

Si-Clauses (Conditional Sentences) — Grammar Capsule

Companion reference for the Si-Clauses drill: the four patterns, the golden rule, and the traps.

Part 1 — The Rule

Every si-clause locks a specific condition tense to a specific result tense — never mix and match. There are three core patterns plus one mixed variant, and the whole system runs on this lock table:

Pattern	Si-clause (condition)	Result clause	Example
Type 1 — Réel/Probable	si + présent	futur	<i>Si tu pars maintenant, tu arriveras à l'heure.</i>
Type 2 — Hypothétique	si + imparfait	conditionnel présent	<i>Si j'avais plus de temps, je voyagerais davantage.</i>
Type 3 — Irréel du passé	si + plus-que-parfait	conditionnel passé	<i>S'il avait su, il aurait réagi différemment.</i>
Hypothèse mixte — past cause, present effect	si + plus-que-parfait	conditionnel présent	<i>Si elle avait économisé, elle serait riche aujourd'hui.</i>

The golden rule

Futur and conditionnel never follow si directly — in any of the four patterns. French schoolchildren learn it as «*les si n'aiment pas les -rais*»: after si, no -rai, no -rais. The tense that "feels" right to an English speaker goes in the OTHER clause.

Why English misleads you

Formal English matches French closely ("If I had known, I would have reacted"), so the trap isn't the textbook forms — it's colloquial English. "If I **would have** known..." is everywhere in spoken North American English, and it calques directly into **si j'aurais su* — which is also a famous native-French error, so you'll even hear it around you. The drill's Trap mode exists to burn out exactly this reflex: conditionnel after si sounds normal to your ear and is still wrong.

Legitimate variants of Type 1

Si + présent doesn't have to be answered by the futur. General truths and instructions are fine too: *S'il **pleut**, le match **est annulé*** (présent) · *Si tu **as faim**, **mange** quelque chose* (impératif). What the result clause can never be is futur-after-si's mirror image — the futur stays out of the si-clause itself.

The exception that proves the rule: si = "whether"

The golden rule applies to **hypothesis-si** only. When si means "whether" — an indirect question — futur and conditionnel are perfectly correct after it: *Je ne sais pas s'il **viendra*** · *Elle se demandait s'il **accepterait***. Quick test: if you can replace si with "whether" in English, the golden rule is off duty.

Small mechanics

Elision: si + il(s) contracts — *s'il*, *s'ils* — but si + elle(s) never does: *si elle*, never **s'elle*. **Order:** the clauses swap freely — *Je voyagerais davantage si j'avais plus de temps* — and the comma disappears when si comes second.

Nearby trap: *quand* DOES take the futur (*Quand tu arriveras...*); don't let the si rule bleed onto quand.

Ties to the rest of the site

Type 3 and the mixed pattern lean on the plus-que-parfait and conditionnel passé — the same auxiliary machinery drilled on the Vandertramp Plus-Que-Parfait and Conditionnel Passé pages, être-family agreement included (*si elle était partie, elle serait arrivée*). If those forms are slowing you down inside si-clauses, drill them there in isolation first.

Part 2 — Compare & Contrast Cheat Sheet

Classic traps — minimal pairs

You want to say	Right	Wrong (and why)
If I had known...	Si j' avais su...	Si j'aurais su — the colloquial-English calque; no conditionnel after hypothesis-si.
If you leave now, you'll arrive on time.	Si tu pars , tu arriveras ...	Si tu partiras — no futur after si; présent carries the future meaning.
If she had saved, she would be rich today.	Si elle avait économisé, elle serait riche.	...elle aurait été riche aujourd'hui — present-day result wants conditionnel présent (mixed pattern).
I don't know if he'll come.	Je ne sais pas s'il viendra .	Not a trap! si = "whether" here — futur is correct.
if she / if he	si elle / s'il	s'elle — elision only before il(s).
When you arrive...	Quand tu arriveras ...	Quand tu arrives (for a future event) — quand takes futur; only si refuses it.

Pattern recognition at speed

Hear the si-clause tense, and the result tense is already decided — that's the whole trick the drill automatizes:

You hear after si...	The result MUST be...	Meaning signature
présent	futur (or présent/impératif)	real, likely, still open
imparfait	conditionnel présent	hypothetical now — imagined, not past!
plus-que-parfait	conditionnel passé	counterfactual past — too late
plus-que-parfait + "aujourd'hui/maintenant" in the result	conditionnel présent	past cause still felt now

One nuance worth internalizing: si + imparfait is NOT about the past. *Si j'avais le temps* = "if I had time (now/in general)" — imagined present. The past-tense form is doing hypothetical work, exactly like English "if I had time." The actually-past pattern is Type 3, with the plus-que-parfait.