Like all particles, ἄν is a little word that is not necessarily translated by a word in English. But this particle in particular is useful when translating: as it is found in a limited number of constructions it is a useful indicator of meaning.

There are 5 main uses of this particle, all of which are in some way 'modal':

1. In the **apodosis** of unreal conditional clauses (translate ~*would/would have*)
2. With the potential optative (translate ~*would*)
3. With the potential indicative (translate ~*would have*)
4. In the **protasis** of future real conditional clauses (translate together with εἰ as *if*)
5. With the subjunctive in **general** relative, temporal or conditional clauses (translate ~*ever*)

(It may also be found in some purpose clauses, but it is not required here.)

All of the 5 uses above are connected with conditionals.

The use in the apodosis of unreal conditional clauses is what distinguishes these from real conditional clauses, turning them from discussions of events that do happen to ones that might happen.

The **potential** use of the optative and indicative may be connected with their use in these unreal conditional clauses. If we say:

I could have given these to you yesterday

There is an implied conditional clause:

(if you had been well enough to come to work)

Similarly,

I might go to London at the weekend

implies

... if the weather is nice

As discussed in uses of the moods, the use of ἄν with the optative is what **distinguishes** the potential optative from the wish optative. Similarly, the use of it with the indicative is the only way to indicate that this event did not happen.

The other two uses are found in a subordinate clause with the subjunctive. The presence of ἄν confirms that the event is not a certain one.

Examples of the 5 different uses below:

- in the apodosis of unreal conditional clause:

  τούτοις τοῦτο πᾶσιν ἀνδάνειν
  λέγοιτ' ἄν, εἰ μὴ γλῶσσαν ἐγκλῄοι φόβος.
  This would be described as pleasing everyone if fear did not block their tongues.
  (Sophocles Antigone 504-5)

- marking the potential optative:

  τίς γὰρ ἂν ἢ λόγος ἢ χρόνος ἢ ῥήτωρ ἱκανὸς γένοιτο μηνῦσαι τὴν τῶν ἐνθάδε κειμένων ἀνδρῶν ἀρετήν;
  What speech, what time, what speaker would be enough to describe the virtue of these men lying here?
  (Lysias Speeches 2.55)

- marking the potential indicative:

  καίτοι πόθεν κλέος γ' ἂν εὐκλεέστερον κατέσχον ἢ τὸν αὐτάδελφον ἐν τάφῳ τιθεῖσα;
  And yet how would I have got a more glorious reputation than by burying my brother?
  (Sophocles Antigone 502-4)

- with the subjunctive in the protasis of future real conditional clause (see conditionals: ἐάν as ἄν or ἤν):

  εἶεν· τί δῆτ' ἐρεῖ τις, ἤν τις αὖ φανῇ
  στρατοῦ τ' ἄθροισις πολεμίων τ' ἀγωνία;
  πότερα μαχούμεθ' ἢ φιλοψυχήσομεν,
  τὸν κατθανόνθ' ὁρῶντες οὐ τιμώμενον;
  Well, what will people say if the armies are gathered together again, if there is another war?
  Will we fight or prefer to live, seeing that the dead are not respected?
  (Euripides Hecuba 313-6)

- with the subjunctive in **general** relative, temporal or conditional clauses (translate *~ever*):

  ἐν τῷδε γὰρ κάμνουσιν αἱ πολλαὶ πόλεις,
  ὅταν τις ἐσθλὸς καὶ πρόθυμος ὢν ἀνὴρ
  μηδὲν φέρηται τῶν κακιόνων πλέον.
  Many cities struggle when good men get no more than their inferiors.
  (Euripides Hecuba 306-8)