BBC Learning English
Grammar Challenge
Second conditional

bbclearningenglish.com

_____

Catherine's Grammar Explanation: 2ⁿᵈ Conditional

Task for challenger: Elena and Matt are getting ready to go on holiday. What is Elena worried about and why?

Elena: Have you got everything Matt? Where's your passport?

Matt: Don't worry Elena, it's in a really safe place. I'm not going to lose it.

Elena: Oh gosh Matt, I hope not. If you lost your passport it would take ages to get another one, and it'd cost you a fortune!

Matt: And if it cost me a fortune, I wouldn't be able to take you on holiday again, would I?

Hi Anna! Well done: Elena's worried about Matt losing his passport. She thinks it would take a lot of time and money to get a new one. But Matt told her it's in a safe place, so he isn't very likely to lose it.

When we talk about things which are unlikely to happen, or which won't happen because they are impossible, we can use the 2ⁿᵈ conditional. This structure puts *if* and the past simple together with *would* and the infinitive. Here's Elena:

Elena: *If you lost your passport it would take ages to get another one…*

Let's break that down. First, she says *if you lost your passport* – that's *if* with a past simple verb – *lost*. The past simple shows that there's only a small possibility of this happening. To give the possible result of losing the passport, she uses *would* with the infinitive without to, like this:

Elena: *…it would take ages to get another one*

_____

Here's another example. This time, Elena's using the **short** form of *would*.

Elena: *…and it would cost you a fortune*

Of course as well as *would*, we can use *wouldn't*.

Matt: *And if it cost me a fortune, I wouldn't be able to take you on holiday again, would I?*

Ok, that's all from me. Good luck with your grammar challenge!

_____

Grammar Tables: 2nd Conditional

To talk about an impossible or improbable situation, we can use *if* and the past simple together with *would* and the infinitive.

Positive & Negative

if	past simple	subject + would / wouldn't	infinitive (without to)
If	*you lost your passport*	*it would*	*take ages to get another one…*
If	*it cost me a fortune*	*I wouldn't*	*be able to take you on holiday again*
If	*I couldn't take you on holiday again*	*we would*	*save a lot of money*

Question

if	past simple	would / wouldn't + subject	infinitive (without to)
If	*it cost me a fortune*	*would I*	*be able to take you on holiday again?*
If	*we couldn't go on holiday again*	*would we*	*save a lot of money?*
If	*you lost your passport*	*how much would it*	*cost to get another one?*

_____