CHAPTER 16

Past Unreal Conditionals and Past Wishes

A. GRAMMAR IN DISCOURSE: The Ifs of History ............ 352

B. FORM: Past Unreal Conditionals and Past Wishes ....................... 354
  Past Unreal Conditionals
  If I had known the answer, (then) I would have passed the test.
  Past Wishes
  I wish (that) I had taken a vacation last year.
  Informally Speaking: Reduced Forms of Past Conditionals

C. MEANING AND USE 1: Past Unreal Conditionals ...................... 359
  Past Unreal Conditionals
  Giving Advice
  Restating Past Unreal Conditionals with But

D. MEANING AND USE 2: Past Wishes ........................................ 363
  Making Wishes About the Past
  Expressing Regret or Dissatisfaction
  Using If Only
  WRITING: Write an Email Expressing Regret About Not Meeting a Deadline .......... 366

PART 6 TEST: Conditionals .................................................. 369
A1 Before You Read

Discuss these questions.

Think of a decision that you regret. What should you have done differently? Think of a decision that you have never regretted. Why not?

A2 Read

Read this magazine article to find out about some possible alternatives to actual historical events. Do you agree with this writer's ideas?

The Ifs of History

by Hans Koning

The if of history are numberless. For everything that has happened we can, of course, line up infinite alternatives. But not much is gained from this, except for the obvious observation that the human history is very iffy.

The ifs I am talking about are last-minute ifs—that is, I am not going to lose myself and my readers by guessing what would have happened if there had been a Bering Strait or English Channel or no Franklin Delano Roosevelt. A last-minute if is: What would have happened if, in February 1933, Giuseppe Zangara's hand had not been pushed aside in Miami and his bullet had killed Franklin Roosevelt rather than the mayor of Chicago?

This example gets right to the point. Most of my ifs are life-or-death ifs. And that raises the well-known dilemma: Are certain individuals of greater importance to the flow of history? I find it hard to accept that the chance life or death of one person could decide the lives and deaths of millions. But I suspect that the truth lies somewhere in between. A few individuals have influenced destiny, but in the long run, history exhibits its own logic.

If that German officer in Hitler's headquarters who moved a briefcase had minded his own business, then the bomb in the briefcase would have killed Hitler. A different government would have taken over in Berlin and World War II would have ended. The Allies would have occupied Germany ten months sooner. As many as a million prisoners' lives would have been saved.
If Cleopatra hadn’t lived, Marc Antony would have kept his mind on the affairs of state and not been eliminated from the race for Roman emperor. He would have continued sharing power with his brother-in-law Octavian, whom he hated, and he would have worked to oppose Octavian’s unjust use of force. If Marc Antony had done that, it would have hastened the fall of the Roman Empire by a hundred years. Everything thereafter would have happened one hundred years sooner.

If Joseph Ginoux, a café owner in Arles, had allowed Vincent van Gogh to pay for his lodging in paintings instead of evicting him, then Vincent would have had some peace and security. His nervous breakdown might have happened later and been less severe. He would have painted for five, perhaps ten years more. The people of Arles wouldn’t have drawn up their petition to have him put in an asylum. In a less hostile and threatening world, his later work would have reached an unimaginable perfection. Gauguin and Picasso would have been influenced differently; twentieth-century painting would have been different. (And Ginoux’s heirs would have been the richest people in France.)

A3 After You Read

Check (√) the events that actually happened or are true, according to the article.

1. √ A man tried to kill Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Miami.
2. ___ Hitler was killed by a bomb in a briefcase.
3. ___ Marc Antony was eliminated from the race for Roman emperor.
4. ___ Van Gogh was evicted from where he was living.
5. ___ Joseph Ginoux received paintings from van Gogh.
Past Unreal Conditionals and Past Wishes

Think Critically About Form

A. Look back at the article on page 352 and complete the tasks below.

1. **IDENTIFY** A past unreal conditional sentence is underlined. Find three more examples.
2. **RECOGNIZE** What form is used in each *if* clause? What form is used in each main clause?

B. Discuss your answers with the class and read the Form charts to check them.

Past Unreal Conditionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAST UNREAL CONDITIONALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IF CLAUSE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IF + PAST PERFECT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had known the answer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I’d known the answer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IF + PAST PERFECT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had known the answer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IF + PAST PERFECT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had known the answer,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The contraction of both *had* and *would* with pronouns is *’d*.
- When the *if* clause comes first, it is followed by a comma. When the main clause is first, there is no comma and *then* is not used.
  - If I had known the answer, (then) I would have passed the test.
  - I would have passed the test if I had known the answer.
- Either clause or both clauses can be negative.
  - If I hadn’t known the answer, I would have asked for help.
  - If I hadn’t known the answer, I wouldn’t have passed the test.
- Questions are formed by putting the main clause in question word order.
  If you had known the answer, would you have passed the test?
- See Appendix 14 for contractions with had and would.

### Past Wishes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wish Clause</th>
<th>That Clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simple Present</strong></td>
<td>(That) had taken a vacation last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish</td>
<td>(that) I had taken a vacation last year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- That is often omitted after wish, but it is always implied.
- Notice the use of past perfect or past modal short forms when a wish clause follows but.
  I didn’t take a vacation last year, but I wish I had.
  I invited Joe to the party, but I wish I hadn’t.
  I didn’t go to the show, but I wish I could have.

### B1 Listening for Form

**Listen to each conversation and choose the response that you hear.**

1. a. Not really. If it had been me, I would have interrupted him.
   b. Not really. If it had been me, I wouldn’t have interrupted him.

2. a. If I had another chance, I’d prepare more for the interview.
   b. If I’d had another chance, I’d have prepared more for the interview.

3. a. No, I wouldn’t.
   b. No, I wouldn’t have.

4. a. If I had listened to my roommate, I would have taken it.
   b. If I had listened to my roommate, I wouldn’t have taken it.
5. a. Yes, if I'd had my way, we would have moved to Seattle.
   b. Yes, if I had my way, we would move to Seattle.

6. a. I know. I would have called if it had been so late.
   b. I know. I would have called if it hadn't been so late.

B2 Completing Past Conditional Sentences

A. Complete these sentences with would have, could have, or might have in a past result clause.

1. If I had studied medicine, I would have become a doctor.
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

2. If I had known ten years ago what I know now, ____________________________
   ____________________________________________

3. If I had listened to my parents, ____________________________
   ____________________________________________

4. If I hadn’t ever learned to read, ____________________________
   ____________________________________________

5. If I had been born in Australia, ____________________________
   ____________________________________________

6. If I had lived in another century, ____________________________
   ____________________________________________

7. If I hadn’t studied English, ____________________________
   ____________________________________________

8. If I hadn’t come to school today, ____________________________
   ____________________________________________

B. On a separate sheet of paper, write three more past if clauses. Then trade papers with your partner and complete the sentences.
**B3 Working on Past Conditionals**

Work in small groups. Start a past unreal conditional sentence chain with *If I hadn't slept well last night*, and finish it with a result clause. Use the end of the last person's sentence to begin your own sentence.

A: *If I hadn't slept well last night, I'd have been exhausted this morning.*
B: *If I'd been exhausted this morning, I would have stayed home from work.*
C: *If I'd stayed home from work,...*

**Informally Speaking**

**Reduced Forms of Past Conditionals**

Look at the cartoon and listen to the conversation. How is each underlined form in the cartoon different from what you hear?

The waiter overcharged me for lunch today, but I didn't say anything.

Well, I would have shown him the mistake. I sure wouldn't have paid the extra money.

In informal speech, would have, could have, and might have are often reduced like other past modals (see Chapter 8, page 175). Have may sound like /ɔv/. If it is reduced even more, it sounds like /ə/. Notice the reduction of the past perfect in the if clauses as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Form</th>
<th>What You Might Hear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If Tim had driven, he would have arrived earlier.</td>
<td>&quot;If /tɪmd/ driven, he /wʌdəv/ arrived earlier.&quot; OR &quot;If /tɪmd/ driven, he /wʊdə/ arrived earlier.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Tim had driven, he could have arrived earlier.</td>
<td>&quot;If /tɪmd/ driven, he /kʊdəv/ arrived earlier.&quot; OR &quot;If /tɪmd/ driven, he /kʊdə/ arrived earlier.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Joe had been there, I would not have gone.</td>
<td>&quot;If /dʒʊəd/ been there, I /wʊdntəv/ gone.&quot; OR &quot;If /dʒʊəd/ been there, I /wʊdntə/ gone.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Joe had been there, I might not have gone.</td>
<td>&quot;If /dʒʊəd/ been there, I /mɪtndəv/ gone.&quot; OR &quot;If /dʒʊəd/ been there, I /mɪtndə/ gone.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B4 Understanding Informal Speech**

Listen and write the standard form of the words you hear.

1. *Would you have chosen* ______ a different career if you hadn't married so young?
2. If I had studied, I ______________________ much better on the quiz.
3. We _______________ so late if the car had been working.
4. If I hadn't been careful, I _______________ an accident.
5. I _______________ late if I'd missed the bus.
6. If I hadn't scored, we _______________ the game.

B5 Working on Past Wishes

A. Work with a partner. Complete these conversations with the appropriate forms of the verbs in parentheses to form past wishes. Then practice the conversations.

1. A: _______________ (he/ever/wish) that he _______________ (choose) a different career when he graduated?
   B: Yes. Sometimes he _______________ (wish) he _______________ (go) to graduate school right after college.

2. A: My sister _______________ (wish) she _______________ (see) the apartment upstairs when she was looking for one.
   B: I didn't know she was interested in a two-bedroom apartment.

   I _______________ (wish) I _______________ (show) it to her.
   Then we could have been neighbors.

3. A: _______________ (you/ever/wish) you _______________ (learn) to ski when you were younger?
   B: Yes, I _______________ (wish) I _______________ (be) braver when my school offered lessons.

B. Complete these sentences with the short form.

1. I never learned to swim, but I wish I had.
2. He didn't graduate this year, but he wishes _______________
3. We didn't see that movie, but we wish _______________
4. They took the train, but they wish _______________
5. She couldn't attend the meeting yesterday, but she wishes _______________
Past Unreal Conditionals

Think Critically About Meaning and Use

A. Read the sentences and answer the questions below.
   a. If she had been a better student, she would have graduated on time.
   b. If she were a better student, she would graduate on time.

1. **Evaluate** Which sentence refers to a situation that was not true in the past?
2. **Evaluate** Which sentence refers to a situation that is not true in the present?

B. Discuss your answers with the class and read the Meaning and Use Notes to check them.

Meaning and Use Notes

Past Unreal Conditionals

1A Past unreal conditional sentences express imaginary situations that were actually not true in the past. In the if clause, the past perfect indicates the situation was unreal in the past. In the result clause, would have, could have, or might have also indicate the result was unreal in the past.

If I had been the boss, I would have fired him. (I wasn't the boss, so I didn't fire him.)

1B Could have or might have in the result clause indicates one of several possible imaginary outcomes. Would have indicates that the speaker is more certain about the imaginary results.

If you'd had your car, you could have left earlier.

If you'd had your car, you might not have left so late. (Could have and might have both express one of several possible imaginary outcomes.)

If you'd had your car, you wouldn't have left so late. (Would have expresses more certainty about the imaginary outcome.)

(Continued on page 360)
Giving Advice

2 Unreal conditionals beginning with *If I had been you* can be used as an indirect way of giving advice. The *if* clause is often omitted. Unreal conditionals sound softer than modals like *should have*.

**Advice with Past Unreal Conditionals**

(If I'd been you,) I would have left early.

**Advice with Modals**

You should have left early.

Restating Past Unreal Conditionals with But

3 Often, a sentence with *would have* is used without an *if* condition. Instead, the main clause is joined to a true (not imaginary) sentence with *but*. The true sentence with *but* implies the unreal past condition.

**True Sentence with But**

I would have watched the tennis match, but I had to study.

I would have left earlier, but my car didn’t start.

**Past Unreal Conditional**

I would have watched the tennis match if I hadn’t had to study.

I would have left earlier if my car had started.

C1 Listening for Meaning and Use

Listen and choose the best answer to each question.

1. a. I don’t know.
   b. I didn’t know.

2. a. Yes, he did.
   b. He could have.

3. a. Maybe, but he’d be quite old.
   b. Maybe he hadn’t.

4. a. It’s hard to say.
   b. They certainly were.

5. a. Maybe not.
   b. Yes, they did.

6. a. It might be.
   b. It might have.

7. a. No, it won’t.
   b. No, I doubt it.

8. a. No one knows.
   b. No one knew.
C2 Giving Indirect Advice

Work with a partner. Take turns giving indirect advice to your partner by telling what you would have done. The if clauses may be omitted.

1. A: I didn’t understand last week’s homework, but I didn’t do anything about it.
   B: *(If I’d been you,) I would have gone to see the instructor.*

2. A: My best friend asked to borrow a lot of money. I gave it to him without asking any questions.
   B: __________________________

3. A: A salesperson was rude to me yesterday when I was buying a gift.
   B: __________________________

4. A: My doctor didn’t answer all my questions.
   B: __________________________

5. A: My boss didn’t offer me the raise that I wanted. I was disappointed.
   B: __________________________

6. A: The airline refused to change my ticket, even though it was an emergency.
   B: __________________________

C3 Distinguishing Fact and Fiction

Work with a partner. List the two facts that each conditional sentence implies. Then paraphrase the conditional sentence using *would have* followed by a true sentence with *but*.

1. If Alexander the Great hadn’t died of yellow fever in 532 B.C., he would have attacked Carthage and Rome.
   Facts: 1. *Alexander the Great died of yellow fever in 532 B.C.*
   2. *He didn’t attack Carthage and Rome.*
   Paraphrase: *Alexander the Great would have attacked Carthage and Rome.*
   *but he died of yellow fever in 532 B.C.*

(Continued on page 362)
2. If Napoleon’s armies had had proper nails for horseshoes, they would have conquered Russia.

Facts: 1. 
2. 

Paraphrase: 

3. If Apollo 13 hadn’t had an explosion during its flight, it would have landed on the moon as planned.

Facts: 1. 
2. 

Paraphrase: 

4. If Mozart hadn’t died young, he would have finished his famous piece Requiem.

Facts: 1. 
2. 

Paraphrase: 

5. If an asteroid or meteorite hadn’t crashed into Earth, dinosaurs wouldn’t have died out 65 million years ago.

Facts: 1. 
2. 

Paraphrase: 

C4 Describing the Ifs of History

Work in small groups. Think of five historical events that you know something about. Make up two past unreal conditional sentences about each event.

Apollo 13: If an oxygen tank hadn’t exploded during the flight into space, the astronauts’ lives wouldn’t have been in danger. If the explosion hadn’t happened, the astronauts would have landed on the moon.
Past Wishes

Think Critically About Meaning and Use

A. Read the sentences and answer the questions below.
   1a. I wish the temperature were warmer. I am freezing.
   1b. I wish the temperature had been warmer. I was freezing.
   2a. If only he didn’t have a cold. He really wants to go out.
   2b. If only he hadn’t had a cold. He really wanted to go out.

1. **ANALYZE** Which sentences are about present situations? Which are about past situations?

2. **ANALYZE** Which pair of sentences seems to express stronger feelings?

B. Discuss your answers with the class and read the Meaning and Use Notes to check them.

**Meaning and Use Notes**

**Making Wishes About the Past**

1. Past *wish* sentences refer to past situations that did not occur. They express a desire to change something that happened in the past.

   I wish the weather had been nice yesterday. (It rained yesterday.)
   I wish you could have seen the movie. (You didn’t see the movie.)

**Expressing Regret or Dissatisfaction**

2. When you use a past *wish* sentence, you express regret or dissatisfaction about a past situation.

   I wish I had gone to the meeting. I completely forgot about it. I wish someone had called to remind me.

**Using If Only**

3. *If only* is often used in place of a past wish to express strong regret. *If only* sentences focus on the wish to change a negative outcome.

   If only I hadn’t lost my wallet!  If only the war had ended sooner!
D1 Listening for Meaning and Use
Listen to each situation and choose the sentence that is true.

1. a. I read about World War II.  5. a. They got reservations.
     b. I saw a movie.          b. They didn’t fly home.
2. a. I wasn’t home.            6. a. There was a tree on the driveway.
     b. I answered the phone.   b. I wasn’t leaving.
3. a. She wasn’t elected.       7. a. You took a day off last week.
     b. She represents us now.  b. You took today off.
4. a. You called.              8. a. I didn’t have a headache.
     b. The exam ended.        b. I didn’t stay.

D2 Expressing Regret
Work with a partner. Take turns making up past wish and if only sentences that express regret. Think of as many sentences as possible for each situation.

1. You refused to lend your brother money. He had to drop out of school because he couldn’t pay his tuition.
   
   I wish I'd lent him the money.
   If only I'd helped him.

2. You lost your temper today when you were baby-sitting your nephew. He began to cry.

3. You didn’t tell your boss how overworked you’ve been feeling. Now he has changed your schedule, and you can’t take a day off.

4. You didn’t call the doctor last week when you got sick. Now you’ve missed a week of classes.

5. You forgot your best friend’s birthday. There was a special dinner for your friend and you didn’t go.

6. You accepted a job offer on Monday. On Tuesday you got a better offer from another company.
D3 Expressing Regret or Dissatisfaction

A. Work with a partner. Take turns reacting to the statements by using a past wish sentence or if only sentence with short forms.

1. A: The library was closed yesterday.  
   B: \textbf{I wish it hadn't been.}  

2. A: Our team didn't win first prize.  
   B: \textbf{If only we had.}  

3. A: The president raised taxes again.  
   B: \textbf{}  

4. A: My TV stopped working.  
   B: \textbf{}  

5. A: The train was late.  
   B: \textbf{}  

6. A: I didn't invite Peter.  
   B: \textbf{}  

7. A: It snowed a lot.  
   B: \textbf{}  

8. A: They didn't call back.  
   B: \textbf{}  

B. With your partner, expand one of the examples above into a longer conversation between two people. (Try to have each person speak three or four times.) Give more details about the situation and try to use at least one more wish sentence, if only sentence, or past unreal conditional sentence sentence.

\begin{align*}
A: & \text{The library was closed last night.} \\
B: & \text{I know. I wish it hadn't been.} \\
A: & \text{I needed to work on my paper. If only I had checked the schedule a few days ago, I would have been able to finish on time.}
\end{align*}

D4 Explaining Wishes

A. Think of two past events in your life that you wish you could have changed. Write a past wish sentence about each one. Then write a past if sentence to explain your wish.

\begin{align*}
I & \text{wish my family hadn't moved when I was young.} \\
If & \text{they hadn't moved, I wouldn't have been so lonely.}
\end{align*}

B. Now expand one of the events from part A into a paragraph. First, make a list of details that would have been different if your wish had come true. Then use your list to write your paragraph. Use would have, could have, and might have.

\begin{quote}
I wish my family hadn't moved when I was young. If we hadn't moved, I wouldn't have been so lonely. I wouldn't have had to leave my best friend. Who knows? We might have remained friends forever. We could have...
\end{quote}
Think Critically About Meaning and Use

A. Read each sentence and the statements that follow. Write T if the statement is true or F if it is false.

1. I would have reached you if the phone had been working.
   ___ a. The phone was working.
   ___ b. I didn’t reach you.

2. I wish I had taken a vacation.
   ___ a. I should have taken a vacation.
   ___ b. I took a vacation.

3. She wouldn’t have taken the medication if she had known about the risks.
   ___ a. She knew about the risks.
   ___ b. She took the medication.

4. If only I hadn’t followed his advice.
   ___ a. I didn’t follow his advice.
   ___ b. I shouldn’t have followed his advice.

5. I would have come over, but my car broke down.
   ___ a. I couldn’t come over because my car broke down.
   ___ b. If my car hadn’t broken down, I would have come over.

6. If I had been there, I’d have complained to the manager.
   ___ a. I complained to the manager.
   ___ b. I’d have complained to the manager, but I wasn’t there.

7. If we hadn’t bought our tickets already, we wouldn’t have gone to the show.
   ___ a. We had already bought our tickets.
   ___ b. We went to the show.

8. If only we’d been told about the delay.
   ___ a. No one told us about the delay.
   ___ b. I regret that we weren’t told about the delay.
B. Discuss these questions in small groups. (Try to come up with three answers, using would, could, and might in each main clause.)

1. **GENERATE** What past unreal conditionals can you think of to explain the wish in sentence 2?
2. **GENERATE** What past unreal conditionals can you think of to explain the if only regrets in sentences 4 and 8?

---

**Edit**

Find the errors in these paragraphs and correct them.

Historians love to think about the dramatic “what-ifs” of history. They have even given the name “counterfactual history” to this pursuit. How would history have changed if some key event had been different? What would the consequences been if the weather has been different in a certain battle? What would had happened if a famous person had lived instead of died? These are the sorts of questions that are asked in two recent books that imagine how history might been under different circumstances: *What If?*, edited by R. Cowley and S. Ambrose; and *Virtual History*, edited by N. Ferguson.

Don’t just wish you’ve been alive in a different era. Go back and explore what could have, should have, or might have happened at various times in history. You won’t be sorry. You’ll wish you’ll gone back sooner!
Write

Imagine you are doing a project for a history class. The deadline is in two weeks, but your research isn’t going well. Write an email to your instructor expressing regret for the delay and explaining the problems you’ve had and what you might have done differently. Use past unreal conditionals and at least one past wish or if only sentence.

1. **Brainstorm** Think about all the problems you’ve had and what you could have or should have done differently. Then use these categories to help you organize your email into paragraphs:
   - **Opening:** Say why you’re writing. Express regret that you will miss the deadline.
   - **Body:** Explain the problems you’ve encountered. Talk about what you did and how things would have turned out differently if you had done things differently.
   - **Closing:** Make a polite request for an extension. Apologize again, and, if desired, say what you’ve learned from the experience.

2. **Write a First Draft** Before you write your first draft, read the checklist below and look at the examples in D2 and D4 on pages 364–365. Write your draft using past unreal conditionals.

3. **Edit** Read your work and check it against the checklist below. Circle grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

   **DO I...**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>organize my ideas into paragraphs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>express regret using a past wish or an if only sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use one or more past unreal conditionals to talk about the results you might have had if you had done things differently?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use an unreal future conditional to make a polite request in the closing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Peer Review** Work with a partner to help you decide how to fix your errors and improve the content. Use the checklist above.

5. **Rewrite Your Draft** Using the comments from your partner, write a final draft.

   ![Email Example](image)

   From: Carlos Rivera
   To: Professor Walters
   Subject: Research Project Due March 24th

   Dear Professor Walters,
   I’m writing to let you know about the problems I’m having with my research project on the mysteries about the Mayans. I wish I had spoken to you earlier, but I’m afraid that I’m not going to be able to meet the deadline...