

I'm not robot!

Subjunctive mood

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She insists that he come. The English subjunctive is a special, relatively rare verb form that expresses something desired or imagined. We use the subjunctive mainly when talking about events that are not certain to happen. For example, we use the subjunctive when talking about events that somebody: wants to happen anticipates will happen imagines happening Base Subjunctive Form of base subjunctive The form of the base subjunctive is extremely simple. For all verbs and all persons, the form is the base of the verb, for example: be, have, do, go, sing, work The base subjunctive does not use any other forms (goes, sings, works). This table shows the base subjunctive in all persons, using the verbs be, work and sing as examples: base-subjunctive be work sing I be work sing you be work sing he, she, it be work sing we be work sing they be work sing Note that the subjunctive does not change at all according to person (I, you, he etc). Use of base subjunctive In certain that clauses The base subjunctive is typically used in that clauses after two structures: 1. suggest-verb (or noun) + that advise, ask, command, demand, desire, insist, order, prefer, propose, recommend, request, suggest command, demand, order, proposal, recommendation, request, suggestion 2. advisable/anxious-adjective + that advisable, best, crucial, desirable, essential, imperative, important, necessary, unthinkable, urgent, vital adamant, anxious, determined, eager, keen Look at these sentences which include examples of the above: main clause suggest-verb that clause with subjunctive He suggests that you be present at the meeting. The board recommend that he join the company. He requested that the car park not be locked at night. main clause suggest-noun that clause with subjunctive They made a suggestion that we be early. He made a proposal that the company buy more land. The president has issued an order that the secretary resign next month. main clause advisable-adjective that clause with subjunctive It is advisable that she rest for a week. It was essential that the army advance rapidly. After the landing, it will be vital that every soldier not use a radio. main clause anxious-adjective that clause with subjunctive Tara is anxious that you return soon. They are keen that he not be hurt. We were determined that it remain secret. Notice above 1 : the position of not when creating negation that the main clause can be in any tense Look at some more examples, which include that clauses in negative and continuous form: The judges order that he stay the execution. We have made a request that we not be disturbed. It is important that a car be waiting when we arrive. The manager was eager that his visitor see the new building. The board of directors recommended that he not be dismissed. Have you seen my suggestion that work hours be reduced? The use of the subjunctive as above is more common in American English than in British English, where should structures are often used: It was essential that we should vote the following day. He requested that the car park should not be locked at night. be after if We sometimes use subjunctive be after if/whether, though this is rather formal, especially in British English: If that be (not) the case, I intend to report the matter. Whether he be prepared or not, If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved. William Shakespeare Fixed expressions Note the following fixed expressions with the subjunctive: Bless you! God bless America! God save the Queen. Long live the President! Heaven forbid! Heaven help us! were-Subjunctive Form of were-subjunctive were-subjunctive be I were you were he, she, it were we were you were they were Note that the subjunctive does not change according to person (I, you, he etc). Use of were-subjunctive In the following examples, you can see that we sometimes use the were-subjunctive (instead of was) after: Note that in these cases were is always correct, but was is possible in informal language: Formal with were Informal with was I would go if I were younger. I would go if I was younger. If he were not so mean, he would buy one. If he wasn't so mean, he would buy one. I'd tell her if I were you. We do not normally say "if I was you" even in colloquial language. It's not as if I were ugly. It's not as if I was ugly. She acts as if she were the Queen. She acts as if she were the Queen. I wish I weren't so slow! I wish I wasn't so slow! I wish the computer were working. I wish the computer was working. Suppose she were here. What would you say? Suppose she was here. What would you say? If I Were a Rich Man Fiddler on the Roof If I were a carpenter And you were a lady, Would you marry me anyway? Would you have my baby? Tim Hardin Strange as it may seem, although the words hope and wish seem to be similar, we do not use the subjunctive with hope. Correct sentences with hope would be, for example: I hope that this computer works. I hope that this computer is working. Subjunctive Quiz Usage Notes Everything you need to know about some tricky verbs And here's the indicative in the same situation: Sara: if I was the last person on earth, would you date me?Ava: Sara, if you were the last person on earth, I wouldn't exist.— incorrect avalance (@valanceinert) September 8, 2018 The subjunctive is triggered in some cases but not in others, and not just on Twitter. We happen to have in our files a selection of contrasting examples (also featuring the helpfully obvious verb be) from the letters of the esteemed F. Scott Fitzgerald: I wish I were twenty-two again ... — F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter, 27 Dec. 1925 So if I were elected King of Scotland tomorrow ... — F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter, 18 July 1933 ... my birthday is two-column front page news as if I were 80 instead of 40 ... — F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter, 23 Mar. 1937 In those examples, wish, if, and as if triggered the subjunctive. But Fitzgerald often follows the same words with the indicative: I wish I was in print. — F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter, 20 May 1940 ... if I was Vassar, I wouldn't take you ... — F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter, 18 Apr. 1938 ... as if the percentage of artists who made any kind of go of the lousy business was one to four. — F. Scott Fitzgerald, letter, Spring 1939 Clearly there is a choice to be made here, and if Fitzgerald could use either form, so can (and do) others. It's been several hundred years now that we've seen these examples of the indicative settling down in neighborhoods that were formerly exclusively subjunctive, with was competing with the older subjunctive were in wishes and in hypothetical and other unreal statements. We don't know what accounts for it, but the pull toward was is probably abetted by the near invisibility of the subjunctive; it doesn't have any distinctive forms, and often the forms it takes are identical to the forms the indicative takes in similar contexts. The subjunctive doesn't, however, seem to be in a hurry to complete its supposed disappearing act from the living language. It's still easy to find in casual writing as well as in formal prose. And we see too that its forms even get pulled into service by conditional conjunctions like if, as if, and as though in cases where the mood isn't actually subjunctive: They asked if I were apprehensive about visiting the fabulous cat, given her frequent refusal to grant visitors an audience. The were says "subjunctive" but the if is not conditional; it's merely introducing the question about apprehension that may or may not factually exist. Such examples are considered to be hypercorrections by those who notice them, but it's likely few people do. The Subjunctive Mood Most Indo-European languages, in addition to verb tenses (which demonstrate time), have verb moods (which indicate a state of being or reality). For instance, the most common moods in English include the indicative, the imperative, the interrogative, and the conditional. Another, rarer mood is the subjunctive mood (indicating a hypothetical state or a state contrary to reality, such as a wish, a desire, or an imaginary situation). It is harder to explain the subjunctive. Five hundred years ago, English had a highly developed subjunctive mood. However, after the fourteenth century, speakers of English used the subjunctive less frequently. Today, the mood has practically vanished; modern speakers tend to use the conditional forms of "could" and "would" to indicate statements contrary to reality. The subjunctive only survives in a few, fossilized examples, so they can be confusing. Here are the most common uses: 1. By far the most common use of the subjunctive is the use of the subjunctive after "if" clauses that state or describe a hypothetical situation. Subjunctive: "If I were a butterfly, I would have wings." Note that in the indicative, we normally write, "I was." For instance, "When I was a young boy, I liked to swim." However, to indicate the subjunctive, we write "I were." The subjunctive indicates a statement contrary to fact. In the butterfly example above, I am not really a butterfly, but I am describing a hypothetical situation that might occur if I were one. Indicative: "When I was a butterfly in a former life, I had wings." In this sentence, the author uses the indicative to indicate that she indeed was a butterfly in the past, and she is not just hypothetically speaking about a situation contrary to her reality. Note that "when" usually takes the indicative after it, and "if" frequently takes the subjunctive. 2. The subjunctive also survives in a few idiomatic phrases in English as well. For instance, when someone sneezes, we say, "God bless you," or "Bless you," rather than "God blesses you." In this case, examine the subjunctive phrase and contrast it with the indicative. Subjunctive: "You sneezed! God bless you." In the subjunctive, the phrase indicates a hope or desire that God bless the sneezing individual. Obviously, God isn't blessing that person at the moment, because the person is sick, so the subjunctive indicates a wish contrary to current reality in the speaker's viewpoint. Indicative: "God blesses you each day." In the indicative, the author indicates that God really does bless the individual. This speaker uses the indicative to reflect what he sees as reality, i.e., God blesses people. 3. Finally, the subjunctive can also appear in restrictive clauses after phrases like I wish that, I hope that, I desire that, or I suggest that, when the speaker wishes to emphasize the tentative, contingent, suppositional, or unreal nature of that wish, hope, or suggestion. Subjunctive: "I suggest that John arrive on Tuesdays this month." The day for the weekly arrival is a mere suggestion, a hypothetical idea that John might or might not follow. The statement does not necessarily mean he will arrive at that time each week. This is is subjunctive, not indicative. Indicative: "I believe that the train arrives on Tuesdays during this month." The indicative states a fact the speaker believes is true. The train indeed arrives on Tuesdays each week of this month. Subjunctive: "She wishes that Americans in the South were more formal today." The subjunctive indicates that, in fact, Americans are not formal today. The wish states a desire for an unreal state that does not reflect the current situation. Indicative: "She thinks that Americans in the South are more formal than most Americans today." Now the speaker has made a statement in the indicative, which implies that the statement reflects or indicates what reality is actually like. Note, however, that sometimes the indicative appears after "if"-clauses when the speaker wishes to indicate that the possibility is quite realistic. Indicative: "If he brings Martha to Kosovo for the honeymoon (and he probably will), she will be upset." A good hint that the first clause should be indicative is the verb "will" in the second clause, which hints at a statement of reality. Subjunctive: "If he were to bring Martha to Kosovo for the honeymoon, she might be upset." (He might or might not bring her; it is only a possibility. The verb "might" in the last part of the sentence strongly hints that the situation is hypothetical, thus we use subjunctive in the first clause.) 4. Either the subjunctive or the indicative can appear after phrases or clauses including "might" and "may." Indicative: "A car will crash into his house if he builds it on Interstate-40." The sentence above indicates a real possibility that he is building his house on Interstate-40, and thus a car very likely will crash into it. Thus, it is indicative about reality. Subjunctive: "A car might crash into his house if he were to build it on Interstate-40." The sentence above using the subjunctive suggests that it is unlikely he actually is building his house on Interstate-40, but instead the speaker brings up the scenario as a hypothetical situation. 5. Finally, one more situation creates the subjunctive mood. The word "let" can be used to indicate the desire that some hypothetical situation come to pass or grant permission for this hypothetical situation to take place. This is called a "jussive subjunctive." Indicate: That peasant eat cake every day. Subjunctive: Let that peasant eat cake every day. Have you mastered it? Click here for a quick subjunctive quiz (currently offline). Click here to get a PDF handout going over this same material.

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