

If ... not and unless; if and whether; etc.

A

If ... not and unless

Unless is used in conditional sentences with the meaning 'except if':

- You can't travel on this train **unless you have** a reservation.

With **unless** we use present tenses when we talk about the future:

- Unless it rains**, I'll pick you up at six. (*not Unless it will rain ...*)

B

In *real* conditional sentences, we can often use either **unless** or **if ... not** with a similar meaning:

- Unless** the theatre is able to raise £100,000, it will have to close. (*or If the theatre isn't able to ...; implies 'it will have to close only if it can't raise the money'*)

However, we use **if ... not** but not **unless** –

☆ when we say in the main clause that an event or action in the **if**-clause is unexpected:

- I'll be amazed **if** Christie doesn't win.

☆ usually in questions:

- If you don't** pass the test, what will you do?

☆ when the 'only if' implication does not apply:

- If it wasn't** the best performance of *Hamlet* I've seen, it was certainly the strangest.

We usually use **if ... not** rather than **unless** in *unreal* conditional sentences:

- If I weren't** so tired, I'd give you a hand.

However, **unless** can be used in *unreal* conditional sentences when the main clause is negative:

- She wouldn't have gone to university **unless** her parents had insisted.

C

If and whether

We can use **if** or **whether** to say that two possibilities have been talked or thought about, or to say that people are not sure about something:

- They couldn't decide **if / whether** it was worth resitting the exam.
 Do you know **if / whether** Ben's at home?

Whether can usually be followed immediately by **or not**. Compare:

- I didn't know **if** Aya was coming **or not**. (*not ... if or not Aya was coming.*) *and*
 I didn't know **whether or not** Aya was coming. (*or ... whether Tom was coming or not ...*)

D

We use **whether** rather than **if** –

☆ after a **preposition** (although **if** is sometimes used informally) and before a **to**-infinitive:

- We argued **about whether** butter or margarine was better for you. (*informally ... if ...*)
 I couldn't decide **whether to buy** apples or bananas.

☆ in the pattern **noun / adjective + as to whether** to mean 'about' or 'concerning':

- There was some *disagreement as to whether* he was eligible to play for France.

Also: conflict, confusion, debate, discussion, doubt, question, speculation, uncertainty; concerned, indifferent, uncertain, undecided, unsure

and we prefer **whether** rather than **if** –

☆ after the verbs **advise, choose, consider, depend on, discuss, talk about, and think about**:

- You should *consider whether* the car you are interested in is good value.

☆ in a clause acting as a subject or complement:

- Whether the minister will quit over the issue** remains to be seen.
 The first issue is **whether he knew he was committing a crime**.

Exercises

86.1 Match the sentence halves and write a new sentence with the same meaning, beginning each one with **Unless ...** **A**

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 We'll never get to the meeting ... | a ... or the farmers will lose their crops. |
| 2 Alternative sources of funding must be found ... | b ... if the train doesn't leave within five minutes. |
| 3 If the roads haven't changed in that part of town ... | c ... I'm sure I'll be able to find my way there. |
| 4 The weather must start improving soon ... | d ... or the research will not be able to continue. |
| 5 If it isn't ridiculously expensive ... | e ... I think I'll buy that painting. |
| 6 You are only entitled to state benefit ... | f ... if you have been unemployed for six months. |

1 + b *Unless the train leaves within five minutes, we'll never get to the meeting.*

86.2 If necessary, correct the italicised phrase using **if ... not**. **B**

- Unless she had gone* to university, she would have gone into the army. *If she hadn't gone*
- Unless the infection is treated* urgently, there is a real danger that she will die.
- Unless he was* so clumsy, he'd be the best person to do the work.
- You won't be allowed into the country *unless you have* a visa.
- It'll be surprising *unless Anya passes* her piano exam.
- Unless you get* a loan from the bank, how will you pay for the house?
- They'll go on strike *unless they get* a pay rise.
- Where will you stay *unless Louise is at home*?
- The police can't prosecute me *unless they can prove* I intended to steal the ring.
- She'd be a really good teacher *unless she was* so disorganised.

86.3 Write **whether** or **if / whether** (if both are possible) in these sentences. **C & D**

- I was wondering you'd had your exam results yet.
- She was undecided as to to fly or go by train.
- Police have refused to confirm or not they have arrested anyone for the theft.
- It is unclear the new regulations will affect all buildings or just new ones.
- a: How much will the laptop cost?
b: That depends on I get one with a 15 or 17-inch screen.
- Danny said that he was leaving home, but I didn't know to believe him.
- Have you any idea Steve will be at the meeting?
- Can you remember the door was open or closed when you got to the house?
- There was considerable debate as to chess was a game or a sport.
- I don't know Andrea's going to wait for us or not.
- The government is considering to hold an enquiry into the accident.
- Everyone in the village was very friendly. It didn't matter you'd lived there for a short or a long time.

