its regards.)
- If we had brought an umbrella, we wouldn't have got wet. The cloud had warned us. We had not listened.
- If I had slept more last night, I wouldn't be tired now. And if I weren't tired now, I would stop talking about it.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *If I ____ (leave) earlier, I would have caught the bus*. – **had left**. The if-side rewinds: *had* + participle.
2. *If she had learned to cook, she ____ (not order) noodles every night*. – **wouldn't order**. The result is now: the mixed conditional.
3. “*If I would have known...*” – × → **If I had known...** *would* never enters the *if*-side.
4. *If we ____ (bring) an umbrella, we wouldn't have got wet*. – **had brought**. *bring* rebels to *brought*, and *had* drives the time machine.
5. *Rúguǒ wǒ zǎodiǎn zǒu, jiù néng gǎnshàng gōngjiāo le*. – **If I had left earlier, I would have caught the bus**. Both verbs rewind.