

Lesson Plan: Conditional inversion

Level	Advanced (C1-C2)
Time	60-90 minutes
Skills	Grammar, writing, speaking
Focus	Should / were / had + inversion as formal alternatives to if-clauses

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Form conditional sentences using inversion instead of an if-clause
- Use should + inversion for open/first conditional in formal contexts
- Use were + inversion for hypothetical/second conditional
- Use had + inversion for third conditional
- Understand why conditional inversion sounds more formal and literary

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Should + inversion (first conditional alternative)

- Standard: If you have any questions, please contact us.
- Inverted: Should you have any questions, please contact us.
- Standard: If the report is ready, send it immediately.
- Inverted: Should the report be ready, please send it immediately.

Were + inversion (second conditional alternative)

- Standard: If I were the director, I would handle it differently.
- Inverted: Were I the director, I would handle it differently.
- Standard: If she were more experienced, she might get the role.
- Inverted: Were she more experienced, she might get the role.

Had + inversion (third conditional alternative)

- Standard: If he had known, he would have acted sooner.
- Inverted: Had he known, he would have acted sooner.
- Standard: If they hadn't intervened, it would have been a disaster.
- Inverted: Had they not intervened, it would have been a disaster.

Style and register

- Conditional inversion is formal, literary, and professional.
- Common in: formal letters, legal documents, academic writing, speeches.
- Not appropriate in everyday conversation — would sound very stiff.

Meaning & Nuance

Standard if-clause	Inverted form	Type
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If you need help...	Should you need help...	1st conditional / open
If I were in your position...	Were I in your position...	2nd conditional / hypothetical
If they had prepared...	Had they prepared...	3rd conditional / past hypothetical
If this were not the case...	Were this not the case...	2nd conditional / hypothetical
If the deadline had passed...	Had the deadline passed...	3rd conditional / past

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Spot the inversion (10 min)

Task: Read 5 sentences with conditional inversion. Students rewrite as standard if-clauses.

- 'Should you require assistance, do not hesitate to contact us.'

→ *Students see the meaning is the same — only register differs.*

2. Presentation (20 min)

Task: Should / Were / Had + inversion with systematic examples.

- Key pattern: the auxiliary moves to the front; 'if' is dropped entirely.
- Had they not: negative inversion — not precedes the subject.
- Register: these forms are formal and should not be overused even in advanced writing.

3. Transformation practice (20 min)

Task: Rewrite 8 if-clauses as inverted conditionals.

- 'If there are any changes, we will notify you.' → 'Should there be any changes, we will notify you.'

→ *Students then reverse: turn inverted forms back into if-clauses.*

4. Formal writing task (25 min)

Task: Write a formal letter or policy document using at least 3 examples of conditional inversion.

- Scenarios: a legal notice, a company policy update, a formal proposal.
- Peer review: does the register feel consistently formal?

TEACHER NOTES

- Conditional inversion is explicitly tested at C1/C2 level in Cambridge Use of English.
- 'Had they not' (negative inversion) is harder than the positive form — deserves extra drilling.
- Students should understand this is a formal register tool — NOT appropriate in everyday speech.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Rewrite 6 standard conditionals as inverted forms and identify which type each is.
2. Write a formal letter using should, were, and had inversion at least once each.
3. Find 5 examples of conditional inversion in formal English texts (contracts, policies, speeches).