VI

I wish/if only

The expressions "**I wish**" and "**if only**" are used in English to express wishes or regrets about the present, past, and future situations, often conveying a desire for things to be different than they are.

Present and Future Wishes

Form: **I wish / If only + past simple**

This form is used to express a wish or regret about the present situation. Here, the past simple tense doesn't indicate past time but rather a hypothetical or unreal situation in the present or future.

Examples:

- I wish I knew the answer. (I don't know the answer now, but I want to.)
- If only I had more time. (I don't have enough time now, but I wish the situation were different.)
- Past Wishes

Past Wishes

Form: **I wish / If only + past perfect**

This form is used to express a wish or regret about something that did not happen in the past. The past perfect shows that the situation is contrary to past reality.

Examples:

- I wish I had seen the movie. (I didn't see the movie, but I wanted to.)
- If only I had studied harder for the exam. (I didn't study hard, but I now regret it.)
- Future Wishes

Future wishes

Form: I wish / If only + could/would:

This form Expresses a desire for something that is unlikely to happen or a polite or indirect request.
For hypothetical wishes about the future, "**I wish**" and "**if only**" are often followed by modal verbs like "**could**" or "**would**":

Examples:

- I wish I could fly. (I can't fly, but it's a nice idea.)
- If only it would stop raining. (It's raining now and I want it to stop, but I have no control over the weather.)



Negative wishes: To express a negative wish, "not" is placed after the auxiliary verb (e.g., I wish I were not working tomorrow).

Stylistic Considerations
"If only" can sound more dramatic or emphatic and is common in literary or formal contexts, while "I wish" is more universally used in both spoken and written English.

These structures can be used to create a polite or soft tone, especially in formal requests or expressions of regret.

I Wish/If Only Exercise 1:

Choose the correct answer.

1. I wish I _____ **(be)** taller.
a) am
b) was
c) were

2. If only she _____ **(have)** more confidence in her abilities.
a) has
b) had
c) would have

3. I wish you _____ **(come)** to the party last night.
a) come
b) came
c) had come

4. If only I _____ **(know)** the answer to your question!
a) know
b) knew
c) had known

5. I wish we _____ **(live)** in a warmer climate.
a) live
b) lived
c) would live

6. I wish he _____ **(not be)** so stubborn.
a) isn't
b) wasn't
c) weren't

7. If only he _____ **(arrive)** on time for once.
a) arrives
b) arrived
c) had arrived

8. I wish you _____ **(be)** here with me now.
a) are
b) were
c) had been

9. If only she _____ **(pay)** attention to the details. She wouldn't have failed the test.
a) pays
b) paid
c) had paid

10. I wish I _____ **(learn)** how to cook better.
a) had learned
b) learned
c) learned

I Wish/If Only Exercise 2:

Complete the conversation between Arthur and Evie with the correct for of the verb in brackets.



Arthur: Hey, Evie. What's been on your mind lately?

Evie: Hi, Arthur. Well, I wish **(1). _____ (travel)** more when I was younger. I feel like I missed out on so many opportunities. If only I **(2) _____ (explore)** more of the world when I had more time. I wish I **(3)_____ (be wise)** back then.

Arthur: Yeah, I understand. If only we **(4)_____(know)** then what we know now, right? I often think about how different things could be be now if I **(5) _____ [make]** different choices in the past.

Evie: Exactly. For example, if only I **(6) _____ (study)** harder in college, I might have got a better job.

Arthur: Yeah, but you can't change the past. What's important is what we do do moving forward, but It's true, I wish I **(7)_____ (have)** more free time.

Evie: True. I wish I **(8)_____ (not, waste)** so much time worrying about things I can't change.

Arthur: It's all part of growing up, Evie. We learn from our mistakes and use those lessons to shape our future.

Evie: If only we **(9)_____ (realise)** that sooner, huh?

Arthur: Absolutely. But hey, better late than never, right?

Evie: Definitely. Thanks again, Arthur. If only I **(10)_____ (be)** as wise as you.

Arthur: HaHa very funny. Anytime, Evie. That's what friends are for.

Wish and if only: answer key

Grammar practice · B2 Upper-intermediate

Where two or more answers are given, any of them is correct.

Exercise 1

1. b) was or c) were
2. b) had
3. c) had come
4. b) knew or c) had known
5. b) lived
6. b) wasn't or c) weren't
7. b) arrived or c) had arrived
8. b) were
9. c) had paid
10. a) had learned

Exercise 2

(1) I had travelled
(2) had explored
(3) had been wiser
(4) had known
(5) had made
(6) had studied
(7) had
(8) had not wasted
(9) had realised
(10) were / was

Corrections to the printed pages

Exercise 1, item 10: options b) and c) are the same. The answer is a).

Exercise 2, gap 1: the answer includes the subject, I.