

Test Your Grammar Skills

26 Past, Present, and Future Uses of Would

Would is used:

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| 1. as the past form of will | (see 7 sentences labelled P below) |
| 2. to describe hypothetical situations | (see 12 sentences labelled H below) |
| 3. to create a formal or polite sentence | (see 7 sentences labelled F below) |

Connected:

1. Past:

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|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| a) past intentions/expectations | It was clear that they would phone back again. (P) | |
| b) reported speech (past of will) | He said he would see me at work the following day. (P) | |
| c) used to | They would walk home by the river every Friday. (P) | } |
| d) insistence | He would keep (on) begging me to go, but I couldn't. (P) | |
| e) 3rd conditional | If I hadn't met her, we wouldn't have become friends. (H) | } |
| f) would + have (did not happen) | I would have gone to the match, but I didn't have time. (H) | |
| g) past possibility | I needed to find somebody who would listen to me. (P) | |
| h) future in the past #1 (result) | Emily would go on to win first prize in the contest. (P) | } |
| i) future in the past #2 (prediction) | I thought/knew/believed/was sure you would buy that car. (P) | |

2. Present:

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|---|--|---|
| a) likes and dislikes | I would like/love/hate another cup of tea. (F) | } |
| b) offers and invitations | Would you like to go for a walk, Deidre? (F) | |
| c) Polite requests (indirect questions) | Would you.../Would you be able to.../Would it be possible for you to... + infinitive; Would you mind... + gerund (F) | |
| d) typical behaviour | You would say/do that, wouldn't you? (H) | |
| e) to express uncertainty | He would seem/appear to be late. / I wouldn't know. (F) | } |
| f) 2 nd conditional (hypothetical) | If I were better paid, I wouldn't be living in this flat. (H) | |
| g) mixed conditional | If I'd done more revision, I wouldn't be so nervous now. (H) | |
| h) permission (formal/literary) | "May I sit here?" "I would be glad/honoured if you would." (F) | |
| i) adjective: a would-be + position | John is a would-be pilot. = an aspiring/wannabe pilot (H) | |
| j) hypothetical behaviour (now) | I'd give you half of my dessert, but it's too delicious! (H) | |

3. Future:

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|--|---|---|
| a) 2 nd conditional – unreal future | If I had enough money, I'd climb Mount Kilimanjaro. (H) | } |
| b) advice: If I were you/him/her/them | If I were you, I wouldn't go to the gig next week. (H) | |
| c) imaginary/hypothetical plans | It would be good to have a walk this evening. (F) | } |
| d) preferences | I would prefer not to/rather not go to the auction. (F) | |
| e) predictions/probability | I'd think/imagine/guess it would probably rain later. (H) | |
| f) I wish / If only + would | I wish it would snow tomorrow. (H) | } |
| g) would that (formal/literary; | Would that they would/could change their ways. / | |
| strong wish/regret) | Would that I were healthier/richer/stronger,etc. (H) | |

Fact file:

- *would* is a modal auxiliary verb. It only has one form, so cannot be conjugated.
- After *would* there must be a verb infinitive without to. The negative form is: *would not / wouldn't*.
- The contraction is 'd, e.g. She would like to get a job. / She'd like to get a job. Avoid confusion with the past form contraction of had: She had got a job. / She'd got a job.
- It is pronounced Wuud. It is a homophone with the material "wood". They both sound exactly the same but have different spellings and meanings. The weak form is wd.
- *would* dates back to the 14th century. It was first recorded c.1300 as the Old English word *wolde*, which was the past form of *wyllen*, which we know today as *will*.