

If I do... and If I did...

A Compare these examples:

(1) Sue has lost her watch. She thinks it may be at Ann's house.

SUE: I think I left my watch at your house. Have you seen it?

ANN: No, but I'll have a look when I get home. **If I find** it, I'll tell you.

In this example, Ann feels there is a real possibility that she will find the watch. So she says: **If I find...**, I'll...

(2) Ann says: **If I found** a wallet in the street, I'd take it to the police.

This is a different type of situation. Here, Ann is not thinking about a real possibility; she is *imagining* the situation and doesn't expect to find a wallet in the street. So she says: **If I found...**, I'd (= I would)... (not 'If I find..., I'll...').

When you imagine something like this, you use *if + past* (if I found / if you were / if we didn't etc.). But the meaning is *not past*:

- What would you do if you **won** a million pounds? (we don't really expect this to happen)
- I don't really want to go to their party, but I probably will go. They'd be offended if I **didn't** go.
- Sarah has decided not to apply for the job. She isn't really qualified for it, so she probably wouldn't get it if she **applied**.

If I won a million pounds...



B We do not normally use **would** in the *if*-part of the sentence:

- I'd be very frightened if somebody **pointed** a gun at me. (not 'if somebody would point')
- If I **didn't** go to their party, they'd be offended. (not 'If I wouldn't go')

But it is possible to say '*if... would*' when you ask somebody to do something:

- (*from a formal letter*) I would be grateful if you **would send** me your brochure as soon as possible.
- 'Shall I close the door?' 'Yes, please, if you **would**.'

C In the other part of the sentence (not the *if*-part) we use **would** ('d) / **wouldn't**:

- If you took more exercise, you'd (= you **would**) probably feel healthier.
- **Would** you **mind** if I used your phone?
- I'm not tired enough to go to bed yet. I **wouldn't** sleep (if I went to bed now).

Could and **might** are also possible:

- If you took more exercise, you **might feel** healthier. (= it is possible that you would feel healthier)
- If it stopped raining, we **could go** out. (= we would be able to go out)

D Do not use **when** in sentences like those on this page:

- They would be offended if we **didn't** accept their invitation. (not 'when we didn't')
- What would you do if you were bitten by a snake? (not 'when you were bitten')

For *if* and *when* see also Unit 25C.

EXERCISES

37.1 Put the verb into the correct form.

- 1 They would be rather offended if I didn't go to see them. (not/go)
- 2 If you took more exercise, you would feel better. (feel)
- 3 If I was offered the job, I think I it. (take)
- 4 I'm sure Amy will lend you the money. I'd be very surprised if she
(refuse)
- 5 If I sold my car, I much money for it. (not/get)
- 6 A lot of people would be out of work if the factory (close down)
- 7 What would happen if I that red button? (press)
- 8 Liz gave me this ring. She very upset if I lost it. (be)
- 9 Mark and Carol are expecting us. They would be disappointed if we
..... (not/ come)
- 10 Would Tim mind if I his bicycle without asking him? (borrow)
- 11 If somebody in here with a gun, I'd be very frightened. (walk)
- 12 I'm sure Sue if you explained the situation to her. (understand)

37.2 You ask a friend questions. Use What would you do if...?

- 1 (Maybe one day your friend will win a lot of money.)
What would you do if you won a lot of money?
- 2 (Your friend's car has never been stolen but perhaps one day it will be.)
What
- 3 (Perhaps one day your friend will lose his/her passport.)
.....
- 4 (There has never been a fire in the building.)
.....

37.3 Answer the questions in the way shown.

- 1 A: Shall we catch the 10.30 train?
B: No. (arrive / too early) If we caught the 10.30 train, we'd arrive too early.
- 2 A: Is Ken going to take the examination?
B: No. (fail) If he
- 3 A: Why don't we stay at a hotel?
B: No. (cost too much money) If
- 4 A: Is Sally going to apply for the job?
B: No. (not / get it) If
- 5 A: Let's tell them the truth.
B: No. (not / believe us) If
- 6 A: Why don't we invite Bill to the party?
B: No. (have to invite his friends too)
.....

37.4 Use your own ideas to complete these sentences.

- 1 If you took more exercise, you'd feel better.
- 2 I'd feel very angry if
- 3 If I didn't go to work tomorrow,
- 4 Would you go to the party if
- 5 If you bought some new clothes,
- 6 Would you mind if

If I knew... I wish I knew...

A Study this example situation:

Sue wants to phone Paul but she can't do this because she doesn't know his number. She says:

If I knew his number, I would phone him.

Sue says: If I knew his number... This tells us that she *doesn't* know his number. She is imagining the situation. The *real* situation is that she doesn't know his number.



When you imagine a situation like this, you use *if + past* (if I knew / if you were / if we didn't etc.). But the meaning is present, not past:

- Tom would read more if he **had** more time. (but he doesn't have much time)
- If I **didn't** want to go to the party, I wouldn't go. (but I want to go)
- We wouldn't have any money if we **didn't** work. (but we work)
- If you **were** in my position, what would you do?
- It's a pity you can't drive. It would be useful if you **could**.

B We use the past in the same way after *wish* (I wish I knew / I wish you were etc.). We use *wish* to say that we regret something, that something is not as we would like it to be:

- I **wish** I **knew** Paul's phone number.
(= I don't know it and I regret this)
- Do you ever **wish** you **could** fly?
(you can't fly)
- It rains a lot here. I **wish** it **didn't** rain so often.
- It's very crowded here. I **wish** there **weren't** so many people. (but there are a lot of people)
- I **wish** I **didn't** have to work. (but I have to work)



C After *if* and *wish*, you can use *were* instead of *was* (if I were / I wish it were etc.). So you can say:

- If I **were** you, I wouldn't buy that coat. *or* If I **was** you...
- I'd go out if it **weren't** raining. *or* ...if it **wasn't** raining.
- I **wish** it **were** possible. *or* I **wish** it **was** possible.

D We do not normally use *would* in the *if*-part of the sentence or after *wish*:

- If I **were** rich, I **would** have a yacht. (*not* 'If I **would** be rich')
- I **wish** I **had** something to read. (*not* 'I **wish** I **would** have')

Sometimes *wish...would* is possible ('I wish you would listen'). See Unit 40C.

E Note that *could* sometimes means 'would be able to' and sometimes 'was/were able to':

- You **could** get a job more easily (you **could** get = you would be able to get)
- if you **could** speak a foreign language. (you **could** speak = you were able to speak)

EXERCISES

38.1 Put the verb into the correct form.

- 1 If I ...**knew**... his number, I would phone him. (know)
- 2 I ...**wouldn't buy**... that coat if I were you. (not/buy)
- 3 I you if I could, but I'm afraid I can't. (help)
- 4 We would need a car if we in the country. (live)
- 5 If we had the choice, we in the country. (live)
- 6 This soup isn't very good. It better if it wasn't so salty. (taste)
- 7 I wouldn't mind living in England if the weather better. (be)
- 8 If I were you, I (not/wait). I now. (go)
- 9 You're always tired. If you to bed so late every night, you wouldn't be tired all the time. (not/go)
- 10 I think there are too many cars. If there so many cars (not/be), there so much pollution. (not/be)

38.2 Write a sentence with If... for each situation.

- 1 We don't visit you very often because you live so far away.
.....
If you didn't live so far away, we'd visit you more often......
- 2 He doesn't speak very clearly – that's why people don't understand him.
If he more, people
- 3 That book is too expensive, so I'm not going to buy it.
If the book, I
- 4 We don't go out very often because we can't afford it.
.....
- 5 It's raining, so we can't have lunch in the garden.
.....
- 6 I have to work tomorrow evening, so I can't meet you.
.....

38.3 Write sentences beginning I wish... .

- 1 I don't know many people (and I'm lonely). **I wish I knew more people.**.....
- 2 I don't have a key (and I need one). I wish
- 3 Ann isn't here (and I need to see her).
- 4 It's cold (and I hate cold weather).
- 5 I live in a big city (and I don't like it).
- 6 I can't go to the party (and I'd like to).
- 7 I have to work tomorrow (but I'd like to stay in bed).
- 8 I don't know anything about cars (and my car has just broken down).
.....
- 9 I'm not lying on a beautiful sunny beach (and that's a pity).
.....

38.4 Write your own sentences beginning I wish... .

- 1 (somewhere you'd like to be now – on the beach, in New York, in bed etc.)
I wish I
- 2 (something you'd like to have – a computer, a job, lots of money etc.)
.....
- 3 (something you'd like to be able to do – sing, speak a language, fly etc.)
.....
- 4 (something you'd like to be – beautiful, strong, rich etc.)
.....

UNIT 37

37.1

- 3 would take / 'd take
- 4 refused
- 5 wouldn't get
- 6 closed down (or was/were closed down)
- 7 pressed
- 8 would be / 'd be
- 9 didn't come
- 10 borrowed
- 11 walked
- 12 would understand

37.2

- 2 What would you do if your car was stolen? or ...were stolen?
- 3 What would you do if you lost your passport?
- 4 What would you do if there was a fire in the building? or ...if there were a fire in the building?

37.3

- 2 If he took the examination, he'd fail. or ...he would fail.
- 3 If we stayed at a hotel, it would cost too much money.

KEY TO EXERCISES

- 4 If she applied for the job, she wouldn't get it.
- 5 If we told them the truth, they wouldn't believe us.
- 6 If we invited Bill to the party, we'd have to invite his friends too.

37.4

Example answers:

- 2 somebody broke into my house.
- 3 I'd have a much nicer day than usual.
- 4 you were invited?
- 5 you'd look much nicer.
- 6 I didn't come out with you this evening?

UNIT 38

38.1

- 3 would help / 'd help
- 4 lived
- 5 would live / 'd live
- 6 would taste
- 7 was/were
- 8 wouldn't wait ... would go / 'd go
- 9 didn't go
- 10 weren't ... wouldn't be

38.2

- 2 If he spoke more clearly, people would understand him.
- 3 If the book wasn't/weren't so expensive, I'd buy it / I would buy it. *or* If the book was/were cheaper,...
- 4 If we could afford it, we'd / we would go out more often.
- 5 If it wasn't/weren't raining, we could have lunch in the garden.
- 6 If I didn't have to work tomorrow evening, I could / I would / I'd meet you. *or* ...I'd be able to meet you.

38.3

- 2 I had a key.
- 3 I wish Ann was/were here.
- 4 I wish it wasn't/weren't (so) cold.
- 5 I wish I didn't live in a big city.
- 6 I wish I could go to the party.
- 7 I wish I didn't have to work tomorrow.
- 8 I wish I knew something about cars.
- 9 I wish I was/were lying on a beautiful sunny beach.

38.4

Example answers:

- 1 I wish I was at home.
- 2 I wish I had a big garden.
- 3 I wish I could tell jokes.
- 4 I wish I was taller.