How to Use Zero Conditional Sentences

Zero conditional sentences express general truths—situations in which one thing *always* causes another. When you use a zero conditional, you're talking about a general truth rather than a specific instance of something. Consider the following examples:

If you don't brush your teeth, you get cavities.

If I am hungry. I eat.

When people smoke cigarettes, their health suffers.

When using the zero conditional, the correct tense to use in both clauses is the [simple present tense](#).

When people smoke cigarettes, their health will suffer.

Secondly, notice that the words *if* and *when* can be used interchangeably in these zero conditional sentences. This is because the outcome will always be the same, so it doesn't matter "if" or "when" it happens.

How to Use First Conditional Sentences

First conditional sentences are used to express situations in which the outcome is likely (but not guaranteed) to happen in the future. Look at the examples below:

If you rest, you will feel better.

If you set your mind to a goal, you'll eventually achieve it.

Note that we use the simple present tense in the if-clause and simple future tense in the main clause—that is, the clause that expresses the likely outcome. This is how we indicate that under a certain condition (as expressed in the if-clause), a specific result *will* likely happen in the future. Examine some of the common mistakes people make using the first conditional structure:

If you rest, you will feel better.

If she is thirsty, she will drink water.

Explanation: Use the [simple present tense](#) in the if-clause.

If you set your mind to a goal, you eventually achieve it.

If you set your mind to a goal, you'll eventually achieve it.

Explanation: Use the zero conditional (i.e., simple present + simple present) only when a certain result is guaranteed.

If there is a future result, use the first conditional (i.e., simple present + simple future).