

Conditionals without wenn

— UNEINGELEITETE KONDITIONALSÄTZE

A German conditional clause can drop wenn and put the conjugated verb first instead: *Hätte ich Zeit, würde ich kommen.*

You can build a conditional (if-) clause without “wenn” by moving the conjugated verb to first position.

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01 00:15

Right now: setting a condition by putting the verb first

SHORTCUT ⚡ In German you can drop the conjunction **wenn** (if) and build the conditional clause by putting the **conjugated verb first**. This structure is usually used with Konjunktiv II (*hätte, wäre, würde*).

✓ **Hätte** ich Zeit, würde ich kommen.

Had I the time, I would come. (Wenn ich Zeit hätte...)

✓ **Sollte** es regnen, bleiben wir zu Hause.

Should it rain, we'll stay home. (Wenn es regnen sollte...)

This structure looks like a question, but it isn't one. A comma joins the two clauses, and the second (main) clause always starts with a verb or with **so/dann**.

02 01:30

You already do this in English — the same trick

English does this too, in slightly formal speech: “*If I had* the time” becomes “*Had I* the time”, “*If you should* have questions” becomes “*Should you* have questions”, “*If I were* rich” becomes “*Were I* rich”. The “if” disappears and the verb jumps to the front. In German the move is far more common — and once **wenn** is gone, the word order **has** to change.

WITH WENN	WITHOUT WENN
Wenn ich Geld hätte, . . .	Hätte ich Geld, . . .
Wenn er nicht gekommen wäre, . . .	Wäre er nicht gekommen, . . .
Wenn Sie Fragen haben, . . .	Haben Sie Fragen, . . .

As you can see, **wenn** drops out and the conjugated verb from the very end (**hätte/wäre/haben**) moves to the front.

- ✓ **Wüsste** ich die Antwort, würde ich sie dir sagen.
If I knew the answer, I would tell you.

03 02:45

Table: three common uses

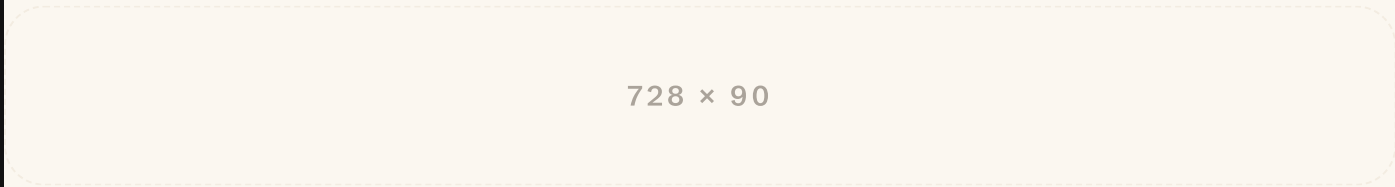
You can use conditionals without wenn anywhere, but you will meet them most often in these three situations:

USE	EXAMPLE	MEANING
Konjunktiv II	Wäre ich reich, . . .	If I were rich . . .
Regret about the past	Hätte ich das gewusst, . . .	If I had known that . . .
Sollte (possibility)	Sollte er anrufen, . . .	Should he call . . .

The “sollte” pattern (“in case it happens that ...”) in particular is a favourite in formal correspondence.

- ✓ **Sollten** Sie Fragen haben, melden Sie sich.
Should you have any questions, get in touch.

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04 03:45

The main-clause trap

- ✓ **Hätte** ich Zeit, **würde** ich kommen.
Correct. The second clause starts with the verb.



TRAP

Starting the second clause with the subject

When the condition starts with a verb, in standard German the main clause after the comma starts with a **verb** too (or with “so/dann”). Starting it with the subject is heard now and then in speech, but in writing and in exams it counts as wrong.

✗ **Hätte ich Zeit, ~~ich~~ würde kommen.**

Wrong in standard German: the second clause doesn't start with the subject. You may hear it in speech, but don't write it.

✓ **Hätte ich Zeit, **dann** würde ich kommen.**

Correct. “dann” or “so” can also go in between.

The reason is the same as in the weil vs. denn logic: because the first clause counts as a subordinate clause, it occupies position 1 of the main clause. So the verb has to come in position 2.

05 04:30

The part nobody tells you: using “so” instead of “dann”

If you are writing a formal email (B2 Schreiben), use **so** instead of **dann** to connect the two clauses. It gives you the image of someone who has mastered business language (Geschäftssprache).

Sollten Sie Fragen haben, dann rufen Sie mich an.

Not wrong, but everyday language.

✓ **Sollten Sie Fragen haben, **so** rufen Sie mich an.**

Much more professional and formal.

In writing, a verb-first conditional always looks more elegant than the standard sentence built with **wenn**.

06 BUILD

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TIPS

Know this before the test

The core of the topic in three lines, then the mistakes people make most often.

01

wenn drops out, the
conjugated verb moves
to the front

Conditional clauses without
wenn always start with the
conjugated verb.

Wäre das Wetter schön, ...

02

The main clause starts
with a verb or with
so/dann

No subject after the
comma: the verb comes
directly (or so/dann + verb).

Hätte ich Zeit, würde ich
dir helfen.

03

Sollte for possibility

For the meaning "in case ...
should happen", the verb
sollten moves to the front.

Sollte er anrufen, sag ihm
Bescheid.

✗ ~~Hätte ich das gewusst, ich wäre
nicht gekommen.~~

✓ Hätte ich das gewusst, wäre ich
nicht gekommen.

In the main clause after the comma the verb
(wäre) has to stay in second position — the
whole condition counts as position 1.

✗ ~~Wenn hätte ich Zeit, würde
ich kommen.~~

✓ Hätte ich Zeit, würde ich kommen.

With wenn the verb goes last (Wenn ich Zeit
hätte). Without wenn the verb goes first
(Hätte ich Zeit).

06 05:00

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Finish the topic: take the full test

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