

A

Compare these examples:

- (1) LISA: Shall we go by bus or by train?  
JESS: **If we go** by bus, it **will** be cheaper.

For Jess, it is possible that they will go by bus, so she says:

**If we go** by bus, it **will** be ...



- (2) Lisa and Jess decide to go by train.  
Later, Jess talks to Joe.

- JOE: How are you going to travel?  
JESS: We're going by train. **If we went** by bus, it **would** be cheaper, but the train is quicker.

Now Jess knows they are not going to travel by bus, so she says:

**If we went** by bus, it **would** be ... (not If we go ...)



When we imagine something that will not happen, or we don't expect that it will happen, we use **if + past** (**if we went / if there was / if you found** etc.).

But the meaning is *not* past:

- What would you do **if you won** a lot of money? (we don't really expect this to happen)
- If there was** (or **were**) an election tomorrow, who would you vote for?

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

Compare **if I find** and **if I found**:

- I think I left my watch at your house. **If you find** it, can you call me?

but **If you found** a wallet in the street, what would you do with it?



B

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

- I'd be very scared **if somebody pointed** a gun at me. (not if somebody would point)
- If we went** by bus, it would be cheaper. (not If we would 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**:

- What **would** you **do** if you were bitten by a snake?
- I'm not going to bed yet. 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 I won a lot of money, I **might buy** a house. (= it is possible that I would buy a house)
- If it stopped raining, we **could go** out. (= we would be able to go out)

## Exercises

## 38.1 What do you say in these situations?

- Of course you don't expect to win the lottery. Which do you say?
  - If I win the lottery, I'll buy a big house.
  - If I won the lottery, I'd buy a big house.  (*b is correct*)
- You're not going to sell your car because it's old and not worth much. Which do you say?
  - If I sell my car, I won't get much money for it.
  - If I sold my car, I wouldn't get much money for it.
- You often see Sarah. A friend of yours wants to contact her. Which do you say?
  - If I see Sarah, I'll tell her to call you.
  - If I saw Sarah, I'd tell her to call you.
- You don't expect that there will be a fire in the building. Which do you say?
  - What will you do if there is a fire in the building?
  - What would you do if there was a fire in the building?
- You've never lost your passport. You can only imagine it.
  - I don't know what I'll do if I lose my passport.
  - I don't know what I'd do if I lost my passport.
- Somebody stops you and asks the way to a bank. Which do you say?
  - If you go right at the end of this street, you'll see a bank on your left.
  - If you went right at the end of this street, you'd see a bank on your left.
- You're in a lift. There is an emergency button. Nobody is going to press it. Which do you say?
  - What will happen if somebody presses that button?
  - What would happen if somebody pressed that button?

## 38.2 Put the verb into correct form.

- I'd be very scared if somebody pointed (point) a gun at me.
- I can't afford to buy a car. If I \_\_\_\_\_ (buy) a car, I'd have to borrow the money.
- Don't lend Amy your car. If she \_\_\_\_\_ (ask) me, I wouldn't lend her mine.
- If the computer factory closed down, many people \_\_\_\_\_ (lose) their jobs.
- I don't think Gary and Emma will get married. I \_\_\_\_\_ (be) amazed if they did.
- What would you do if you \_\_\_\_\_ (be) in a lift and it \_\_\_\_\_ (stop) between floors?
- If somebody \_\_\_\_\_ (give) me £10,000, I \_\_\_\_\_ (have) a very long holiday.

38.3 Write sentences beginning *If ...*

- We've decided not to catch the 10.30 train. (arrive too early)  
If we caught the 10.30 train, we'd arrive too early.
- Kevin is not going to do his driving test now. (fail)  
If he \_\_\_\_\_
- We've decided not to stay at a hotel. (cost too much)  
If \_\_\_\_\_
- Sally isn't going to leave her job. (not / get another one)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- We've decided not to invite Ben to the party. (have to invite his friends too)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I'm not going to tell him what happened. (not / believe me)  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 38.4 Use your own ideas to complete these sentences.

- If I won a lot of money, I'd buy a house.
- I'd be very angry if \_\_\_\_\_
- If you bought a car, \_\_\_\_\_
- I'd be surprised if \_\_\_\_\_
- Would you mind if \_\_\_\_\_