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.

1 If only I *lost / hadn't lost / didn't lose* my camera on the beach.
2 It's high time we *stop / stopped / had stopped* dumping waste in the seas.
3 My back's all red. I wish I *had / did / would* put more sun cream on.
4 I'd rather she *couldn't / didn't / won't* go alone, to be honest.
5 If only I *hadn't to / had to / didn't have to* go camping. I hate sleeping in tents.
6 I wish you all *knew / had known / know* just how much effort I put into this trip.
7 If only I *had seen / saw / did see* her earlier. I'd have asked her to join us.
8 I'd rather we *use / used / had used* less plastic than we currently do.
9 If only the fire *doesn't destroy / didn't destroy / hadn't destroyed* the forest.
10 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.

1 If only more people _____ (leave) a patch of their garden to grow wild, it would help wildlife.
2 So many products damage the environment. It's time consumers _____ (take) more interest in how the things they buy are made.
3 It's difficult to know what products contain. I'd rather companies _____ (label) them more clearly.
4 Some species are now at risk of extinction. I wish we _____ (do) more to protect them earlier.
5 I wish supermarkets _____ (not/sell) fruit and vegetables wrapped in plastic.
6 The new road blocks a migration route for animals. If only they _____ (consult) wildlife experts, it could have been avoided.
7 We all contribute to pollution. It's high time we _____ (recognise) that fact.
8 The heat is terrible! If only it _____ (not/be) so hot today!
9 It sounds like the lecture you attended was fascinating. I wish I _____ (know) about it.
10 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.

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