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HUNGARIAN LESSON

Hungarian Grammar 3 · Chapter 6 · The Conditional

🌤️ "Would" — A feltételes mód

*The conditional says what would happen, and it is also the polite way to ask for things. It has one marker, **-na / -ne**, added to the verb stem, followed by its own set of personal endings. You have already met two conditionals as set phrases: szeretnék (I would like) and kérnék (I would ask for). This chapter explains them and the rest of the system.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Stem + -na/-ne + ending. Back vowels take -na, front vowels -ne: *olvasnék* (I would read), *mennék* (I would go). The first person singular is **-nék**, the second **-nál / -nél**. The past conditional is the past tense plus the fixed word **volna**: *olvastam volna* (I would have read).

1. The indefinite conditional

Use this set when there is no object or an indefinite one. The marker comes straight after the stem, and the endings are shown in the table.

PERSON	OLVAS (BACK)	MEGY (FRONT)	ENDING
I	**olvasnék**	**mennék**	-nék
you (sg)	**olvasnál**	**mennél**	-nál / -nél
he, she	**olvasna**	**menne**	-na / -ne
we	**olvasnánk**	**mennénk**	-nánk / -nénk
you (pl)	**olvasnátok**	**mennétek**	-nátok / -nétek
they	**olvasnának**	**mennének**	-nának / -nének

The stem used is the one you already know from the present: *megy* becomes *menn-* (from the infinitive *menni*), and *van* becomes *lenn-* (*lennék, lennél, lenne, lennénk, lennétek, lennének*). The *-ik* verbs take the same endings: *ennék, ennél, enne, ennénk, ennétek, ennének* (from *enni*) and *innék* (from *inni*).

> **Spelling: the doubled -nn-**
>
> Verbs whose infinitive is *-enni* or *-nni* (*menni, lenni, enni, tenni, venni*) show a doubled *-nn-* in the conditional: *mennék, lennék, ennék, tennék, vennék*. The infinitive helps: swap the final *-i* for the personal ending, as in *menn-i → menn-ék*.

2. The definite conditional

With a definite object (*a könyvet, őt, azt*) the endings change, as in every other tense. Only the singular forms and the third plural differ from the indefinite set.

PERSON	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE
I	**olvasnék**	**olvasnám**
you (sg)	**olvasnál**	**olvasnád**
he, she	**olvasna**	**olvasná**
we	**olvasnánk**	**olvasnánk**
you (pl)	**olvasnátok**	**olvasnátok**
they	**olvasnának**	**olvasnák**

Front-vowel verbs mirror this with *-ném, -néd, -né, -nék*: **vennék** (I would buy, indefinite) against **venném** (definite).

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Olvasnék egy könyvet.	I would read a book.
Olvasnám a könyvet.	I would read the book.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Venné ezt a kabátot?	Would he/she buy this coat?
Mit csinálnál?	What would you do?

3. Polite requests and wishes

In Hungarian, as in English, the conditional softens a request. The commonest forms are fixed phrases worth learning whole.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Szeretnék egy kávét.	I would like a coffee.	indefinite object
Szeretném a kávét.	I would like the coffee.	definite object
Szeretnék menni.	I would like to go.	+ infinitive (Chapter 5)
Kérnék egy sört.	I would like a beer. (lit. I would ask for)	ordering
Tudnál segíteni?	Could you help?	polite request
Hoznál egy kávét?	Would you bring a coffee?	polite request
Lehetne egy pohár víz?	Could I have a glass of water?	*lehet* in the conditional

> **Watch out: szeretek against szeretnék**
>
> **Szeretek úszni** means "I like swimming" (Chapter 5). **Szeretnék úszni** means "I would like to swim". One letter changes "a habit" into "a wish".

4. "If … would": ha clauses

An unreal or unlikely condition uses **ha** (if) with the conditional in *both* clauses, unlike English, which puts "would" only in the result: **Ha lenne időm, olvasnék.** (If I had time, I would read. Literally: if I would-be time, I would-read.)

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Ha gazdag lennék, utaznék.	If I were rich, I would travel.
Ha tudnád, mit mondott, nevetnél.	If you knew what he said, you would laugh.
Ha esne az eső, otthon maradnánk.	If it were raining, we would stay at home.

For a *real* condition ("if it rains tomorrow, I'll stay home") Hungarian uses **ha** with the plain present or future: **Ha holnap esik, otthon maradok.** The conditional is for the "what if" cases.

5. The past conditional

"Would have" is the **past tense plus volna**. The past verb carries the person (Chapters 2–4), and *volna* never changes.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Olvastam volna.	I would have read.
Elmentünk volna.	We would have gone.
Megvettem volna a kabátot.	I would have bought the coat.
Ha tudtam volna, szóltam volna.	If I had known, I would have told you.
Ha otthon lettél volna, találkoztunk volna.	If you had been at home, we would have met.

Both clauses of an unreal past condition take *volna*. Negation stands before the past verb: **Nem olvastam volna.** The map from Chapter 1 gives the whole family in one view: the present conditional (*olvasnék*), the past conditional (*olvastam volna*) and, as you will see in Chapter 9, the rarer compound forms.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The conditional in a café, in a daydream, and in a regret.

① In the café

A:

Jó napot! Mit szeretne?

Good day! What would you like?

B:

Kérnék egy kávét és egy pogácsát.

I would like a coffee and a scone.

A:

Szeretné a kávét tejjel?

Would you like the coffee with milk?

B:

Igen, kérem.

Yes, please.

② A daydream

A:

Mit csinálnál, ha sok pénzed lenne?

What would you do if you had a lot of money?

B:

Utaznék, és egy kis házat vennék Magyarországon.

I would travel, and I would buy a small house in Hungary.

A:

Én is. A család is velünk jönne.

Me too. The family would come with us as well.

③ A regret

A:

Miért nem jöttél tegnap?

Why didn't you come yesterday?

B:

Ha tudtam volna, eljöttem volna.

If I had known, I would have come.

A:

Majd legközelebb!

Next time, then!

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	FORM	EXAMPLE
Indefinite endings	-nék, -nál, -na, -nánk, -nátok, -nának (front: -nék, -nél, -ne, -nénk, -nétek, -nének)	**olvasnék · mennél**
Definite endings	-nám, -nád, -ná, -nánk, -nátok, -nák (front: -ném, -néd, -né, -nénk, -nétek, -nék)	**olvasnám · venném**
"Would like"	szeretnék (indef.) · szeretném (def.)	**Szeretnék egy kávét.**
Polite request	conditional	**Tudnál segíteni?**
Unreal "if"	ha + conditional, conditional	**Ha lenne időm, olvasnék.**
Past conditional	past tense + volna	**Olvastam volna.**
Unreal past "if"	ha + past + volna, past + volna	**Ha tudtam volna, szóltam volna.**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "I would read": *olvas*.

▼ Show answer

Olvasnék.

2. "You (sg) would go": *megy*.

▼ Show answer

Mennél.

3. "We would work": *dolgozik*.

▼ Show answer

Dolgoznánk.

4. "I would read the book" (definite).

▼ Show answer

Olvasnám a könyvet.

5. "I would like a coffee."

▼ Show answer

Szeretnék egy kávét. (Or **Kérnék egy kávét.**)

6. "If I had time, I would read."

▼ Show answer

Ha lenne időm, olvasnék.

7. "Could you help?" (informal)

▼ Show answer

Tudnál segíteni?

8. "I would have read."

▼ Show answer

Olvastam volna.

9. "If I had known, I would have come."

▼ Show answer

Ha tudtam volna, eljöttem volna.

10. What is the difference between *szeretek* and *szeretnék*?

▼ Show answer

Szeretek is the present, "I like"; **szeretnék** is the conditional, "I would like".

Coming up in Chapter 7: The Imperative. Commands and requests: the bare-stem forms (*olvass, ülj, gyere*), the *-j* marker, definite forms (*olvasd*), polite and plural commands, and the negative imperative with *ne*.