Unreal Conditionals

The unreal in English is used to talk about things in your imagination, but which are not true. The unreal is often used with *if* and *wish*.

The **unreal conditional** talks about the present time, life today, right now, but imagining (or wishing) something that is not real. It is a thought or a dream.

In a *wish* sentence, or in an *if*-clause, you use the **past tense** to show that the verb is unreal about the present. The main clause (often called the "result" clause) uses *would*:

If I *had* a lot of money, I *would buy* a house and a car.

  (The truth is that I don't have a lot of money.)

If I *knew* Spanish, I *would work* in Spain.

  (The truth is that I don't know Spanish.)

I wish I *had* a better job. If I *had* a good job, I *would be* much happier.

  (The truth is that I don't have a good job.)

I wish I *had* a computer. If I *had* a computer, I *would be* a rich businessman.

  (The truth is that I don't have a computer.)

The verb *to be* is always *were* in the unreal:

He wishes he *were* the mayor. If he *were* mayor, he *would solve* the homeless problem.
(The truth is that he is not the mayor.)

If I *were* taller, I *would play* basketball. I wish I *were* six feet tall.
(The truth is that I am not tall.)

Exercise
    1. She doesn't speak English, so she doesn't understand you.

      If she _____ English, she _____ you.

    2. He can't drive, so he won't buy a car.

      If he _____, he _____ a car.

    3. He isn't rich, so he won't buy a beach house.

      If he _____ rich, he _____ a beach house.

    4. He eats too much, so he's fat.

       If he didn't _____ too much, he _____ fat.

Answers

1. spoke, would understand

2. could drive, would buy

3. were, would buy

4. didn't eat, wouldn't be