

The Present Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive is not a tense but a mood. It is called a mood because it doesn't deal with factual reality but with opinions, feelings, suppositions, dreams and speculation. In short, it deals with uncertainty of outcomes. For example:

I hope that you come to my party. *Espero que vengas a mi fiesta.*

The subjunctive exists in English but it is less apparent than in Spanish. For instance, if your brother has a cold, the doctor might recommend that he drink several glasses of water a day. Normally, the conjugation would be "he drinks" but in the subjunctive mood, you drops the "s". In other words,

Normal: He **drinks** water because it is healthy.

Subjunctive: It is important that he **drink** at least three glasses of water.

There is a three-part formula **required** for use of the subjunctive. If you do not use all of these components, you are not using it correctly.

1. indicative verb, attached to the primary subject or actor
2. the word "que" (the conjunction "that")
3. second verb expressing uncertainty (subjunctive mood) attached to the secondary actor

For example, in the first sample sentence on this page, "Espero" is the indicative verb, followed by "que" and "vengas", a verb in the subjunctive mood.

In order to put verbs into the subjunctive mood, we use **opposite endings**, not unlike commands in Spanish. Irregular "yo" forms are also good cues. Consider: tengo/tenga, vengo/venga, salgo/salga, etc.

Command:	No vengas a mi fiesta.	No comas la nieve amarilla.
Subjunctive:	No quiero que vengas a mi fiesta.	No quiero que comas mis tacos.

While putting verbs into the subjunctive itself is not hard, deciding when it is appropriate to use the subjunctive can be. Since its usage is rather unusual, we will use the acronym WEIRDO to identify different circumstances that call for the subjunctive.

W wishes, desires, or imperatives	E emotions	I impersonal observations	R recommendations	D doubts, denials, or disbeliefs	O Ojalá
Quiero que... Deseo que... Necesito que... Espero que... Demando que... Insisto en que...	Me alegro que... Me fastidia que... Estoy triste que... Temo que...	Es bueno que... Es importante que... Es posible que...	Recomiendo que... Sugiero que...	Dudo que... No creo que... ¿Crees que...?	Ojalá que... (Let's hope that...)

Certain constructions require the subjunctive. For example:

- a) Indirect Commands: Let John have it. *Que John lo **tenga**.*
b) Adverbial phrases: I'm telling you so you'll know the truth. *Te lo digo para que **sepa** la verdad.*
c) Indefinite Antecedents: I want a friend who can keep secrets! *¡Quiero un amigo que **guardé** secretos!*

Such "indefinite antecedents" refer to things you want but don't know if they are possible or really exist. For example:

I want a boyfriend who is tall, dark, handsome and who likes to ride horses.

*Quiero un novio que **sea** alto, moreno, guapo y que le **guste** montar a caballo.*

The subjunctive can also be used in various tenses. For example:

Present Perfect Subjunctive: *Espero que hayan llegado a tiempo.*

Past Perfect Subjunctive: *Dudábamos que Bill hubiera hecho la tarea.*

Note: there are six verbs with irregular present subjunctive forms. With *estar*, *ser* and *dar*, drop both the "o" and the "y".

estar	estoy... esté	esté, estés, esté, estemos, estéis, estén
dar	doy... dé	dé, des, dé, demos, deis, den
ir	voy... vaya	vaya, vayas, vaya, vayamos, vayáis, vayan
saber	sé... sepa	sepa, sepas, sepa, sepamos, sepáis, sepan
haber	he... haya	haya, hayas, haya, hayamos, hayáis, hayan
ser	soy... sea	sea, seas, sea, seamos, seáis, sean

Examples

In review: for the Present Subjunctive, we use opposite endings and observe irregular "yo" forms° in conjugating verbs. We also observe stem-changes* in the subjunctive that resemble those in present and preterite tenses.

W	wishes, desires, or imperatives	Deseo que tengas ° un aniversario memorable. (tener) Necesito que me des el número del director. (dar) Espero que pienses + antes de abrir la boca otra vez. (pensar) Demando que me entregues el dinero. (entregar)
E	emotions	Me alegro que Roberto esté presente para la boda. (estar) Me fastidia que Yolanda siempre grite . (gritar) Temo que nadie vaya ° a venir a mi fiesta. (ir)
I	impersonal observations	Es bueno que tu amigo te diga ° la verdad. (decir) Es importante que los estudiantes trajigan ° sus libros a clase. (traer) Es posible que Paco lo haga ° en una hora. (hacer)
R	recommendations	Recomiendo que te pongas ° una chaqueta. (poner) Sugiero que visites la capital. (visitar)
D	doubts, denials, or disbeliefs	Dudo que existan los dragones. (existir) No creo que sea así. (ser) ¿Crees tú que pueda + haber la paz mundial? (poder)
O	ojalá	Ojalá que vengas °. (venir)

When not to use the Subjunctive

We do not use the subjunctive mood to express, facts, beliefs, truth, certainties or the obvious. For example:

Creo que la película "Up" es excelente.

I think the film "Up" is excellent.

No hay duda que Central tiene un equipo excepcional.

There's no doubt that Central has a great team.

Es obvio que los perros son mejores que los gatos.

It's obvious that dogs are better than cats.

Tú sabes que dos más dos son cuatro.

You know that two plus two is four.

The verbs *pensar* and *creer* in Spanish express certainty, unlike "to think" or "to believe" in English, which can be used to express uncertainty. We also do not use the subjunctive when discussing people or things we know exist. For example:

Hay una secretaria aquí que habla español.

There's a secretary here that speaks Spanish.

Busco al hombre que tiene la llave.

I'm looking for the man that has the key.

Sample Indicative & Subjunctive Sentences

These sentence pairs show differences between the indicative and subjunctive. Note how in most of the examples the English verb form is the same in translating the two Spanish moods.

Indicative: Es cierto que sale tarde. (It is definite that she is leaving late.)

Subjunctive: **Es probable que salga tarde.** (It is likely that she will leave late.)

Explanation: In the indicative sentence, the early departure is presented as fact. In the others, it is not.)

Indicative: Busco el carro barato que funciona. (I'm looking for the cheap car that works.)

Subjunctive: **Busco un carro barato que funcione.** (I'm looking for a cheap car that works.)

Explanation: In the first example, the speaker knows that there is a car that matches the description, so the indicative is used as an expression of reality. In the second example, there is doubt that such a car exists, so the subjunctive is used.

Indicative: Creo que la visitante es Ana. (I believe the visitor is Ana.)

Subjunctive: **No creo que la visitante sea Ana.** (I don't believe the visitor is Ana.)

Explanation: The subjunctive is used in the second example because the subordinate clause is negated by the main clause. Generally, the indicative is used with creer que or pensar que, while the subjunctive is used with no creer que or no pensar que.

Indicative: Es obvio que tienes dinero. (It is obvious you have money.)

Subjunctive: **Es bueno que tengas dinero.** (It is good you have money.)

Explanation: The indicative is used in the first example because it expresses reality or apparent reality. The subjunctive is used in the other example because the sentence is a reaction to the statement in the subordinate clause.

Indicative: Habla bien porque es experto. (He speaks well because he's an expert.)

Subjunctive: **Habla bien como si fuera experto.** (He speaks well as if he were expert.)

Explanation: The subjunctive is used in the second example because it's irrelevant to the sentence whether he's an expert, although the sentence suggests that he isn't.

Indicative: Quizás lo pueden hacer. (Perhaps they can do it (and I'm sure of it.))

Subjunctive: **Quizás lo puedan hacer.** (Perhaps they can do it (but I doubt it.))

Explanation: In a sentence such as this, the subjunctive is used to emphasize uncertainty or doubt, the indicative to emphasize certainty. Note how the Spanish verb form is used to indicate an attitude that might need further explanation in English.

Indicative: Hay políticos que tienen coraje. (There are politicians who have courage.)

Subjunctive: **¿Hay políticos que tengan coraje?** (Are there politicians with courage?)

Explanation: The subjunctive is used in the second example to express doubt, and it is not clear that the subject of the sentence exists in reality.

Indicative: Llegaré aunque mi carro no funciona. (I will arrive even though my car isn't running.)

Subjunctive: **Llegaré aunque mi carro no funcione.** (I will arrive even if my car isn't running.)

Explanation: The indicative is used in the first sentence because the speaker knows his car isn't working. In the second sentence, the speaker doesn't know whether it is running, so the subjunctive is used.

Indicative: La pirámide se ha reconstruido por el gobierno provincial.. (The pyramid has been restored by the provincial government.)

Subjunctive: **Estoy feliz que la pirámide se haya reconstruido.** (I am happy that the pyramid has been restored.)

Explanation: The indicative is used in the first sentence because it is a direct statement of fact. The main point of the second example is the speaker's reaction to the event, so the subjunctive is used.)

Indicative: Cuando estás conmigo se llena mi corazón. (When you are with me my heart is full.)

Subjunctive: **Cuando estés conmigo iremos por un helado.** (When you are with me we will go for an ice cream.)

Explanation: When the indicative is used with cuando in a sentence of the type in the first example, it refers to a recurring action. The use of the subjunctive in the second indicates that the event has yet to happen.