

Use of: I wish / if only

There are three distinct types of *I wish / If only* sentences:

1. Wish, wanting change for the present or future with the simple past.



2. Regret with the past perfect.



3. Complaints with would + verb.

Expressing a wish:

Form:

If only / I wish + simple past

Example:

- If only I knew how to use a computer.
(I don't know how to use a computer and I would like to learn how to use it)

Use of: I wish / if only

Use:

- To express a wish in the present or in the future.
- The simple past here is an unreal past.
- When you use the verb to be the form is “were”.

Example:

I wish I were a millionaire!

Expressing regret:

Form:

If only / I wish + past perfect

Example:

- If only I had woken up early.
(I didn't wake up early and I missed my bus.)

Use:

- To express a regret.
- The action is past.

Complaining:

Form:

I wish / if only + would + verb

Example:

- I wish you wouldn't arrive so late all the time.
(I'm annoyed because you always come late and I want you to arrive on time)

Use:

Use of: I wish / if only

- To complain about a behavior that you disapprove.
- Expressing impatience, annoyance or dissatisfaction with a present action.

Ever thought about how you would have changed something in the past, or what you hope to do in the future?

Everyone feels something they regret about the past, whether it's big or small. And everyone wishes they could do something differently if they got the chance!

In English, expressing your regrets and hopes is usually done with a couple of useful phrases and words:

“wish”	and	“if only”
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They can be used for past, present and future.

Talking about past regrets

Both “wish” and “if only” are used to describe an alternative version of events that would have happened in place of what you regretted instead.

To use them, you use the past perfect tense, after “wish” or “if only”.

Examples:

- “If only we had not missed the last flight home, we could have seen her one last time.”
- “I wish I had told him how I really felt before he left.”

Talking about the present

When expressing a wish or regret that is related to current or future events, this is usually about something you might still have the opportunity of changing.

Unlike a past regret, it hasn't usually happened yet, so you can afford a bit more optimism!

You can still use the same form of “wish” or “if only” to express your regrets. But instead of using the past tense, you can use the past simple tense.

Use of: I wish / if only

Example:

- “If only I knew what was in the exam, then I could revise properly for it.”

Even though this is in the past simple tense, this sentence actually means:

“I don’t yet know what is in the exam – but if I do, I will be able to revise for it.”

Talking about the future

Expressing a ‘regret’ about the future is not usually a regret, but in fact, often a complaint.

In English, we can use “wish” or “if only” to express how you dislike or want to change something for the future, in a similar way to the above examples.

To do this, simply follow “wish” or “if only” with “would” and the verb describing what you’d like to change.

- “I wish you wouldn’t speak with your mouth full!”

You can also use the same structure to describe your impatience or dissatisfaction with something.

- “If only the trains would run on time, then we would not have any difficulty in getting to work.”
- “I wish it would stop raining, as it’s always so cold.”