WHAT IS A CONDITIONAL SENTENCE?
Conditional sentences have two parts or clauses that give a condition in the dependent clause and a result in the independent clause. The condition clause usually contains an if statement. There are several different forms of conditional sentences that allow the writer to express various meanings using different tenses.

- Condition (if) clause + result clause

ZERO CONDITIONAL
The zero conditional uses the present tense in both clauses and is used to talk about something that is always or generally true. The present tense signifies that these actions are both possible and typical.

**Form:** If + simple present, simple present

- **Example 1:** If it **rains**, I **take** an umbrella with me to work.
- **Example 2:** If I **wake up** early, I always **read** in bed.

FIRST CONDITIONAL
The first conditional uses the present tense in the if clause and the future tense in the result clause. This form is used to talk about something that is a probable future result of a condition.

**Form:** If + simple present, will + base verb

- **Example 1:** If I **see** you later, I **will say** hello.
- **Example 2:** If I **don’t see** you later, I **won’t be able** to say hello.

SECOND CONDITIONAL
The second conditional uses the past tense in the if clause and a modal and base verb in the result clause. This form is used to talk about a hypothetical situation that cannot happen or is unlikely to happen.

**Form:** If + simple past, modal + base verb

- **Example 1:** If I **had** a million dollars, I **would buy** a large vacation home.
- **Example 2:** If I **were** you, I **wouldn’t wait** to study for the test.

Note: The condition and the result are not taking place in the past, but the past tense is used to indicate the unreal nature of the situation.

Schedule your online or in-person tutoring appointment today! (734) 432-5304 or writingcenter@madonna.edu
Additional online resources can be found at www.madonna.edu/owl

Rev. 07.01.2020
THIRD CONDITIONAL
The third conditional uses the past perfect in the if clause and a modal and present perfect in the result clause. This form is used to talk about a hypothetical situation in the past that did not happen – typically with an outcome that did not happen and is perhaps the opposite of what did happen.

Form: If + past perfect, modal + present perfect

Example 1: If it had rained last week, the plants would not have died.

Example 2: If I had finished college, I would have become a doctor.

MIXED CONDITIONAL
Mixed conditionals combine the second and third conditionals to present both an unreal condition either in the past or the present and an unreal result either in the past or the present.

The first form presents an unreal condition in the past that changes an unreal outcome in the present (the past changes the present).

Form 1: If + past perfect, modal + base

Example 1: If I had finished college, I would be a doctor now.

Example 2: If it had rained last week, the plants would be alive now.

The second form presents an unreal condition in the present that changes an unreal outcome in the past (the present changes the past).

Form 2: If + simple past, would/could + present perfect

Example 1: If I spoke louder, you would have heard me before.

Example 2: If you were nicer, you could have had more friends when you were younger.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON CONDITIONALS
There are a few aspects of conditionals that should be noted in order to make their use easier and clearer.

- Conditionals can be categorized as real and unreal. You can think of this as meaning possible or impossible. Zero and first conditionals are possible as they deal with things that are generally true or that could be true in the future. Second, third, and mixed conditionals are impossible because they are either hypothetical or concerned with events in the past that we cannot change.
  - Real Conditionals: Zero and First
  - Unreal Conditionals: Second, Third, and Mixed
- In the second conditional, the simple past is used in the condition clause. If the be verb is being used, it is typical to use were in more formal contexts. If you’re speaking informally though, was is more usual.
  - Formal: If I were you, I would drink more water.
  - Informal: If I was you, I wouldn’t stay out so late.