

What Is the Subjunctive Mood?

The subjunctive mood is the verb form used to explore a hypothetical situation (e.g., "If I **were** you") or to express a wish, a demand, or a suggestion (e.g., "I demand he **be** present").

- If it **were** me, I'd go.
(As this explores a hypothetical situation, "was" becomes "were.")
- I wish it **were** real.
(As this expresses a wish, "was" becomes "were.")
- It is imperative that the game **begin** at once.
(As this expresses a demand, "begins" becomes "begin.")
- I propose he **work** full time.

This table summarizes how a verb changes when it's in the subjunctive mood.

Normal Form	Normal Example	Subjunctive Form	Subjunctive Example
"am," "are," "is" (" to be " in the present tense)	I am available. You are lucky. She is here.	"be"	I demand that I be * available. I ask that you be * truthful. It's essential that she be * here.
"has" (third person singular of " to have " in the present tense)	She has a chance.	"have"	I demand she have * a chance.
"was" (first person and third person singular of "to be" in the past tense)	I was free. He was happy.	"were"	If I were free, I'd go. I wish he were happy.

*These are rather common in American English where many archaic features are better preserved or in official British English.

In conversational British English *should + infinitive* is used.

I wish he **had been here yesterday. The action is prior to that of the main clause.

Verbs That Attract the Subjunctive Mood

The following verbs often attract the subjunctive mood: "to ask," "to command," "to demand," "to insist," "to order," "to propose," "to recommend," "to suggest," and "to wish."

- If you are a dog and your owner **suggests** that you wear a sweater suggest that he **wear*** a tail. (American English)

- He demands (demanded) that they **should do*** it right away. (British English)
- She insists that he **do*** it right away. (American English)
- I recommend that we **should do*** it right away. (British English)

* No perfect infinitive is used in object clauses. Object clauses of this type are generally introduced by the conjunction *that*.

Adjectives That Attract the Subjunctive Mood

The following adjectives – especially when used with the conjunction "*that*" – often attract the subjunctive mood: "crucial," "essential," "important," "imperative," and "necessary," "urgent".

- It is **necessary** to the happiness of man that he **be** mentally faithful to himself.
- When unseen forces come together to provide a man with the strength and capacity to achieve something great, it is **essential** that he **use** the time responsibly and timely. (American English)

Nouns That Attract the Subjunctive Mood

The following nouns often attract the subjunctive mood: suggestion, proposal, demand, order, request, recommendation, requirement, understanding, decision, agreement, wish, desire.

- I remember his request that the books **should be kept** in place.
- They supported the proposal that a committee **should be appointed** to deal with the matter.
- The proposal that the committee **be set up*** was met with support.

*This is found in American English or formal style in British English.

Set Phrases Featuring the Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive mood also features in some well-known terms.

- God **bless** you. (wish) (wish)
- God **save** the Queen. (wish)
- May The Force **be** with you. (wish)
- **Come** what will. (wish or hope)

The Subjunctive mood is used in Type 2 and Type 3 conditional sentences.

Type 2

(**If** + simple past;... **would** + simple form)

- Type 2 conditional sentences are not based on fact. They are used to talk about unreal present or future situations.

If I **had** a lot of money, I'd **travel** round the world. (But I do not have a lot of money.)

If I **didn't feel** so tired, I'd **come** out with you. (But I feel very tired.) If the weather was nice, I'd go to the beach. (But the weather is not nice.)

- We also use this structure to talk about unlikely present or future situations.

If she really **loved** you, she **wouldn't be** so horrible to you. If I won a lot of money, I'd take a long holiday.

The past form eg **had, loved** does not have a past meaning in sentences like these; it has a hypothetical present or future meaning. We often use **were** instead of **was** after *if*, especially in a more formal style.

If the weather **were** nice, I'd go to the beach.

That watch **wouldn't be** so cheap if it **were** really made of gold.

- We often use *if I were you* to give advice and *if you were me* to ask for advice.

If I **were** you, I'd apply for the job. What would you do if you were me?

- We can use the modal verbs *might* or *could* instead of *would* in the main clause to imply a possible rather than a definite consequence.

If I **won** a lot of money, I **might** stop working. (= I would perhaps stop working.)

I **could** repair the car, if I **had** the right tools. (= I would be able to repair the car...)

Type 3

(**If** + past perfect;... **would have** + past participle)

- Type 3 conditional sentences are not based on fact. They are used to talk about unreal past situations.

If the weather **had been** nice yesterday, I **would have gone** to the beach. (But the weather was not nice.)

If you **hadn't missed** your bus, you **wouldn't have been** late for school. (But you missed your bus.)

- We can use the modal verbs *might* and *could* instead of *would* in the main clause.

If you **had taken** the exam, you **might have passed** it. (= ... you would perhaps have passed it.)

Type 2 and Type 3 mixed

It is possible for each of the two clauses in a conditional sentence to have a different time reference, and the result is a mixed conditional.

If I **had eaten** breakfast several hours ago, I **would not be** hungry now. (= I did not eat breakfast several hours ago, so I am hungry now.)

Wish and If only

1. **Wish** and **if only** + *past tense*

We can use *wish* and *if only* with a past tense to express regret about the present (to say that we would like something to be different).

I wish I had a car. (I do not have a car.) I wish he wasn't so horrible to me. (He is horrible to me.) She wishes she could play the guitar. (She cannot play the guitar.) If only we knew Maria's address. (We do not know Maria's address.)

If only is more emphatic than ***wish***.

We often use were instead of was after wish and if only, especially in a more formal style.

I wish he weren't so horrible to me. If only I were better-looking.

2. *Wish* and *if only* + *would*

I wish you would stop making that noise.

We use would after wish and if only when we want something to stop happening, or we want something different to happen.

I wish you wouldn't slam the door when you come in. It makes me angry.

I wish he wouldn't leave his clothes lying all over the bathroom floor. If only you would stop complaining!

3. *Wish* and *if only* + *past perfect*

To express regret that something happened or did not happen in the past, we can use wish and if only with the past perfect (*had* + past participle).

Oh, I'm tired. I wish I'd gone to bed earlier last night. (I did not go to bed very early last night.) I wish I hadn't stayed out so late. (I stayed out late.) If only you had explained the situation to me. (You did not explain the situation to me.)

As if

a. We use as if to say how someone or something seems. It usually follows the linking verbs be, feel, look, seem.

You look as if you're cold.

It looks as if it's going to stop raining.

We sometimes use as if + a past tense to talk about the present.

My brother sometimes behaves as if he was my father.

The sentence does not refer to the past here: we use the past (he was my father) because the idea is 'unreal' (in fact he is not my father).

We often use were instead of was after as if to express 'unreal' ideas, especially in a more formal style: My brother sometimes behaves as if he were my father.

b. We can use as though instead of as if.

You look as though you're tired.

My brother sometimes behaves as though he were my father.

c. In an informal style, like is sometimes used instead of as if/though.

It looks like it's going to stop raining.

It's time

1. We can use the to infinitive after the structure *it's time* (for someone).

It's time for us to leave. It's time to go to bed now.

2. We can also use *it's time* + a past tense when we think that someone should have already done something.

Your bedroom is in a terrible mess. Don't you think it's time you cleaned it?

I'm tired. It's time I went to bed.

We use the past here eg *you cleaned, I went*, but the meaning is present or future, not past.

We also say *it's about (high) time*.

Your bedroom is in a terrible mess. Don't you think it's about time you cleaned it?

1. Analyse the form and meaning of the Subjunctive. Translate the sentences into Russian.

1. Oh, if I only knew what to do. 2. If it would only stop raining for a single day. 3. I would never allow anybody to hurt my child. 4. A few years ago I would have thought it wrong. 5. Come what may she was determined that they should never meet again. 6. It was urgent that he should look into the matter. 7. It was proposed that the conference open at 10 a. m. 8. I move that the meeting be adjourned. 9. Now, children. It is high time you were washed and dressed. 10. It was time they made up their quarrel. 11. a) I wish he were with us. b) I wish he had been with us yesterday, c) I wish it were not raining now. 12. I wish I knew what to do. 13. I wish he had thought of it before. 14. I wish you would believe me. 15. We wished he would accept our proposal. 16. We wished she wouldn't find fault with everybody. 17. I wish I could help you. 18. I wish you could have let me know beforehand. 19. a) I felt as if I were blind, b) I felt as if I had gone blind. 20. She looked as if she were angry with me. 21. He looked at me as if I had gone mad. 22. She moved about as if she were made of glass. 23. The detective made up his mind to see the driver so that he might give him the details of the accident. 24. He dropped his voice so that the other men in the room should not hear him. 25. He withdrew his eyes lest she should read them. 26. And if anything should happen, keep in touch. 27. Should you care for a full explanation, you may call any day between 10 and 11 a.m. 28. But for the rain we would make an outing. 29. If it had not been for the storm, the ship would have arrived much earlier. 30. I should feel absolutely happy, but for your unpleasant remark. 31. If it had not been for that war, he would have graduated by now.

2. Transform the sentences using the Subjunctive Mood in object clauses after the verbs: suggest, demand, order, recommend, propose, move, insist.

A. 1. The doctor advised me to give up smoking. 2. His father told him to join the Navy. 3. The chairman's proposal was to discuss the resolution point by point. 4. His proposal was to set up a special commission to investigate the matter.

B. 1. The chief said: "Clear up the matter." 2. The marchers shouted out "Put an end to the bloodshed!" 3. The police inspector said: "You must get more evidence to prove his guilt." 4. The president said: "Mr Douglas must be expelled from the club."

3. Transform the sentences using subject clauses introduced by It is (was) time.

1. It's time for the children to go to bed. 2. It's time for them to make up their

quarrel. 3. It's time for you to know this rule. 4. Isn't it time to have dinner? 5. Isn't it time for him to stop behaving like this?

4. Transform the sentences using object clauses after the verb wish.

1. a) It's a pity he is not with us. b) It's a pity he was not with us yesterday. 2. What a pity, it is raining. 3. It's a pity you don't believe me. 4. It's a pity you didn't follow the doctor's advice. 5. I'm afraid I don't know what to do. 6. It's a pity you don't do anything to improve your pronunciation. 7. I'm sorry I can't help you. 8. I'm sorry I couldn't help you when you needed it. 9. I'm afraid he is very angry with me. 10. We were afraid he had failed us. 11. He was afraid everybody knew his secret. 12. I'm afraid they've lost the way. 13. She was afraid she had made a mistake.

5. Replace the infinitive by the Subjunctive.

1. If it (not to be) so dark, I (to read) a little before I go to sleep. 2. If it (not to be) so dark, we (not to lose) the way last night. 3. The flowers (to grow) much better if you (to water) them regularly. 4. I (cannot go) today even if you (ask) me. 5. We've got only ten minutes left. We (not to make) it even if we (to hurry up). 6. If we (to book) the tickets well in advance, we (not to be queuing) for them now. 7. Even if I (to want) to, I (can do) nothing about it now. 8. The accident (not to happen) if the driver (to observe) traffic rules. 9. It's too cold. I (to go) for a swim if it (to be) warmer. 10. If he (not to be) so absent-minded, he (not to lose) his papers. 11. You're wrong. I (to reconsider) your decision if I (to be) you. 12. I had too little time. I (not to translate) the article even if I (to have) a dictionary.

6. Transform each pair of statements into a conditional sentence.

1. It is raining hard. We can't go to the country. 2. You didn't let me know beforehand. Therefore I didn't come. 3. He is very absent-minded. No wonder, he lost his papers. 4. Too bad, you didn't take the medicine yesterday. You would be better now. 5. No wonder he failed. He hadn't worked hard for the exam. 6. I was about to finish the translation, but you interrupted my work. 7. I have no dictionary. I won't have translated the article by tomorrow. 8. The goal-keeper was hurt badly. The team lost the game. 9. I didn't get the ticket yesterday. Pity, I won't be able to leave tonight. 10. We've been queuing for three hours now. I wish we had booked the tickets well in advance.