

# 32 Future possibilities

There are many ways to talk about imaginary future situations. Different structures can be used to indicate whether a situation is likely or unlikely.

See also:

Present simple **1** Past simple **7**

Past perfect simple **13**

## 32.1 LIKELY FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

"What if" or "suppose" followed by the present tense can be used to express a future outcome that is likely to happen.

"What if" means "what would happen if an imagined situation occurred?"

What if  
Suppose

I **fail** my exams? I won't be able to go to college.

Present tense shows the speaker believes this is likely to happen.

"Suppose" refers to the consequences of an imagined situation.



### FURTHER EXAMPLES

**What if** the computer **crashes**?  
I will lose all my work.

**Suppose** they **assess** our coursework.  
We will have to keep a portfolio.

## 32.2 UNLIKELY FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

"What if" or "suppose" followed by the past simple can be used to express a future outcome that is possible, but unlikely to happen.

Just imagine! { **What if**  
**Suppose** } we all **got** 100% on our exams?

The past tense shows the speaker thinks this is unlikely to happen.



### FURTHER EXAMPLES

**Suppose** I **got caught** cheating.  
My parents would be furious.

**What if** our flight **was canceled**?  
We'd be stuck here!

### 32.3 THINGS THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED

“What if” and “suppose” can also be used with the past perfect to describe situations that were possible in the past, but that didn’t happen, or might not have happened.



That was so dangerous! **{ What if / Suppose }** you **had broken** your leg?

The past perfect shows that this didn’t happen, but it was possible.

#### FURTHER EXAMPLES

We were lucky to catch that plane!  
**What if it hadn’t been** delayed?

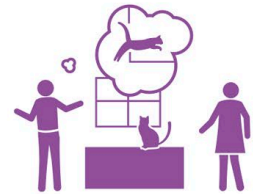
**Suppose you had taken** the job.  
We would have had to move.

### 32.4 IN CASE

“In case” or “just in case” plus the present tense are used to show planning for a possible future situation.

Make sure the windows are shut  
**in case** the cat **tries** to escape.

Present tense.



#### FURTHER EXAMPLES

You should take an umbrella with you **in case** it **rains** later.

We should start organizing our project work, **just in case** they **want** to see it.

You should write these instructions down **in case** you **forget** what to do.

You should leave for the airport early, **just in case** the traffic **is** bad.

“Just” is added to “in case” to talk about preparation for a situation that is less likely.