

Predicting tomorrow with si clauses and the conditional

AP French Language and Culture · Lesson

Quick answer: French si clauses link a condition to a result. Use si plus the present with the future for a likely event, si plus the imperfect with the conditional for an imagined one, and si plus the pluperfect with the past conditional for a missed chance. The conditional and future also express predictions and uncertainty.

Level: AP French Language and Culture · **Standards:** AP French Language and Culture (College Board CED), Theme: Science and Technology

How do the three types of si clauses work?

A si clause states a condition; the main clause states the consequence. The tense after si tells the reader how likely the hypothesis is, so choose the pair before you write.

Meaning	Si clause	Main clause
Likely	si + present	future (or present, imperative)
Imagined	si + imperfect	present conditional
Unreal past	si + pluperfect	past conditional

One technology, three hypotheses

Si l'école installe des panneaux solaires, elle économisera de l'énergie. — If the school installs solar panels, it will save energy.

Si l'école installait des panneaux solaires, elle économiserait de l'énergie. — If the school installed solar panels, it would save energy (but it is unlikely).

Si l'école avait installé des panneaux solaires, elle aurait économisé de l'énergie. — If the school had installed them, it would have saved energy (too late).

si + présent → futur (probable)

si + imparfait → conditionnel présent (imaginé)

si + plus-que-parfait → conditionnel passé (trop tard)

Pick the pair according to how real the hypothesis is.

How do you make predictions about technology?

The simple future

Take the infinitive and add -ai, -as, -a, -ons, -ez, -ont. Drop the final -e of -re verbs. Irregular stems: ser-, aur-, ir-, fer-, pourr-, verr-, viendr-, voudr-.

Prediction markers: bientôt (soon), à l'avenir (in the future), d'ici dix ans (within ten years), un jour (one day). Example: D'ici dix ans, les élèves de Dakar suivront des cours avec un tuteur virtuel. — Within ten years, students in Dakar will take classes with a virtual tutor.

Do not copy English

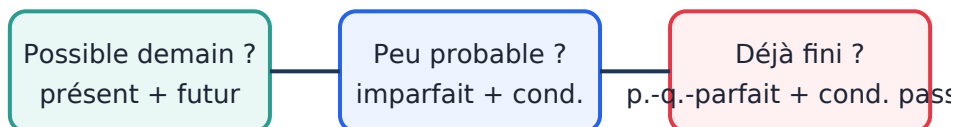
English allows if I had known, I would come. French never puts a conditional after si: say si j'avais, never si j'aurais. Also, si followed by il becomes s'il.

When does the conditional express doubt or politeness?

Reporters use the conditional for facts that are not yet confirmed: Selon la presse, le prototype serait prêt en juin. — According to the press, the prototype would be ready in June. Politeness works the same way: Pourriez-vous m'expliquer ce logiciel ? — Could you explain this software to me?

Words that traveled

The French word ordinateur was proposed in 1955 by the professor Jacques Perret when IBM France sought a French name for its machines. In Québec, the official term courriel is widely used for e-mail.



Ask the three questions in order.

Zoé's tip

Underline the verb after si, then match its partner: present goes with future, imperfect with conditional, pluperfect with past conditional. Check the pair before you reread anything else.

Key points to remember

- Never place a future or conditional right after si; the si clause takes the present, imperfect or pluperfect.
- Likely: si + present, then future, present or imperative.
- Imagined: si + imperfect, then present conditional.
- Unreal past: si + pluperfect, then past conditional (aurait + participle).
- Journalists use the conditional to report unconfirmed information.

Predicting Tomorrow with Si Clauses and the Conditional: frequently asked questions

Can I use the future or the conditional after si?

No. In a hypothesis, the verb right after si is in the present, imperfect or pluperfect. The future and conditional belong in the main clause.

How do I form the past conditional?

Use the conditional of avoir or être plus the past participle: il aurait compris, nous serions partis. Choose the auxiliary as in the passé composé.

Why do journalists use the conditional?

It shows that the information is not confirmed. Le projet coûterait dix millions means the cost is reported but not verified.

How do I say within ten years in French?

Say d'ici dix ans and use the future tense. It also works with other durations, such as d'ici deux semaines.

What changes when si meets il?

Si contracts to s' before il and ils. Before elle or on it stays si.