

RT

The Roads Not Taken

Five people, five turning points, and the grammar of regret: wish and if only

B2

Reading

Grammar

40 min

★ Lesson Objectives

- ★ Read personal stories about life-changing decisions
- ★ Learn vocabulary related to decisions, regret and reflection
- ★ Use wish and if only for present, past and future
- ★ Distinguish wish + past simple, wish + past perfect, wish + would
- ★ Discuss personal regrets and hypothetical life choices
- ★ Write about decisions using wish and if only

1 Before You Read

- ▶ If you could change one decision in your life, what would it be?
- ▶ Is regret useful or a waste of energy?
- ▶ 'Everything happens for a reason.' Do you agree?

2 Reading: Five Lives, Five Turning Points

Every life is shaped by a handful of moments — the job you took, the person you married, the opportunity you let slip through your fingers.

Elena, 41, Athens. Turned down a scholarship to study music in Vienna for her boyfriend. They broke up a year later. "I wish I had accepted that scholarship. If only I had been braver."

Daisuke, 37, Osaka. Inherited a struggling printing business. "I wish I were doing something I loved. If only I could go back, I would sell the company and follow my passion."

Amara, 29, Nairobi. Dropped out for a tech startup. It failed, then a second took off. "I don't regret it. If only more people knew that failure is a stepping stone. I wish society didn't punish risk-takers."

Marco, 55, Milan. Refused to invest in a coffee chain that now has 200 locations. "I wish I had invested. I wish I hadn't been so cautious. I wish people would stop reminding me!"

Signe, 48, Bergen. Left a prestigious law firm to become a ceramicist. "I wish I had done it sooner. If only I had listened to myself earlier. But I don't dwell on it. I finally made the leap."

Regret is universal. Sometimes the road not taken leads nowhere. Sometimes the painful road leads exactly where you need to be. The most powerful words: **if only**.

3 Vocabulary

Word	Definition	Example
scholarship	money for education	<i>Won a scholarship.</i>
inherited	received from family	<i>Inherited the business.</i>
duty	moral obligation	<i>Sense of duty.</i>
profitable	making money	<i>No longer profitable.</i>
passion	strong enthusiasm	<i>Teaching was her passion.</i>
devastated	extremely upset	<i>Would have been devastated.</i>
tech startup	new tech company	<i>Her startup failed.</i>
minimum-wage	lowest legal pay	<i>Minimum-wage jobs.</i>
stepping stone	helps you progress	<i>Failure as stepping stone.</i>
risky	involving danger/loss	<i>Seemed too risky.</i>
cautious	careful to avoid problems	<i>Too cautious to invest.</i>
rueful	showing sad regret	<i>A rueful smile.</i>
prestigious	high status/respect	<i>Left a prestigious firm.</i>
ceramicist	makes pottery	<i>Became a ceramicist.</i>
dwel	think too long about	<i>Don't dwell on the past.</i>
leap	big, brave step	<i>Made the leap.</i>

Collocations: turning point • missed opportunity • what might have been • look back on • take a risk • follow your heart • pay off a debt • make a leap

4 Grammar: Wish & If Only

■ In the Text, You Saw...

- Present: "I wish I were doing something I loved." (now)
- Past: "I wish I had accepted that scholarship." (regret)
- Would: "I wish people would stop reminding me." (annoyance)
- If only: "If only I had been braver." (strong wish)

Type	Structure	Use	Example
Present	wish + past simple	Different NOW	I wish I lived by the sea.
Past	wish + past perfect	PAST regret	I wish I had studied harder.
Would	wish + would	Annoyance/complaint	I wish he would listen.
Ability	wish + could	Want ability	I wish I could fly.

★ Wish vs If Only

I wish = normal wish. If only = stronger, more emotional.

"I wish I had more time." vs "If only I had more time!" (same grammar, different intensity)

★ Wish + Were

Formal: "I wish I were taller." / "If only he were here."

Informal: "I wish I was taller." — but were is preferred in exams and writing.

▲ Common Mistakes

X "I wish I can fly." → ✓ "I wish I could fly."

X "I wish I didn't go yesterday." → ✓ "I wish I hadn't gone..."

X "I wish I would be taller." → ✓ "I wish I were taller." (would = for others)

5 Game: Present, Past, or Would?

- I live in a noisy city. → I wish I ___ in a quiet village. → lived (present wish)
- I didn't study. I failed. → I wish I ___ for the exam. → had studied (past regret)
- Loud music every night. → I wish he ___ playing. → would stop (annoyance)
- Can't speak Japanese. → If only I ___ speak Japanese. → could (ability)
- She turned down the job. → She wishes she ___ it. → had accepted (past regret)
- Not tall enough. → He wishes he ___ taller. → were (present wish)
- Said something rude. → If only I ___ that. → hadn't said (past regret)
- It keeps raining. → I wish it ___ raining. → would stop (wanting change)
- Not enough money. → I wish I ___ more money. → had (present wish)
- Didn't go to concert. → If only she ___! → had gone (past regret)

6 Comprehension Quiz

1. Why does Elena regret?

Answer: She turned down a scholarship for her boyfriend

2. What is Daisuke's dilemma?

Answer: Inherited a struggling business but wants to teach

3. What's unusual about Amara?

Answer: She doesn't regret failing because it led to success

4. What does Signe wish?

Answer: That she had made the career change sooner

5. 'I wish I ___ near the sea.' (present)

Answer: lived

6. 'I wish I ___ harder last year.' (past)

Answer: had studied

7. 'I wish he ___ smoking.' (annoyance)

Answer: would stop

8. 'If only I ___ braver.' Correct form?

Answer: were (formal)

7 Fill in the Blanks

Words: had • had checked • were • would stop • could • had taken • would • had known

1. I wish I ___ more time to travel.
2. If only she ___ that email before sending it.
3. He wishes he ___ taller.
4. I wish they ___ making noise.
5. If only I ___ speak Italian.
6. She wishes she ___ the job.
7. I wish my boss ___ listen to my ideas.
8. If only we ___ about the traffic earlier.

● **Answers:** 1. had • 2. had checked • 3. were • 4. would stop • 5. could • 6. had taken • 7. would • 8. had known

8 Speaking & Writing

◆ Discussion Questions

1. Which of the five stories do you relate to most?
2. Do you wish you had chosen a different career?
3. Take a risk and fail, or play it safe and wonder 'what if'?
4. Complete: 'If only I ___...'
5. Can failure really be a stepping stone?

◆ Example Dialogue

- A: I wish I had travelled more in my twenties.
B: If only I had taken that gap year everyone recommended.
A: I wish I were the kind of person who takes risks.
B: I wish my job would give me more flexibility.
A: If only we could go back in time!

◆ Writing Task

Write 80–120 words about decisions and regrets:

- What do you wish were different now? (wish + past simple)
- What do you wish you had done differently? (wish + past perfect)
- What do you wish others would change? (wish + would)

Use wish and if only at least 4 times.

9 Review Checklist

I can now...

- ✓ understand personal stories about life-changing decisions
- ✓ use vocabulary related to decisions, regret and reflection
- ✓ use wish + past simple for present regrets
- ✓ use wish + past perfect for past regrets
- ✓ use wish + would for complaints and annoyance
- ✓ understand the difference between wish and if only



Congratulations!

You have completed Lesson 17: The Roads Not Taken.