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The conditional is used to refer to hypothetical events. It occurs in polite requests and most frequently with **if** clauses. In French, it is called **le conditionnel** and is most often translated by **would** in English.

formation

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).

 **jouer 'to play'**

je jouer ais , I would play	nous jouer ions , we would play
tu jouer ais , you would play	vous jouer iez , you would play
il, elle / on jouer ait , he, she (it) /would play	ils / elles jouer aient , they would play

The above formation works for **-er** verbs (aimer, j'aimer**ais**), **-ir** verbs (finir, je finir**ais**) and **-re** verbs (vendre, je vendr**ais**). Remember to drop the final **e** from the infinitive stem of **-re** verbs .

pronunciation


The **r** in the stem is representative of the conditional, as well as the future. Only the difference in the pronunciation of the endings distinguishes the two. The difference between the **je** forms is subtle. Can you hear the differences? Note also how the **e** of the infinitive of **-er** verbs changes in the future and conditional forms.

 **regarder 'to look at'**

future	conditional
je regarder ai	je regarder ais
tu regarder as	tu regarder ais
il / elle regarder a	il / elle regarder ait
nous regarder ons	nous regarder ions
vous regarder ez	vous regarder iez
ils / elles regarder ont	ils / elles regarder aient

irregular stems

Verbs with irregular future stems use the same irregular stems in the conditional. Here is a list of the most common irregular stems:



infinitive	stem	conditional	translation
aller	ir-	j'irais	I would go
avoir	aur-	j'aurais	I would run

courir	courr-	je courrais	I would run
devoir	devr-	je devrais	I would be obliged to
envoyer	enverr-	j'enverrais	I would send
être	ser-	je serais	I would be
faire	fer-	je ferais	I would do
falloir	fauodr-	il faudrait	it would be necessary
mourir	mouorr-	je mourrais	I would die
obtenir	obtiendr-	j'obtiendrais	I would obtain
pleuvoir	pleuvr-	il pleuvrait	it would rain
pouvoir	pourr-	je pourrais	I would be able
recevoir	recevr-	je recevrais	I would receive
savoir	saur-	je saurais	I would know
tenir	tiendr-	je tiendrais	I would hold
venir	viendr-	je viendrais	I would come
voir	verr-	je verrais	I would see
vouloir	vouodr-	je voudrais	I would want

verbs with spelling changes

Some verbs with spelling changes in the present form their future/conditional stem regularly. These include verbs like *préférer*, *espérer*, *manger*, and *commencer*.



infinitive	stem	conditional	translation
préférer	préférer-	je préférerais	I would prefer
espérer	espérer-	j'espérerais	I would hope
manger	manger-	je mangerais	I would eat
commencer	commencer-	je commencerais	I would start

Verbs with spelling changes like *appeler*, *employer* and *acheter* add **-r** to the present of the **je** form to create their future stem.



present tense	stem	conditional	translation
j'appelle	appeller-	j'appellerais	I would call
j'emploie	emploier-	j'emploierais	I would use
j'achète	achèter-	j'achèterais	I would buy

uses

• wishes or requests

The conditional expresses potentiality. It is used to express a wish or a suggestion, to make a request, or to accept or extend invitations. It is less direct and more polite than the imperative. The verbs 'pouvoir', 'vouloir', and 'devoir' are often found in the conditional to diminish the strength of a command. In most cases, the conditional is translated as meaning **would**



in English. However, **je pourrais** means 'I could', **je devrais** means 'I should' and **je voudrais** means 'I would like'. Also do not confuse 'would' in English meaning 'used to' which should be translated as an **imparfait** in French, and NOT as the conditional: A Paris, Joe-Bob allait au MacDo tous les jours. (In Paris, Joe-Bob would/used to go to McDonald's everyday).



Joe-Bob et Tammy se trouvent au restaurant où Edouard travaille comme serveur.

Edouard: Bonsoir Madame, Monsieur. **Aimeriez**-vous commander un apéritif pour commencer?

Tammy: Oh oui! **Pourrions**-nous avoir un Ricard et un Perrier? Ensuite, je **voudrais** une salade verte, s'il vous plaît.

Joe-Bob: Je veux un hamburger.

Edouard: Monsieur, vous **devriez** être plus poli dans ce restaurant, sinon, je **pourrais** oublier votre commande!

Joe-Bob and Tammy are at the restaurant where Edouard works as a waiter.

Edouard: Good evening, would you like to order drinks to start?

Tammy: Oh yes, could we have one Ricard and one Perrier? Then I would like a green salad, please.

Joe-Bob: I want a hamburger.

Edouard: Sir, you should be more polite in this restaurant, or else I could forget your order!

• hypothetical action

The conditional is used when making statements which are contrary to present facts. It expresses a hypothetical result which depends on (stated or implied) circumstances which do not exist. In order for the action expressed by the conditional to occur, something else must take place first. Note that the condition in the **si** or **if** clause, is always stated in the imparfait. (See '**si**' clauses for further examples.)



Tex et Joe-Bob regardent la télé. 'Le gros lot se monte à 30 millions de dollars. Que **feriez**-vous si vous **gagniez**?'

Tex: Moi, j'**écrirais** sans cesse des livres de philosophie.

Joe-Bob: Moi j'**achèterais** mon diplôme d'université.

Tex and Joe-Bob are watching television. 'The Lottery is at 30 million dollars. What would you do if you won?'

Tex: I would write philosophy books non-stop.

Joe-Bob: I would buy my university diploma.

• possibility or uncertainty

The conditional is also used to give information whose accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Journalists often use it to report events which are not known to be true.



Tammy et Bette regardent la télé. Soudain, leur programme préféré est interrompu et un commentateur annonce:

'Une tornade vient de s'abattre sur Hubbard, Texas. Il y **aurait** plusieurs victimes. Un tatou et un écureuil **seraient** gravement blessés. Restez avec nous, nous **devrions** avoir plus de détails d'ici quelques secondes ...'

Presque immédiatement, le téléphone sonne. Tammy répond: 'A ..., Allô?'

A l'autre bout, Tex dit: 'Tammy, c'est moi, Tex. Ne t'inquiète pas, on va très bien. Je rentrerai bientôt.'

Tammy and Bette are watching television. Suddenly, their favorite program is interrupted and a commentator announces:

'A tornado just struck in Hubbard, Texas. Allegedly, there are several casualties. An armadillo and a squirrel seem to be seriously wounded. Stay with us, we should have more details in a few seconds ...'

Almost immediately, the phone rings. Tammy answers: 'He ..., Hello?'

At the other end, Tex says: 'Tammy, it's me Tex. Don't worry we're fine. I'll be home soon.'

• **reported speech** (indirect discourse)

In addition, the conditional is used to represent the future in relation to a narration in the past when reported speech is used to tell what someone said.



Tex a dit qu'il **rentre**rait bientôt.

Tex said he would be home soon.



texercises

fill in the blanks

Give the conditional of the verb indicated in parentheses.

1. Tex: Je _____ un café, s'il vous plaît. (vouloir)
2. Tex: Edouard et moi, nous _____ bien envie d'une petite liqueur. (avoir)
3. Bette: Si ça ne te fais rien, je _____ aller au concert. (préférer)
4. Tammy: Tex, c'est l'anniversaire de Fiona. Tu _____ lui offrir un cadeau. (devoir)
5. Tammy: Il _____ vraiment que Tex travaille. (falloir)
6. Bette: On _____ beaucoup rencontrer Tex. (aimer)
7. Joe-Bob: _____ - vous me prêter de l'argent? (pouvoir)
8. Tex: J' _____ beaucoup des excuses. (apprécier)
9. Edouard: Vous _____ aimable de fermer la porte. (être)
10. Trey: Tex, tu _____ faire plus de sport. (devoir)
11. Tex: Vous _____ intérêt à faire attention. (avoir)
12. Tammy et Bette _____ vivre en France. (aimer)