

Conditional Tense

Le conditionnel (the conditional) can be used in French as a tense and as a mood. As a tense, le conditionnel expresses the future seen from a past point of view. As a mood, the conditional allows us to talk about a hypothetical or imagined reality that can only occur under certain circumstances.

It's considered a mood NOT a tense, which describes how an action takes place (rather than when).

When to use le conditionnel in French: Le conditionnel is often translated with would or could in English. In French, we use the conditional in the following cases:

to express a wish, a possibility, or a hypothesis in the present or the future (conditionnel présent) or in the past (conditionnel passé)

as a tense to talk about the future from a past point of view

in if-clauses (see the section on conditional clauses)

to make polite requests

The conditional is called "le conditionnel" and its endings are -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient (the imperfect endings).

conjugate the conditional

Present conditional

To conjugate the present conditional (le présent du conditionnel), add the conditional ending to the infinitive, just as you would when forming the future tense. For regular -re verbs add the endings to the infinitive minus the final -e.

The stem used to form the conditional is the same as the stem of the future (usually the infinitive). The conditional endings are -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient (These are also the imperfect endings).

We form the conditionnel présent by adding the imparfait endings to the stem of the futur simple form of the verb.

When to use conditional

SI CLAUSES:

The first si clause doesn't actually use the conditional mood at all:

Si + Present, Future Simple

Si j'ai le temps, je t'appellerai. (If I have time, I'll call you.)

This si clause expresses certain actions taken in the future should an event occur in the present. One implies that the present action is nearly certain, thus the use of the future instead of the conditional.

The second si clause in French is as follows:

Si + Imperfect, Conditional

Si j'avais le temps, je t'appellerais. (If I had time, I would call you.)

This si clause expresses actions that are based entirely on a condition. It is implied that the action is possible but not certain.

The third si clause in French is as follows:

Si + Pluperfect, Past Conditional

Si j'avais eu le temps, je t'aurais appelé. (If I'd had time, I would've called you.)

When to use conditional (cont)

This si clause expresses a certain amount of regret. It's the idea that "should have" or "could have" expresses in English. As you can see from the above sentence, the past conditional is quite easy to form once you know the conditional and the passé composé.

Like the plus perfect or plus-que-parfait, the past conditional is a composed tense made up of the conditional of the auxiliary verb (être or avoir, depending on the lexical verb) and the past participle of the lexical verb.

Aside from the si clauses, which are the principal use of the conditional in French, you can also use the conditional to express politeness, particularly with verbs expressing desire, like vouloir or aimer.

Je veux un sandwich. (I want a sandwich.)

Je voudrais un sandwich. (I would like a sandwich.)

J'aime le cinéma. (I like the movie theater.)

J'aimerais venir au cinéma avec vous. (I would like to come to the cinema with you.)

Peux-tu me donner un stylo ? (Can you give me a pen?)

Pourrais-tu me donner un stylo ? (Could you give me a pen?)

You can also use the conditional to give advice:

Tu dois faire tes devoirs tout de suite. (You must do your homework right now.)

Tu devrais faire tes devoirs tout de suite. (You should do your homework right now.)

When to NOT use the conditional

Don't use the conditional with all verbs to "be polite"

The politeness aspect of the conditional should really only be used with verbs expressing desire, like vouloir, aimer, désirer or with verbs that incite action from the other person—like pouvoir or devoir. Other than these verbs, err on the side of caution when considering the conditional to express politeness.

Don't use the conditional immediately after si

Irregulars in the Conditional

There are several irregular roots in the future simple; these irregular roots are the same in the conditional. Here are just a few:

Aller: ir-

Avoir: aur-

Devoir: devr-

Etre: ser-

Faire: fer-

Falloir: faudr-

Pleuvoir: pleuvr-

Pouvoir: pourr-

Savoir: saur-

Tener: tiendr-

Venir: viendr-

Voir: verr-

Vouloir: voudr-

courir: courr-

envoyer: enverr-

mourir: mourr-

obtenir: obtiendr-

recevoir: recevr-

To these roots, add the same endings as with the imperfect:

Je -ais

Tu -ais

Il/Elle/On -ait

Nous -ions

Vous -iez

Ils/Elles -aient

Conjugation: Past Conditional

The French past conditional, also called the conditional perfect, is a compound tense formed with the auxiliary verbs avoir or être in the present conditional and the past participle.

Uses of the conditionnel passé consist of expressing regret for an action that never occurred and hypothetical situations of events that did or didn't take place. J'aurais dû + infinitive indicates "I should have".

The past conditional also has a journalistic use for events that allegedly or reportedly occurred.

The past conditional is also used to express hypothetical past situations. The grammatical structure is: If A had (not) happened (plus-que-parfait), then B would have (not) happened (past conditional). Ex's: "J'aurais mangé" (I would have eaten) and "Je serais allé" (I would have gone).

J'aurais + past participle

Tu aurais +pp

il aurait +pp

nous aurions +pp

vous auriez +pp

ils auraient +pp

//

je serais +pp

tu serais +pp

il serait +pp

nous serions +pp

vous seriez +pp

ils seraient +pp



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