

～たら

if / when

Romaji: **tara**

～たら is the everyday conditional: “if” or “when”, depending on how likely the thing is. 雨が降ったら、行きません is “If it rains, I won’t go”, while 家に帰ったら、電話します is “When I get home, I’ll call.” Build it by taking the plain past form and adding ら — 行った → 行ったら, 高かった → 高かったら, 学生だった → 学生だったら. Of Japanese’s four conditionals it is the most flexible in speech, and the one to reach for when you are not sure which to use.

構文 CONSTRUCTION

Plain past + ら (verbs)

駅に着いたら、電話してください。 — Call me when you get to the station.

い-adjective past + ら

安かったら、買います。 — If it’s cheap, I’ll buy it.

Noun / な-adjective + だったら

雨だったら、中止です。 — If it rains, it’s cancelled.

Past result: ～たら + past = “when I did X, Y happened”

窓を開けたら、猫が入ってきた。 — When I opened the window, a cat came in.

例文 EXAMPLES

① ^{えき} 駅に着いたら、^{でんわ} 電話してください。

Please call me when you arrive at the station.

② もし^{じかん} 時間があったら、^{てつだ} 手伝ってください。

If you have time, please give me a hand.

③ ^{まど} 窓を開けたら、^{ねこ} 猫が^{はい}入ってきた。

When I opened the window, a cat came in.

注意点 NUANCES

- ▶ The past form is a red herring — ～たら carries no past meaning by itself. 帰ったら is “when I get home”, not “when I got home”. It is past-shaped because the condition is imagined as already completed.
- ▶ When the second clause is also past, the sentence stops being a condition and becomes a discovery: 家に帰ったら、誰もいなかった (“I got home and nobody was there”). This use is very common and often missed.
- ▶ ～たら accepts requests, invitations and commands after it, which と does not: 終わったら教えてください is fine, × 終わると教えてください is not.
- ▶ For something certain to happen, prefer ～たら over ～れば in speech; for a general truth that always holds, と is the better fit (春になると桜が咲く).

やってみよう YOUR TURN

Write one sentence with ～たら about something likely to happen today, one about something unlikely, and one “when I did X, Y happened” discovery in the past. Same form, three different jobs.