

## The Sinking of the Third Conditional

<p><b>Bruce Ismay</b></p> <p>You are the owner of the company that made the Titanic. You know your story, you know you made mistakes, but in reality you do not think you are to blame for the accident.</p> <p>People are attacking you for everything you did and didn't do.</p> <p>You must defend yourself.</p> <p>Think of some things you can say in a debate.</p>	<p><b>Captain Stanley Lord of the Californian</b></p> <p>You are the captain of a ship that did not go to help the sinking Titanic. You know your story and you know you made some mistakes, but in truth you do not think you are to blame for the loss of life.</p> <p>People are attacking you for your decision not to go to help, but you only did what you thought was right. If you had known the truth, you would have helped.</p> <p>You must defend yourself. Think of what you can say.</p>
<p><b>Berg Ice</b></p> <p>You are a Titanic survivor, but you lost your wife and two children, so you are very angry about the disaster. You know the story, and you want the people responsible to accept liability.</p> <p>You must make your case, make them listen and make them realise what they have done.</p> <p>Think of some things you can say in a debate.</p>	<p><b>Miss Cold Water</b></p> <p>You survived the disaster and know that it was a terrible tragedy, but you aren't as angry as some survivors, because you think that the crew did what they could. You know that some mistakes were made, but in reality you think that there were very difficult circumstances and that it was unavoidable.</p> <p>Think of some things that you can say in a debate.</p>

## Reading Comprehension (adapted from [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

The sinking of the RMS Titanic was one of the worst maritime disasters in history. On April 14, 1912, at 11:40 p.m., the 'unsinkable' luxury ship hit an iceberg and sank in just under three hours with the loss of around 1500 lives. There are many different descriptions of the disaster by the surviving passengers and crew, but few people doubt that human error played a part in the tragedy. Let's look at some of the things that went wrong.

On the night of Sunday, 14 April 1912 the temperature was near freezing and the ocean was completely calm. Surviving 2nd Officer Charles Lightoller later wrote, "the sea was like glass". The ship's course had been changed by the captain, but other than this, he saw no reason to slow down. The owner of the ship, Bruce Ismay, was also on board and had instructed the captain to speed up in order to break the record for a transatlantic voyage. The captain agreed, but perhaps if he had known of the messages the ship had received in the radio room, he would have acted differently. According to a ship ahead called the Mesaba, lots of large icebergs were in the area. These messages did not reach him.

There were three teams of lookouts on board keeping constant watch for obstacles in the ship's path, but as Charles Lightoller said at the British inquiry, "Everything was against us, there was no moon, no wind, no binoculars and with the dark side of the iceberg facing the ship, the lookouts were powerless."

When the alarm was finally raised the crew acted very quickly but it was already too late to save the ship. Within twenty minutes of the collision the ship had flooded, so the captain ordered the lifeboats to be prepared, filled with women and children, and lowered into the water. This didn't go well, regulations about the number of lifeboats a ship should carry were already out of date when the Titanic set sail, and even if the evacuation had been better organised, there wouldn't have been enough boats to hold everybody.

Meanwhile, the crew were sending out distress signals. The first message was "sinking, need immediate assistance," and then "SOS". Several ships responded, including the Mount Temple, Frankfurt, and the Titanic's sister ship, Olympic, but they were too far away. The closest ship to respond was the Carpathia, which arrived in about four hours, too late to save everybody.

Various distress flares launched from the sinking ship were also ineffective, including those seen by a ship called the Californian, whose captain, Stanley Lord, had ordered his crew to stop the ship for the night because of the icebergs. When Captain Lord was informed of the flares he failed to respond because he did not think they were important. Nor did the crew of the Californian wake their radio operator, who had gone to bed for the night.

And what of Bruce Ismay, who many believe acted without regard for safety by requiring an unprepared ship to sail at such speed in spite of the danger? History tells us that he survived, but from the lifeboat turned his back on his beautiful ship as it sank.

That night, of a total of 2,208 people, only 712 were rescued by the Carpathia, while 1,496 perished. If the lifeboats had been filled to capacity, 1,178 people could have been saved. If there

had been enough lifeboats, maybe everybody could have been saved. If Captain Stanley Lord had responded to the distress signals seen by his crew, more lives could have been saved. And if the crew of the Titanic had taken better precautions of their own, the disaster may not even have happened in the first place. Like the mystery of the orchestra that played on to the end, this is something we may never know the truth about.

**Now answer these questions:**

- 1) How was the Titanic described before it set sail?
- 2) What do most people believe about the cause of the disaster?
- 3) Why was the ship travelling so fast?
- 4) Why didn't the captain know about icebergs in the area?
- 5) Why didn't the lookouts see the iceberg in time?
- 6) What two problems prevented everybody being able to get into lifeboats?
- 7) What was Captain Lord's response to the distress flares his crew saw?
- 8) What other mistake did the crew of the Californian make?
- 9) How far do you think Bruce Ismay was to blame?

**Answers:**

- 1) *Unsinkable, luxury*
- 2) *That it was partly caused by human error*
- 3) *Because the pressure from the owner of the ship, Bruce Ismay, who wanted to break the transatlantic record*
- 4) *Because radio messages received from the Mesaba were not passed to him by the radio room operators*
- 5) *Because there was no moon, there were no binoculars and the dark side of the iceberg was facing the ship*
- 6) *There weren't enough, and the evacuation attempt was badly organized*
- 7) *He did not act because he didn't think they were important*
- 8) *They failed to wake their radio operator*
- 9) *This is a subjective answer, although I would expect students to suggest that he was partly to blame, specifically for requiring the ship*