

Definition:

The **subjunctive mood** is a verb form used to express situations that are hypothetical, unreal, or contrary to fact. It conveys attitudes, wishes, emotions, doubts, and possibilities rather than straightforward statements of fact. The subjunctive mood is often used to emphasize the uncertainty or subjective nature of the action or situation described.

For example imagined possibilities (or impossibilities!), and future intentions. It is often used in dependent clauses, such as **if** statements in conditional statements –

Example if I were younger.

Or in suggestions,
I suggest that he **go** home.

The subjunctive form uses verb forms that may look the same as regular tenses, and as it sounds formal it is less common in modern English – so it is not always easy to spot. This quick guide will give a useful introduction to subjunctive mood, though.

Subjunctive form:

The subjunctive mood uses a simple form of the verb, which is usually identical to the bare infinitive. So the subjunctive form of “to go” is “go”, “to walk”, “walk”. This means the subjunctive is only noticeable in certain tenses and verb forms.

In the present tense, the subjunctive form is the same as the simple verb form for first person, second person and plural subjects (I, you, we, and they) – it just loses the third person **S** for he, she and it subjects.

An important exception here is for the verb “to be”, which has a distinct subjunctive form for all subjects: **be** (I be, you be, we be, they be, and he/she/it be).

In the past tense, “to be” is the only verb that has a distinct subjunctive form – using were for all subjects. Otherwise, the past subjunctive uses the same form as regular past tense.

The subjunctive mood is often apparent following a verb of suggestion/advice, with or without that:

- I requested that they **stop** playing music.*
- They proposed that he **leave** the club.*

Usage of Subjunctive Mood:

1. Wishes and Desires:

The subjunctive mood is used to express wishes, hopes, desires, or aspirations.

Example: "I wish he were here with us." (Expressing a desire that is not currently true.)

2. Unreal or Hypothetical Situations:

The subjunctive is used to talk about situations that are unreal, contrary to fact, or purely hypothetical

Example: "If I were you, I would study harder." (Expressing an unreal situation or giving advice based on a hypothetical condition.)

3. Suggestions, Recommendations, and Requests:

The subjunctive mood can be used to make suggestions, recommendations, or polite requests.

Example: "I suggest that he go to the doctor." (Suggesting a course of action.)

4. Doubts and Emotions:

Subjunctive mood is used to express doubts, emotions, or uncertainty.

Example: "I'm surprised that she speak fluent French." (Expressing surprise at something that may not be true.)

5. Expressions of Necessity and Importance:

The subjunctive is used to express necessity, importance, or urgency.

*Example: "It's crucial that everyone be present for the meeting."
(Emphasizing the necessity of attendance.)*

I advised that he work harder.

- *The doctor suggested that she do more exercise.*

Note that in many cases where we use the subjunctive, an alternative, informal version is often possible. These may use modal verbs, such as should, or sometimes just follow regular grammatical structure in an informal setting.

- *I advised that he should work harder.*

Other subjunctive forms – negative, continuous and passive

The subjunctive may be used in negative forms, which is often done for formal suggestions and restrictions.

- *It is best that you not **go** to Guinea.*

It may be used in a continuous, for actions that are temporary or ongoing.

- *It is imperative that he **be** waiting for us when we arrive.*

And it is useful in the passive tense, in formal declarations, demands, and suggestions that focus on the result and not the actor.

- *I proposed that the meeting **be** moved until later.*
- *They demand that all dogs **be***

Common Subjunctive Verb Collocations

There are a number of verbs and expressions that are commonly followed by the subjunctive form. These may or may not be joined to the subjunctive with that. Notice, though, that in these examples the subjunctive is only really distinct in the he, she and it and the past to be form.

- *To advise (that) – I advised that she eat less cake.*
- *To ask (that) – They asked that we keep the noise down.*
- *To command (that) – We commanded that the party finish.*
- *To demand (that) – John demanded he receive a refund.*
- *To desire (that) – She desires that he write more poetry.*
- *To insist (that) – The police insisted we be more careful.*
- *To propose (that) – The council are proposing that the park close.*
- *To recommend (that) – We recommended that you wash your hair.*
- *to request (that) – Tracy required we meet somewhere else.*
- *To suggest (that) – Who suggested that you be in this class?*
- *To urge (that) – I urged that he study harder.*
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The following expressions are also often followed by the subjunctive:

- *It is a good idea (that)*
- *It is a bad idea (that)*
- *It is best (that)*
- *It is recommended (that)*
- *It is desirable (that)*
- *It is crucial (that)*
- *It is essential (that)*
- *It is important (that)*
- *It is urgent (that)*
- *It is imperative (that)*
- *It is vital (that)*

Why the Subjunctive Mood Is Important

When used in idioms and set phrases (e.g., "If I were you," "God bless you"), the subjunctive mood does not create issues for writers. However, outside set terms, verbs in the subjunctive mood sometimes sound awkward. Mostly, though, they sound right to the native ear.

The subjunctive mood definitely has its place in English grammar, but we shouldn't pretend it isn't starting to fade. And, it's starting to fade for two understandable reasons: firstly, it isn't particularly useful to convey meaning (i.e., the meaning often remains clear if it isn't used), and, secondly, the rules for using it are tricky. In fact, the subjunctive mood is pretty inefficient as a language tool, and, as a language develops, efficiency always trumps dogma.

That said though, verbs in the subjunctive mood still sound aesthetically pleasing to the native ear, and nobody has started in earnest to condone subjunctive-mood avoidance, so you should use it.

Here's some guidance: If you naturally opt for the verb in the subjunctive mood, use it. If you're unsure whether the normal verb or the subjunctive verb sounds better, use the subjunctive one. If you can't bear how the subjunctive one sounds, have the confidence to use the normal verb.

We all have different thresholds for what sounds awkward and right, but here are some examples to clarify the guidance.

- *I demand that he be present.*
(If you naturally go for "be," leave it.)
- *It*
- *is essential that he **is/be** there.*

(If you can't decide between the normal verb ("is") and the subjunctive ("be"), go for the subjunctive one.)

- *I must insist that he ~~lower~~/lowers his voice.*

(If you can't bear how the subjunctive verb ("lower") sounds, have the confidence to use the normal one.)

An uncomfortable truth? Even if your subjunctive verb doesn't sound better, using it is a bit of an opportunity to show off...and to smugly say "it's in the subjunctive mood" if questioned on it. Winner

The English language contains five different types or categories of mood. The type/category of mood depends on which one of these the verb expresses:

- *A fact (the indicative mood)*
- *A command (the imperative mood)*
- *A question (the interrogative mood)*
- *A condition (the conditional mood)*
- *A wish or possibility (the subjunctive mood)*

The subjunctive mood expresses a wish, obligation, possibility, or suggestion. It usually refers to a hypothetical situation that has not yet happened and is not guaranteed to happen.