

When to use past verb forms to talk about present or future?

A past tense does not always have a past meaning. In some kinds of sentences, past verb forms are used to talk about the present or future.

After if, unless, supposing etc

After if, unless and words with similar meanings, past verb forms are often used to refer to the present or future.

If I had another \$500, I would buy a bigger car.

You look as if you were about to cry.

Supposing you didn't win the first prize?

If you caught the morning flight, you could be in Paris by evening.

After it's time, would rather and wish

After these expressions, too, past forms can have present or future meaning.

Ten o'clock – it is time we left.

I wish I were better-looking.

I wish I had a car.

Don't come to see me today – I would rather you came tomorrow.

After past modals

The 'past' modal auxiliary verbs would, could, should and might are usually used to refer to the present or future. They are used as 'distanced' forms of will, can, shall and may.

Would you come this way?

Could you move a bit?

It might rain later in the evening.

They should be here soon.

Would you like another cup of coffee?