Help With: The Three Conditionals

First Conditional
The first conditional is formed with *if* and present or future tense verbs. It suggests a result which is usually realistic and possible.

If I have time, I will go to the party with Michael. If you want to, you can eat some cookies.

As with any conditional, the sentence order can be reversed. The comma is often omitted if the sentence is short and leaving it out does not make the meaning confusing.

I will go to the party with Michael if I have time.

Second Conditional
The second conditional is formed with *if*, a past tense verb, and *could* or *would* (or even *should* or *might*). It describes a future imagined result which is usually unrealistic or impossible. Notice that both *you* and *I* take *were* in the conditional.

If I won the lottery, I would buy everyone pizza.
If we turned into birds, we could fly over the city. If I were there, I could have helped you.

Sometimes people use the second conditional if they are trying to say something delicately without offending someone.

If you told the truth, you might not make your friend so angry.

Third Conditional
The third conditional is formed with *if* and *had*, a past perfect verb, and *could* or *would*. This conditional often expresses regret.

If I had more exercise when I was young, I wouldn't have been so unhealthy in life. If Claire had been born a hundred years earlier, she might have been famous.

Sometimes this conditional emphasizes the choice was made a long time ago.

Distant past (Third): If Shakespeare hadn't moved to London, he wouldn't have been famous.
Recent (Second): If I didn't eat in the cafeteria, I wouldn't have a stomach ache every day.

Be careful with third conditionals and negative constructions as comparing these difficult verb tenses can get confusing.
☒ If Christine hadn't remained to drink so much espresso, she wouldn't have been so unwilling to stop dancing on the tables.