

# Would

## Past form of "will"

*Would* is an auxiliary modal verb. And it's the past form of "will".

Since it's a past form, we use *would* to talk about the past, and also the future in the past, to talk about hypothesis (when we imagine something) and for politeness in requests and questions. Using *would*, we can express desire, opinion or hope, wish and regret.

The auxiliary modal verb *would* is invariable. There is only one form for all the subjects: **would**. And after it, the main verb is always in the base form, even when the verb is in the *present perfect* or *be + "ing"*:

*I would have gone with you if I had bought the tickets.*

*If I had money, I would be swimming in the Maldives now.*

	subject	modal <i>would</i>	not	main verb <i>base form</i>	
+	I	would		go	there.
-	She	would	not	be	late.
?	Would	you		help	me?

## Beliefs

We use **would** to express *past beliefs about the future*:

*He thought we would be late, so we would have to take the bus to get there.*

## Willingness

We use **would** to talk about *what people wanted to do or were willing to do in the past*:

*My brother wouldn't lend me the car, so we had to take the train.*

And also to talk about **typical behavior**, things that we often did (because we were willing to do them) **in the past**:

*When they were children they used to spend their holidays at their grandmother's at the seaside. They'd get up early every morning and have a quick breakfast. Then they'd run across the road to the beach.*

*Every summer we'd go to the seaside.*

*We would always argue. We could never agree.*

## Untrue present situations

We use **would** to express present situations which are opposite to the truth - and they can be conditional sentences as well:

*I would buy that car but I can't afford it.*

## Past refusals

We use **would** to mention things that were refused in the past:

*He wanted a divorce but his wife wouldn't agree.*

*Yesterday morning, the car wouldn't start.*

## Future in the past

When talking about the past, we can use **would** to express something that has not happened at the time we are talking about:

*She left 5 minutes late, unaware that the delay would save her life.*

*In NYC he met the woman that he would one day marry.*

## Desire or inclination

When mentioning things we want, we use **would** to express politeness:

*We'd love to live there.*

*What I'd really like is some tea.*

## Polite requests and questions

We use **would** for polite requests and questions:

*Would you please be quiet?*

*Would you open the door, please?*

*Would you go with me?*

*What would the capital of Nepal be?*

## Opinion or hope

When we want to express our opinion or something we hope, we can use **would**:

*I'd imagine they'll buy a new one.*

*I suppose some people would call it torture.*

*I would have to agree.*

*I'd expect her to come.*

*Since you ask me, I'd say the purple one fits better.*

## Presumption or expectation

We use **would** when we want to mention things we expect and presumptions:

*That would be Mark calling, I'll answer it.*

*A: We saw a police helicopter overhead yesterday morning.*

*B: Really? They would have been looking for those bank robbers.*

## Uncertainty

When using **would**, we express less certainty than other common expressions:

*He would seem to be getting better.* (less certain than: He seems to be getting better.)

*It would appear that I was wrong.* (less certain than: It appears that I was wrong.)

## Conditionals

We often use **would** to express the so-called second and third conditionals:

*If I had won the lottery, I would have bought a mansion.*

*He would have no money if he had lost his job.*

Using the same conditional structure, we often use **would** when giving advice:

*I wouldn't eat that if I were you.*

*If you asked me, I'd say you should go.*

Sometimes the condition is "understood" and there does not have to be an "if" clause:

*Someone who liked John would probably love John's father.* (=If someone liked John they would probably love John's father.)

*You'd never know it.* (for example: If you met him you would never know that he was rich.)

## Derogatory comment

When we want to show a critical or even disrespectful attitude, we can use **would**:

*She wouldn't give herself in, would she?*

A: *Sam said he didn't do it.*

B: *Well, he would, wouldn't he?*

## Regret (poetic/rare)

This rare, poetic or literary usage of **would** does not follow the normal structure:

*Would that it were true!* (=If only it were true! We wish that it were true!)

*Would that his mother had lived to see him become president.*

## Wish

We can use **would** to express things we wish:

*I wish you would stay.* (=I really want you to stay, I hope you will stay)

*My boss doesn't like me. I'm sure she wishes I'd resign.*



## Reporting what people said

We can use **would** as the past of *will* in reported speech:

*He said he would buy some cigarettes. ("I will buy some cigarettes")*

## Expressions with would

We use **would you..., would you mind (not) -ing, would you mind if (simple past)** for **requests**:

***Would you*** carry this for me, please?

***Would you mind*** carrying this?

***Would you mind not*** telling him until tomorrow?

***Would you mind if I*** opened the window?

We use **would you like..., would you like to...** for **offers and invitations**:

***Would you like*** another drink?

***Would you like to*** join us in this adventure?

We always use ***I would like..., I'd like ... (someone... to...) / (to) ...*** to say **what we want or what we want to do**:

***I'd like*** that one, please.

***I'd like to*** meet you before you go back to Canada.

***I'd like you to*** look after my plants.

When we want to say what we prefer, it's common to say ***I'd rather*** (I would rather):

***I'd rather*** have the new one, not the old one.

*I don't want any dessert. It's getting late, ***I'd rather*** go home.*

When we want to **give an opinion and we're not sure or we want to be polite**, we can use expressions such as ***I would think, I would imagine, I'd guess, I'd say...***:

*It's very difficult, ***I would imagine***.*

***I'd say*** she'll probably be back at dusk.

# NOTES

## main verb

The main verb is always in the base form, it cannot be preceded by "to":  
*I would like some water. (NOT I would to like some water.)*

## contraction

We must be careful, since **would** and **had** share the same contracted form **'d**. We need to pay attention to the verb that will come after it:

*He'd gone to Ireland.* = He **had** gone to Ireland

*He'd go to Ireland.* = He **would** go to Ireland

## non stated sentences

Even though there is always a main verb, sometimes it is understood and not stated, as in:

*A: I'd like to stay.*

*B: I wish you would. (= would stay)*

*A: Do you think she'd come?*

*B: I'm sure she would. (would come)*

*A: Who would help us?*

*B: Paul would. (would help us)*

## distance or remoteness

Note that all of the usages of would express some kind of distance or remoteness:

- remoteness in time (past time)
- remoteness of possibility or probability
- remoteness between speakers, which express formality and politeness