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IF

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abbr.
intermediate frequency

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if ⓘ (if)

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conj.

1.
 - a. In the event that: *If I were to go, I would be late.*
 - b. Granting that: *If that is true, what should we do?*
 - c. On the condition that: *She will play the piano only if she is paid.*
 2. Although possibly; even though: *It is a handsome if useless trinket.*
 3. Whether: *Ask if he plans to come to the meeting.*
 4. Used to introduce an exclamatory clause, indicating a wish: *If they had only come earlier!*
- n.*
A possibility, condition, or stipulation: *There will be no ifs, ands, or buts in this matter.*

[Middle English, from Old English *gif*; see *i-* in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

Usage Note: Many conditional (*if ... then*) constructions seem bewilderingly picky about which tenses, moods, and auxiliaries may go into them, particularly those that have to do with a counterfactual or make-believe world—one that the writer thinks is likely to be false but whose implications are worth exploring. But the grammatical requirements for such counterfactual sentences are quite straightforward: 1. The *if*-clause must have a verb in the conditional subjunctive mood (which many linguists call by the Latin name *irrealis* to distinguish it from the ordinary English subjunctive). When referring to situations in the present, this mood is identical to the preterite or past-tense form (*If you danced better ...*) except for the verb *be*, whose *irrealis* is *were* rather than *was* (*If he were rich ...*). When a writer wants to refer to a situation that hypothetically could have occurred in the past, a more remote past form must be used—the past perfect or the pluperfect (*If you had danced better ...*; *If he had been rich ...*). 2. The *then*-clause must contain *would* or a similar modal auxiliary such as *could*, *should*, or *might*. A large percentage of the Usage Panel disapproves of past counterfactual constructions using *did* rather than *had*: in 2011, 74 percent disliked *If I didn't have my seatbelt on, I'd be dead*, and 89 percent found it unacceptable to say *If he didn't come to America, our team never would have won the championship*. Forms using *would have* are somewhat more acceptable: the sentence *If she would have only listened to me, this never would have happened* was acceptable to 33 percent of the Panel in 2016. · When the situation described by an *if* clause is not presupposed to be false, that clause must contain an indicative verb: *If Kevin was out sick yesterday, he will probably work late today*. Note also that the presence of the modal verb *would* in the main clause should not be taken as a sign that the verb in the *if* clause must be in the subjunctive, if the content of that clause is not presupposed to be false: *He would always call the office if he was (not were) going to be late for work*. · According to the traditional rule, the subjunctive is not used following verbs such as *ask* or *wonder* in *if* clauses that express indirect questions, even if the content of the question is presumed to be contrary to fact: *We wondered if dinner was (not were) included in the room price*. · With all deference to the traditional rules, it should be

noted that a survey of the prose of reputable writers over the past 200 years would reveal a persistent tendency to use the indicative *was* where the traditional rule would require the subjunctive *were*. A sentence beginning *If I was the only boy in the world*, while not strictly correct, is wholly unremarkable. · In informal writing both *if* and *whether* are standard in their use to introduce a clause indicating uncertainty after a verb such as *ask*, *doubt*, *know*, *learn*, or *see*: *We shall soon learn whether (or if) it is true*. In such contexts, however, the use of *if* can sometimes create ambiguities. Depending on the intended meaning, the sentence *Let her know if she is invited* might be better paraphrased as *Let her know whether she is invited* or *If she is invited, let her know*. · When used as a coordinator, the phrase *if not* always signals a contrast, but it can have almost contradictory meanings, depending on the context. Sometimes it can mean “but not,” as in *She won her team's admiration, if not its award, for her performance in the playoffs* and *The board was encouraged, if not convinced, by the budgetary projections*. At other times, especially when there is a comparison of two adjectives or noun phrases in which the second represents a significant increase in degree above the first, *if not* usually means “and even,” as in *This job will be difficult, if not impossible* and *The law practice includes clients from all over the state, if not the country*. Since many sentences of this kind can be interpreted one way or the other, it is important that the context make clear what sort of contrast is being indicated by *if not*. See Usage Notes at [doubt](#), [should](#), [wish](#).

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

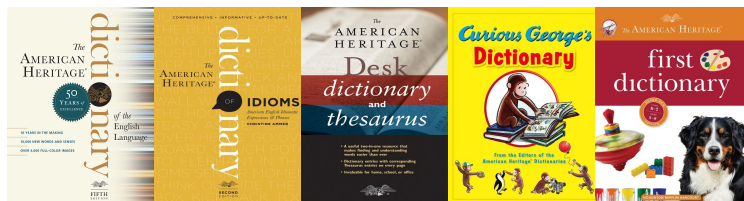
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