

Past tenses Past or not

Without looking below for now, listen to your teacher read out sentences that use past tenses and lift up one of your two cards depending on whether the meaning is past or not.

Label the underlined parts below with “P” if they are about past times.

- I could speak Chinese quite well.
- Could you possibly...?
- I'm getting used to starting early in the morning to miss rush hour.
- I used to use a fax all the time
- He would always arrive late for meetings, even ones he had asked for.
- We would be very grateful if...
- If I were in your place, I'd take the offer from the headhunter.
- Supposing you had complete freedom, how would you change your company?
- If I'd stayed just 15 minutes more, I'd have got into a fight.
- If I'd stayed just 15 minutes more, I'd probably still have that job.
- I wish I didn't have so many meetings this week.
- I wish I hadn't accepted so many projects in August.
- If only I had more free time in the mornings.
- If only I had had more time to talk to him.
- Was there anything else?
- There was just one last thing I wanted to ask.
- I had one or two things that I wanted to add.
- I was wondering if...

What are the two uses of past tenses above which are not about past time? Which sentences are examples of each of those two uses?

Change these sentences which aren't about the past into ones which are about past times:

- I'm getting used to starting early in the morning to miss rush hour.
- If I were in your place, I'd take the offer from the headhunter.
- Supposing you had complete freedom, how would you change your company?
- I wish I didn't have so many meetings.
- If only I had more free time in the mornings.

Change these sentences about the past into ones that are about the present or future.

- I could speak Chinese quite well.
- I used to use a fax all the time.
- He would always arrive late for meetings, even ones he had asked for.
- If I'd stayed just 15 minutes more, I'd have got into a fight.
- I wish I hadn't accepted so many projects.
- If only I had had more time to talk to him.

Suggested answers

Not past sentences and meanings

- Could you possibly...? – Not past (politeness)
- I'm getting used to starting early in the morning to miss rush hour. – Not past
- We would be very grateful if... – Not past (politeness)
- If I were in your place, I'd take the offer from the headhunter. – Not past (imagination)
- Supposing you had complete freedom, how would you change your company? – Not past (imagination)
- If I'd stayed just 15 minutes more, I'd have got into a fight. – Both parts not past (imagination)
- If I'd stayed just 15 minutes more, I'd probably still have that job. – First part not past, second part past (imagination)
- I wish I didn't have so many meetings this week. – Not past (imagination)
- If only I had more free time in the mornings. – Not past (imagination)
- Was there anything else? – Not past (politeness)
- There was just one last thing I wanted to ask. – Not past (politeness)
- I had one or two things that I wanted to add. – Not past (politeness)
- I was wondering if... – Not past (politeness)

What are the two uses of past tenses above which are not about past time? Politeness and unreal/ imaginary/ impossible.

Change these sentences which aren't about the past into ones which are:

- I'm getting used to starting early in the morning to miss rush hour – I was getting used to starting early in the morning
- If I were in your place, I'd take the offer from the headhunter. – If I had been in your place, I would have taken the offer from the headhunter
- Supposing you had complete freedom, how would you change your company? – Supposing you had had complete freedom, how would you have changed your company?
- I wish I didn't have so many meetings. – I wish I hadn't had so many meetings
- If only I had more free time in the mornings. – If only I had had more time.

Change these sentences about the past into ones that are about the present or future.

- I could speak Chinese quite well – I can speak Chinese quite well.
- I used to use a fax all the time – I use a fax all the time.
- He would always arrive late for meetings, even ones he had asked for. – He always arrives late for meetings, even ones he has asked for.
- If I'd stayed just 15 minutes more, I'd have got into a fight. – If I stayed just 15 minutes more, I'd get into a fight.
- I wish I hadn't accepted so many projects. – I wish I didn't accept so many projects.
- If only I had had more time to talk to him. – I wish I had more time to talk to him.

Cards to hold up

Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past
Past	Not past	Past	Not past