

LATIN CONDITIONALS

A conditional is a complex sentence made up of two parts: an **if** clause (called the condition or protasis, if you want to impress an English teacher), and a **then** clause (the consequence, or apodosis... or just the main clause). The **if** sets up a hypothetical state or condition, and the **then** describes a resulting action which will happen, supposing the condition is a fact. (In Latin, the **if** [*sī*] is nearly always stated, the **then** [*deinde*, etc.] usually isn't). Rule of thumb: don't supply **if** in your translation where *sī* or *nisi* is not in the Latin, and don't leave **if** out of your translation where *sī* is present in the Latin. (*nisi* can be translated "if... not" or "except" or "unless".)

1. GENERAL (Simple Fact) CONDITIONS:

Latin Tenses: the verb of the **if** clause in the indicative (any tense); the verb of the **then** clause can be any tense of indicative or imperative.

Translation: translate the tenses literally.

Sense: The events described may happen (in the present, past or future) or may not.

sī equus remedium **cēlat**, mordē equum!

If the horse **hides** the remedy, bite the horse!

sī equus remedium **cēlāverit**,
ego mordēbō equum.

If the horse **will have concealed** the remedy,
I will bite the horse.

sī equus remedium **cēlābat**,
Brūtus momordit equum.

If the horse **was concealing** the remedy,
Brutus bit the horse.

2. FUTURE-LESS-VIVID (Should/Would) CONDITION:

Latin Tenses: the verbs of both clauses will be in the present subjunctive.

Translation: translate the verb of the **if** clause as "should VERB"; translate the verb of the **then** clause as "would VERB."

Sense: The events described may happen in the future or may not. (The use of the subjunctive, though, makes the possibility a little more remote.)

sī equus remedium **cēlet**,
ego equum mordeam.

If the horse **should hide** the remedy,
I would bite the horse.

3 (a). **PRESENT CONTRARY-TO-FACT CONDITION:**

Latin Tenses: the verbs of both clauses will be in the imperfect subjunctive.

Translation: translate the verb of the **if** clause as “were VERBing” or “VERBed”; translate the verb of the **then** clause as “would VERB”.

Sense: The events described are not happening, but the action of the main clause would be happening if the action in the condition (the **if** clause) **were happening**.

sī equus remedium **cēlāret**,
equum mordērem.

If the horse **were hiding** the remedy,
I would bite the horse.
(But: he’s not, so I don’t.)

3 (b.) **PAST CONTRARY-TO-FACT CONDITION**

Latin Tenses: the verbs of both clauses will be in the pluperfect subjunctive.

Translation: translate the verb of the **if** clause as “had VERBed”; translate the verb of the **then** clause as “would have VERBed”.

Sense: The events described did not happen, but the action of the main clause would have happened if the action in the condition (the **if** clause) **had happened**.

sī equus remedium **cēlāvisset**,
equum momordissem.

If the horse **had hidden** the remedy,
I would have bitten the horse.
(But: he didn’t, so I didn’t.)