

## Conditional Sentences

Conditional sentences describe the necessary variable(s) that must be in place before a particular result can occur. The conjunctions **if**, **even if**, **when**, **whenever**, **whether**, and **unless** are often used to indicate the conditionality of a given result.

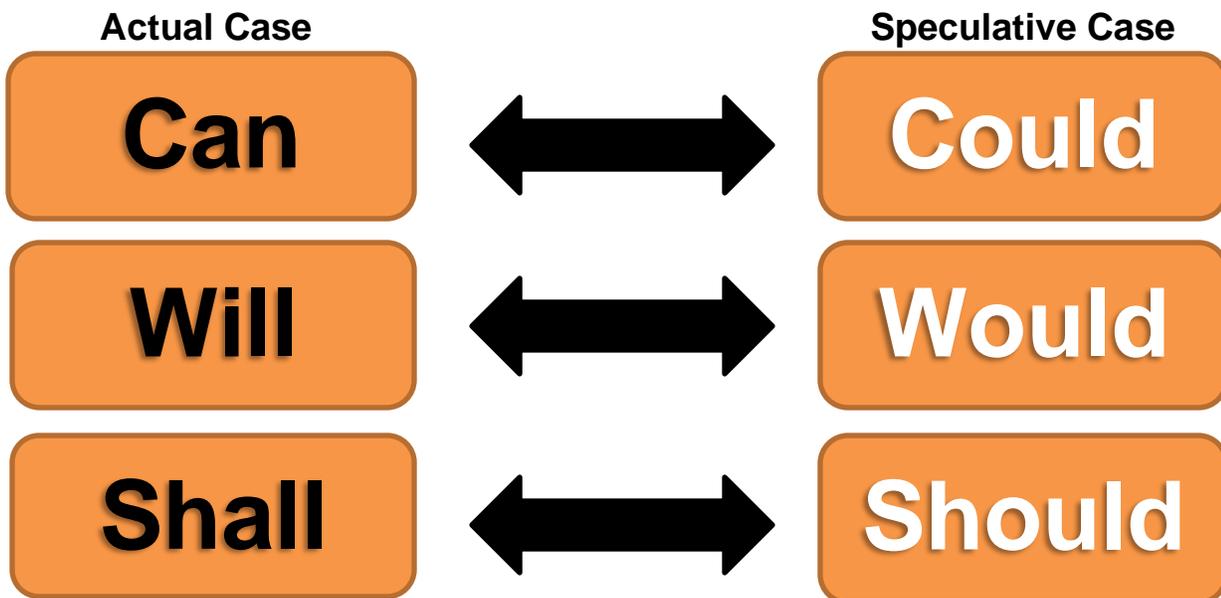
**Ex. Whenever I drink hot coffee, I burn my tongue.**



**Note:** In sentences such as the example above, which express a **general** or **habitual fact**, the verb tense remains the same in both clauses.

### Speculative Conditional Sentences

In English, it is necessary to differentiate between those conditional statements that are **actual**, or that describe actual scenarios, and those statements that are hypothetical or **speculative**.



**Ex. I will go to Europe for Spring Break if I have enough money.**

(Actual Intention – the speaker is committed to the idea of going if they can find enough money)

**Ex. I would go to Europe for Spring Break if I had enough money.**

(Hypothetical – the speaker does not know if they will have enough money and so is reluctant to commit to the idea completely)

The speculative forms (*could*, *would*, *should*) can also operate as past tense forms of the modal verbs *can*, *will*, and *shall*.

**Ex. Until about the age of fifteen, I could speak French.**

The *could* in the example above describes an actual ability, but this ability was possessed by the speaker only in the past ('until about the age of fifteen'). However, more frequently the past conditions we express using the speculative forms are hypothetical, rather than actual, ideas. In other words, the **hypothetical situation** described is based on an **actual intention** that, for whatever reason, was **not carried out**. In such cases, the modal should include the verb *have*.

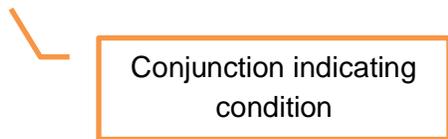
**Ex. I should have told my boss about that missing file.**

In the above example, the speaker may have had the intention of telling their boss about the file ("I shall tell my boss"), but did not do so and is now emphasizing the hypothetical case ("Even if I was too busy, I should have told my boss about that missing file.").

In addition, in the present tense, the speculative forms are often used together in one sentence to reinforce the hypothetical nature of the idea expressed.



**Ex. If I could have dinner with anyone alive or dead, I would have dinner with Bruce Lee.**



Because the example above conveys the idea that the speaker would want to have dinner with a deceased celebrity, the nature of the idea is clearly hypothetical, and so **the actual case forms** *can* and *will* would be inappropriate.

**Using Actual and Speculative Forms Together**

In many situations, it is possible to use an actual form in the first clause of a sentence and a speculative form in the next clause, or vice versa.



**Note:** In the above example, the speculative form *should* is **not past tense**, but simply the hypothetical version of *shall*. In other words, the speaker knows they understand trigonometry, but they are still undecided whether or not they will tutor their classmates, and because they have not yet decided, their action of 'tutoring' is still only a **possibility** rather than an **actuality**.

**Ex. If you would finish your part of the lab, I will submit the completed report to the professor.**

