

“WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF...?” CHAIN STORIES

We can use conditionals to talk about hypothetical future events that are unlikely or impossible. Use this activity to practice or review unreal future conditionals (also called hypothetical conditionals or the second conditional). It can be used as a fun closing activity after a grammar presentation or as a review-oriented warm up activity.

LEVEL

Intermediate and above

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Speaking or writing, grammar (primary focus); listening or reading (secondary focus)

GOALS

Students will use oral or written conditionals to develop a series of related “cause and effect” events. The chain of events will create a short, often funny, story. Repetition in the story creation process enables students to both hear and practice the grammatical pattern several times.

MATERIALS

- Teacher: whiteboard, chalkboard, or large pieces of paper posted on the wall; markers or chalk; a clock or timing device
- Students: pencils or pens, blank writing paper, small cards or squares of blank paper (enough for each group of 4-8 students to have 10 cards)

PREPARATION

- Prepare a list of 5-7 unreal conditional prompts. The prompts can be unlikely or completely impossible. For example, your list may include prompts such as:
 - If I got a perfect score on my college entrance exams,
 - If I visited the United States next week,
 - If I won the lottery/a million dollars,
 - **If I were elected president,
 - If the internet was shut down tomorrow,
 - If aliens landed in my city,
 - If scientists found a way for humans to live for 150 years, ...

- Select the amount of time you want to devote to the activity. A warm up or brief review may take 10-15 minutes of class time; for a closing activity after an initial grammar presentation, you may want to dedicate 20-25 minutes to the activity.

** During the lesson you may wish to review or highlight that, according to prescriptive grammar rules, with this conditional form the verb “to be” becomes “were” for all persons in the condition clause (*If I were you, If John were 10 years older*, etc.). You can also explain that many American native English speakers no longer observe this rule, so students may also hear *If I was you, If John was 10 years older*, etc.

PROCEDURES – SPEAKING ACTIVITY

1. Write several prompts from your list on the board. To emphasize these events are hypothetical (not real in the present), ask students a few concept-checking questions, such as, “Have these things already happened? Are these events likely to happen in real life?”
2. Highlight that the situations all begin with “If” and elicit the verb tense used in the “if” clause/condition clause (simple past). Ask the class to brainstorm a few more hypothetical situations and add them to the list on the board. Aim to have a list of at least 10 situation prompts.
3. Create groups of 4-8 students, and ask student volunteers to pass out stacks of 10 blank cards to each group. Ask groups to copy 10 prompts onto their cards, and then to put the cards in a facedown pile.
4. Tell groups they will create chain stories using the hypothetical prompts. Model how to develop a chain story, writing the information below on the board as you go along:
 - Provide a prompt that isn’t on the list written on the board: *If I never needed to sleep,....*
 - Complete the prompt: *If I never needed to sleep, I would learn 10 languages.*
 - Explain how to create a “link the story chain” by using the result clause in the next sentence’s condition clause (in other words, by using the previous effect as the next cause): *If I learned 10 languages, I would travel the world.* Highlight how the verb in the old result clause changes from *would + verb* to the simple past tense, if desired.
 - Repeat the process to create 4 or 5 story links, eliciting some of the result clauses from the class. Your completed chain story might look like this:

If I never had to sleep, I would learn 10 languages.

If I learned 10 languages, I would travel the world.

If I traveled the world, I would eat lots of interesting food.

If I ate lots of interesting food, I would study cooking.

If I studied cooking, I would return to my country and be a famous chef.

5. Tell students that the person with the next birthday in each group will pick the first prompt. This person should pick a prompt card from the stack, read it out loud, and then verbally complete the conditional sentence following the model. The person to his or her right must complete the next link in the chain story by taking the previous result clause and turning it into a condition clause. For example: Person 1 - *If I won a million dollars, I’d buy a spaceship.* Person

2 – *If I bought a spaceship, I would take my friends to Mars.* Each person in the group must make a link in the chain story until everyone has contributed. When the story is complete, the person to the right of the original “story starter” will choose a new card to start the process again. Remind students that the stories can be serious or funny, but they should be classroom appropriate.

6. Tell students how long the activity will last, set the timer, and direct groups to begin.
7. To focus on grammatical accuracy, there are several ways to provide feedback during this activity. For example, group members can give each link in the story a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” based on whether or not they think the contribution is grammatically correct. Groups can discuss any observed problem areas and the contributor can try to correct his/her statement. Alternatively, you can monitor groups as they create their spoken chain stories, and collect examples of student errors for a delayed feedback and error correction session at the end of the activity.

PROCEDURES - WRITING ACTIVITY VARIATION

1. Follow steps 1-4 above.
2. After modeling how to create a chain story, explain that when the activity starts, each person will pick a different prompt from the facedown pile. Students will write their prompt on a piece of paper and complete the conditional sentence in writing.
3. Then everyone passes his/her paper in a clockwise direction. Each person then adds a link in the new story. Students then pass the papers clockwise again.
4. Continue the process until everyone receives his/her original paper back. The group members then read the different chain stories aloud.
5. To focus on grammatical accuracy, each student can check the story he/she started for errors during and after the read aloud. Group members can work together to address any questions about correct usage.