

Zero Conditional

The zero conditional is used to express something that is scientifically proven or something that is generally true. It is also used to convey rules and communicate instructions.

In a zero conditional sentence the conditional clause can use a variety of present verb forms but the result clause must use the present simple or the imperative form of the verb. The result clause can also use modal verbs.

If/When/Unless clause (condition)

If /When/Unless this thing happens

Main clause (result)

that thing happens.

In a zero conditional sentence, the clauses are interchangeable but pay close attention to where the comma goes. Only use a comma if the conditional clause comes first.

If you **freeze** water, it **turns** to ice.

Water **turns** to ice if you **freeze** it.

When you heat ice, it **melts**.

Ice **melts** when you heat it.

Unless you water the flowers, they die.

Flowers die unless you water them.

If you **raise your hand**, you can ask a question.

You can ask a question if you **raise your hand**.

Exercise 1: below are examples of different categories the zero conditional can be used for. Show students the categories one by one and have them, in groups, brainstorm more examples following the rules for the zero conditional.

Classroom rules:

1. If you want to ask a question, you must raise your hand.
2. You must apologise to the whole class if your phone rings.

(3 minutes to brainstorm more classroom rules)

Scientific facts and general truths:

1. If you eat too much junk food, you gain weight.
2. Water turns to ice if you freeze it.

(3 minutes to brainstorm more scientific facts and general truths)

Cause and effect:

1. When you push this button, the curtains open.
2. They pass the exams if they study long hours.

(3 minutes to brainstorm more cause and effect)

Routines:

1. When I work late, I drink lots of coffee.
2. She wears her pink running shoes when she runs.

(3 minutes to brainstorm more routines)

Instructions:

1. If he contacts you, tell me immediately.
2. Finish the task alone if no one is free to help you.

(3 minutes to brainstorm more instructions)

I call my boss	He wears his lucky socks	If you burn more calories than you take in	A white flame appears	Energy levels drop
You must return it at the end of class	When you finish the annual report	If I'm late	When his team plays	Unless they study
You lose weight	The projector won't turn off	When you add magnesium to water	When it rains	Unless you press the button twice
I take an umbrella	Students fail	If you borrow a pencil	Unless you exercise	Give it to the accountant

Exercise 2: print out and cut up a set of cards for each group and instruct them to match two clauses to make zero conditional sentences.

As an extra activity, have each group work together to write the sentences accurately, focusing on the correct punctuation.

For higher level students or groups that finish quickly, have them write the other possible way each sentence could be written.

Exercise 3: correct the errors in the following zero conditional sentences.

1. If students mess in class the teacher will punish them.
2. When he went running, he wore his old shorts.
3. Unless plants had enough sunlight and water they wither.
4. Water will turn to ice unless you freeze it.
5. If employees finish their work quickly, they will go home early?

Exercise 4: multiple choice – choose the correct alternative.

1. If you go to bed early,
 - a. you felt more rested in the morning.
 - b. you feel more rested in the morning.
2. When he gets up on Saturday mornings,
 - a. he watches cartoons.
 - b. he's going to watch cartoons.

3. If you heat water to 100 degrees,
 - a. it melts.
 - b. it will melt.

4. When I'm in the meeting,
 - a. don't interrupting me for anything.
 - b. don't interrupt me for anything.

5. In case of an emergency,
 - a. this number you will call.
 - b. call this number.

6. When you receive the contract,
 - a. send it to me quickly.
 - b. you quickly sent it.

7. If you visit Beijing,
 - a. you should go to the Forbidden City.
 - b. you should have gone to the Forbidden City.

8. When I'm studying,
 - a. I will need coffee.
 - b. I need coffee.

9. Unless you finish your work,
 - a. don't to go home.
 - b. don't go home.

10. If you fly with this airline,
- a. you will get a free meal.
 - b. you get a free meal.

Exercise 5: multiple choice – choose the correct verbs that fit the zero conditional sentences below

1. When he _____, _____ him I'm looking for him.

- a. arrives
- b. will arrive
- c. telling
- d. tell

2. _____ enough water when you _____ exercise.

- a. drinks
- b. drink
- c. doing
- d. do

3. If they _____ to London, _____ them to visit me.

- a. come
- b. came
- c. tells
- d. tell

4. When I _____, I always _____ to heavy metal music.

- a. jogging
- b. jog
- c. listen
- d. listening

5. I can't _____ unless I _____ my luck socks.

- a. playing
- b. play
- c. wear
- d. wore

6. When the teacher _____, you must _____.

- a. talk
- b. talks
- c. listens
- d. listen

7. She _____ hungry all day when she doesn't _____ a big breakfast.

- a. feeling
- b. feels
- c. eats
- d. eat

8. When we _____ the dog to the park, he _____ lost.

- a. taking
- b. take
- c. getting
- d. gets

9. If babies _____ hungry, they _____.

- a. were
- b. are
- c. cries
- d. cry

10. When I _____ spicy food, my mouth _____.

- a. eat
- b. eating
- c. will burn
- d. burns