



"Was vs. Were" Quick-Decision Cheat Sheet

Use this simple guide to pick **was** or **were** in the subjunctive mood (for hypotheticals, wishes, or "if" scenarios). The golden rule: **Were** for all subjects in unreal situations—yes, even "I" and "he/she/it."

Core Rule

- **Was:** Real past facts (indicative mood).
 - I was tired yesterday.
- **Were:** Hypothetical, unreal, or wished-for scenarios (subjunctive mood).
 - If I were rich... (not real)
 - She wishes she were here.

By Subject (Subjunctive Only)

Subject	Use "Were" for Hypotheticals	Example
I/You/We/They	Always "were"	If I were you, I'd go.
He/She/It/He was	"Were" (not "was")	If he were taller...
Singular Noun	"Were"	If the dog were mine...

Quick Tests

1. Is it real past? → Was.

- He **was** at the store (happened).
- 2. "If only," wish, suppose, or imagine? → **Were**.
 - I wish it **were** Friday.
- 3. After "as if/as though"? → **Were**.
 - She acts as if she **were** the boss.
- 4. In "if I were you" idiom? → **Were** (standard English).

Common Traps

- I/he/she + **were**: Correct in subjunctive (e.g., "If I were king").
- **British English**: Sometimes uses "**was**" informally, but stick to "**were**" for formal writing.
- **To be + going to**: Still "were" if hypothetical (e.g., "If it were to rain...").

Print this, memorize the "were for unreal" mantra, and you'll nail it 99% of the time. Example: "If I **was** king" → Wrong. "If I **were** king" → Spot on.