

8.2 Unreal past and regrets – *wish, if only, it's time and would rather*

Present and future

- To express regret about a present situation which seems to be impossible to change, we use **wish/if only + subject + Past Simple**:

I wish I knew more about ecology.

I wish oceans weren't used as rubbish tips.

If only we could save sea animals from starvation.

If only I didn't have to work so much.

- To say that we believe somebody should do something in the present or in the near future, we use **it's (high) time + subject + Past Simple**:

It's high time people stopped driving cars in cities.

It's high time you started recycling your rubbish.

- To talk what we would prefer somebody to do in the present or in the future, we use **would rather + subject + Past Simple**:

I'd rather we switched to organic fruit and vegetables.

My mum would rather I studied more.

Past

- To express regret about a past situation, we use **wish/if only + subject + Past Perfect**:

I wish we had done more to prevent this tragedy.

My sister wishes we hadn't moved to this area, but I'm happy about it.

If only the city council hadn't reduced the funds for environmental protection.

If only I had listened to you when you advised me not to go on that expedition!

1 Choose the correct option.

- If only I *lost / hadn't lost / didn't lose* my camera on the beach.
- It's high time we *stop / stopped / had stopped* dumping waste in the seas.
- My back's all red. I wish I *had / did / would* put more sun cream on.
- I'd rather she *couldn't / didn't / won't* go alone, to be honest.
- If only I *hadn't to / had to / didn't have to* go camping. I hate sleeping in tents.
- I wish you all *knew / had known / know* just how much effort I put into this trip.
- If only I *had seen / saw / did see* her earlier. I'd have asked her to join us.
- I'd rather we *use / used / had used* less plastic than we currently do.
- If only the fire *doesn't destroy / didn't destroy / hadn't destroyed* the forest.
- I wish I *could / did / will* do more to protect endangered species.

2 Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

- If only more people _____ (leave) a patch of their garden to grow wild, it would help wildlife.
- So many products damage the environment. It's time consumers _____ (take) more interest in how the things they buy are made.
- It's difficult to know what products contain. I'd rather companies _____ (label) them more clearly.
- Some species are now at risk of extinction. I wish we _____ (do) more to protect them earlier.
- I wish supermarkets _____ (not/sell) fruit and vegetables wrapped in plastic.
- The new road blocks a migration route for animals. If only they _____ (consult) wildlife experts, it could have been avoided.
- We all contribute to pollution. It's high time we _____ (recognise) that fact.
- The heat is terrible! If only it _____ (not/be) so hot today!
- It sounds like the lecture you attended was fascinating. I wish I _____ (know) about it.
- I'd rather we _____ (not/discuss) the issue right now if you don't mind.

3 Complete the text with the correct form of the verbs in the box.

(do know not assume not fly switch warn)

I love travelling, but lately I've become more conscious of my environmental footprint. When I look back on the amazing places I've visited, I have fond memories, but I also wish I ¹ _____ quite so many air miles. It's time more of us ² _____ to less polluting forms of transport. I've been trying to cut my air travel, but it's not always that easy. I wish big travel companies ³ _____ that everyone wants to fly. Of course, they don't offer other transport options, because they'd rather everyone ⁴ _____ the same to keep things simple. Researching different routes yourself can be fun, but it doesn't always work out. When I planned to take a ferry from Spain to Morocco last year, for example, I wish I ⁵ _____ that it sometimes gets cancelled in bad weather. I got stuck in Cádiz for two days and missed the train I'd booked from Tangier to Marrakesh. If only someone ⁶ _____ me about possible delays, I'd have waited to buy my train ticket when I arrived.