# The subjunctive in Spanish

In <u>Spanish</u>, the subjunctive (*subjuntivo*) is used in conjunction with impersonal expressions and expressions of emotion, opinion, or viewpoint. It is also used to describe situations that are considered unlikely or are in doubt, as well as for expressing disagreement, volition, or denial.

Many common expressions introduce subjunctive clauses. Examples include:

- Es una pena que... "It is a shame that..."
- Quiero que... "I want..."
- Ojalá que... "Hopefully..."
- Es importante que... "It is important that..."
- Me alegro de que... "I am happy that..."
- Es bueno que... "It is good that..."
- Es necesario que... "It is necessary that..."
- Dudo que... "I doubt that..."

Spanish has two past subjunctive forms. They are almost identical, except that where the "first form" has -ra-, the "second form" has -se-. Both forms are usually interchangeable although the -se- form may be more common in Spain than in other Spanish-speaking areas. The -ra- forms may also be used as an alternative to the <u>conditional</u> in certain structures.

## [edit] The present subjunctive

#### When to use:

- When there are two clauses, separated by que. However, not all que clauses require subjunctive. They must also have at least one of the following criteria.
- As the fourth edition of **Mosaicos** states, when "the verb of the main clause expresses emotion (e.g. fear, happiness, sorrow)"
- Impersonal expressions are used in the main clause (It's important that...)
- Always remember that the verb in the second clause is the one that is in subjunctive!

#### How to form:

- Conjugate to the present tense first person singular form. (ex. hablar --> hablo)
- Drop the o (hablo --> habl)
- Add the opposite ending (habl --> hable, hables, hable, hablemos, habléis, hablen)
- The following are the endings for AR and ER/IR verbs:

#### AR

• e emos

- es éis
- e en

### ER/IR

- a amos
- as áis
- a an

The following are conjugations of the irregular verbs of the present subjunctive.

## Ser

- sea seamos
- seas seáis
- sea sean

#### Estar

- esté estemos
- estés estéis
- esté estén

#### Ir

- vaya vayamos
- vayas vayáis
- vaya vayan

#### Saber

- sepa sepamos
- sepas sepáis
- sepa sepan

#### Dar

- dé demos
- des deis
- dé den

In addition, CAR/GAR/ZAR verbs have their own endings. For example:

# Jugar

• juegue juguemos

- juegues juguéis
- juegue jueguen

#### Tocar

- toque toquemos
- toques toquéis
- toque toquen

#### Cruzar

- cruce crucemos
- cruces crucéis
- cruce crucen

#### Examples:

- *Ojalá* me compren (comprar) un regalo. (Hopefully, they will buy me a gift.)
- *Te recomiendo que* no corras (correr) con tijeras. (I recommend that you do not run with scissors.)
- *Dudo que* el restaurante abra (abrir) a las seis. (I doubt that the restaurant opens at six.)
- Lo discutiremos cuando venga (venir). (We will talk about it when he/she comes.)
- Es importante que nosotros hagamos ejercicio. (It is important that we excercise.)
- Me alegro de que tu seas mi amiga. (I am happy that you are my friend.)

#### [edit] The past (imperfect) subjunctive

Used interchangeably, the past (imperfect) subjunctive can end either in "-se" or "-ra". Both forms stem from the third person plural (ellos, ellas, ustedes) of the preterite tense. For example, with the verb "estar", when conjugated in the third person plural of the preterite tense, it becomes "estuvieron". Then, you drop the "-ron" ending, and add either "-se" or "-ra". Thus, it becomes "estuviese" or "estuviera". The past subjunctive may be used with "if... then" statements with the conditional tense.

### Example:

• Si yo **fuera** el maestro, no daría demasiada tarea. (If I were the teacher, I would not give too much homework.)

Spanish used to have a future subjunctive tense, but it is now all but extinct. It is never heard in everyday speech, and is usually reserved for literature, <u>archaic</u> phrases and expressions, and legal documents. Phrases expressing the subjunctive in a future period instead employ the present subjunctive. For example: "I hope that it *will rain* tomorrow" would simply be "Espero que *llueva* mañana" (where *llueva* is the third-person singular present subjunctive of *llover*, "to rain").

# In the Mood: The Subjunctive, Part 1

Learning when to use the subjunctive mood can be particularly challenging for English-speakers learning Spanish. That's probably because the subjunctive mood is distinguished from the indicative mood so infrequently in English.

Subjunctive? Indicative? Mood? What in the world do those mean?

OK. Let's start with the basics. (If you already know these basics of grammar, skip ahead to the explanation of when the subjunctive is used.) First of all, the **mood** (sometimes called the mode) of the verb expresses either the speaker's attitude toward the verb or describes how it is used in the sentence. This can better better be described by examples of the six moods in both English and Spanish.

Mood	Description	Examples
infinitive (infinitivo)	The name of a verb. It can be used as the subject or object of a sentence. In English it takes the form of "to + verb." In Spanish, infinitives end in -ar, -er, or -ir.	I want <b>to go</b> . Quiero <b>ir</b> .
gerund (gerundio)	The gerund is used with the auxiliary "to be" (estar), and it can also be used as a noun (far more frequently in English than in Spanish).	He is speaking. Él está hablando.
participle (participio)	The participle is used with the auxiliary "to have" (haber) to form various tenses. In both languages, the participles frequently are used as adjectives.	I have <b>fallen</b> . <i>Me</i> he <b>caído</b> .
imperative (imperativo)	Commands or suggestions.	Click here. Haz clic aquí.
indicative (indicativo)	Indicates action, process, or identity as taking place in reality.	See examples below.
subjunctive (subjuntivo)	Indicates action, process, or identity as dependent on the speaker's reaction to it.	See examples below.

That may seem as clear as Mexico City on a smoggy day. Another way of expressing the concept is that the indicative expresses reality or what is believed to be reality. But the subjunctive is used for different purposes: It expresses facts that are **contrary** to reality. It expresses **doubt** that something is or will be a fact. It expresses how a person **feels** about a possible action or state of being. It expresses a **wish**, **intent** or **command** for a possible action or state of being. It is usually used in subordinate clauses that begin with *que* or *si*, although in some sentences (such as simple sentences expressing doubt), a subjunctive verb can be the main verb in the sentence.

How the subjective is used can best be seen through examples of various uses:

Example	Reason
Quiero que no tengas frío. I want you to be not cold.	It's irrelevant whether the person is cold or not. The sentence <b>expresses a wish</b> , not reality.
Siento que <b>tengas</b> frío. I'm sorry you're cold.	The sentence expresses the speaker's emotions about a perceived reality. What is important in this sentence is the speaker's feelings, not whether the other person is cold.
Te doy mi chaqueta para que no tengas frío. I'm giving you my coat so you won't be cold.	The sentence expresses the <b>speaker's intent</b> , not necessarily reality.
Se permite que <b>lleven</b> chaquetas allí. People are allowed to wear jackets there.	The phrase <b>expresses permission</b> for an action to take place.
Di a ella que <b>lleve</b> una chaqueta. Tell her to wear her jacket.	Expresses a <b>command or wish</b> of the speaker.
<i>No hay nadie que tenga frío.</i> Nobody is cold.	Expression of <b>negation</b> of the action in a subordinate clause.
Tal vez <b>tenga</b> frío. Perhaps he is cold.	Expression of <b>doubt</b> .
Si yo <b>fuera</b> un rico, tocaría el violín. If I were a rich man, I	Expression of a statement <b>contrary to fact</b> .

would play the fiddle.

Here are some examples of sentences showing differences between the indicative and subjunctive.

Indicative	Subjunctive	Explanation
Es cierto que sale tarde. It is definitely leaving late	Es imposible que salga tarde. Es probable que salga tarde. It is impossible that it is leaving late. It is likely that it will leave late.	The indicative is used to express perceived reality, while the subjunctive is used to express doubt, negation or mere probability.
Busco el carro barato que funciona. I'm looking for the cheap car that works.	Busco un carro barato que funcione. I'm looking for a cheap car that works.	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.
Creo que es ella. I believe it is she.	No creo que <b>sea</b> ella. I don't believe it's she.	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. (The Spanish verb pensar has more of a feeling of definitiveness than does the English equivalent, "to think."
Es obvio que tienes dinero. It is	Es bueno que tengas dinero. It is good you have	The indicative is used in the first example because it expresses reality (or

obvious you have money.	money.	apparent reality). The subjunctive is used in the other example because the sentence is a reaction to the statement in the subordinte clause.
Habla bien porque es un experto. He speaks well because he's an expert.	Habla como si fuera un experto. He speaks as if he were an expert.	The subjunctive is used in the second example because it's irrelevant to the sentence whether he's an expert.
Quizás lo pueden hacer. Perhaps they can do it (and I'm sure of it).	Quizás lo puedan hacer. Perhaps they can do it (but I doubt it).	In a sentence such as this, the subjunctive is used to emphasize uncertainty or doubt, the indicative to emphasize certainly.
Hay políticos que tienen coraje. There are politicians who have courage.	¿Hay políticos que <b>tengan</b> coraje? Are there politicians with courage?	The subjunctive is used in the second example to express doubt.
Llegaré aunque mi carro no funciona. I will arrive even though my car isn't running.	Llegaré aunque mi carro no funcione. I will arrive even if my car isn't running.	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.

**A final note:** The subjunctive used to be used in English more than it is today, and today it is used more frequently in formal speech than in everyday use. Cases where it is still in English used might help you remember some of the instances where it is used in Spanish.

- Contrary-to-fact condition: If I were the president, I'd keep us out of war.
- Expression of a desire: I would like it if he were my father.
- Expressions of request or advice: I insist that he go. We recommended that he fill out the form.

But remember that there are numerous instances where the subjunctive is used in Spanish where we make no distinction in English.

## In the Mood: The Subjunctive, Part 2

Learning not only when to use the subjunctive mood, but which form of the subjunctive to use, can be one of the most difficult parts of learning Spanish verb usage. The rules can appear quite complicated at first, partly because the subjunctive mood is nearly absent in English. But learning the tenses — either in the traditional way of memorizing rules and then applying them, or by becoming familiar enough with the language to know what sounds right — is essential to gaining fluency.

In an earlier lesson, we learned the principles that determine when to use the indicative and when to use the subjunctive. In this lesson, we will look at which tense to use, and the next lesson will look at the basic rules of forming the subjunctive. The goal here isn't to convey a complete understanding of the subjunctive tenses, but to supplement other study materials you have and to help you gain a basic understanding of how the verbs in a sentence work together.

The subjunctive has four tenses:

- present subjunctive
- present perfect subjunctive
- imperfect subjunctive
- past perfect (or pluperfect) subjunctive

Remember that, generally speaking, the subjunctive is used in dependent clauses. Which form of the subjunctive is used depends on two factors:

- the tense of the verb in the main clause
- the time relationship between the verb in the dependent clause and the subjunctive verb

Although there are some exceptions, the following chart shows the most common ways in which the tenses are differentiated:

Main verb is	Dependent (subjunctive) verb refers to action that	Tense to use in the dependent clause	Sample sentence (subjunctive in boldface)
in the present, future, present	takes place at the same time or after the main verb	present subjunctive	Espero que comas. (I expect you to eat.)

perfect, or imperative tense			
in the present, future, present perfect, or imperative tense	has been completed	present perfect subjunctive	Espero que hayas comido. (I expect you to have eaten.)
in the preterite, imperfect, past perfect, or conditional tense	takes place at the same time or after the action of the main verb	imperfect subjunctive	Esperé que comieras. (I expected you to eat.)
in the preterite, imperfect, past perfect, or conditional tense	has been completed	past perfect subjunctive (also called pluperfect subjunctive)	Esperé que hubieras comido. (I expected you to have eaten.)

Note that in many cases there are various ways of translating the sentence to English. For example, *espero que comes* also could be translated as "I expect that you will eat." Because there is no future subjunctive, verbs in the present subjunctive form often are translated into English using the future tense. *Dudo que me compres recuerdos*, I doubt you will buy souvenirs for me.

Here's another way to look at the sequence of verb tenses:

- If the main verb is in a present or future tense, use either the present subjunctive or present perfect subjunctive, depending on whether the subjunctive verb refers to action (or presumed action) that has been completed.
- If the main verb is in a past or conditional tense, use either the imperfect or past perfect subjunctive, depending on whether the subjunctive verb refers to action has has been completed at the time of the action in the main verb.

These tenses can seem quite confusing at first. But as you learn the language they will become second nature.

# In the Mood: The Subjunctive, Part 3

Present subjunctive conjugation
Imperfect subjunctive conjugation
Present perfect subjunctive conjugation
Past perfect subjunctive (pluperfect) conjugation

Except those rare few of us who can learn verb conjugations without effort, mastering them at some point will require rote memorization. While the verb forms can be confusing at first, with use they become natural as as conjugations in the native tongue.

The charts below show the forms of the subjunctive for regular verbs and most of the irregular ones. See earlier lessons on when to use the subjunctive and the four tenses of the subjunctive. Note that the verbs in the subjunctive follow a pattern similar to that used in the indicative mood. Note also that some verbs (such as those ending in -car, -gar, and -gir, may make change in spelling to maintain the correct sound). Coming soon: a quiz.

## **Present subjunctive**

Type of verb	Formation	Examples
Most -ar verbs	Remove the -o from the first-person indicative form and add the appropriate ending: -e, -es, -e, -emos, -éis, en.	que yo hable, que tú hables, que él (o ella o usted) hable, que nosotros (o nosotras) hablemos, que vosotros (o vosotras) habléis, que ellos (or ellas o ustedes) hablen
Most <b>-er</b> verbs	Remove the -o from the first-person indicative form and add the appropriate ending: -a, -as, -a, - amos, -áis, an.	que yo coma, que tú comas, que él coma, que nosotros comamos, que vosotros comáis, que ellos coman
Most <b>-ir</b> verbs	Remove the -o from the first-person indicative form and add the appropriate ending: -a, -as, -a, - amos, -áis, an.	que yo resista, que tú resistas, que él resista, que nosotros resistamos, que vosotros resistáis, que ellos resistan
Stem-	Follow the regular	que yo <b>cuente</b> , que tú

changing - ar and -er verbs	rule, except that a stressed <b>-o-</b> in the stem becomes an <b>-ue-</b> , and a stressed <b>-e-</b> becomes an <b>-ie-</b> .	cuentes, que él cuente, que nosotros contemos, que vosotros contéis, que ellos cuenten  que yo pierda, que tú pierdas, que él pierda, que nosotros
		perdamos, que vosotros perdáis, que ellos pierdan
Stem- changing - <b>ir</b> verbs	Follow the regular rule, except an <b>-e</b> -becomes an <b>-i</b> - in the next-to-last syllable except in the <i>nosotros</i> and <i>vosotros</i> forms in some verbs.	que yo mienta, que tú mientas, que él mienta, que nosotros mintamos, que vosotros mintáis, que ellos mientan
	In some others, the - e- becomes an -i- in all forms. The -o- in the next-to-last syllable becomes -ue- except in the <i>nosotros</i> and <i>vosotros</i> forms,	que yo repita, que tú repitas, que él repita, que nosotros repitamos, que vosotros repitáis, que ellos repitan
	where it becomes a - u	que yo duerma, que tú duermas, que él duerma, que nosotros durmamos, que vosotros durmáis, que ellos duerman
caber	irregular	que yo quepa, que to quepas, que él quepa, que nosotros quepamos, que vosotros quepáis, que ellos quepan
dar	irregular	que yo <b>de</b> , que tú <b>des</b> , que él <b>de</b> , que nosotros <b>demos</b> , que vosotros <b>deis</b> , que ellos <b>den</b>

estar	irregular	que yo <b>esté</b> , que tú <b>estés</b> , que él <b>esté</b> , que nosotros <b>estemos</b> , que vosotros <b>estéis</b> , que ellos <b>estén</b>
haber	irregular	que yo haya, que tú hayas, que él haya, que nosotros hayamos, que vosotros hayáis, que ellos hayan
ir	irregular	que yo vaya, que tú vayas, que él vaya, que nosotros vayamos, que vosotros vayáis, que ellos vayan
jugar	irregular	que yo <b>juegue</b> , que tú <b>jueges</b> , que él <b>juegue</b> , quo nosotros <b>juguemos</b> , que vosotros <b>juguéis</b> , que ellos <b>jueguen</b>
saber	irregular	que yo <b>sepa</b> , que tú <b>sepas</b> , que él <b>sepa</b> , que nosotros <b>sepamos</b> , que vosotros <b>sepáis</b> , que ellos <b>sepan</b>
ser	irregular	que yo <b>sea</b> , que tú <b>seas</b> , que él <b>sea</b> , que nosotros <b>seamos</b> , que vosotros <b>seáis</b> , que ellos <b>sean</b>

# Imperfect subjunctive

Type of verb	Formation	Examples
All verbs	Remove the <i>-on</i> from the third-person indicative	que yo <b>hablara</b> , que tú <b>hablaras</b> , que él

preterite form and add the appropriate ending: -a, -as, -a, -amos, -ais, an. Put the stress on the last syllable of the stem in the *nosotros* form.

There is also a seldom-used form of this tense that is used primarily in literature. It is seldom heard in speech. It is conjugated as above, except the **-ra** becomes **-se**. It normally is not necessary to memorize this form, but you should be able to recognize it when you see it.

hablara, que nosotros habláramos, que vosotros hablarais, que ellos hablaran

que yo hablase, que tú hablases, que él hablase, que nosotros hablásemos, que vosotros hablaseis, que ellos hablasen

## Present perfect subjunctive

Type of verb	Formation	Examples
All verbs	Use the present subjunctive form of <b>haber</b> and follow it with the past participle.	que yo haya salido, que tú hayas salido, que él haya salido, que nosotros hayamos salido, que vosotros hayáis salido, que ellos hayan salido

# Past perfect subjunctive (pluperfect)

Type of verb		Examples
All	Use the past subjunctive form of <b>haber</b> and follow it with the past participle.	que yo hubiera puesto, que tú hubieras puesto, que él hubiera puesto, que nosotros hubiéramos puesto, que vosotros hubieráis puesto, que ellos hubieran puesto

# **Pronouncing the Spanish X**

**Question:** I have some pronunciation problem with the Spanish letter X. The Spanish X is sometimes pronounced like the English X, but sometimes like the English S. Are there rules when it is pronounced as an X and when as an S?

**Answer:** Due to regional variations, there aren't any rules that hold true throughout the Spanish-speaking world. In general, however, when between vowels (as in *exactamente*) the Spanish *x* is pronounced basically like the English "ks" sound but softer or less explosive. When it comes before another consonant (as in *expedición*), it has the "s" sound in some areas but the soft "ks" sound in others. In some areas, the letter's pronunciation before a consonant varies from word to word. The only way to know for sure is to listen to someone speaking with the regional accent you wish to emulate.

When a word begins with *x* (there aren't many such words, and most are English cognates), it is usually given the "s" sound, not the "z" sound of English. Thus a word like *xenofobia* sounds the same as if it were spelled *senofobia*.

In some Mexican place names, indeed in the name of  $M\acute{e}xico$  itself, the x is pronounced the same as the Spanish letter j.

Making matters more confusing is that in a few words of Catalan, Basque or indigenous American origin the *x* is pronounced like the English "sh." This is especially common in southern Mexican and Central American place names. One of the larger cities of Guatemala, for example, is Xela, pronounced something like SHEL-ah.

# The Spanish Subjunctive: Quiz Answers

1. I	want you to eat with me.
0	Quiero que comes conmigo.
0	Quiero que comas conmigo.
0	Quiero que comieras conmigo.
0	Quiero que comís conmigo.
2. P	Perhaps I will go home
0	Quizás voy a casa.
0	Quizás irés a casa.
0	Quizás vaya a casa.
0	Quizás iba a casa.
3. V	Vhat's that? I don't know.

¿Qué es eso? No saba.
¿Qué es eso? No sé.
¿Qué es eso? No sepa.
¿Qué es eso? No supiera.
4. I certainly believe he is happy.
Creo que está feliz.
Creo que estuvo feliz.
Creo que esté feliz
Creo que estuviera feliz.  5. I doubt he is happy.
Dudo que está feliz.
Oudo que estuvo feliz.
Dudo que esté feliz.
Oudo que estuviera feliz.
6. It is obvious he loves her.
Es obvio que la ama.
Es obvio que la ame.
Es obvio amaria.
Es obvio que la amaría.  7. It's not obvious he loves her
No es obvio que la ama.
No es obvio que la ame.
No es obvio amarla.
No es obvio que la amaría.
8. I want to drink.
Quiero que bebe.
Quiero beba.
Quiero que beba.
Quiero que beberí.
Quiero beber.
9. I'm looking for the student who speaks Spanish. I saw him yesterday.
Busco al estudiante que habla español. Lo vi ayer.
Busque al estudiante que habla español. Lo vi ayer.

0	Busco al estudiante que hable español. Lo vi ayer.
O 10.	Busque al estudiante que hable español. Lo vi ayer. I'm looking for a student who speaks Spanish.
0	Busco un estudiante que habla español.
0	Busque un estudiante que habla español.
0	Busco un estudiante que hable español.
	Busque un estudiante que hable español. I expected her to come.
0	Esperé viniera.
0	Esperé la venir.
О	Esperé que venir.
0	Esperé que viniera.
0	Esperé que vino.
О	Esperé vino.
	Esperé que venga. She talks as if she were intelligent.
0	Hable como si fuera inteligente.
0	Hable como si fue initeli.
0	Habla como si fuera inteligente.
O 13.	Habla como si fue inteligente . I called when you were at home.
0	Llamé cuando estabas en casa.
0	Llamé cuando estuvieras en casa.
О	Llamara cuado estabas en casa.
	Llamara cuando estuvieras en casa. I will call in case you are at home.
0	Llamaré en caso de que estás en casa.
0	Llamaré en caso de que estés en casa.
0	Llamaré en caso de que estuvieras en casa.
	Llamaré en caso de que estará en casa. He worked even though he was tired.
0	Trabajaba aunque estaba cansado.
0	Trabajaba aunque estuvo cansado.

O	Trabajaba aunque estuviera cansado.
O 16.	Trabajaba aunque esté cansado. If I had time, I would travel.
0	Si yo tengo tiempo, viajaría.
0	Si yo tendría tiempo, viajaría.
0	Si yo tenga tiempo, viajaría.
O 17.	Si yo tuviera tiempo, viajaría. If he had had time, he would have worked.
0	Si haber tiempo, haber trabajar.
0	Si habe tenido tiempo, había trabajado.
0	Si hubiera tenido tiempo, habría trabajado.
O 18.	Si hubiera tenido tiempo, huviera trabajado. I want her to work.
0	Quiero la trabajar.
0	Quiero trabajarla.
0	Quiero que la trabajaba.
0	Quiero que trabaje.
0	Quiero que la trabaje.
0	Quiera la trabajar.
0	Quiera la trabaja.
O 19.	Quiera que trabaja. I want to work.
0	Quiero trabajar.
0	Quiera trabajar.
0	Quiera que trabaje.
0	Quiera trabaje.
0	Quisiera trabaje.
	Quiero me trabaja. They want me to work.
0	Quieren me trabajar.
0	Quieren me trabaje.
0	Quieren que me trabaje.
0	Quieren que trabaje.

0	Quieran que trabaje.
0	Quieran que me trabaje.

Here are the answers to <u>the quiz</u> on the subjunctive. A <u>self-scoring version</u> also is available.

- 1. Quiero que comas conmigo.
- 2. Quizás vaya a casa.
- 3. ¿Qué es eso? No sé.
- 4. Creo que está feliz.
- 5. Dudo que esté feliz.
- 6. Es obvio que la ama.
- 7. No es obvio que la ame.
- 8. Quiero beber.
- 9. Busco al estudiante que habla español. Lo vi ayer.
- 10. Busco un estudiante que hable español.
- 11. Esperé que viniera.
- 12. Habla como si fuera inteligente.
- 13. Llamé cuando estabas en casa.
- 14. Llamaré en caso de que estés en casa.
- 15. Trabajaba aunque estaba cansado.
- 16. Si yo tuviera tiempo, viajaría.
- 17. Si hubiera tenido tiempo, habría trabajado.
- 18. Quiero que trabaje.
- 19. Quiero trabajar.
- 20. Quieren que trabaje.