Past Unreal Conditionals

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▶ **1A** Past unreal conditional sentences express imaginary situations that were actually not true in the past. In the *if* clause, the past perfect indicates the situation was unreal in the past. In the result clause, *would have*, *could have*, or *might have* also indicate the result was unreal in the past.

If I **had been** the boss, I **would have fired** him. (I wasn't the boss, so I didn't fire him.)

▶ **1B** *Could have* or *might have* in the result clause indicates one of several possible imaginary outcomes. *Would have* indicates that the speaker is more certain about the imaginary results.

If you**'d had** your car, you **could have left** earlier.

If you**'d had** your car, you **might not have left** so late. (*Could have* and *might have* both express one of several possible imaginary outcomes.)

If you**'d had** your car, you **wouldn't have left** so late. (*Would have* expresses more certainty about the imaginary outcome.)

Giving Advice

▶ **2** Unreal conditionals beginning with *If I had been you* can be used as an indirect way of giving advice. The *if* clause is often omitted. Unreal conditionals sound softer than modals like *should have*.

Advice with Past Unreal Conditionals	**Advice with Modals**
(If I**'d been** you,) I **would have left** early.	You **should have** left early.

Restating Past Unreal Conditionals with But

▶ **3** Often, a sentence with *would have* is used without an *if* condition. Instead, the main clause is joined to a true (not imaginary) sentence with *but*. The true sentence with *but* implies the unreal past condition.

True Sentence with But	**Past Unreal Conditional**
I would have watched the tennis match, **but I had to study**.	I would have watched the tennis match **if I hadn't had to study**.
I would have left earlier, **but my car didn't start**.	I would have left earlier **if my car had started**.