

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:

I'd phone him **if I knew** his number.
(I'd phone = I **would** phone)

Sarah *doesn't* know Paul's number, so she says 'if I **knew**'.
She *imagines* what she **would** do **if** she **knew** his number.



... if I knew his number ...

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

- ☐ There are many things I'd like to do **if I had** more time. (but I don't have time)
- ☐ **If I didn't** want to go to the party, I wouldn't go. (but I want to go)
- ☐ **If you were** in my position, what would you do?
- ☐ It's a pity he can't drive. It would be useful **if he 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'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.

Compare:

- ☐ **I'm glad I live** here. (I live here and that's good)
- ☐ **I wish I lived** here. (I don't live here unfortunately)

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

You can also use **was**. 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 for a walk if it weren't so cold. | or | ... if it wasn't so cold. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I wish Anna were here. | or | I wish Anna was here. |

D We do not usually say 'if ... would'. We use **would** ('d) in the other part of the sentence:

- ☐ **If I were** rich, I **would** travel a lot. (*not* If I would be rich)
- ☐ Who **would** you ask **if** you **needed** help? (*not* if you would need)

In the same way we say:

- ☐ **I wish I had** something to read. (*not* I wish I would have)
- ☐ **I wish she were** here now. (*not* I wish she would be)

For '**I wish ... would ...**' see Unit 41.

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

- ☐ She **could get** a better job (she **could get** = she **would be able to** get)
if she **could speak** another language. (if she **could speak** = if she **was able to** speak)
- ☐ I wish I **could** help you. (I wish I **could** = I wish I **was able to**)

Exercises

39.1 Put the verb into the correct form.

- If I knew (I / know) his number, I would phone him.
- I wouldn't buy (I / not / buy) that coat if I were you.
- (I / help) you if I could, but I'm afraid I can't.
- This soup isn't very nice. (it / taste) better if it wasn't so salty.
- We live in a city and don't need a car, but we would need one if
(we / live) in the country.
- If we had the choice, (we / live) in the country.
- I'd make a lot of changes if (I / be) the manager of the company.
- I wouldn't call someone in the middle of the night if (it / not / be) important.
- If I were you, (I / not / wait). (I / go) now.
- You're always tired because you go to bed so late. If (you / not / go)
to bed so late every night, (you / not / be) tired all the time.
- I think there are too many cars. If (there / not / be) so many cars,
..... (there / not / be) so much pollution.
- We all need jobs and money, but what (you / do) if
..... (you / not / have) to work?

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

- 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.
- I like these shoes but they're too expensive, so I'm not going to buy them.
I them if so
- We'd like to go on holiday, but we can't afford it.
We if
- It would be nice to have lunch outside but it's raining, so we can't.
We
- 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 ...**.

- I don't know many people (and I'm lonely). I wish I knew more people.
- I don't have much free time (and I need more). I wish
- Helen isn't here (and I need to see her).
- It's cold (and I hate cold weather).
- I live in a big city (and I don't like it).
- I can't find my phone (which is a problem).
- I'm not feeling well (which isn't good).
- I have to get up early tomorrow (but I'd prefer to sleep late).
.....
- I don't know much about science (and I should know more).
.....

39.4 Write your own sentences beginning **I wish ...**.

- (somewhere you'd like to be now – on the beach, in New York, in bed etc.)
I wish I
- (something you'd like to have – a motorbike, more friends, lots of money etc.)
.....
- (something you'd like to be able to do – sing, travel more, cook etc.)
.....
- (something you'd like to be – famous, more intelligent, good at sport etc.)
.....