

# 14 Second conditional (If he was ...); I wish I was

1 Look at this sentence:

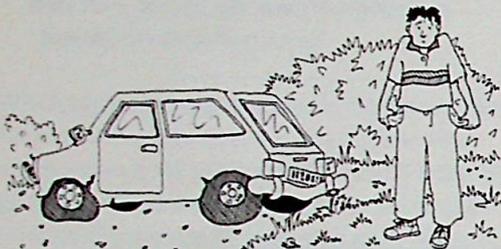
*If Charlie Chaplin was alive today, he would be over 100 years old.*

Of course, Chaplin isn't alive today. The sentence imagines something that is not true. The verb after *if* is Past Simple, but it refers to the present. This structure is called the Second Conditional:

**If + PAST SIMPLE + would (or 'd)**

*If he worked harder, he would do better.*

Another example is someone who doesn't have enough money to buy a new car and says:



*I'd buy a new car if I had enough money.*

Note that we do not use a comma (,) before *if*.

2 We can use the same type of sentence to talk about the future:

**If + PAST SIMPLE + would (or 'd)**

*If I won a lot of money, I'd buy a big house.*

This sentence describes an unlikely future situation: it is unlikely that I will win a lot of money.

3 We can use *wish* to say that we want something to be different from how it is now. Note that the verb after *wish* is past (e.g. *could, was, had*):



*I wish (that) Chaplin was still alive.*

*Mary wishes she had enough money for a new dress.*

*I wish I was very rich.*

4 After *if* and after *wish*, we sometimes use *I/he/she/it* with *were*:

*If he were (or was) alive today,...*

*I wish Charlie Chaplin were (or was) still alive.*

Notice also the expression *if I were you*, when you give someone advice:

*If I were you, I'd go to the police.*

(Not *if I was you,...*)

## Practice

A Complete these sentences.

- 0 If Sally lived in Brighton, she would be (she/be) near her parents.
- 0 Fred would read more if he didn't work (he/not/work) so hard.
- 1 If Elizabeth didn't have to work in the evenings, \_\_\_\_\_ (she/go) to concerts.
- 2 Susan wouldn't go to work by car if \_\_\_\_\_ (she/live) near a train station.
- 3 Alan wouldn't be fat if \_\_\_\_\_ (he/not/eat) so much.
- 4 If Peter didn't live in a flat, \_\_\_\_\_ (he/have) a dog.
- 5 Pam would definitely learn French if \_\_\_\_\_ (she/get) a job in France.
- 6 If Mark wanted to be healthy, \_\_\_\_\_ (he/not/smoke).

**B** In the next few years:

It is unlikely that astronauts will visit Mars.  
~~It is unlikely that governments will stop buying guns.~~  
It is unlikely that doctors will find a cure for cancer.  
It is unlikely that they will discover oil in Ireland.  
It is unlikely that young people will stop buying pop records.

Now use the predictions in the box to complete these sentences.

- 0 If governments stopped buying guns, the world would be safer.
- 1 If \_\_\_\_\_, the Irish would be very happy.
- 2 If \_\_\_\_\_, this terrible disease would disappear.
- 3 If \_\_\_\_\_, the popular music industry would disappear.
- 4 If \_\_\_\_\_, we would learn a lot about the planet.

**C** A manager tells people why they can't have a job. Write their thoughts with *I wish*.

- 0 You don't have a driving licence, so you can't have the job.  
I wish I had a driving licence.
- 0 You can't have the job because you can't type.  
I wish I could type.
- 1 You can't have the job because you don't have good eyesight.  
I wish \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 You can't speak German, so you can't have the job.  
I wish \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 You don't have a degree, so you can't have the job.  
I wish \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 You can't have the job because you are not 18.  
I wish \_\_\_\_\_

**D** Imagine how life nowadays could be better. Complete the sentences using the words in brackets, and any other words you need.

- 0 People don't do enough exercise, so there is a lot of heart disease.  
(more, less) If people did more exercise, there would be less heart disease.
- 1 There are too many cars. The city is very polluted.  
(fewer) I wish there \_\_\_\_\_, then the city wouldn't be very polluted.
- 2 People drive too fast, so there are a lot of accidents.  
(more slowly) I wish people \_\_\_\_\_, then there would be fewer accidents.
- 3 People watch too much TV, so they don't have much time for reading.  
(more) If people watched less TV, they \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 Children have bad teeth because they eat too many sweets.  
(fewer) Children would have better teeth if they \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5 Not enough people travel by bus, so the roads are crowded.  
(more) I wish \_\_\_\_\_, then the roads would be less crowded.
- 6 People haven't got enough time to cook, so they eat a lot of 'fast food'.  
(more, less) If people \_\_\_\_\_, they \_\_\_\_\_.