**PAST TENSES WITH HYPOTHTICAL MEANING**

We use past tenses after the following expressions to describe situations in the present, past or future which are imagined or unreal:

*wish / if only / It’s (high) time, would rather / sooner, would prefer, as if / though, suppose/supposing, what if*

 Wish + Simple Past: used to communicate the idea that you would like your circumstances (e.g. the way you look, the place you live, etc) to be different from what they are now.

Note: ***I wish I was / I wish I were***: are both possible and acceptable, I wish I were is more formal.

I wish I lived in a hotter country.

 Wish + could: used to communicate the idea that you would like to be able to do something but you can’t.

I wish I could write like you.

We cannot use would for an impossible change:

If only the earth ~~would be~~ was /were square.

 Wish + somebody + would: used when you want somebody to do something, when you want somebody to stop doing something or when you are complaining about something annoying.

I wish he would stop talking.

Note

Notice the difference between **wish** and **hope**. If we hope something will happen, we believe it is possible and likely.

I hope they will come. (= I want them to and I think it’s likely.)

I wish they would come. (=I don’t believe it’s likely.)

Wish + Past Perfect: used to express regret for something you did or did not do in the past.

I wish I hadn’t shouted at her.

 If only: it can be used instead of I wish and follows the same rules but it makes wishes more emphatic; in spoken English, only is often heavily stressed.

If only I’d taken them up on their offer.

We can put a subject between if and only for emphasis:

If only you / If you only knew what I’ve been going through.

 It’s time: We use this expression to say that something is not happening and it should be:

It’s (high) time you gave up playing computer games. (You should give them up)

Would rather / sooner, would prefer

I’d rather / I’d sooner you didn’t ask me for any more money. (Please don’t)

I’d prefer it if you didn’t ask me for any more money.

**Note**

If the speaker and the preference are the same, we use an infinitive, not the past tense:

I’d rather/sooner watch TV. (not ~~to watch~~)

I’d prefer to watch TV.(not ~~watch~~)

We can also say I’d prefer you not to go.

 As if / as though

We use the past after as if / as though to indicate that the situation is unlikely.

He acts as if / as though he was (were) a teenager. (In fact, he is in his thirties.)

We use a present tense to indicate that something is likey.

He looks as if / though he is a teenager. (And he probably is.)

Suppose / supposing, imagine, what if

We use these expressions to ask about an imaginary situation in the present or future, and its possible consequences:

(Just) suppose/ supposing/ imagine you won the lottery, how would you spend the money?

What if you had hurt yourself – what would have happened then?