

# Wishes and regrets with '*I wish*' and '*If only...*'

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To express wishes and regrets in English, you can use the wish + preterite or if only + preterite formulas:

## 1 - Wish

*Wish* is used to express wish or regret in the present or past. *Wish* is followed by a preposition with a subject and a verb.

The verb *wish* is used to express wish or regret in the present or past tense. *Wish* is followed by a proposal with a subject and a verb:

- I wish I knew the truth.

*To express regret in the present*

Wish + prerrit (modal) expresses a regret about the present. The desired thing has no chance of being realized. It may concern the speaker or another person:

- I wish I was rich.
- I wish you didn't get so upset about her.

⚠ If we use the verb be, we can use *was* or *were*, *were* being of a more sustained register:

- I wish I was rich. / I wish I were rich.
- I wish he wasn't so bossy.

*To express regret in the past*

Finally, we can also express regret about an event in the past. In this case, we use wish + past perfect:

- I wish we had never come here.
- I wish he had told me the truth.
- I wish you hadn't done that.

*To express a request or irritation*

To express a request indirectly, to express a feeling of irritation or to talk about an event that has a chance of being realized, we use *wish* + *would*:

- I wish you would talk to me more often.
- I wish somebody would answer the phone.

To express a forecast or a wish:

Wish followed by the verb + to is similar to the verb 'to want' or 'would like', with an idea of forecasting in the future:

- They wish to have five children.
- We wish to stay for four nights.

You can also use 'wish' with a name to wish for an event:

- We wish you a merry Christmas.
- I wish you a pleasant journey.
- I wish you a happy birthday.

⚠ 'I wish to' can have the meaning of 'I want to' but it's very formal and not used very often:

- I wish to make a complaint.
- I wish to see the manager.

2 - If only

If only + preterite allows you to express wishes in relation to an unreal situation:

- If only I had a car.
- If only you came to see me more often.
- If only I could speak Spanish!
- If only you had told me before!

With the verb *be*, we sometimes use the form *were* to all persons (mainly in writing):

- If only I were / was richer.
- If only I weren't / wasn't so tall.

To express regrets about a past situation, it's necessary to use the perfect past instead of the preterite:

- If only they had come.

3 - Little tip !

One can also express regret or reproach with *should have* + *past participle*:

- We should have taken the bus.