

TEACHER'S CORNER – FEBRUARY 2015

CONDITIONALS

Conditionals can be a troublesome grammar point for EFL learners. However, teachers should invest time in exploring this topic because conditionals allow us to express a wide variety of English language functions. To name a few, we can use conditionals to state facts, to give advice, to discuss and analyze future and past situations, and to talk about hypothetical situations. This month we'll take a closer look at some of the ways conditionals function and how we can provide students meaningful (and fun!) ways to practice using these grammatical forms.

To begin, examine these conditional sentences and their functions. What do the sentences have in common?

- *If water reaches 212° Fahrenheit (100° Celsius), it boils.* (fact)
- *If I were you, I wouldn't waste money buying junk food.* (giving advice)
- *She will pass the class if she studies and does her homework.* (talking about the future)
- *You would have caught the bus if you had woken up 15 minutes earlier.* (analyzing the past)
- *If Maria were president, she would pass more laws to protect the environment.* (talking about a hypothetical situation)

Although these sentences perform different functions, they share a common feature: all conditionals include a cause and effect relationship. The "cause" part of each sentence describes a condition or situation. This part of a conditional is called the "condition clause," and usually begins with the word "if" (or an equivalent phrase like *as long as* or *in the event that*). The "effect" part of a conditional is called the "result clause," which explains an outcome that is dependent on the condition described in the other part of the sentence.

If you mix red paint and blue paint together, you get purple paint.

condition clause (cause) + **result clause (effect)**

As you saw in the sentence list above, the condition clause and the result clause can be placed in any order. For example, look at Sentences A and B below. Do they have the same meaning?

A: *She will pass the class if she studies and does her homework.*

B: *If she studies and does her homework, she will pass the class.*

Notice that if the condition clause comes first, it is followed by a comma (Sentence B). A comma is not needed when the result clause is first in a conditional sentence (Sentence A).

Some teachers may already be familiar with several ways of classifying conditional structures, such as the zero, first, second, and third conditional or systems that focus on real and unreal states along with the conditional's time or function (e.g., unreal past conditional, timeless factual conditional). Don't worry! Advanced knowledge of conditional classification schemes isn't needed to successfully use this month's activities in your classroom.