

The Third Conditional

We use the third conditional to talk about unreal past events.

- *I could have got into that dress if I hadn't eaten so much. (but I did eat too much, so I couldn't get into that dress)*
- *If he had realised the traffic light was red, he would have stopped. (but it's too late now)*
- *You wouldn't have missed the train if you had run. (but he didn't run so he missed the train)*
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The structure of the third conditional is:

If + Past Perfect -would/could/might have + past participle

- *If I had known him earlier, I would have warned him.*
- *If we hadn't been busy last night, we could have joined you for dinner.*
- *If Martin had written that email, he might have used more courteous phrases.*

The "if clause" doesn't necessarily have to be in the first place.

- *We could have saved more money if we had spent it more reasonably.*
- *Sandra could have passed out if she hadn't had a glass of water.*

The difference between the second and the third conditionals

Both the second and third conditionals express unreal situations and events. We use the second conditional to talk about an unreal situation in the present and imagine its results in the present or future. However, the third conditional describes a situation that didn't exist or didn't happen in the past.

- *If you learned more, you could pass that exam. (he still has a chance to pass the exam)*
- *If you had learned more, you could have passed that exam. (it's all in the past, we can only imagine what would have happened)*

Do the exercise to perfect your knowledge:

1. I _____ at home if I _____ you were coming. (be, know)
2. Maria _____ sacked if she _____ so irresponsible. (be, not be)
3. If it _____ all day, we _____ a picnic in the park. (not rain, can have)
4. I _____ at the meeting if I _____ this morning. (be, not oversleep)
5. You _____ me a lot of trouble if you _____ me where they were. (save, tell)
6. If you _____ to my directions, you _____ lost. (listen, not get lost)
7. I _____ longer if I _____ in such a hurry. (stay, not be)
8. If we _____ that you could drive, we _____ you. (know, call)
9. I _____ on time for dinner if I _____ the train. (be, not miss)
10. He _____ injured if he _____ a helmet. (not be, wear)

Answer key:

1. I would have been at home if I had known you were coming.
2. Maria wouldn't have been sacked if she hadn't been so irresponsible.
3. If it hadn't rained all day, we could have had a picnic in the park.
4. I would have been at the meeting if I hadn't overslept this morning.
5. You would have saved me a lot of trouble if you had told me where they were.
6. If you had listened to my directions, you wouldn't have got lost.
7. I would have stayed longer if I hadn't been in such a hurry.
8. If we had known that you could drive, we would have called you.
9. I would have been on time for dinner if I hadn't missed the train.
10. He wouldn't have been injured if he had worn a helmet.