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# English subjunctive

GRAMMAR

LEVEL  
Advanced

NUMBER  
C1\_2011G\_EN

LANGUAGE  
English

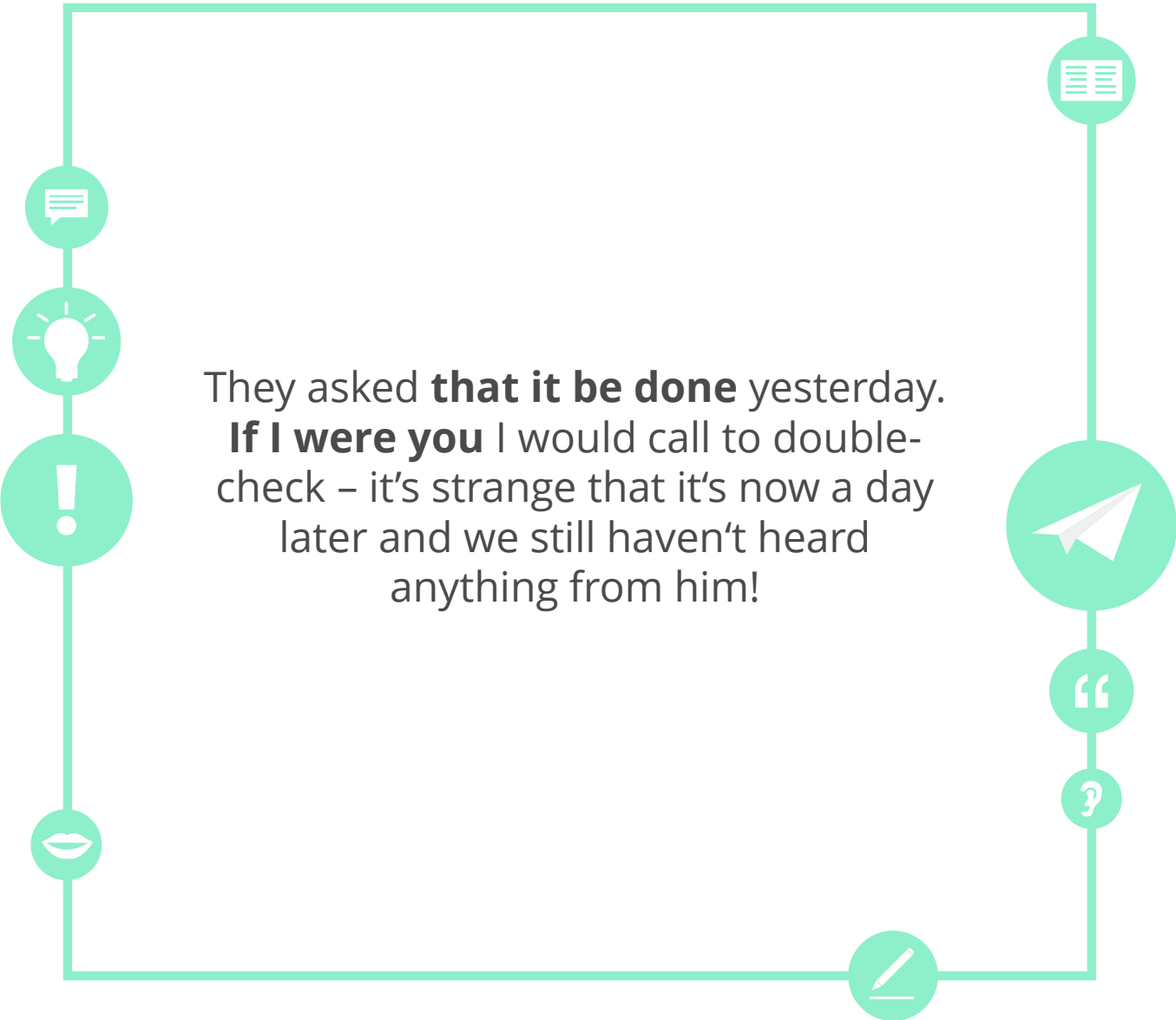




## Goals

- Can recognise the forms of the subjunctive and explain how it contrasts with the indicative.
- Can form sentences with the subjunctive in both the past and the present.





They asked **that it be done** yesterday.  
**If I were you** I would call to double-check – it's strange that it's now a day later and we still haven't heard anything from him!



## The English subjunctive

Have you heard of the English subjunctive before? What do you already know about it?



Is the subjunctive used in your mother tongue or in any other languages that you speak? What is it used for?



## English subjunctive

- The subjunctive is easy to form in English. We use the **simple form of the verb without** the infinitive **to**.

- I recommend **that he consult** a lawyer before proceeding any further.





## English present subjunctive

- The present subjunctive often looks identical in form to the present indicative. This is one reason why the subjunctive is not very well known in the English language. We call it the present subjunctive not because of a relation to time, but because it **resembles the present indicative in form**.



However, the subjunctive and the indicative mood are different. The indicative is used for objective facts while **the subjunctive is used to express opinion, belief, intention, purpose or desire**.



## English present subjunctive



- The **indicative** and **subjunctive** forms are **not** always **identical**.
- Watch out when using the **third person singular** (he/she/it) of the present tense.
- The **subjunctive does not take the (s) ending**, but the indicative does. Contrast this with the **you** form of the subjunctive and the indicative, which looks the

Present subjunctive	Present indicative
It is necessary that she see a dentist as soon as possible.	She sees the doctor every Thursday morning.
It is important that you help your son with his homework.	You usually try to help your son with his homework, I know.



## Using the present subjunctive

- We often use the **present subjunctive** in clauses with the word **that**.
- These clauses express something that is **recommended, desired, asked for** or **essential**.

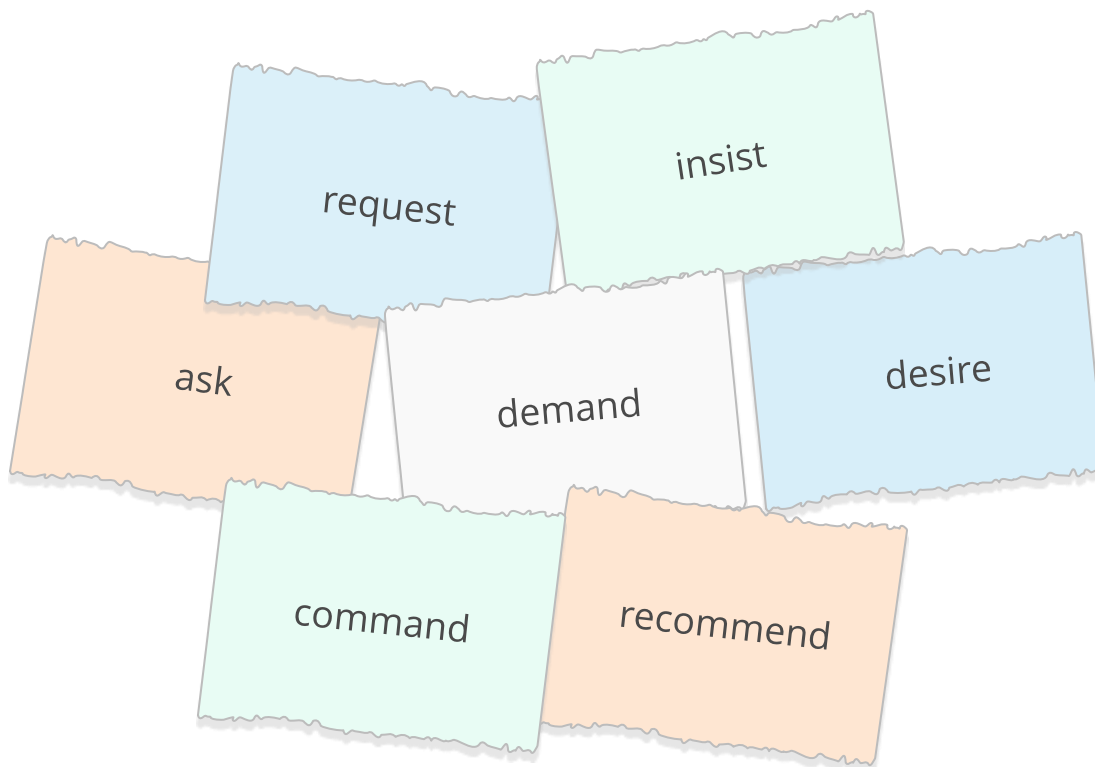
We advise that	→	you follow their instructions.
I will suggest that	→	he phone her as soon as he can.
They have requested that	→	you reply in writing.
She asked that	→	he come early to the party.
We urge that	→	you see a doctor as soon as possible.





## Over to you

**We use all the verbs below with the subjunctive, followed by the word that. Can you think of a sentence for each verb?**





## Help out a friend

**Your friend is visiting your home country for the first time. Give advice and suggestions for their trip using these verbs with the subjunctive followed by the word that.**



advise

propose

suggest

urge



## Choosing your destination

**Imagine that you work in a travel agency. Your teacher wants to book a holiday but isn't yet sure where to go. Ask questions and give advice using the subjunctive. Once you have agreed on the destination, give more advice about their trip using the subjunctive.**



climate

affordability

family

distance

dangerous



## Using the subjunctive

- The subjunctive is often used to show urgency or importance.

- It is essential that we catch him before he leaves the country.





## Using the subjunctive

- We use the subjunctive after many expressions used to convey **urgency** or **importance**.
- The subjunctive comes after the following expressions:

- It is a **bad idea** that...
- It is **crucial** that...
- It is **essential** that...
- It is **imperative** that...
- It is **desirable** that...
- It is **recommended** that...

- It is a **good idea** that he get there at least 3 hours before his flight.
- It is **vital** that she submit her job application before the deadline.
- It is **best** that you reconsider your decision.



## Giving advice

**Think of the examples listed on the previous slide. Use the expressions plus the subjunctive to give advice about what someone should do in each situation below.**



I want to improve my English.

I want to get a really well paid job.

I want to meet the love of my life.



## Getting your dream job

**The quote below is from someone talking about how to break into the entertainment industry. Do you think the same can be said for your own field of work? What is important when it comes to making it in a competitive job market? Discuss with your teacher using the expressions you have learnt with the subjunctive.**

“

Well, the key, of course, is in knowing the right people.

”



## You are the teacher!

**Imagine you are a teacher of your native language. Give advice to someone who wants to learn your language. What should they do? Use the subjunctive in your answers. Do you yourself do these things to improve your English?**



reading and listening

making friends

travel





## Past subjunctive

- The **past subjunctive** takes the same form as the **past simple**.
- There's an exception in one important case: with the verb **to be**.

- If I **had** more money, I would donate to charity more frequently.
- If I **could** swim, I would join a rowing club.
- If I **were** Queen of the world I would ban all cars from city centres.





## Past subjunctive



- When we form the past subjunctive with the verb **to be**, we use **were** rather than **was** for every subject.
- However, in spoken English you might hear people use **was** instead of **were** for the **first** and **third person**. This is less formal and is mostly used in everyday speech.



If I was you I would be very proud of myself  
If I **were** you I would be very proud of myself



## The past subjunctive

**Have you already heard the past subjunctive used in English? Tell your teacher in which contexts you have heard it.**



## Using the past subjunctive

- We use the **past subjunctive** in subordinate clauses to talk about **unreal or unlikely present or future eventualities**.

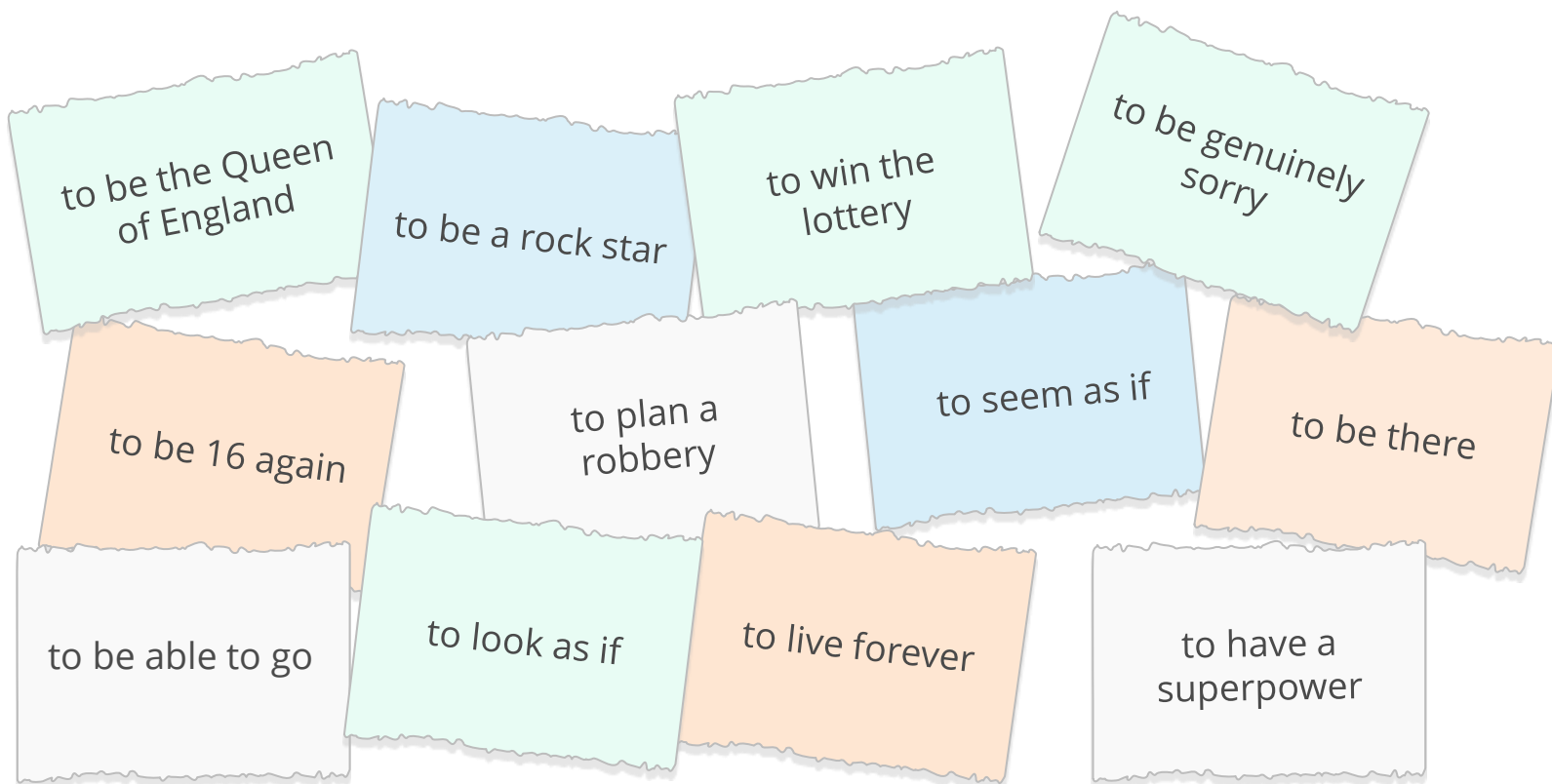
- What would you do if you **were** president of the USA?
- I wish you **were** able to come to her wedding too, it will be such a beautiful day!
- I would rather we **left** before midnight, I am really tired and we have a long day tomorrow too.
- I wish she **understood** everything he said, even though she doesn't speak Spanish.



## The past subjunctive

Can you make a sentence using the past subjunctive for each of the cards below?

When you have finished, ask your teacher a question using each card.





## If I were in your shoes...

In English we use the expression *if I were in your shoes* to imagine what we would do if we were in the same position as someone else. Look at the people below. Tell your teacher what you would do if you were in each of their shoes? How would you find their life?



President of the  
USA

a homeless  
person

a millionaire

Superman

an alien visitor  
to earth

Santa Claus

a doctor at a  
hospital

a child on their  
first day of  
school

a famous singer



## If I were in your shoes...

For each image, construct two sentences. The first should give the individual some advice in the present subjunctive. The second should explain something you would do if you were in their shoes for a day using the past subjunctive.





## Agony Aunt for a day

### Advice column

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

What an interesting problem you describe! ...

**You are an agony aunt – someone who writes letters advising people on their problems in magazines. Imagine somebody from the previous exercise has written to you. Write them a short paragraph giving them advice about their problem.**



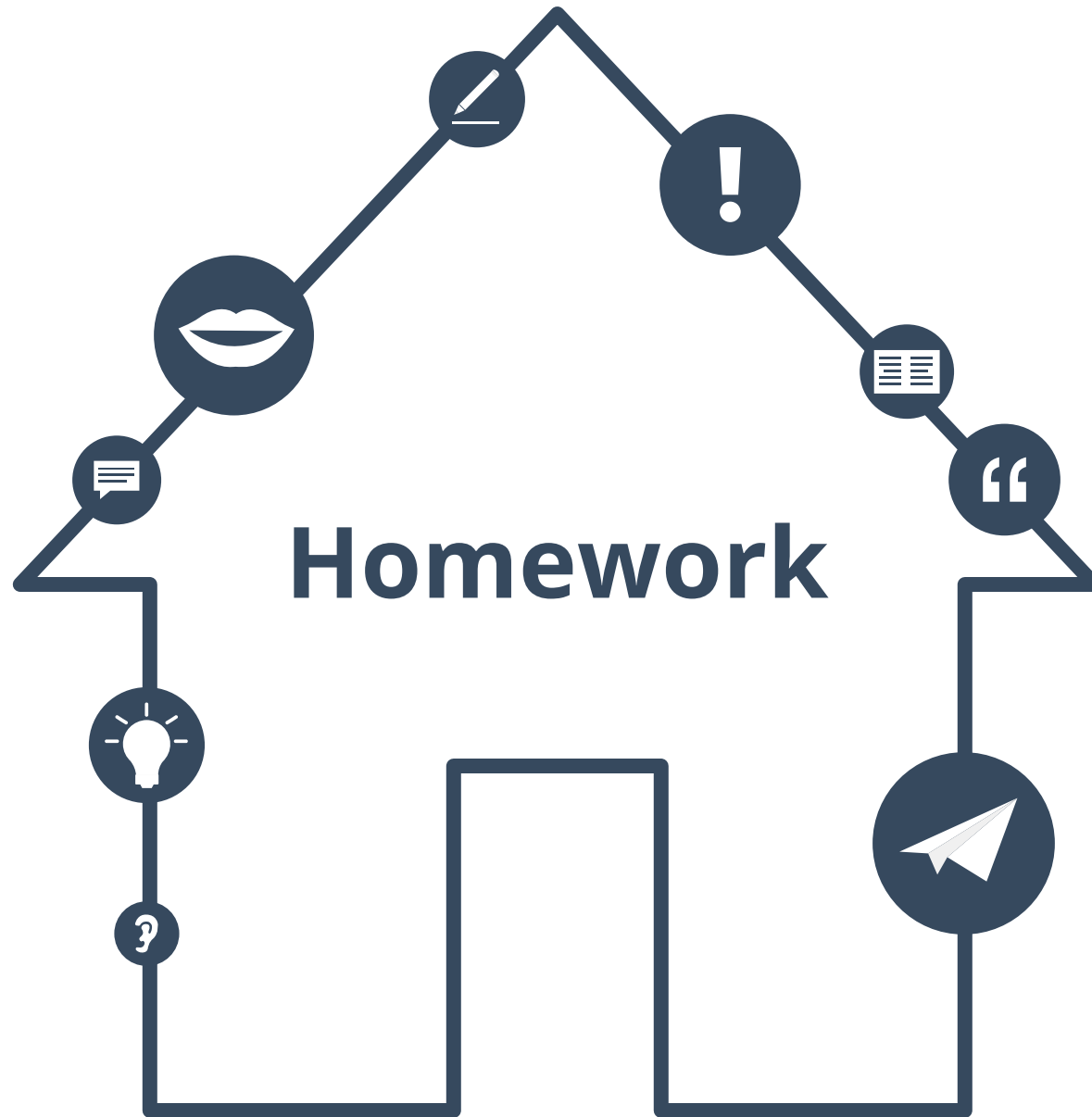


## Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!







**How did you find this lesson? Which parts of the lesson did you enjoy most? Which were most challenging? Which were easiest?**

A vertical sheet of white paper with a spiral binding on the left side and horizontal lines for writing.



**Choose ten of your favourite expressions or verbs from the lesson that use the subjunctive and write a sentence here using each.**

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