Past Tenses

CEFR C1 · Backshift, unreal pasts and discourse function
WS1 Backshift & Reported Speech · WS2 The Unreal Past · WS3 Habitual Past & Aspect Nuance · WS4 Critical Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Backshift & Reported Speech

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Tenses Shift Back

When we report speech or thought after a past reporting verb, tenses usually **backshift**: present → past, past → past perfect, will → would, and so on. Backshift is optional when the statement is still true or a general fact. Time and place words also shift (*now → then, today → that day, here → there*).

Direct	Reported (backshifted)
"I **am** tired."	She said she **was** tired.
"I **saw** him."	He said he **had seen** him.
"We **will** come."	They said they **would** come.
"It **is raining**."	She said it **was raining**.

Part A – Report the Statement

1. "I've finished the report." → She said _____.
2. "We are leaving tomorrow." → They told me _____.
3. "I didn't take it." → He claimed _____.
4. "The meeting starts at nine." → She said _____.

Part B – Backshift or Not?

Decide whether backshift is necessary. Explain.

#	Reported sentence	Backshift needed? / why
1	He said the Earth _____ (go) round the Sun.	
2	She told me she _____ (live) in Berlin (she still does).	
3	The witness said he _____ (see) nothing that night.	

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: The Unreal Past

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Past Form, Not Past Time

A past-tense form can express **unreality** rather than past time: in second conditionals (*If I knew…*), after **wish / if only**, after **would rather** and **it's time**, and after **as if / as though**. The past perfect marks unreal **past** (regret): *I wish I had known*. *Were* is used for all persons in formal unreal clauses.

Structure	Meaning	Example
wish / if only + past	regret about now	I wish I **had** more time.
wish / if only + past perfect	regret about the past	I wish I **had studied** harder.
would rather + past	preference for another to act	I'd rather you **didn't** smoke.
it's (high) time + past	it should happen now	It's time we **left**.
as if / as though + past	unreal comparison	He talks as if he **knew** everything.

Part A – Complete the Unreal Past

1. I wish I _____ (can) speak Japanese.
2. If only we _____ (not / miss) the train earlier!
3. It's time you _____ (go) to bed.
4. She acts as though she _____ (own) the place.
5. I'd rather you _____ (tell) me the truth.

Part B – Now or Past Regret?

Choose past or past perfect and state whether the regret is about now or the past.

#	Sentence	Form + now/past
1	I wish I _____ (know) the answer right now.	
2	If only he _____ (listen) to me last year.	
3	I wish it _____ (not / rain) yesterday.	

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Habitual Past & Aspect Nuance

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: used to, would, and the Continuous

For past habits, **used to** covers states and actions; **would** covers repeated actions only. The **past continuous** can express a repeated, often irritating habit with *always* (*He was always losing things*), and can soften requests or add tentativeness (*I was hoping…, I was wondering…*). Choice signals nuance, not just time.

Nuance	Form	Example
Past state (no would)	used to	I **used to be** shy.
Repeated past action	would / used to	He **would sit** by the window for hours.
Irritating repetition	was always + -ing	She **was always arriving** late.
Tentative / polite	past continuous	I **was wondering** if you could help.

Part A – Choose the Best Form

1. (state) There _____ a bakery on this corner. (be)
2. (irritating habit) He _____ (always / borrow) money and never repaid it.
3. (polite) I _____ (hope) you might join us.
4. (repeated action) Every evening she _____ (walk) along the river.

Part B – Identify the Nuance

#	Sentence	Nuance
1	"I was thinking we could meet on Friday."	
2	"They were forever asking for favours."	
3	"We used to have a cottage by the lake."	
4	"On Sundays he would read the whole paper."	

Part C – Rewrite for the Nuance Named

1. (irritating habit) He often criticised everyone. → _____
2. (tentative request) I want to ask a favour. → _____

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Critical Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Reading

> Looking back, she wished she had spoken sooner. For years she had told herself there was still time, as if the years were not slipping past. If only she had listened when her mother, who used to sit for hours in that same chair, had tried to explain. Now it was too late — or so it seemed. She kept returning to the same thought: had she been paying attention, none of this would have happened.

1. Identify each past form that expresses **unreality** rather than past time, and explain each.
2. "the years were not slipping past" follows "as if". Analyse the tense choice and its effect.
3. Find the past perfect used for the "earlier past" and distinguish it from any past perfect used for **unreal past**.
4. "had she been paying attention" is an inverted conditional. Rewrite it with *if* and comment on register.

Part B – Extended Analytical Writing

Write a reflective or analytical paragraph of 160–200 words on a decision, regret, or turning point. You must include and underline: (1) one **unreal past** (wish / if only / as if); (2) one **unreal past perfect** (past regret); (3) one **past perfect** for real earlier past; (4) one **habitual past** (used to / would / was always -ing); (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to claim strength.

#	Line
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

Features: _____ / 5 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C1 Level, Past Tenses

Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 …she had finished the report. · 2 …they were leaving the next day. · 3 …he hadn't taken it. · 4 … the meeting started at nine. (backshift optional — timetable/fact)

Worksheet 1 – Part B

1 goes/went — no backshift needed (general truth), both acceptable. · 2 lives/lived — optional, as it's still true. · 3 had seen — backshift required (past → past perfect, one-off past event).

Worksheet 2 – Part A

1 could · 2 hadn't missed · 3 went · 4 owned · 5 told

Worksheet 2 – Part B

1 knew — regret about now. · 2 had listened — regret about the past. · 3 hadn't rained — regret about the past (yesterday).

Rule: past form → present/future regret; past perfect → past regret.

Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 used to be · 2 was always borrowing · 3 was hoping · 4 would walk / used to walk

Worksheet 3 – Part B

1 tentative/polite suggestion. · 2 irritating repeated habit. · 3 past state. · 4 repeated past action.

Worksheet 3 – Part C (model)

1 He was always criticising everyone. · 2 I was wondering if I could ask a favour.

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 "wished she had spoken sooner" (unreal past regret); "as if the years were not slipping past" (unreal comparison); "If only she had listened" (unreal past regret); "none of this would have happened" (unreal past result — third-conditional consequence). · 2 Past continuous after "as if" signals an unreal/ counterfactual comparison — she behaved as though time were not passing, which it in fact was. · 3 Real earlier past: "her mother … had tried to explain" (a genuine past event before the narrative now); unreal past: "she had spoken/had listened" (counterfactual regrets that did not happen). · 4 "If she had been paying attention, none of this would have happened." The inverted form (had she been…) is more formal/literary.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor	Marks
Unreal past	wish/if only/as if used correctly	0–5
Unreal past perfect	Past regret expressed accurately	0–5
Real past perfect	Earlier-past use, distinct from unreal	0–5
Habitual past	used to/would/was always -ing correct	0–5
Argument & length	160–200 words; developed with hedges	0–5