

# The Conditional Tense

Frequently, the conditional is used to express probability, possibility, wonder or conjecture, and is usually translated as would, could, must have or probably.

The student said that he would study one more hour. (probability, possibility)

What time could it have been? (wonder, conjecture)

He must have been at home. (wonder, conjecture)

We were probably busy when you called. (probability, possibility)

NOTE: when "would" is used in the sense of a repeated action in the past, the imperfect is used.

To conjugate regular -ar, -er and -ir verbs in the conditional, simply add one of the following to the infinitive:

ía

ías

ía

íamos

íais

ían

Here are all three regular conditional verb forms together:

HABLAR	COMER	VIVIR
hablaría	comería	viviría
hablarías	comerías	vivirías
hablaría	comería	viviría
hablaríamos	comeríamos	viviríamos
hablaríais	comeríais	viviríais
hablarían	comerían	vivirían

Here are the previous examples, translated to Spanish.

**El alumno dijo que estudiaría una hora más.**

The student said that he would study one more hour.

**¿Qué hora sería?**

What time could it have been?

**Estaría en su casa.**

He must have been at home.

**Estaríamos ocupados cuando llamaste.**

We were probably busy when you called.

The same twelve common verbs that are irregular in the future tense are also irregular in the conditional tense. Their endings are regular, but their stems change in the same way they change in the future tense. Because the endings are the same as all other conditional tense verbs, we show only the “yo” form, and have underlined the irregular stem. We have also grouped them according to their patterns of change.

caber ..... yo cabría  
poner ..... yo pondría  
decir ..... yo diría  
haber ..... yo habría  
salir ..... yo saldría  
hacer ..... yo haría  
poder ..... yo podría  
tener ..... yo tendría  
querer ..... yo querría  
valer ..... yo valdría  
saber ..... yo sabría  
venir ..... yo vendría

Next, let’s look at some specific uses of the conditional.

To express speculation about the past:

**Aquél día correrían más de veinticinco kilómetros.**

That day they must have run more than 25 kilometers.

To express the future from the perspective of the past:

**Yo sabía que abrirían la tienda a las siete.**

I knew that they would open the store at seven o’clock.

To express hypothetical actions or events which may or may not occur:

**Sería interesante estudiar chino.**

It would be interesting to study Chinese.

To indicate what would happen were it not for some certain specific circumstance:

**Yo viajaría pero no tengo dinero.**

I would travel but I don’t have money.

For polite use to soften requests:

**Por favor, ¿podría decirme a qué hora abre la gasolinera?**

Could you please tell me what time the gas station opens?

To ask for advice:

**¿Cuál compraría Ud.?**

Which one would you buy?

For reported speech:

**Juan dijo que terminaría el trabajo.**

Juan said that he would finish the work.

To express what would be done in a particular situation:

**¿Hablarías inglés en España?**

Would you speak English in Spain?

**No. Hablaría español.**

No. I would speak Spanish.

Let's look at one more use of the conditional.

To express an action which is contrary to fact:

**Si yo tuviera tiempo, iría al cine esta noche.**

If I had time, I would go to the movies tonight.

NOTE: *This last example uses a verb tense you are not yet familiar with -- the imperfect subjunctive (tuviera).*

*This topic will be covered in depth in a later lesson.*

Finally, a few words need to be said to call attention to the contrasting uses of the future and the conditional. As previously stated, the conditional is used for conjecture and to express probability with regards to a past action, as in the following example:

**¿Qué hora sería?**

What time could it have been?

**Serían las cinco.**

It was probably five o'clock.

If, however, the conjecture or expression of probability is about the present, the future tense is used:

**¿Qué hora será?**

What time can it be?

**Serán las cinco.**

It is probably five o'clock.

With regards to reported speech, notice that if the main clause is in the past, the conditional is used.

**Juan dijo que terminaría el trabajo.**

Juan said that he would finish the work.

But if the main clause is in the present, the future is used.

**Juan dice que terminará el trabajo.**

Juan says that he will finish the work.

Let's add two flashcards for the conditional tense:

## Verb Flashcards

### 95. Conditional Tense

Infinitive + ending

(-ía, -ías, -ía, -íamos, -íais, -ían)

### 96. Conditional Tense Irregulars

caber..... yo cabría  
poner..... yo pondría  
decir..... yo dirría  
haber..... yo habría  
salir..... yo saldría  
hacer..... yo harría  
poder..... yo podría  
tener..... yo tendrría  
querer..... yo querrría  
valer..... yo valdrría  
saber..... yo sabrría  
venir..... yo vendrría