Talking about unreal situations

To talk about unreal conditions – things that will probably not happen or situations that are untrue or imaginary – we use special tenses with *if*.

**Present and future situations**
To talk about situations that are unreal or imaginary now or in the future, we use a past tense in the if-clause and would + infinitive in the result clause. Note that a past tense is used even though the meaning is present or future.

If I *knew* anything more, I *would tell* you. (NOT If I know anything, I would tell you.) (NOT If I knew anything, I will tell you.)
If I *had* a car, I *would be* perfectly happy.

This structure can be used to make a suggestion sound more polite.

It *would be* nice, if you *helped* me with my homework.

In British English, *should* can be used after *I* and *we* with the same meaning as *would*.

If I *knew* his name, I *should / would tell* you. (British)
If we *had* a car, we *should / would* be happy.

*If I were*  
*Were* is often used instead of *was* after *if*. This is common in both formal and informal speech and writing. In fact, were in more common in a formal style.

*If I were* a little taller, I would be quite attractive. (More formal than ‘If I was a little taller,...)

**Notes**
In *if* sentences, a past tense can be used to talk about a present or future situation. It merely suggests that a situation is less probable.

For example, the sentence ‘*If I got my rise, I would buy a car*’ indicates less possibility of my getting a rise than the sentence ‘*If I get my rise, I will buy a car*’.