

GRAMMAR · LESSON 15 · B1

I wish I understood Scottish accents. But I don't — yet.

Wish + Past Simple — the grammar of longing

Wish + past simple is how English says "I want this to be different, but it isn't." The past tense doesn't mean the past — it means **distance from reality**, just like in the second conditional.

🕒 50 min

📄 Wishes

📄 CEFR B1

👤 Ages 11-16

What you'll learn

- Use **wish + past simple** for present situations you want to change.
- Use **wish + could** for abilities, **wish + would** for other people's habits (never about yourself).
- Use **wish + had + V3** for past regrets. See the direct link to the second conditional.

1

WARM-UP · 4 MIN

What do you wish were different?

- | | |
|----|--|
| Q1 | Name one thing about school you wish were different. |
| Q2 | Is there a skill you wish you could do? |
| Q3 | Think of someone whose habit annoys you. What do you wish they would stop? |
| Q4 | Is there something from last week you wish you had done differently? |

2

GRAMMAR FOCUS · 18 MIN

Three types of wish

English uses **wish** to talk about things we want to be different but **can't change right now**. After wish, the verb moves **one tense back** — exactly like the second conditional.

I wish + past simple / past form

WISH + PAST SIMPLE	WISH + COULD	WISH + WOULD
<p>Present situations</p> <p>I wish I lived closer. (= <i>but I don't</i>) She wishes she spoke better English.</p>	<p>Abilities you lack</p> <p>I wish I could play guitar. (= <i>but I can't</i>) He wishes he could stay longer.</p>	<p>Other people's habits</p> <p>I wish it would stop raining. She wishes her brother would tidy up. (<i>Never about yourself!</i>)</p>

Wish and the second conditional – same tense shift

WISH	SECOND CONDITIONAL (L14)
I wish I had a car. (= <i>I don't.</i>)	If I had a car, I'd drive . (= <i>same unreal.</i>)
I wish I spoke French. (= <i>I don't.</i>)	If I spoke French, I'd work in Paris.

Past regrets, "if only", and "were"

PAST REGRET	<p>wish + had + V3 – I'm sorry this happened. <i>I wish I had studied harder. She wishes she hadn't said that.</i></p>
IF ONLY	<p>Stronger, more emotional version of 'I wish'. Same grammar. <i>If only I lived closer. If only I had listened.</i></p>
WERE	<p>'Were' preferred for all persons after wish in formal English. <i>I wish I were taller. I wish it were summer.</i></p>

⚠ Three classic B1 mistakes

- ❑ ~~I wish I have more time.~~ ❑ **I wish I had more time.** (*Past simple after wish, not present.*)
- ❑ ~~I wish I would be taller.~~ ❑ **I wish I were taller.** (*Don't use wish+would about yourself.*)
- ❑ ~~I wish I can swim.~~ ❑ **I wish I could swim.** (*can → could after wish.*)

3

KEY VOCABULARY · 6 MIN

Ten words for longing and change

Word	POS	Meaning	Example
to long for	<i>phr v</i>	to want something very much	<i>I long for warmer weather.</i>
homesick	<i>adj</i>	sad because you miss home	<i>I wish I weren't so homesick.</i>
to adjust	<i>v</i>	to get used to a new situation	<i>It takes time to adjust.</i>
frustrated	<i>adj</i>	annoyed because you can't do what you want	<i>I feel frustrated when I can't express myself.</i>
grateful	<i>adj</i>	feeling thankful	<i>I'm grateful for the opportunity.</i>
to appreciate	<i>v</i>	to recognise the value of something	<i>Living abroad helped me appreciate home.</i>
comfort zone	<i>n</i>	a situation where you feel safe	<i>I wish I didn't have to leave my comfort zone.</i>
regret	<i>n/v</i>	sadness about something you did/didn't do	<i>I have no regrets.</i>
to miss	<i>v</i>	to feel sad because someone is not with you	<i>I wish I didn't miss my friends so much.</i>
to cope	<i>v</i>	to deal with something difficult	<i>I'm learning to cope with the cold.</i>

4

READING · 12 MIN

I Wish It Were Different

I Wish It *Were Different*

THE PULSE · ISSUE 17
FOUR MONTHS OF "I WISH"

Dara, 15, left Phnom Penh for a year-long exchange in Edinburgh. The cold, the accents, the food — everything is different. And the grammar of "I wish" turned out to be the grammar of her whole experience.

D

Dara, 15

Phnom Penh → Edinburgh

"I wish I understood Scottish accents better. I wish the food were spicier."

Dara arrived in Edinburgh on a Tuesday in September. It was 14 degrees and raining. In Phnom Penh, it was 34 degrees and raining harder — but the rain there was warm. Her first wish sentence: **I wish it were warmer.**

The first month was the hardest. "**I wish I understood** Scottish accents better," she wrote. "**I wish** the food **were** spicier. **I wish** it **weren't** dark at four." Every sentence used the past tense — not because she was talking about the past, but because she was talking about something she **wanted to be different but couldn't change.**

Some wishes were about ability: "**I wish I could** cook Cambodian food for my host family." Some were about other people: "**I wish** my host sister **would** stop leaving the bathroom light on." (Wish + would = another person's annoying habit. Never about yourself.)

Then came the past regrets. "**I wish I had packed** more warm clothes. **I wish I hadn't been** so scared on the first day. **I wish I had talked** to more people in September." (*Wish + had + V3 = regretting the past. Same logic as should have + V3 from Lesson 11.*)

In her final journal entry: "**I wish** this year **weren't** ending so fast." At the start, she wished Edinburgh were more like Phnom Penh. At the end, she wished she could stay.

... FOUR MORE WISH LIVES ...

K

Kofi, 14 · Accra · Ghana

School

"**I wish** our school **had** a proper science lab. **I wish** we **could** do real experiments." He pauses. "**I wish** the government **would** invest more in schools outside the capital."

M

Mei, 15 · Shanghai · China

Family

"**I wish** my grandparents **lived** closer," Mei says. "**I wish I could** see them every month." And: "**I wish** grandmother **would** learn to video-call." Last year: "**I wish I had remembered** her birthday card."

C Carlos, 13 · Bogotá · Colombia

Transport

"I wish Bogotá **had** a metro. I wish the traffic **weren't** so bad." And a habit wish: "I wish people **would** stop honking for no reason." **If only** the metro were already built.

I Isla, 14 · Glasgow · Scotland

Languages

"I wish I **spoke** another language properly. I wish I **could** hold a real conversation in French." After meeting Dara: "I wish I **had started** learning Khmer when she arrived."

5

PRACTICE · 8 MIN

8 quick choices

1	I wish I ____ taller. · A) am B) were C) would be
2	She wishes she ____ play the piano. · A) can B) will C) could
3	I wish my neighbour ____ playing loud music. · A) would stop B) stopped C) stops
4	I wish I ____ studied harder last month. · A) have B) had C) would have
5	I wish the weather ____ so cold today. · A) isn't B) wouldn't be C) weren't
6	____ I could turn back time! · A) If only B) I wish I C) Unless
7	He wishes he ____ to the party last night. · A) goes B) had gone C) would go
8	I wish I ____ more friends here. (present) · A) have B) would have C) had

6

SPEAKING · 5 MIN

The wish interview

Q 1	What do you wish were different about your routine?
Q 2	Name a skill you wish you could do.
Q 3	Something you wish a friend/family member would change?
Q 4	One thing from last year you wish you had done differently?
Q 5	A wish to send to your future self?

7

WRITING · 10 MIN

"Five wishes"

8

COMPREHENSION QUIZ · 6 MIN

10 questions

1	I wish I ___ a bigger room. · A) have B) had C) would have D) will have
2	She wishes she ___ swim. · A) can B) could C) would D) will
3	I wish my brother ___ leaving his shoes out. · A) stops B) stopped C) would stop D) had stopped
4	I wish I ___ that email. · A) didn't send B) hadn't sent C) don't send D) wouldn't send
5	___ I were better at maths! · A) I wish B) I hope C) I want D) I need
6	He wishes it ___ so noisy in the library. · A) isn't B) weren't C) wouldn't be D) won't be
7	I wish I ___ to the concert last Friday. · A) go B) went C) had gone D) would go
8	If only the bus ___ on time for once! · A) comes B) came C) would come D) had come
9	I wish I ___ speak Japanese. · A) can B) could C) would D) should
10	If I ___ closer, I wouldn't need the bus. (second conditional) · A) live B) lived C) would live D) had lived



ANSWER KEYS

Check your answers

Practice · Part 5

1	B — were	<i>Present unreal → past simple (subjunctive).</i>
2	C — could	<i>Wish + ability = could.</i>
3	A — would stop	<i>Other person's habit → wish + would.</i>
4	B — had	<i>Past regret → wish + had + V3.</i>
5	C — weren't	<i>Present unreal negative → weren't.</i>
6	A — If only	<i>Stronger wish = if only.</i>
7	B — had gone	<i>Past regret → wish + had gone.</i>
8	C — had	<i>Present unreal → wish + past simple.</i>

Quiz · Part 8

1	B — had	<i>Present unreal → past simple.</i>
2	B — could	<i>Wish + ability.</i>
3	C — would stop	<i>Other person's habit.</i>
4	B — hadn't sent	<i>Past regret (hadn't + V3).</i>
5	A — I wish	<i>Present unreal wish.</i>
6	B — weren't	<i>Subjunctive (negative).</i>
7	C — had gone	<i>Past regret.</i>
8	C — would come	<i>If only + annoying repeated habit.</i>
9	B — could	<i>Wish + ability.</i>
10	B — lived	<i>Second conditional if-clause = past simple. Same logic as wish.</i>

Beautiful work on Lesson 15! You now hold the grammar of longing: *wish + past simple* for the present, *wish + could* for ability, *wish + would* for other people's habits, and *wish + had + V3* for past regrets. In **Lesson 16**, we shift from unreal worlds to a completely new structure: the **Passive Voice** (present and past simple) — for when the action matters more than who did it.