

The Third Conditional

It is difficult to find something interesting to do with the third conditional of English, but students seem to find the exercise below fun to do.

Grammatically, the pattern is relatively straightforward: the so-called if-clause contains had + past participle and the so-called then-clause typically contains would or could + have + past participle (for examples, see the exercises).

Of course, to actually teach the pattern, it is much more effective to put some examples on the board and have them learn to imitate the pattern. For the majority of students, such technical descriptions of patterns would be completely useless.

In each story, there is a chain of events with one thing causing another, one after another. That is, each thing that happens depends on something that happened before. And, of course, if the first hadn't happened, the second wouldn't have either.

Do the first story together with the class. Guide them through it with questions like: If Encik Yahya hadn't eaten the bad apple, what wouldn't have happened? If he hadn't been sick, what wouldn't have happened? If he hadn't gone to the hospital, what wouldn't have happened? If he hadn't met Faridah, what wouldn't have happened? And, so on.

Warning: the last sentence in the Encik Yahya story is in the second conditional, not the third! The students are not asked to do anything with this pattern, but some of them may notice that it is different.

If the class needs the guidance, as you do the first story, write the answers on the board one above the other in a way that makes the pattern clear.

The second story can be done individually, in pairs, or as a class, depending upon how much help the students need. Have individual students read the stories when they are complete.

Student Worksheet

[if possible, picture of Encik Yahya eating an apple and thinking of Faridah]

This is a story about Encik Yahya.

Encik Yahya was never happy. One day, he ate a bad apple. It made him sick, so he had to go to hospital. At the hospital, he met a pretty nurse named Faridah. He fell in love with Faridah and they got married. If Encik Yahya hadn't eaten the bad apple, he wouldn't be so happy today.

Now, tell the story about Encik Yahya another way:

If he hadn't...

1. If Encik Yahya hadn't eaten the bad apple, he wouldn't have gotten sick.
2. If he _____, he _____ to hospital.
3. If he _____ to the hospital, he _____ Faridah.
4. If he _____ Faridah, he _____ in love with her.
5. If he _____ in love with her, he _____ her.
6. If he _____ her, he wouldn't be so happy now.

[if possible, draw a picture of little Nora pulling the fire alarm]

This is a story about little Nora.

If only she hadn't...

Little Nora had just learned to read. One day, she noticed some writing on a handle. The writing said, 'Pull'. Nora read the writing. She knew the word 'pull'. So she pulled on the handle. The fire alarm went off. That day, Nora got to see the fire engines. It was a very exciting day.

Nora's mother told the story another way:

1. If she hadn't noticed the writing, she wouldn't have read it.
2. If she _____ the writing, she _____ the handle.
3. If she _____ the handle, the fire alarm _____.
4. If the fire alarm _____, she wouldn't have seen the fire engines.
5. If Nora hadn't learned to read, she wouldn't have seen the fire engines — and, I _____ so embarrassed.