How to Use “I Wish” and “If Only”

We can use **WISH** in fixed expressions:

* I wish you a happy New Year/birthday/retirement.
* We wish you good luck in your new apartment/job.

You can also use **wish** instead of **want**:

* I wish/want to speak to the manager.
* I wish/want to enrol at that school.

However, we can use the verb **wish** and the phrase **if only** to speak about things we want but which are not likely to happen.

* **Wish** and **if only** are interchangeable but **if only** is more emphatic.

**I wish / If only + Past Tense – wish about the present**

We use **wish** and **if only** with past tense forms to express regret about the present situation.

* I wish we were on holiday. (But we are not. We have to work.)
* I wish I had a bigger house. (But I don’t. My house is small.)
* If only it weren’t so hot. (But it’s scorching.)

Note: in standard English, after **I/he/she/it** we use ‘were’ and not ‘was’.

We can use **wish + past continuous** to say that we want to be doing something different in the present.

* I wish we were flying instead of driving.
* If only we were watching a movie now. But we have to do our homework.

**I wish/If only + would – wish about the future**

We use the modal verb **would** to express a wish for a change in the future:

* I wish it would stop raining.
* I wish you would pass that test.
* If only my neighbours would stop yelling at each other.

**I wish/If only + Past Perfect – regret about the past**

We use the construction wish + Past Perfect to express regret about the past.

* If only I had passed the test.
* I wish I had been a better student.
* I wish we hadn’t polluted our planet.
**Wish and hope**

If you want to express your wish about the future, use *hope + present form*, and not wish.

*I hope* it isn’t windy tomorrow. (not: I wish it weren’t windy)

*We hope* you have a pleasant trip. (not: we wish you had a pleasant trip)

**Exercise:**

1. I wish _______ a bigger car.
   a) I have
   b) I had
   c) would have

2. _______ she passes her exam.
   a) I wish
   b) If only
   c) I hope

3. I wish _______ stop snowing.
   a) it would
   b) it had
   c) it will

4. If only _______ on the beach instead of working now.
   a) we were lying
   b) we had been lying
   c) we will be lying

5. I wish _______ Japanese.
   a) I speak
   b) I spoke
   c) I was speaking

6. If only someone _______ our car.
   a) bought
   b) would buy
   c) buys

7. I wish I _______ so much last night.
   a) didn’t eat
   b) wasn’t eating
   c) hadn’t eaten
8. I wish Peter _______ smoking.
   a) stops
   b) stopped
   c) would stop
9. If only I ______ to my mum when I was little.
   a) were listening
   b) listened
   c) had listened
10. If only my neighbours _______ so loud.
    a) weren't
    b) hadn't
    c) weren't being
Key
1. I wish I had a bigger car.
2. I hope she passes her exam.
3. I wish it would stop snowing.
4. If only we were lying on the beach instead of working now.
5. I wish I spoke Japanese.
6. If only someone would buy our car.
7. I wish I hadn't eaten so much last night.
8. I wish Peter would stop smoking.
9. If only I had listened to my mum when I was little.
10. If only my neighbours weren't so loud.