

## ● Unreal past, wishes / contrast

### Unreal past

Past tenses do not always refer to past time. In some sentences and with some verbs or phrases we use a past tense to refer to the present or the future or to a general situation. These include sentences that contain:

| Structure                         | Example   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| a second conditional              | <i>I'd buy that top if I <b>had</b> more cash on me.</i>  |
| suppose / what if / imagine       | <i>I know it's probably not going to happen but <b>suppose</b> / <b>imagine</b> I <b>became</b> a famous super model!</i><br><i>I know it's probably not going to happen but <b>what if</b> I <b>became</b> a famous super model?</i> |
| would rather + you/he/she/we/they | <i>I'd <b>rather</b> you <b>didn't come</b> with me to the fashion show tomorrow.</i>   |
| it's (high/about) time            | <i><b>It's (high/about) time</b> that hats <b>came</b> back in fashion.</i>   |
| polite questions                  | <i><b>Did</b> you <b>want</b> me to send you our new catalogue when it comes out?</i>   |
| wish / if only                    | <i><b>If only</b> / I <b>wish</b> I <b>had</b> something to wear tonight.</i>   |

### Watch out!

- Suppose, what if and imagine can also be followed by a present tense. A present tense indicates that the situation is more likely to actually happen. A past tense indicates that the situation is less likely to actually happen.
  - ✓ What if you **are** accepted into art college? (more likely to happen)
  - ✓ What if you **were** accepted into art college? (less likely to happen)

### Wishes

We use different structures with *wish* / *if only*, depending on exactly what we want to express.

| Use   | Structure   | Example   |
|---|---|---|
| Expressing wishes about the present, future or generally                                  | <i>wish</i> / <i>if only</i> + past simple/continuous         | <i>I <b>wish</b> I <b>was studying</b> history of fashion instead of biology!</i> |
| Expressing wishes about the past  | <i>wish</i> / <i>if only</i> + past perfect simple/continuous | <i><b>If only</b> I'd <b>known</b> Burton's was having a sale last week.</i>      |
| Criticising other people or complaining about a situation now, in the future or generally | <i>wish</i> / <i>if only</i> + <i>would</i>                   | <i><b>If only</b> Henry <b>would</b> get a haircut!</i>                           |
| Expressing hypothetical ability or permission now, in the future or generally             | <i>wish</i> / <i>if only</i> + <i>could</i>                   | <i>I <b>wish</b> I <b>could</b> fit into these jeans.</i>                         |
| Expressing desires in a formal way  | <i>wish</i> + full infinitive                                 | <i>I <b>wish to try on</b> this ball gown.</i>                                    |

### Watch out!

- We do not usually say *If only* / *I wish* I would ...
  - ✓ ***If only** / I **wish** I **had** enough money to buy these shoes.*
  - ✓ ***If only** / I **wish** I **could** afford these shoes.*
  - ✗ ~~***If only** / I **wish** I **would** have enough money to buy these shoes.*~~
- To express desires about the future, we often use *hope*.
  - ✓ ***I hope** I **will** have enough money to buy these shoes next week.*
  - ✓ ***I hope to have** enough money to buy these shoes next week.*
  - ✗ ~~***I wish** I **will** have enough money to buy these shoes next week.*~~