

a Compare these examples:

Tom: I think I left my lighter at your house. Have you seen it?

Ann: No, but I'll look. **If I find** it, I'll give it to you.

In this example there is a real possibility that Ann will find the lighter. So she says: "If I **find** . . . I'll . . ." (see also Unit 9c).

Ann: **If I found** a \$100 bill on the street, I would keep it.

This is a different type of situation. Ann is not thinking about a real possibility; she is imagining the situation. So she says: "If I **found** . . . I **would** . . ." (not "If I find . . . I'll . . .").

When you imagine a future happening like this, you use a *past tense* form (**did/came/found**, etc.) after **if**. But the meaning is *not* past:

- What would you do **if you won** a million dollars?
- **If we didn't go** to their party next week, they would be very angry.
- Ann wouldn't lend me any money **if I asked** her.

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

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

Sometimes it is possible to say **if . . . would**, especially when you ask someone to do something in a formal way:

- I would be very grateful **if you would** send me your brochure and price list as soon as possible. (*from a formal letter*)

c In the other part of the sentence (not the **if** part) we use **would/wouldn't**. **Would** is often shortened to **'d**, especially in spoken English:

- If you stopped smoking, you'd probably **feel** healthier.
- They **wouldn't come** to the party if you invited them.

You can also use **could** and **might**:

- They **might be** angry if I didn't visit them. (= perhaps they would be)
- If it stopped raining, we **could go** out. (= we would be able to go out)

d Do not use **when** in sentences like the ones in this unit:

- Tom would be angry **if I didn't** visit him. (*not* when I didn't visit)
- What would you do **if you were** bitten by a snake? (*not* when you were)

See also Unit 9c.

For **if** sentences see also Units 35 and 36.

a Study this example situation:

Tom wants to call Sue, but he can't because he doesn't know her telephone number. He says:

If I knew her number, **I would call** her.

Tom says "**If I knew** her number . . ." This tells us that he doesn't know her number. He is imagining the situation. The real situation is that he doesn't know her number.

When you imagine a situation like this, you use a *past tense* form ("I did / I had / I knew," etc.) after **if**. But the meaning is present, not past:

- Tom would travel **if he had** more money. (but he doesn't have much money)
- **If I didn't want** to go, I wouldn't. (but I want to go)
- We wouldn't have any money **if we didn't work**. (but we work)

b We also use the past for a present situation after *wish*. We use **wish** to say that we regret something, that something is not as we would like it to be:



I wish I knew Sue's telephone number. (I don't know it.)

Do you ever wish you **could** fly? (You can't fly.)

I wish it **didn't rain** so much in this city. (It rains a lot.)

It's crowded here. **I wish** there **weren't** so many people. (There are a lot of people.)

I wish I **didn't have** to work. (I have to work.)

c In **if** sentences and after **wish** we use **were** instead of **was**:

- **If I were** you, I wouldn't buy that coat. (but I am not you)
- I'd go out **if it weren't** raining. (but it is raining)
- I wish my room **were** larger. (but it isn't very large)

d Do not use **would** in the **if** part of the sentence or after **wish**:

- **If I were** rich, I would buy a castle. (*not* **if I would** be rich)
- I wish I **were** taller. (*not* I wish I **would** be taller.)

But sometimes **I wish . . . would . . .** is possible. See Unit 37.

Could sometimes means "would be able to" and sometimes "was able to":

- She **could** (= would be able to) get a job more easily **if she could** (= was able to) type.

a Study this example situation:

Last month Ann was sick. Tom didn't know this, and he didn't go to see her. They met again after Ann got better. Tom said:

If I had known that you were sick, **I would have gone** to see you.

The real situation was that Tom didn't know Ann was sick. So he says **If I had known . . .** When you are talking about the past, you use the *past perfect* (**I had done / I had been / I had known**, etc.) after **if**.

- **If I had seen** you when you passed me in the street, I would have said hello. (but I didn't see you)
- I would have gone out **if I hadn't been** so tired. (but I was too tired)
- **If he had been looking** where he was going, he wouldn't have walked into the wall. (but he wasn't looking)

Do not use **would (have)** in the **if** part of the sentence:

- **If I had seen you**, I would have said hello. (*not* if I would have seen)

Both **would** and **had** can be shortened to **'d**:

- If I'd seen (= **had seen**) you, I'd have said (= **would have said**) hello.

b Use the *past perfect* (**I had done**) after **wish** when you say that you regret something that happened or didn't happen in the past:

- **I wish I had known** that Ann was sick. I would have gone to see her. (I didn't know that she was sick.)
- I feel sick. **I wish I hadn't eaten** so much. (I ate too much.)
- **Do you wish you had studied** science instead of languages? (You didn't study science.)
- The weather was terrible. **I wish it had been** warmer. (It wasn't warm.)

You cannot use **would have** after **wish**:

- I wish it **had been** warmer. (*not* would have been)

c **Would have (done)** is the past form of **would (do)**:

- If I had gone to the party last night, I **would be** tired now. (I am not tired now – *present*.)
- If I had gone to the party last night, I **would have seen** Ann. (I didn't see Ann – *past*.)

Might have and **could have** are possible instead of **would have**:

- If we'd played better, we **might have won**. (= perhaps we would have won)
- We **could have gone** out if the weather hadn't been so bad. (= we would have been able to go out)