


THE 10 WAYS TO USE WOULD

GRAMMAR LESSON & QUIZ

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Would is a modal auxiliary verb with lots of different uses in English. Today, you're going to learn ten ways to use would, from making polite requests to talking about your preferences.

1 To make polite requests

Let's start with one of the most common phrases with **would**. When we want to **ask** for something **politely**, we say **I would like...**

- I **would like** a cup of tea, please.
- I **would like** the scones with jam.
- I **would like** a new notebook.

We can use **would like** to request things for other people too.

- I would like a sandwich and my husband **would like** the salad.
- They **would like** water, please.

The structure of this is **subject + would like + object** or **subject + would like + to-infinitive**.

We can also use would to make requests as a **question**.

- **Would** you **close** the curtains, please?
- **Would** you **buy** me a newspaper?



2 To make invitations or offers

If we want to **offer** someone something or **invite** them somewhere, we also often use the word **would**. For example, if you want to **politely** offer someone a drink or some food, you can say:

- **Would you like** a cup of tea?
- **Would you like** a biscuit with that?

If you want to invite someone to an event or a place, you can say:

- **Would you like** to come to our house tomorrow for dinner?
- **Would you like** to go to the party tonight?

3 In reported speech

Reported speech is often a bit of a dreaded topic for English learners but it's actually quite easy when you know all the tenses. And, it's especially easy when you use the word **would**. Whenever you see the word **will** in **direct speech**, you can use **would** in **reported speech**. Here are two examples:

- She said she **would come**.
- They told me they **would finish** it by the next day.

Let's look at the transformation from direct speech to reported speech:

- "I **will** help you move house," said Robert.
- Robert said he **would** help me move house.

And another one:

- "I **will** be there at 5 pm," said Jean.
- You told me you **would** be here at 5 pm!



4 To talk about typical behaviour in the past

We also use **would** to talk about **repeated actions** in the **past**. These are actions we did often but don't do anymore. Look at these examples:

- When I was a child, we **would go** to France during the summer holidays.
- When Julian was at university, he **would eat** ready meals almost every night.

You **can't** use **would** to talk about **states** in the past. For states, we use the structure **used to** or the **past simple**.

- When I was a child, I **used to** love chocolate but now I don't like it.

Take a look at some more examples of when you can use **would** to talk about repeated past actions:

- Kaitlyn **would drink** milk with honey in the winter when she lived with her grandma.
- My friends and I **would play** football every evening when I was a teenager.
- My dad **would** often **go** away on business trips before he retired.

5 To talk about willingness in the past

If you want to talk about how **willing** or **happy** someone was to do something in the **past**, you can use the word **would**. Although, we usually use this in a negative sense, so, use the word **wouldn't**.

- The shop **wouldn't** give me a refund even though my new phone is obviously broken!
- Dave **wouldn't** carry any of my boxes for me.



6 In hypothetical situations

You can use **would** to talk about **unreal** or **hypothetical** situations. These are situations that we are imagining.

- I **would like** to live in Spain because the weather's beautiful. (but I live in England!)
- That restaurant **would be** too expensive. (so we won't go there!)
- I **would get** seasick with those huge waves so we're not going on the boat trip.
- They **would love** to visit Australia one day.

7 In conditional sentences

The second conditional

We use **would** in the second conditional to talk about **imaginary**, **impossible** or **very unlikely** situations in the **present**. With the second conditional, however, we have two clauses: the **if clause** and the **would clause**.

- **If I moved** to another country, **I would miss** my parents.
- **Claire would take** a trip around the world **if she won** the lottery.
- **If they spoke** English, **they would move** to New Zealand.
- **They would help** you **if you asked** them politely.

The structure of the second conditional is **[if + subject + past simple,] [subject + would + base form of the verb]**. Look carefully at the **comma** after the if clause: it needs to be there when the **if clause comes first**. But, when you change the order of the clauses, you can remove the comma.

And remember, even though we're using **past tenses**, we're imagining things in the **present**.

The third conditional

Next up, we have the third conditional. This is the conditional we use when we talk about **hypothetical situations** in the **past**. We often use this structure to **imagine changing the past** or things happening differently. Here are some examples of third conditional sentences:

- **I would have called** you **if I had known** you were at home.
- **If she had helped** us, **we would have finished** earlier.
- **If he had practised** more, **he would have passed** his driving test.
- **She wouldn't have missed** her flight **if her alarm had gone** off.

The structure of the third conditional is **[if + subject + past perfect,] [subject + would have + past participle]**. Again, when the **if clause** comes **first**, we need a **comma** after it.

*Want to learn more about the conditionals in English?
Check out [this video](#).*

8 With wish

We can use **would** with the verb **wish** to talk about things we **want people to do** (or not do !) but we know they **probably won't**. So, these are **hypothetical** sentences.

We usually use the construction when we're **annoyed** by someone's **habit** or something they do regularly. It's not usually about something no one can change and we **don't** use it to talk about ourselves. The structure of this is **[subject + wish] + [subject + would + base form of the verb]**.

Here are a few examples:

- I **wish** you **wouldn't leave** the door unlocked.
- Sam **wishes** his dad **wouldn't smoke**.
- I **wish** you **would clean** the house more often.
- I **wish** my sister **wouldn't borrow** my clothes.



9 To talk about preferences

If we want to talk about what we or someone else prefers from several options, we can use the phrase **would rather**. This could be a real situation in the present or a hypothetical situation.

The structure is **subject + would rather + base form of the verb**.

- I **would rather** get a takeaway today. I'm too tired to cook.
- **Would** you **rather** go to the cinema or the theatre?
- I **would rather** move to Canada than the US.
- We **would rather** start work at 8 am not 9.
- **Would** you **rather** have coffee or tea?

10 To give opinions

Finally, we're at the tenth way we can use would in English.

When we want to **give our opinion** about something but we want to be **polite** or we're **not sure** we're correct, we can use would as part of some set phrases.

We often say **I would think**, **I would imagine** or **I would guess**.

- **I would think** we need to talk to the manager before we commit to this.
- **I would imagine** it's been a tough few days for him.
- **I'd guess** he would want to help.

Looking for other interesting ways to give your opinion in English? Take a look at [this video](#).



Activity

Complete the sentences!

1. You're in a cafe and the waiter has just come over. Order a drink politely.
I _____ a _____, please.
2. You are going to catch a train tomorrow and you need someone to drive you to the station. Ask!
_____ me to the train station tomorrow?
3. Put this into reported speech: "I will be happy," said Sarah.
Sarah said...
4. Finish this sentence so it's true for you:
When I was a child, usually we _____ on holiday to...
5. You are telling someone that your friend refused to help you with some homework.
I asked Dieter to help me with my homework but he _____.
6. You want to live in Russia for a while so you can learn Russian but you know it won't happen.
I _____ to live in Russia and go to Russian classes.
7. a) Imagine you had lots of money. What would you buy?
If I _____ more money, I _____... (have, buy)
- b) You didn't invite your friend to a party because you thought he was on holiday.
I _____ you if I _____ you were back from your holiday. (invite, know)
8. Your housemate never washes their dirty dishes. Tell them what you want them to do using wish.
I _____ the dishes.
9. Your friend asks if you want to go out tonight. You want to stay at home.
I _____ at home tonight.
10. You are recommending a film to a friend you don't know very well. Give your opinion.
I _____ you would like that film.

1. I would like a --, please. 2. Would you drive, 3. she would be happy, 4. would go, 5. wouldn't, 6. would like, 7. a) had, would buy, b) would have invited, had known, 8. Wish you would, 9. would rather stay, 10. think/imagine/guess