

Many speakers prefer to use *were* for all persons when talking about the imagined present or future, especially in more formal situations and in American English. This form is sometimes called the past subjunctive and is also used in second conditional sentences:

If I were you, I'd think twice before refusing that offer. (► Unit 38.2)

If only he were a little more convincing on the economic issues.

FORMALITY CHECK In the above examples we can also use *was* but this is more informal.

what if, suppose + past tense ► Unit 82.1

3 *It's (about) time/high time (that)*

We use *it's (about) time + past tense* to say that something should be happening and isn't:

It's time we left. (We aren't leaving and we should be.)

It's about time you paid a visit to your grandparents. (You should visit them.)

It's high time is slightly more emphatic:

It's high time that the voice of the people was heard in this House.

(Their voice isn't being heard and it should be.)

! We cannot use a negative after *it's (high/about) time*:

✗ *It's time we didn't stay.* ✓ *It's time we left.*

We can also use *it's time for + object + to + infinitive*:

We'd better open the gates now. It's time for the guests to arrive.

If we are referring to ourselves or the person we are speaking to we can also use *it's time + to + infinitive*:

It's time to leave. I'm afraid it's time to put your books away now, children.

4 *would rather and would sooner*

We use *would rather/sooner* with the past simple to describe preferences:

I'd sooner you gave me a cash refund. A credit note's no use to me.

(= I would prefer a refund. / I wish you would give me a refund.)

They are often used as a polite way to refuse permission, or make suggestions:

I'd rather you didn't use the best china. (= Please don't use the best china.)

I'm not keen on the idea of staying in. I'd sooner we went out bowling or something.

(= Let's go bowling.)

If the person expressing a preference and the subject of the preference are the same, we use an infinitive (without *to*) instead of the past tense. Compare:

We'd sooner you spent your bonus on something useful.

(past tense: speaker and subject are not the same)

I'd rather spend it on something frivolous. (infinitive: speaker and subject are the same)

would prefer ► Unit 36.6

5 *as if and as though*

We use a past tense after *as if* or *as though* to say that how something appears now does not match with reality:

He talks to the children as though they were imbeciles. (We know they aren't imbeciles.)

They are acting as if nothing had happened. (We know something has happened.)

But we use a present tense (including the present perfect) after *as if* or *as though* when we don't know if the appearance reflects reality or not. Compare:

You talk about her as if you know her. (present tense: Perhaps you know her.)

You talk about that film star as if you knew her! (past tense: I'm sure you don't know her.)

We can use these expressions to be critical, ironic or sarcastic:

It isn't as if he's in any position to pass judgement!

(= He probably isn't in a position to do this.)