

A2 · TEENS · LESSON 15 · SECOND CONDITIONAL

If I had wings, I'd fly.

A tense for the things that aren't true — daydreams, hypotheticals, polite advice, and quiet wishes. Step from the real world (first conditional) into the imaginary one. The form looks like the past, but it's all about now.

if + past → would

The formula

were · not was

The special rule

unreal · imagined

Not actually true

/

Warm-Up

Daydream · wish · imagine

Imagine for a moment...

Last lesson, we used *if* for things that **might really happen**: "If it rains, I'll stay." This lesson is about things that **aren't true** — pure imagination. Try answering each daydream with a full sentence.

1. If you **could meet** any famous person, who *would* it be? (*They aren't here.*)
2. If you **had** a million dollars, what *would* you buy first? (*You don't have it... yet.*)
3. If you **could live** anywhere in the world, where *would* you live?
4. If you **were** the prime minister of Turkey for one day, what *would* you change?

//

Grammar Focus

The Second Conditional

The *second conditional* is for situations that are **imagined, hypothetical, or not true now**. It's how we daydream in English. The if-clause uses **past simple** (even though we mean now), and the result clause uses *would / wouldn't + verb*.

Don't be fooled by the past tense form — "If I *had* a car..." doesn't mean you had one yesterday. It means you *don't have one now*, and you're imagining what life would be like if you did. The past form is just English's way of saying: **this isn't real**.

THE FORMULA

If + **past simple** , **would / wouldn't** + verb.

"If I **knew** her number, I **would call** her." · "I **wouldn't go** if I **didn't have** to."

FIRST vs. SECOND — THE KEY CONTRAST

Real possibility, or pure imagination?

Both conditionals look similar, but they live in different worlds. The **first** is about your real future — things that *might* happen. The **second** is about a parallel universe — things that *aren't* true now, but you can imagine.

FIRST · REAL POSSIBILITY

"If it **rains**, I **'ll stay** home."

It might really rain. The future is open. Use **present + will**.

SECOND · IMAGINED

"If I **had** a private island, I **'d live** there."

You don't have an island. It's a daydream. Use **past + would**.

FIRST · LIKELY

"If she **calls**, I **'ll answer**."

She might really call. It's possible right now.

SECOND · UNLIKELY

"If I **spoke** ten languages, I **'d be** a translator."

You don't speak ten. It's just imagination — a "what if".

USE 1 · DAYDREAMING / IMAGINING**Pure "what if" thinking**

The most common use: imagining things that aren't true. Movies, dreams, "what if" questions. The condition is unreal or unlikely; the speaker knows it.

*"If I **had** wings, I 'd fly to Iceland tomorrow."*

*"If we **lived** on Mars, life would be very different."*

*"What would you do if you **won** the lottery?"*

USE 2 · POLITE ADVICE**"If I were you, I would..."**

The classic English way to give advice without sounding bossy. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes — imaginary, of course (you aren't them).

*"If I were you, I **would apologise** to her."*

*"If I were in your situation, I **wouldn't worry** so much."*

"Would you tell him the truth, if you were me?"

USE 3 · QUIET WISHES / REGRETS

Wishing the present were different

Use the second conditional to express a soft regret about how things are right now — a quiet wish that something were different in the present.

"If I **had** more time, I 'd learn piano."

"If we **didn't live** so far apart, we 'd see each other every day."

"If my brother **weren't** so loud, I could study at home."

★ THE SPECIAL RULE

Use *were* — not *was* — with all subjects

In careful English, the second conditional uses **were** for every subject (I, he, she, it, we, they) — not "was". This is a leftover from old English (called the *subjunctive*), and it survives in this one place. Many speakers also accept "was" in casual speech, but in writing and exams, always use **were**.

FIRST PERSON — I

"If I **were** rich..." (not "if I was rich")

THIRD PERSON — HE/SHE/IT

"If she **were** here..." (not "if she was here")

FAMOUS FORMULA

"If I **were** you, I would..." (NEVER "if I was you")

IT / WEATHER

"If it **weren't** so cold..." (not "if it wasn't so cold")

**Key Vocabulary**

10 words for hypothetical situations

WORD	POS	MEANING	EXAMPLE
imagine	(v)	picture in your mind	<i>Imagine if we lived in space.</i>
wish	(v)	want something not real	<i>I wish I had more free time.</i>
dream of	(v)	hope for / fantasise about	<i>I dream of living by the sea.</i>
hypothetical	(adj)	imaginary, not real	<i>It's a hypothetical question.</i>
a fortune	(n)	a very large amount of money	<i>If I had a fortune, I'd give half away.</i>
quit (a job)	(v)	leave on purpose	<i>If I won the lottery, I'd quit my job.</i>
save (a life)	(v)	rescue, prevent harm	<i>If I were a doctor, I'd save lives.</i>
apologise	(v)	say sorry	<i>If I were you, I would apologise.</i>
probably	(adv)	very likely but not certain	<i>If I had wings, I'd probably fly to Italy.</i>
honestly	(adv)	truthfully — used to soften / emphasise	<i>Honestly, if I were rich, I'd still work.</i>

IV

Reading

Four daydreams, four imagined lives

THE WHAT IF ISSUE · VOLUME 15

Lives we *would* live, if...

A daydream in Cape Town, advice in Athens, a regret in Tbilisi, a wish in Buenos Aires. Four teenagers, four imagined worlds.

STORY ONE · A DAYDREAM AT THE BUS STOP

Kefilwe, 14 · Cape Town

Every morning, Kefilwe waits forty minutes for the bus to school. Forty minutes. She's calculated it: that's nearly five hours a week, just standing. So she daydreams. "If I **had** wings," she tells her best friend Naledi one Tuesday, "I **'d fly** home for lunch every day. I *wouldn't* eat the dry sandwiches. I'd have my mum's bunny chow."

"And if you **could** fly," Naledi adds, joining in, "where else **would** you go?" Kefilwe thinks. "I **'d fly** to Lagos to see my cousins. I **'d fly** over the ocean just to see what whales look like from above. And I *wouldn't* pay for any plane tickets — ever again."

The bus arrives. The girls climb on. They don't have wings. But for forty minutes, they almost did.

DAYDREAM · PURE IMAGINATION Every *if*-clause is in **past simple** ("had", "could fly"), but the meaning is *now / imagined*. The result clauses use 'd (*would*) and *wouldn't* for negation. Classic Use 1.

STORY TWO · A GRANDMOTHER'S WISDOM

Eleni, 15 · Athens

Eleni's grandmother — her *yiayia* — has one phrase she uses for every problem in life. Bad day at school? "**If I were** you, I '**d eat** something sweet and sleep early." Fight with a friend? "**If I were** you, I '**d call** her tonight, before you fall asleep angry."

Eleni has noticed that her *yiayia* never says "if I *was*". Always "*were*". One day she asks why. Her *yiayia* laughs. "Because I'm not you, my love. I'm imagining. *Were* is for imagining. *Was* is for what really happened."

This week, Eleni has a problem she can't solve. Her best friend hasn't answered her texts in five days. She thinks of her *yiayia*. "**If I were** you," she imagines her grandmother saying, "I **would just call**." So Eleni calls. Her friend picks up on the second ring, crying. She had been waiting for someone to ask first.

USE 2 · ADVICE WITH "IF I WERE YOU" The *yiayia*'s phrase is the most common second-conditional structure in spoken English: "**If I were you, I would ...**" It's polite, kind, and leaves the choice with the listener.

STORY THREE · THE PIANO IN THE HALLWAY

Nika, 16 · Tbilisi

There is a piano in the hallway of Nika's apartment. It's been there since his great-grandmother lived in this flat, sixty years ago. Nika played it as a child, but stopped at thirteen when school got serious. Now, at sixteen, he passes it twenty times a day on the way to his room.

"If I **had** more time," he tells his mother one evening, "I *would practise* every day. I *would learn* Chopin. I *would play* at the school concert in May." His mother looks at him. "You *have* the time, Nika. You watch your phone for three hours every night."

He stops. She's right. The truth is: it's not time. It's something else. He's afraid to be bad at something he was once good at. "If I *weren't* so afraid," he says quietly, "I *would sit down* right now." His mother smiles. "Then sit down." He does.

USE 3 · SOFT REGRET / WISH Nika's "If I had more time, I'd practise" is a quiet wish about the present. Notice the shift to "If I *weren't* so afraid" — using **were**, not *was*, even with "I". Perfect second-conditional form.

STORY FOUR · A LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIP

Tomás, 17 · Buenos Aires

Tomás's best friend Lucas moved to Madrid two years ago. They video call every Sunday. They write each other long messages. But Tomás still misses him every single week.

"If we **didn't live** so far apart," Tomás writes one night, "we *would meet* for coffee every morning. We *would walk* to school together. We *wouldn't have* to schedule everything."

Lucas writes back at 4 a.m. Madrid time, because he can't sleep either. "If I *could teleport*," he says, "I *'d be* there in five minutes. We *'d go* for empanadas right now. *Would* you come, even if it *were* raining?" "I *'d come* in any weather," Tomás writes. "If you *were* here, nothing else *would matter*."

They are not in the same city. They probably won't be for years. But for ten minutes that night, in two languages and two time zones, they share an imaginary morning.

USE 1 + 3 · IMAGINING + WISH This story mixes pure daydream ("if I could teleport") with quiet wish about the real present ("if we didn't live so far"). Both are second conditional — both step out of reality for a moment.

V Practice

Fill the blanks with the correct form

Choose the correct form for each sentence. Coloured tags indicate which part of the conditional or which rule to apply.

LEGEND: IF-CLAUSE MAIN CLAUSE WERE RULE NEGATIVE 1st vs 2nd

1. If I ____ a car, I would drive to the coast. **IF-CLAUSE**
 A have B will have C had
2. If she knew his number, she ____ him. **MAIN CLAUSE**
 A would call B will call C calls
3. If I ____ you, I would tell the truth. **WERE RULE**
 A was B were C am
4. If we lived nearer, we ____ have to travel so much. **NEGATIVE**
 A wouldn't B don't C won't
5. If it rains tonight, I ____ at home. (*real possibility*) **1st vs 2nd**
 A would stay B stayed C will stay
6. If I ____ a million euros, I'd open my own school. (*unreal*) **1st vs 2nd**
 A have B will have C had
7. If she ____ here, she would help us. **WERE RULE**
 A is B were C would be
8. I ____ learn Japanese if I had more free time. **MAIN CLAUSE**
 A would B will C am

VI

Speaking

Five imaginary scenarios

What *would* you do if...?**ASK A PARTNER — ANSWER FULLY, WITH WOULD / WOULDN'T**

Each prompt asks you to imagine. Answer in a full second-conditional sentence: "If ... , I would ...". Then add why or what else you would do.

1. If you *could* change one thing about your school, what would you change?
2. If you *were* invisible for one day, where would you go and what would you do?
3. If you *could* meet any historical person, who would it be and what would you ask?
4. If you *found* a wallet with 5,000 lira on the street, what would you do?
5. If you *didn't* have to sleep, how would you spend the extra eight hours?

MODEL DIALOGUE — INVISIBLE FOR A DAY

A: "What *would* you do if you could be invisible for a day?"

B: "I think I *would* go to a museum at night, when no one is there."

A: "Nice. I *'d* listen to what my teachers really say about us in the staff room!"

B: "Oh, that's terrifying. I *wouldn't* want to know."

A: "If I *were* you, I *'d* be braver. Knowledge is power!"

VI

Writing

My imaginary life (80-120 words)

Choose the correctly-formed second conditional:

- A If I would have wings, I fly.
- B If I will have wings, I would fly.
- C If I had wings, I would fly.
- D If I have wings, I will fly.

Q2 OF 8 · THE "WERE" RULE

In careful English: "If I ____ you, I would say sorry."

- A am
- B were
- C was
- D would be

Q3 OF 8 · THE CLASSIC MISTAKE

Which sentence is *incorrect*?

- A If I had more time, I would learn Spanish.
- B If she lived here, we would meet often.
- C If they knew the truth, they would be sad.
- D If I would have money, I would travel.

Q4 OF 8 · NEGATIVE

"If I didn't have an exam tomorrow, I ____ to the party."

- A would go
- B will go
- C go
- D would going

Q5 OF 8 · READING RECALL

In Story Two, what does Eleni's *yiayia* always say?

- A "If I were you, I would..."
- B "If I will be you, I will..."
- C "If I was you, I would..."
- D "When I was you, I did..."

Q6 OF 8 · FIRST OR SECOND?

Which is the real future (first conditional, not second)?

- A If I lived on Mars, I'd miss the sea.
- B If I had wings, I would fly home.
- C If it rains tomorrow, I'll take the bus.
- D If I were rich, I'd quit my job.

Q7 OF 8 · WORD ORDER

Which sentence is correctly punctuated?

- A If I had time I would help you.
- B If I had time, I would help you.
- C If I had, time I would help you.
- D If, I had time, I would help, you.

Q8 OF 8 · MEANING

"If I had a car, I would drive to school." This means:

- A I have a car and I drive to school.
- B I had a car last year.
- C I don't have a car. It's an imagined situation.
- D I will buy a car tomorrow.

Answer Key

PRACTICE (PART VI)

1. C 2. A 3. B 4. A 5. C 6. C 7. B 8. A

QUIZ (PART IX)

Q1. C Q2. B Q3. D Q4. A Q5. A Q6. C Q7. B Q8. C