

## How to use 'would'

We can use **subject + would + infinitive** (I would go) or **subject + would + have + past participle** (I would have gone).

'Would' has quite a lot of different uses. It's often a kind of past tense version of 'will'.

Remember that both 'had' and 'would' can be shorted to **'d**. But only 'would' is followed by an infinitive without 'to'. 'Had' is followed by a past participle or by 'to + infinitive'.

### 1: The past of 'will' in reported speech

When we use 'will' in direct speech, we often use 'would' to change it into reported speech.

- Direct speech: I **will be** there at 6pm.
- Reported speech: She said that she **would be** there at 6pm.
- Direct speech: We **won't see** you at the party.
- Reported speech: They said that they **wouldn't see** us at the party

### 2: Willingness in the past

In the present we use 'will' to talk about willingness (willingness means that you are happy to do something). For example, if we say 'I will help you', this means 'I'm offering to help you' or 'I'm happy to help you'. We use 'would' for the same meaning in the past. Usually, we use this in the negative (when we are not happy to do something) and we use 'won't' for the present and 'wouldn't' for the past'.

- His mother **won't let** him go to the party.
- His mother **wouldn't let** him go to the party.

### 3: Habits in the past

- When we were children, we would go to the beach every summer.
- When I lived in Japan, I would take Japanese lessons three times a week.

This is similar in meaning to 'used to + infinitive'. [\*\*\* → see "used to", p. 2]

(We can also use 'will' for typical behaviour or habits in the present, though this is much less common than using 'would' for the past. An example in the present is 'she'll talk and talk for hours!')

### 4: Requests

We use both 'will' and 'would' to make requests. The meaning is the same for both, but a request with 'would' is more polite than a request with 'will'.

- Will you please help me?
- Would you please help me?

## 5: The second conditional

We use 'would + infinitive' in the second conditional.

- If I had enough money, I would travel around the world.
- If we lived in Madrid, we would study Spanish.

## 6: The third conditional

We use 'would + have + past participle' in the third conditional.

- If I had gone to bed earlier, I wouldn't have been so tired.
- If the train hadn't been late, we would have arrived on time.

[\*\*\* → see could have/ should have/ would have, p. 3]

## 7: With 'wish'

- I wish that he wouldn't smoke so much.
- I wish you would come to see me more often.

[\*\*\* → see "How to use 'wish'", p. 8]

## 8: With set phrases to talk about what we want

We use 'would' with some set phrases. These have some 'willingness' meaning in them.

- I would like some coffee.
- She would rather go to the cinema.
- We would prefer to leave immediately.
- Would you mind helping me?

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## Used To Do / Would Do / Be Used To Doing

### 'Used to + infinitive':

We use this expression to talk about habits or repeated actions in the past which we don't do in the present. We also use it to talk about states in the past which are no longer true. For example:

- I used to have long hair (but now I have short hair).
- He used to smoke (but now he doesn't smoke).
- They used to live in India (but now they live in Germany).

Watch out! With the negative and the question it's 'use' and not 'used':

- Did you use to be a teacher?
- Did he use to study French?
- She didn't use to like chocolate, but she does now.
- I didn't use to want to have a nice house.

Note! With this 'used to' there is no verb 'be'. We CAN'T say ~~I'm used to long hair.~~

### 'Would + infinitive'

We can also use 'would + infinitive' to talk about a habit or repeated action in the past. We usually use 'would + infinitive' in this way when we're telling a story about the past. So, we can say:

- When I was a student, we would often have a drink after class on a Friday.
- When I lived in Italy, we would go to a little restaurant near our house.

However, we don't use 'would + infinitive' to talk about states in the past. So, if we're talking about the past, we CAN'T say:

- ~~I would have long hair~~
- ~~I would live in Scotland~~

### 'Be used to':

We use 'be used to + verb-ing' to talk about things which feel normal for us or things that we are accustomed to:

- I'm used to getting up early, so I don't mind doing it (= getting up early is normal for me, it's what I usually do).
- My little daughter is used to eating lunch at noon. So she was grumpy yesterday when we didn't eat until one.

Note that we make the negative or the question with the verb 'be' in the normal way. The 'used to' doesn't change:

- Lucy isn't used to staying up late, so she's very tired today.
- Are your children used to walking a lot?

We can also use 'be used to + noun', which has the same meaning:

- I've lived in the UK almost all my life, so I'm used to rain (= rain is normal for me).
- That football team always lose, so they're used to disappointment!

We can put the verb 'be' into any tense. So we can talk about things in the past or the future as well as the present using this expression:

- It was difficult when I first started university, because I wasn't used to the amount of work we had to do.
- Soon I'll be used to driving in London and I won't be so frightened!

We can use 'get used to + verb-ing' to talk about the change of not normal to normal. We can also use this in any tense:

- Don't worry if your new job is hard at first. You'll get used to it.
- It took me a while, but I got used to speaking another language every day.
- It took me a few months to get used to living in Japan. At first everything seemed very different, but then gradually it became normal for me.

## Could have, should have, would have

These past modal verbs are all used hypothetically, to talk about things that didn't really happen in the past.

### Could have + past participle

1: **Could have + past participle** means that something was possible in the past, or you had the ability to do something in the past, but that you didn't do it. (See also [modals of ability](#).)

- I could have stayed up late, but I decided to go to bed early.
- They could have won the race, but they didn't try hard enough.
- Julie could have bought the book, but she borrowed it from the library instead.
- He could have studied harder, but he was too lazy and that's why he failed the exam.

**Couldn't have + past participle** means that something wasn't possible in the past, even if you had wanted to do it.

- I couldn't have arrived any earlier. There was a terrible traffic jam (= it was impossible for me to have arrived any earlier).
- He couldn't have passed the exam, even if he had studied harder. It's a really, really difficult exam.

2: We use **could have + past participle** when we want to make a guess about something that happened in the past. (See also [modals of probability](#).) In this case, we don't know if what we're saying is true or not true. We're just talking about our opinion of what maybe happened.

Why is John late?

- He could have got stuck in traffic.
- He could have forgotten that we were meeting today.
- He could have overslept.

We can also choose to use **might have + past participle** to mean the same thing:

- He might have got stuck in traffic.
- He might have forgotten that we were meeting today.
- He might have got stuck in traffic.

### Should have + past participle

1: **Should have + past participle** can mean something that would have been a good idea, but that you didn't do it. It's like giving advice about the past when you say it to someone else, or regretting what you did or didn't do when you're talking about yourself.

**Shouldn't have + past participle** means that something wasn't a good idea, but you did it anyway.

- I should have studied harder! (= I didn't study very hard and so I failed the exam. I'm sorry about this now.)
- I should have gone to bed early (= I didn't go to bed early and now I'm tired).
- I shouldn't have eaten so much cake! (= I did eat a lot of cake and now I don't feel good.)
- You should have called me when you arrived (= you didn't call me and I was worried. I wish that you had called me).
- John should have left early, then he wouldn't have missed the plane (= but he didn't leave early and so he did miss the plane).

2: We can also use **should have + past participle** to talk about something that, if everything is normal and okay, we think has already happened. But we're not certain that everything is fine, so we use 'should have' and not the present perfect or past simple. It's often used with 'by now'.

- His plane should have arrived by now (= if everything is fine, the plane has arrived).
  - John should have finished work by now (= if everything is normal, John has finished work).
- We can also use this to talk about something that would have happened if everything was fine, but hasn't happened.
- Lucy should have arrived by now, but she hasn't.

### Would have + past participle

1: Part of the third conditional.

- If I had had enough money, I would have bought a car (but I didn't have enough money, so I didn't buy a car).

2: Because 'would' (and will) can also be used to show if you want to do something or not (volition), we can also use **would have + past participle** to talk about something you wanted to do but didn't. This is very similar to the third conditional, but we don't need an 'if clause'.

- I would have gone to the party, but I was really busy.  
(= I wanted to go to the party, but I didn't because I was busy. If I hadn't been so busy, I would have gone to the party.)
- I would have called you, but I didn't know your number.  
(= I wanted to call you but I didn't know your number, so I didn't call you.)
- A: Nobody volunteered to help us with the fair  
B: I would have helped you. I didn't know you needed help.  
(= If I had known that you needed help, I would have helped you.)

## How to Use 'Wish'

### Wishes about the present or future

#### Wish + (that) + past simple:

We can use 'wish' to talk about something that we would like to be different in the present or the future. It's used for things which are impossible or very unlikely.

- I wish that I had a big house (I don't have a big house, but it's a nice idea!).
- I wish that we didn't need to work today (we do need to work today, unfortunately).
- I wish that you lived close by (you don't live close by).
- I wish that John wasn't busy tomorrow\* (he is busy, unfortunately).

(\*In formal writing, you will see 'were' instead of 'was' after wish. This is correct, but it's also fine to use 'was', in the same way as with the **second conditional**: 'I wish I were rich' or 'I wish I was rich'.)

We also use 'wish' with 'could' to talk about things in the present or future that we would like to be different. In this situation, 'could' is the past simple of 'can'.

Of course, we use 'can' to talk about ability - if we know how to do something or not. For example, 'I can speak Spanish' or 'I can't drive'. We also use 'can' to talk about possibility - if things are possible or not possible. For example, 'we can't come to the party tonight' or 'John can help you clean up'. We use 'could' with 'wish' to talk about ability and to talk about possibility.

- I wish that I could speak Spanish (but, unfortunately, I can't speak Spanish).
- I wish that I could drive (I can't drive).
- I wish that we could go to the party tonight (unfortunately, we're busy so we can't go).
- I wish that John could help you clean up (John is at work, so he can't help).

We don't usually use 'wish' in this way for things that are really possible in the future. Instead, we use 'hope'. [\*\*\* → see "hope", p. 8]

- I hope that you pass your exam (NOT: ~~I wish that you passed the exam~~).
- I hope that it's sunny tomorrow (NOT: ~~I wish that it was sunny tomorrow~~).
- I hope that Julie has a lovely holiday (NOT: ~~I wish that Julie had a lovely holiday~~).

#### Wish + (that) + would:

On the other hand, we use 'would' with 'wish' in a little bit of a special way. It's generally used about other people who are doing (or not doing) something that we don't like and we want that person to change. It's not usually used about ourselves, or about something which nobody can change though, exceptionally, we do use it about the weather.

- I wish that John wouldn't eat all the chocolate. (John does usually eat all the chocolate and I don't like it. I want him to change his behaviour!)
- I wish that the neighbours would be quiet! (They are not quiet and I don't like the noise.)

- I wish that you wouldn't smoke so much! (You do smoke a lot and I don't like it. I want you to change this.)
- I wish that you wouldn't work late so often.
- I wish that it would stop raining!

We don't usually use 'would' when there's no feeling that we want somebody to change their behaviour.

- NOT: ~~I wish that tomorrow would be a holiday~~ (Instead: I wish that tomorrow was a holiday.)
- NOT: ~~I wish that I would work harder~~ (It's strange to use 'wish' + 'would' about yourself, as you can change your behaviour if you don't like it!)

### Wishes about the past

#### Wish + (that) + past perfect:

We can use 'wish' with the past perfect to talk about regrets from the past. These are things that have already happened but we wish they'd happened in a different way. This use of 'wish' is very similar to the **third conditional**.

- I wish that I had studied harder at school. (I didn't study hard at school, and now I'm sorry about it.)
- I wish that I hadn't eaten so much yesterday! (But I did eat a lot yesterday. Now I think it wasn't a good idea.)
- I wish that the train had been on time. (But unfortunately the train was late, and so I missed my interview.)

### Other uses of 'wish'

#### Wish + to + infinitive:

We can use 'wish' with the infinitive to mean 'would like'. This is very formal. We don't usually use a continuous tense with 'wish' in this case.

- I wish to speak to the headmaster. (This means the same as 'I would like to speak to the headmaster'.)
- I wish to go now.

#### Wish + object + to + infinitive:

In the same way, we can use 'wish' with an object and an infinitive.

- I do not wish you to publish this article.
- I wish these people to leave.

#### Wish + somebody + something:

This is used mostly in set phrases.

- I wished him a happy birthday.

- They wished us Merry Christmas.

## Hope

We use 'hope' to talk about things in the present or future that we think have a good chance of happening. On the other hand, we use 'wish' to talk about things that are impossible or unlikely.

We usually need to use '(that) + clause' after 'hope' or 'to + infinitive'. It's very common to drop 'that'.

- I hope that you have a great time.
- I hope that she passed the exam.
- I hope to pass the exam.
- I hope to get there early.

We can also use two short answers: 'I hope so' and 'I hope not'.

### Hope for the present

We can use the present simple (mostly for stative verbs) or the present continuous.

- I hope (that) it's sunny where you are.
- I hope (that) she's having a wonderful time.

### Hope for the future

We can use either the present simple (more common) or the future simple (less common). It usually doesn't change the meaning.

- I hope that she comes to the party tomorrow.
- I hope that she'll come to the party tomorrow.

We often use 'can' with 'hope' for the future.

- I hope you can come to the party tomorrow.

We can use 'to + infinitive' with 'hope' for the future. When we use 'to + infinitive', the subject is the same as the subject of 'hope'.

- I hope to come to the party tomorrow. (=I hope I can come to the party tomorrow.)
- I hope to run a marathon this year.

### Hope for the past

We can also use 'hope' to talk about the past when we think it was possible for the thing to really happen.

1: We can use 'hope' for the past when something happened and is finished, but we don't know what the result was. For example, if you have taken an exam, but I don't know if you passed or not.

We still use 'hope' in the present tense, because it's something that we hope now, but the thing



that we're thinking about is in the past. We can use the past tenses and the present perfect in the normal way (if something has an effect on the present, we use the present perfect and so on).

- I hope she passed the exam.
- I hope John hasn't got lost.
- I hope Amanda found her keys.

2: We can use 'hope' for the past when we do know the result or outcome. For example, if you have taken an exam and failed and I know you failed. In this case, we use 'hope' in a past tense, because we no longer hope for the event or thing; we know it didn't happen. We use it to tell someone about how we felt in the past.

- I hoped you would pass the exam. (But you didn't pass).
- I hoped I'd see Lucy at the meeting. (But I didn't see her.)

It's common to use 'hope' in the past continuous (which doesn't really change the meaning from the past simple) and in the past perfect (which makes the idea that the hoping is finished stronger) in these kinds of sentences.

- I was hoping you would pass the exam.
- I had hoped you would pass the exam.

This use is very compatible with the third conditional.

- I was hoping to pass the exam, and I would have passed it if I hadn't got sick.

### Hope for 'future in the past'

Advanced point: Sometimes we use 'hope' for 'future in the past'. So, in the following example, the mother thought, in the past, 'I hope my son will go to university', and when we talk about this from the present, we use 'would'. We don't know if the son in fact went to university or not from this sentence.

- She always hoped that her son would go to university.

Another example:

- I got lost in the middle of London and I hoped that I would be able to find my way back to my hotel. (We don't know if the person found the hotel or not.)

### Hope for negative wishes

It's also possible to use 'hope' in a very negative way. In this case, the thing doesn't need to be possible.

- I hope your hair falls out and you lose all your money!