

Would

Introduction



Would you take care of the expenses file for me, please?

Definition

Would is modal auxiliary verb which has different uses.

Construction

affirmative: subject + 'would' + **bare infinitive** It **would** start.

negative: subject + 'would' + 'not' + **bare infinitive** It **wouldn't** start.

interrogative: 'would' + subject + **bare infinitive** **Would** it start?

Note that like other modal auxiliaries, **would** has no infinitive and we use the same form with 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'we' and 'they'. 'Do' is not used to form negative or interrogative sentences.

Uses

Uses	Examples
Hoping and wishing	I wish you would stay. Do you have to leave so soon? It's so calm here. I'd love to live in the countryside.

Expressing feelings about hypothetical situations	I'd hate to work nights. It would be lovely to live in Italy. It would be quicker to take the train.
Past tense of 'will' for tendency and habit particularly when reminiscing or being nostalgic [see note below]	When I was young we'd play in the park every evening. We'd always finish early on Fridays in my previous job. My father would always smoke in the kitchen - my mother hated it.
Past tense of 'will' for willingness	My car wouldn't start yesterday. I left my last job because I just wouldn't put up with working unsociable hours.
Giving advice	I'd recommend staying at the Hilton next week. You'd be more comfortable in a taxi than on the train with all those bags.
Polite requests	Would you chair the meeting? Would you mind opening the window, please? I'd like a cup of coffee, please. [more polite than "I want"]
Opinion	"Is Sarah in the boardroom?" "I wouldn't think so; she usually goes home before four." I'd imagine it's very nice in Portugal at this time of year.

Notes

Would you mind..?

Questions that start with 'would you mind' are normally answered in the negative. 'Would you mind' is a little more polite than 'do you mind?' and means 'does it inconvenience you?' By answering in the negative, we are saying that it does not inconvenience us. For example:

Would you mind if I used your telephone?

No, not at all, go ahead.

Would you mind opening the door for me please?

No, certainly, here you are.

Polite phrases

Sometimes you will hear **would** used in very long phrases when people want to be particularly polite. For example:

I wonder if you'd mind closing the window, please. **No, not at all.**

I don't suppose you'd happen to have a pen I could borrow? **Yes. Here you are.**

Tendency/habit

Sometimes we use **would** as an alternative to the past simple to talk about something that happened regularly. For example:

When he got home on Fridays, he'd sit in the garden and smoke his favourite cigars.

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When got home on Fridays, he sat in the garden and smoked his favourite cigars.

This is similar to **used to**:

When he got home on Fridays, he used to sit in the garden and smoke his favourite cigars.

If we are unhappy about something that used to happen regularly, we use the same structure but we emphasise **would** and do not contract it. For example:

He **would** smoke in the house! It was so annoying - why couldn't he do it in the garden?!

Examples



Would you come this way please?



I'd recommend putting another fire escape here.



When I was your age I'd wash my dad's car every weekend and then he'd buy me a milkshake and we'd go to the park.



Yes, please. I'd love a cup of tea.



I'd put all the tables in an appendix at the end rather than have them here.



I would love to be young again and jump in puddles.



That one doesn't have a price tag but I'd imagine that it's expensive.



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Last update: **2023/02/14 14:21**

