

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

A Study this example situation:

Sarah 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.

Sarah 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. (there are a lot of people)
- ☐ I **wish** I **didn't** have to work tomorrow, but unfortunately I do.



C If I were / if I was

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

- | | | |
|--|----|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> If I were you, I wouldn't buy that coat. | or | If I was you, ... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'd go out if it weren't so cold. | or | ... if it wasn't so cold. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I wish Carol were here. | or | I wish Carol was here. |

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 41.

E Could sometimes means 'would be able to' and sometimes 'was/were able to':

- ☐ You **could** get a better job (you **could** get = you would be able to get)
- if you **could** use a computer. (you **could** use = you were able to use)

Could → Units 26–27 If I do / if I did → Unit 38 If I had known / I wish I had known → Unit 40
Wish → Unit 41

Exercises

Unit 39

39.1 Put the verb into the correct form.

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

39.2 Write a sentence with if ... for each situation.

- 1 We don't see you very often because you live so far away.
If you didn't live so far away, we'd see you more often.
- 2 This book is too expensive, so I'm not going to buy it.
I'd if
- 3 We don't go out very often – we can't afford it.
We
- 4 I can't meet you tomorrow – I have to work late.
If
- 5 It's raining, so we can't have lunch outside.
We
- 6 I don't want his advice, and that's why I'm not going to ask for it.
If

39.3 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 mobile phone (and I need one). I wish
- 3 Helen 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 feeling well (and it's not nice).

39.4 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.)
.....

Wish

A

You can say 'I wish you luck / every success / a happy birthday' etc. :

- ☐ I wish you every success in the future.
- ☐ I saw Tim before the exam and he wished me luck.

We say 'wish somebody *something*' (luck / a happy birthday etc.). But you cannot 'wish that something *happens*'. We use *hope* in this situation. For example:

- ☐ I hope you get this letter before you go away. (*not* I wish you get)

Compare I wish and I hope:

- ☐ I wish you a pleasant stay here.
- ☐ I hope you have a pleasant stay here. (*not* I wish you have)

B

We also use *wish* to say that we regret something, that something is not as we would like it. When we use *wish* in this way, we use the *past* (knew/lived etc.), but the meaning is *present*:

- ☐ I wish I knew what to do about the problem. (I don't know and I regret this)
- ☐ I wish you didn't have to go so soon. (you have to go)
- ☐ Do you wish you lived near the sea? (you don't live near the sea)
- ☐ Jack's going on a trip to Mexico soon. I wish I was going too. (I'm not going)

To say that we regret something in the past, we use *wish* + *had* ... (*had known* / *had said*) etc. :

- ☐ I wish I'd known about the party. I would have gone if I'd known. (I didn't know)
- ☐ It was a stupid thing to say. I wish I hadn't said it. (I said it)

For more examples, see Units 39 and 40.

C

I wish I could (do something) = I regret that I cannot do it:

- ☐ I'm sorry I have to go. I wish I could stay longer. (but I can't)
- ☐ I've met that man before. I wish I could remember his name. (but I can't)

I wish I could have (done something) = I regret that I could not do it:

- ☐ I hear the party was great. I wish I could have gone. (but I couldn't go)

D

You can say 'I wish (somebody) would (do something)'. For example:



It's been raining all day. Jill doesn't like it. She says:
I wish it would stop raining.

Jill would like the rain to stop, but this will probably not happen.

We use *I wish ... would* when we would like something to happen or change. Usually, the speaker doesn't expect this to happen.

We often use *I wish ... would* to complain about a situation:

- ☐ The phone has been ringing for five minutes. I wish somebody would answer it.
- ☐ I wish you would do something instead of just sitting and doing nothing.

You can use *I wish ... wouldn't ...* to complain about things that people do repeatedly:

- ☐ I wish you wouldn't keep interrupting me.

We use *I wish ... would ...* for actions and changes, *not* situations. Compare:

- ☐ I wish Sarah would come. (= I want her to come)
- but I wish Sarah was (or were) here now. (*not* I wish Sarah would be)
- ☐ I wish somebody would buy me a car.
- but I wish I had a car. (*not* I wish I would have)

I wish I knew → Unit 39 I wish I was / I wish I were → Unit 39C I wish I had known → Unit 40

Exercises

Unit 41

41.1 Put in wish(ed) or hope(d).

- I wish you a pleasant stay here.
- Enjoy your holiday. I you have a great time.
- Goodbye. I you all the best.
- We said goodbye to each other and each other luck.
- We're going to have a picnic tomorrow, so I the weather is nice.
- I you luck in your new job. I it works out well for you.

41.2 What do you say in these situations? Write sentences with I wish ... would ...

- It's raining. You want to go out, but not in the rain.
You say: I wish it would stop raining.
- You're waiting for Jane. She's late and you're getting impatient.
You say to yourself: I wish
- You're looking for a job – so far without success. Nobody will give you a job.
You say: I wish somebody
- You can hear a baby crying. It's been crying for a long time and you're trying to study.
You say:
- Brian has been wearing the same clothes for years. You think he needs some new clothes.
You say to Brian:

For the following situations, write sentences with I wish ... wouldn't ...

- Your friend drives very fast. You don't like this.
You say to your friend: I wish you
- Joe leaves the door open all the time. This annoys you.
You say to Joe:
- A lot of people drop litter in the street. You don't like this.
You say: I wish people

41.3 Are these sentences right or wrong? Correct them where necessary.

- I wish Sarah would be here now. I wish Sarah were here now.
- I wish you would listen to me.
- I wish I would have more free time.
- I wish our flat would be a bit bigger.
- I wish the weather would change.
- I wish you wouldn't complain all the time.
- I wish everything wouldn't be so expensive.

41.4 Put the verb into the correct form.

- It was a stupid thing to say. I wish I hadn't said it. (I / not / say)
- I'm fed up with this rain. I wish it would stop. (it / stop)
- It's a difficult question. I wish the answer. (I / know)
- I should have listened to you. I wish your advice. (I / take)
- You're lucky to be going away. I wish with you. (I / can / come)
- I have no energy at the moment. I wish so tired. (I / not / be)
- Aren't they ready yet? I wish up. (they / hurry)
- It would be nice to stay here longer. I wish to leave now.
(we / not / have)
- When we were in London last year, we didn't have time to see all the things we wanted to see.
I wish longer. (we / can / stay)
- It's freezing today. I wish so cold. I hate cold weather. (it / not / be)
- Joe still doesn't know what he wants to do. I wish (he / decide)
- I really didn't enjoy the party. I wish (we / not / go)