

Politely wishing and advising with the conditional

French 3 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: The present conditional (le conditionnel présent) takes the future stem and adds the imperfect endings -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient. French uses it for polite requests (je voudrais), wishes (j'aimerais), advice (tu devrais, à ta place, je...) and for what would happen under a condition.

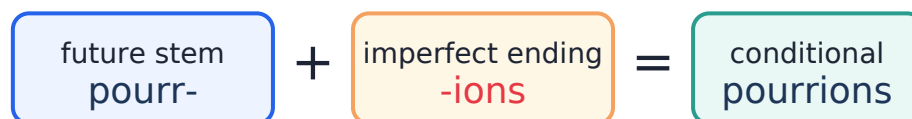
Level: French 3 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Low) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Low, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

How do you form the present conditional?

Definition

The conditional says what *would* happen, or softens a request. Take the **stem of the future** and add the **endings of the imperfect**: -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient. Irregular future stems stay irregular here too.

Subject	aimer	finir	prendre
je	aimera is	finira is	prendra is
tu	aimera is	finira is	prendra is
il / elle / on	aimer ait	finir ait	prendr ait
nous	aimer ions	finir ions	prendr ions
vous	aimer iez	finir iez	prendr iez
ils / elles	aimer aient	finir aient	prendr aient



the r before the ending is always there

Two building blocks make the conditional.

How do you ask politely?

The conditional turns a blunt demand into a courteous request. Servers, clerks and teachers expect it.

Direct	Polite
Je veux un café.	Je voudrais un café. — I would like a coffee.
Tu peux m'aider ?	Pourrais -tu m'aider ? — Could you help me?
Il faut partir.	Il faudrait partir. — We ought to leave.

How do you give advice and express wishes?

For advice use Tu devrais + infinitive (you should), Tu pourrais + infinitive (you could), or À ta place, je + conditional (if I were you, I would). Wishes use J'aimerais or Je voudrais.

Je suis stressé pour mon exposé.

À ta place, je répéteraïs ce soir.

A friend asks, Zoé advises.

Wishes and advice

J'**aimerais** étudier à Québec. — I would like to study in Québec City. Tu **devrais** parler à ton prof. — You should talk to your teacher.

The conditional also names the result of an imagined situation: Avec plus de temps, nous visiterions Rabat. — With more time, we would visit Rabat. Listen for the difference with the future: je viendrai ends with a closed é, while je viendrais ends with an open è. That one sound tells your listener whether you are promising or only imagining.

Watch out

English *would* has two jobs. For a wish or advice, use the conditional. For a habit in the past (*we would go to the lake every summer*), French uses the imperfect: nous allions au lac chaque été. Likewise, *should* is devrais and *could* is pourrais.

Zoé's tip

When you order in a café or ask a stranger for directions, start with Je voudrais... or Pourriez-

vous.... One conditional verb makes you sound friendly and respectful.

Culture note

French journalists use the conditional for unconfirmed news: Le ministre serait en route pour Genève. — The minister is reportedly on his way to Geneva.

Key points to remember

- Formation: future stem + -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient.
- Irregular stems are exactly the same as in the future: ser-, aur-, ir-, fer-, pourr-, voudr-, devr-.
- Je voudrais, j'aimerais and pourriez-vous are the standard polite formulas.
- Tu devrais + infinitive and À ta place, je + conditional give advice.
- Future je parlerai sounds like é; conditional je parlerais sounds like è.

Politely Wishing and Advising with the Conditional: frequently asked questions

How do you form the present conditional in French?

Use the future stem of the verb and add the imperfect endings -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient. For example, finir gives je finirais and nous finirions.

What is the difference between je parlerai and je parlerais?

Je parlerai is the future and ends with the sound é. Je parlerais is the conditional and ends with the sound è. The written -s of the conditional is silent, but the vowel sound changes.

How do you say "I would like" in French?

Say je voudrais or j'aimerais. Je voudrais is the most common choice for ordering or requesting; j'aimerais often introduces a wish, such as j'aimerais visiter Dakar.

How do you give advice in French?

Use tu devrais + infinitive, tu pourrais + infinitive, or À ta place, je + conditional. For more than one person or for a respectful tone, switch to vous devriez.

Is English would always the French conditional?

No. Would for a past habit is expressed by the imperfect in French. The conditional covers politeness, wishes, advice and results of an imagined situation.