1 Second conditional

The second conditional is used to imagine present or future situations that are impossible or unlikely in reality.

If we had a garden, we could have a cat.
If I won a lot of money, I'd buy a big house in the country.
I wouldn't worry if I were you.

The structure is usually: *if* + past simple >> + *would* + infinitive.

When *if* is followed by the verb *be,* it is grammatically correct to say *if I were*, *if he were*, *if she were* and *if it were*. However, it is also common to hear these structures with *was*, especially in the *he/she* form.

If I were you, I wouldn't mention it.
If she was prime minister, she would invest more money in schools.
He would travel more if he was younger.

2 Wishes: 'wish' and 'if only'

We use *wish* and *if only* to talk about things that we would like to be different in either the present or the past. *If only* is usually a bit stronger than *wish*.

In the present

We can use *wish/if only* + a past form to talk about a present situation we would like to be different.

I wish you didn't live so far away.
If only we knew what to do.
He wishes he could afford a holiday.

In the past

We can use *wish/if only* + a past perfect form to talk about something we would like to change about the past.

They wish they hadn't eaten so much chocolate. They're feeling very sick now.
If only I'd studied harder when I was at school.

3 The future: degrees of certainty

We can show how certain we are about the future by using modal verbs and other expressions.

Modal verbs and adverbs

We can use modal verbs (such as *will*, *might*, *may* or *could*) and adverbs (such as *probably* and *definitely*) to show how sure we are.

Very sure

*People **will definitely** work from home more in the future.*
*Robots **definitely won't** replace all human jobs.*

Sure

*Donna **will** really enjoy this film.*
*You **won't** regret it.*

Almost sure

*We'**ll probably** finish the project by tomorrow.*
*He **probably won't** have enough time.*

Not sure

*I **might go** to the party, but I'm not sure yet.*
*He hasn't studied much, so he **might not** pass the exam.*

When you are not sure, we can also use *may*, *could* and *may not*. However, we don't usually use *could not* to talk about the future.

4 Future forms: 'will', 'be going to' and present continuous

We use different verb forms to talk about our plans for the future, depending on what kind of plan it is: a spontaneous plan, a pre-decided plan or an arrangement.

will

We use *will* to talk about spontaneous plans decided at the moment of speaking.

Oops, I forgot to phone Mum! I'll do it after dinner.
I can't decide what to wear tonight. I know! I'll wear my green shirt.
There's no milk. I'll buy some when I go to the shops.

going to

We use *going to* to talk about plans decided before the moment of speaking.

I'm going to phone Mum after dinner. I told her I'd call at 8 o'clock.
I'm going to wear my black dress tonight.
I'm going to go to the supermarket after work. What do we need?

Present continuous

We usually use the present continuous when the plan is an arrangement – already confirmed with at least one other person and we know the time and place.

I'm meeting Jane at 8 o'clock on Saturday.
We're having a party next Saturday. Would you like to come?

We often use the present continuous to ask about people's future plans.

Are you doing anything interesting this weekend?

5 Reported speech: questions

A reported question is when we tell someone what another person asked. To do this, we can use direct speech or indirect speech.

direct speech: *'Do you like working in sales?' he asked.*
indirect speech: *He asked me if I liked working in sales.*

In indirect speech, we change the question structure (e.g. *Do you like*) to a statement structure (e.g. *I like*).

We also often make changes to the tenses and other words in the same way as for reported statements (e.g. *have done → had done, today → that*

day). You can learn about these changes on the [Reported speech 1 – statements](#) page.

Yes/no questions

In *yes/no* questions, we use *if* or *whether* to report the question. *If* is more common.

'Are you going to the Helsinki conference?'

- *He asked me if I was going to the Helsinki conference.*

'Have you finished the project yet?'

- *She asked us whether we'd finished the project yet.*

Questions with a question word

In *what*, *where*, *why*, *who*, *when* or *how* questions, we use the question word to report the question.

'What time does the train leave?'

- *He asked me what time the train left.*

'Where did he go?'

- *She asked where he went.*

Reporting verbs

The most common reporting verb for questions is *ask*, but we can also use verbs like *enquire*, *want to know* or *wonder*.

'Did you bring your passports?'

- *She wanted to know if they'd brought their passports.*

'When could you get this done by?'

- *He wondered when we could get it done by.*