

Unit 38

If I do ... and If I did ...

A Compare these examples:

(1) Lisa has lost her watch. She tells Sue:

LISA: I've lost my watch. Have you seen it anywhere?

SUE: No, but **if I find it**, I'll tell you.

In this example, Sue feels there is a real possibility that she will find the watch. So she says:
if I find ... , I'll ...

(2) Joe says:

If I found a wallet in the street, I'd take it to the police station.

This is a different type of situation. Here, Joe doesn't expect to find a wallet in the street; he is *imagining* a situation that will probably not happen. So he says:

if I found ... , I'd (= I would) ... (not **if I find ... , I'll ...**)

When you imagine something like this, you use **if + past**
(**if I found / if there was / if we didn't** etc.).

But the meaning is *not* past:

- ☐ What would you do if you won a million pounds?
(we don't really expect this to happen)
- ☐ I don't really want to go to their party, but I probably will go. They'd be upset if I **didn't** go.
- ☐ If there **was** (or **were**) an election tomorrow, who would you vote for?

For **if ... was/were**, see Unit 39C.

If I won a million pounds ...



B We do not normally use **would** in the **if**-part of the sentence:

- ☐ I'd be very frightened if somebody **pointed** a gun at me. (not if somebody would point)
- ☐ If I **didn't** go to their party, they'd be upset. (not If I wouldn't go)

But you can use **if ... would** when you ask somebody to do something:

- ☐ (from a formal letter) I would be grateful if you **would** let me know your decision as soon as possible.

C In the other part of the sentence (not the **if**-part) we use **would ('d) / wouldn't**:

- ☐ If you took more exercise, you'd (= you would) feel better.
- ☐ I'm not tired. If I went to bed now, I **wouldn't** sleep.
- ☐ Would you mind if I used your phone?

Could and **might** are also possible:

- ☐ If you took more exercise, you **might** feel better. (= it is possible that you would feel better)
- ☐ If it stopped raining, we **could** go out. (= we would be able to go out)

D Do not use **when** in sentences like those on this page:

- ☐ They'd be upset if I didn't go to their party. (not when I didn't go)
- ☐ What would you do if you were bitten by a snake? (not when you were bitten)

Exercises

Unit 38

38.1 Put the verb into the correct form.

- 1 They would be offended if I didn't go to their party. (not / go)
- 2 If you took more exercise, you would feel better. (feel)
- 3 If they offered me the job, I think I _____ it. (take)
- 4 A lot of people would be out of work if the car factory _____ . (close down)
- 5 If I sold my car, I _____ much money for it. (not / get)
- 6 (in a lift) What would happen if somebody _____ that red button? (press)
- 7 I don't think there's any chance that Gary and Emma will get married. I'd be absolutely astonished if they _____ . (do)
- 8 Liz gave me this ring. She _____ very upset if I lost it. (be)
- 9 Dave and Kate are expecting us. They would be very disappointed if we _____ . (not / come)
- 10 Would Steve mind if I _____ his bike without asking him? (borrow)
- 11 What would you do if somebody _____ in here with a gun? (walk)
- 12 I'm sure Sue _____ if you explained the situation to her. (understand)

38.2 You ask a friend to imagine these situations. You ask What would you do if ... ?

- 1 (imagine – you win a lot of money)
What would you do if you won a lot of money?
- 2 (imagine – you lose your passport)
What _____
- 3 (imagine – there's a fire in the building)

- 4 (imagine – you're in a lift and it stops between floors)

38.3 Answer the questions in the way shown.

- 1 A: Shall we catch the 10.30 train?
B: No. (arrive too early) If we caught the 10.30 train, we'd arrive too early.
- 2 A: Is Kevin going to take his driving test?
B: No. (fail) If he _____
- 3 A: Why don't we stay at a hotel?
B: No. (cost too much) If _____
- 4 A: Is Sally going to apply for the job?
B: No. (not / get it) If _____
- 5 A: Let's tell them the truth.
B: No. (not / believe us) If _____
- 6 A: Why don't we invite Bill to the party?
B: No. (have to invite his friends too) _____

38.4 Use your own ideas to complete these sentences.

- 1 If you took more exercise, you'd feel better.
- 2 I'd be very angry if _____
- 3 If I didn't go to work tomorrow, _____
- 4 Would you go to the party if _____
- 5 If you bought some new clothes, _____
- 6 Would you mind if _____