Beginner
The Use of If I Knew and I Wish I knew

RULES AND EXAMPLES

1. Study this example situation:

Sarah wants to phone Paul, but she can't do this because she doesn't know his number. She says:

If I knew his number, **I would phone** him.

Sakichi says: **If I knew** his number … This tells us that she *doesn't* know is number. She is imagining the situation. The *real* situation is that she doesn't know his number.

When you imagine a situation like this, you use **if** + *past* (**if I knew** / **if** you **were** / **if** we **didn't** etc.). But the meaning is present, *not* past:

Examples:
1. Sato would read more **if** he **had** more time. (but he doesn't have much time)
2. **If I didn't** want to go to the party, I wouldn't go. (but I want to go)
3. We wouldn't have any money **if** we **didn't** work. (but we work)
4. **If** you **were** in my position, what would you do?
5. It's a pity you can't drive. It would be useful **if** you **could**.

2. We use the past in the same way after **wish** (**I wish I knew** / **I wish you were** etc.). We use **wish** to say that we regret something, that something is not as we would like it to be:

Examples:
1. **I wish I knew** Paul's phone number. (= I don't know it and I regret this)
2. Do you ever **wish** you **could** fly? (you can't fly)
3. It rains a lot here. I **wish** it **didn't** rain so often.
4. It's very crowded here. I **wish** there **weren't** so many people. (there are a lot of people)

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3. If **I were** / If **I was**

After **if** and **wish**, you can use **were** instead of **was** (**if I were** … / I **wish** it were etc.). **I was** / **it was** are also possible. So you can say:

Examples:
1. **If I were** you, I wouldn't buy that coat.   Or   **If I was** you, …
2. I'd go out **if it weren't** so cold.   Or   … **if it wasn't** so cold.
3. **I wish** Carol **were** here.   Or   **I wish Carol was** here.

4. We do not normally use **would** in the **if**-part of the sentence or after wish:

Examples:
1. **If I were** rich, I **would** have a yacht. (*not* If I would be rich)
2. **I wish I had** something to read. (*not* I wish I would have)

Sometimes **wish** … **would** is possible: I **wish you would** listen.

5. Could sometimes mean 'would be able to' and sometimes 'was/were able to':

You **could** get a better job   (you **could** get = you would be able to get)
if you **could** use a computer.   (you **could** use = you were able to use)

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