

# Subjunctive

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# Quick and Handy Grammar Review

## SUBJUNCTIVE

All sentences in the English language contain three elements:

1. **Tense**  
*simple present, past progressive, future perfect, etc.*
2. **Voice**  
*active or passive*
3. **Mood**  
*indicative, imperative, subjunctive, etc.*

The **subjunctive mood** can be used to express an unreal situation such as a wish or an action that may or may not occur. Though the subjunctive isn't that common in English, it is needed in the following three cases:

1. Reporting or giving a suggestion
2. Expressing a hypothetical situation
3. Expressing a wish

## 1. Reporting or Giving a Suggestion

### REPORTING SUGGESTIONS

The subjunctive form is used for reporting suggestions with certain verbs. These verbs of suggestion in the independent (main) clause require the base form of the verb (the subjunctive form) in the dependent clause.

The base verb in the dependent clause is not noticeable for some subjects because the verb form is the same (e.g., the base verb *go* and the first and second person present *go* have the same form). However, when a third person singular subject, the *be* verb, or the past tense are used, the subjunctive form is easily distinguishable (e.g., the base verb *go* vs. *goes, am/are/is, and went*).

The subjunctive form is also apparent in negative sentences. Unlike other negative sentences in English, the auxiliary verb *do* is not used with the subjunctive form.

### Common Verbs of Suggestion

- |          |           |             |           |
|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| • advise | • insist  | • recommend | • suggest |
| • ask    | • prefer  | • request   | • urge    |
| • demand | • propose |             |           |

**Positive Pattern:** verb of suggestion + **that** + base verb

**Negative Pattern:** verb of suggestion + **that** + not + base verb

### Examples

- She advises that we **take** the course.
- My coworker is asking that you **finish** the report quickly.
- I prefer that he **speak** to me directly.
- The tour guide recommends that we not **be** late.
- His boss demanded that he not **work** any overtime yesterday.
- Her teacher insisted that she **be** ready for the test tomorrow.

### Note:

In casual writing and speaking, "that" is sometimes omitted from the sentence with no change in meaning. For example, *His boss demanded **that** he work overtime* and *His boss demanded he work overtime* are both correct and have the same meaning.

# Quick and Handy Grammar Review cont.

## 1. Reporting or Giving a Suggestion cont.

### GIVING SUGGESTIONS

The subjunctive form is also used for giving strong suggestions or commands with certain adjectives. These adjectives of importance in the independent clause will result in the base form of the verb in the dependent clause.

As with the verbs of suggestion, the subjunctive is not noticeable with the present tense and certain subjects. However, in sentences with a third person subject, *be* verb, past tense, or negative adverb (e.g., *not* or *never*), the subjunctive is easily distinguishable.

#### Common Adjectives of Importance

- |             |              |          |
|-------------|--------------|----------|
| • important | • imperative | • vital  |
| • necessary | • essential  | • urgent |

**Positive Pattern:** adjective of importance + **that** + base verb

**Negative Pattern:** adjective of importance + **that** + not + base verb

#### Examples

- She says it is vital that employees **keep** out of the restricted area.
- It is essential that the operator of this machine **remain** calm during an emergency.
- I think it is necessary that your dog **be kept** on a leash while at this park.
- It is urgent that they **be** on time.
- It was important that he **call** me yesterday.
- It was imperative that the loser not **make** a scene.

## 2. Expressing a Hypothetical Situation

### THE SECOND CONDITIONAL

The second conditional, also known as the unreal conditional, is used to express an unlikely or impossible outcome. The subjunctive is noticeable when the *be* verb is used in the dependent (*if*) clause. The *be* verb always takes the form *were* (never *was*) no matter what subject is used.

**Pattern:** If + were, would + base verb

#### Examples

- If I **were** you, I wouldn't take that job.
- If he **weren't** so lazy, he would get good grades.
- My friends would travel around the world if they **were** rich.

#### Note:

Remember to use a comma when the dependent (*if*) clause comes before the independent clause.

## Quick and Handy Grammar Review cont.

### 3. Expressing a Wish

Another case where the subjunctive is used in English is with the verb *wish*. When *wish* is used in the independent clause, the *be* verb always takes the form *were* in the dependent clause when there is a present or future meaning. As with the second conditional, the subjunctive is used to indicate a hypothetical or unreal situation.

**Pattern:** wish + were

#### Examples

- I wish I **were** able to go to Hawaii with you next month, but I can't take time off work.
- She wishes that she **were** taller.
- The students wish they **weren't** so behind in their work.

#### Note:

As with section 1 (reporting or giving suggestions), in casual writing and speaking, "that" is sometimes omitted from the sentence with no change in meaning. For example, *She wishes that she were taller* and *She wishes she were taller* are both correct and have the same meaning.

#### A note about *wish* and *hope*:

##### WISH

*Wish* indicates an impossible or unlikely situation (much like the second conditional). Use *were*, a *past perfect verb*, or *would + base verb*.

- I wish he **were** my boyfriend.

##### HOPE

*Hope* indicates a possible situation. Use a *simple present verb*.

- I hope he **is** well enough to go to the party on Saturday.

## Exercise 1

### VERBS OF SUGGESTION

Change the verbs in parentheses into the subjunctive form when necessary.

1. My sister is requesting that I \_\_\_\_\_ her clothes anymore.  
(borrow, not)
2. Mr. Jacobs plans to ask that she \_\_\_\_\_ late tonight.  
(work)
3. Our teacher advises \_\_\_\_\_ extra homework.  
(do)
4. Drinking and driving is something that is \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(recommend, not)
5. The president proposed that American citizens \_\_\_\_\_ a tax break next year.  
(get)
6. Does your mother recommend \_\_\_\_\_ in the morning or after dinner?  
(study)
7. The substitute teacher said that the students \_\_\_\_\_ their projects.  
(finish, not)
8. The father advised that his children \_\_\_\_\_ their snacks quickly.  
(eat)
9. The new girl's parents urged her \_\_\_\_\_ friends as quickly as possible.  
(make)
10. The CEO recommended the employees \_\_\_\_\_ the proposal right away.  
(write)

## Exercise 2

### VERBS OF SUGGESTION

Combine the sentences into one using the subjunctive form.

1. She should tell the truth about her grades. Her counselor recommends it.

*Her counselor recommends that she tell the truth about her grades.*

---

2. My brother shouldn't go out tonight. I advise it.
- 

3. We went ahead with the project. Our manager insisted on it.
- 

4. Mike has to show Yumiko how to install the new software. She is demanding it.
- 

5. I should read one book a week. The ladies in my book club recommended it.
- 

6. Mark should start keeping a record of his expenses. His boss is proposing it.
- 

7. My neighbor should feed his dog right away. It is demanding food.
- 

8. Mrs. Johnson should sign her name on the sheet when she leaves. The receptionist requested it.
- 

9. The clerk should put the groceries into paper bags. She asked him to do it.
- 

10. He should call me by my first name. I will suggest it.
-

## Exercise 3

### ADJECTIVES OF IMPORTANCE

Change the verbs in parentheses into the subjunctive form when necessary.

1. For security purposes, it was essential that the visitor \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(sign in)
2. Do you agree that it is important \_\_\_\_\_ before a test?  
(study)
3. Will you ask if it is necessary that my colleague \_\_\_\_\_ this report by Friday?  
(finish)
4. I think it is important that he \_\_\_\_\_ any more alcohol tonight.  
(drink, not)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ to a counselor about your future plans is essential.  
(speak)
6. It was urgent that you \_\_\_\_\_ his call.  
(return)
7. At the conference last year, everyone agreed it was vital that we \_\_\_\_\_ destroying the ozone layer.  
(stop)
8. It isn't necessary \_\_\_\_\_ an interview with a phone call, is it?  
(follow up)
9. The teacher said it was imperative that the class president \_\_\_\_\_ his cool during the debate.  
(lose, not)
10. The accountant told the manager it was urgent that she \_\_\_\_\_ the books as soon as possible.  
(go over)

## Exercise 4

### VERBS OF SUGGESTION AND ADJECTIVES OF IMPORTANCE

Locate the error in each sentence,  
correct it, and rewrite the sentence correctly.

1. My father suggested that I applied to more than one university.

---

2. Did I hear your coworker say that it is necessary that visitors will sign in?

---

3. I prefer that you don't make any more excuses.

---

4. It is urge that he call me as soon as possible.

---

5. The chef didn't ask that the kitchen staff stayed late to clean up.

---

6. My boss demands that I am on time every day.

---

7. Yumiko thinks it is important that her best friend was always there for her.

---

8. It was vital that the nurse administered the drugs on time.

---

9. Did you propose the project completion date to be moved up?

---

10. When will their boss request that they will hand in the final draft?

---



## Exercise 5

### SECOND CONDITIONAL

Complete the sentences using "if" + the subjunctive form.

1. If + I + rich...

*If I were rich, I would travel around the world.*

---

2. If + I + taller...
- 

3. If + he + a girl...
- 

4. If + I + the president...
- 

5. If + she + a cat...
- 

6. If + my friend + smarter...
- 

7. If + I + in love...
- 

8. If + my teacher + less strict...
- 

9. If + that man + a millionaire...
- 

10. If + I + more athletic...
-

## Exercise 6

### SECOND CONDITIONAL

Rewrite the sentences using the second conditional pattern and the subjunctive form of Be. Use contractions wherever possible.

1. Josh + not be able to compete in the event / if + the rumor + true

*Josh wouldn't be able to compete in the event if the rumor were true.*

---

2. If + I + a doctor / travel to Africa to give medicine to the poor
- 

3. Mrs. Smith + not be here today / if + not so healthy
- 

4. The photographer + take more pictures / if + not getting so dark
- 

5. If + she + able to speak English fluently / not have a better job by now?
- 

6. If + I + a bird / fly to South America
- 

7. The child + not keep crying / if + her diaper + dry
- 

8. If the company + not running smoothly / the CEO + not be able to take time off
- 

9. My brother + be a better student / if + able to focus on his homework
- 

10. If + I + not so lucky / not have been accepted into that prestigious university
-

## Exercise 7

### WISH

Locate the error in each sentence,  
correct it, and rewrite the sentence correctly.

1. I wish I was a politician so that I could make effective changes in my community.

---

2. She wish she were a mother because she loves children so much.

---

3. My sister can't reach the top shelf, so she wishes she is taller.

---

4. He hopes he were happy in his new job.

---

5. My boss wishes he was able to finish the report by 5:00 p.m.

---

6. I can't make it tonight, but I hope I were able to come next time.

---

7. The event planner wishes the night will be already over.

---

8. I can't remember the last time I had a vacation! I wish I am able to take some time off.

---

9. Michelle hopes Canada were in first place during the Olympics.

---

10. Naoko wishes that she is at the top of the list of candidates.

---

## Exercise 8

### QUIZ: REVIEW OF SUBJUNCTIVE FORMS

Circle the correct answer.

- I wish I \_\_\_\_\_ the president of the company.
  - was
  - am
  - were
  - is
- He suggested that she \_\_\_\_\_ an English course.
  - took
  - take
  - to take
  - taking
- It is important \_\_\_\_\_ on a regular basis.
  - study
  - to study
  - studied
  - will study
- If the student \_\_\_\_\_ more prepared, she would pass the exam.
  - are
  - is
  - was
  - were
- His counselor advised that he \_\_\_\_\_ for university as soon as possible.
  - apply
  - applying
  - applied
  - will apply
- Jennifer wouldn't graduate if she \_\_\_\_\_ such a dedicated student.
  - wasn't
  - was
  - weren't
  - were
- My manager recommended \_\_\_\_\_ the project on time.
  - completing
  - complete
  - to complete
  - completed
- The teacher is requesting that the girl \_\_\_\_\_ held back a year.
  - is
  - be
  - were
  - will be
- My professor wishes she \_\_\_\_\_ attending the conference.
  - was
  - to be
  - were
  - is
- It was vital that the counselor \_\_\_\_\_ to the student's parents immediately.
  - to speak
  - speaking
  - spoke
  - speak

## Answer Key

### Exercise 1

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. not borrow      | 6. studying      |
| 2. work            | 7. didn't finish |
| 3. doing           | 8. eat           |
| 4. not recommended | 9. to make       |
| 5. get             | 10. write        |

### Exercise 2

(Note: "that" may be omitted.)

- Her counselor recommends that she tell the truth about her grades.
- I advise that my brother not go out tonight.
- Our manager insisted that we go ahead with the project.
- Yumiko is demanding that Mike show her how to install the new software.
- The ladies in my book club recommended that I read one book a week.
- Mark's boss is proposing that he start keeping a record of his expenses.
- My neighbor's dog is demanding that he feed it right away.
- The receptionist requested that Mrs. Johnson sign her name on the sheet when she leaves.
- She asked that the clerk put the groceries into paper bags.
- I will suggest that he call me by my first name.

### Exercise 3

- |              |                 |             |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. sign in   | 5. Speaking     | 9. not lose |
| 2. to study  | 6. return       | 10. go over |
| 3. finish    | 7. stop         |             |
| 4. not drink | 8. to follow up |             |

### Exercise 4

- My father suggested that I **apply** to more than one university.
- Did I hear your coworker say that it is necessary that visitors **sign** in?
- I prefer that you **not make** any more excuses.
- It is **urgent** that he call me as soon as possible.
- The chef didn't ask that the kitchen staff **stay** late to clean up.
- My boss demands that I **be** on time every day.
- Yumiko thinks it is important that her best friend **always be** there for her.
- It was vital that the nurse **administer** the drugs on time.
- Did you propose the project completion date **be** moved up?
- When will their boss request that they **hand** in the final draft?

### Exercise 5

Answers will vary. "Were" should be used in each sentence.

### Exercise 6

- Josh wouldn't be able to compete in the event if the rumor were true.
- If I were a doctor, I'd travel to Africa to give medicine to the poor.
- Mrs. Smith wouldn't be here today if she weren't so healthy.
- The photographer would take more pictures if it weren't getting so dark.
- If she were able to speak English fluently, wouldn't she have a better job by now?
- If I were a bird, I'd fly to South America.
- The child wouldn't keep crying if her diaper were dry.
- If the company weren't running smoothly, the CEO wouldn't be able to take time off.
- My brother would be a better student if he were able to focus on his homework.
- If I weren't so lucky, I wouldn't have been accepted into that prestigious university.

*(continued on next page...)*

## Answer Key cont.

### Exercise 7

1. I wish I **were** a politician so that I could make effective changes in my community.
2. She **wishes** she were a mother because she loves children so much.
3. My sister can't reach the top shelf, so she wishes she **were** taller.
4. He **wishes** he were happy in his new job.\*  
(He hopes he **is** happy in his new job.)
5. My boss wishes he **were** able to finish the report by 5:00 p.m.
6. I can't make it tonight, but I hope I **am** able to come next time.
7. The event planner wishes the night **were** already over.
8. I can't remember the last time I had a vacation!  
I wish I **were** able to take some time off.
9. Michelle **wishes** Canada were in first place during the Olympics.\*  
(Michelle hopes Canada **is** in first place during the Olympics.)
10. Naoko wishes that she **were** at the top of the list of candidates.

\*Note meaning difference: Using *wish* means it has happened and is not true, while using *hope* means it hasn't happened yet and might be possible.

### Exercise 8

- |      |      |      |      |       |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. c | 3. b | 5. a | 7. a | 9. c  |
| 2. b | 4. d | 6. c | 8. b | 10. d |

#### SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Counselor*, *Neighbor*, and *Rumor*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Counsellor*, *Neighbour*, and *Rumour*. Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spellings.

#### EDITOR'S NOTES:

1. In British English, it is more common to use the modal *should* + base verb instead of the subjunctive base verb. For example, *Her teacher insisted that she **should be** ready for the test tomorrow* is more common than *Her teacher insisted that she **be** ready for the test tomorrow*.
2. *Were* is sometimes called the *past subjunctive*. This is simply because of the form of the verb (*were* is the past form of the *be* verb) and not due to the sentence being in the past tense. Referring to forms as the *present subjunctive* and *past subjunctive* is needlessly complicated—it is better to just call all forms *the subjunctive* and to remember them by the patterns mentioned in this lesson.