

## The subjunctive - Easy Learning Grammar

The **subjunctive** was formerly used in English for situations that were improbable or that expressed a wish. It is only rarely used in modern British English. It is, however, found in certain set phrases and in very formal forms of speech and writing.

- *God **save** the Queen!*
- *God **bless** you!*
- *God **help** us!*
- *Heaven **help** us!*
- *Heaven **forbid** that that should happen to me.*
- ***Suffice** it to say he escaped with only a caution.*

### The present subjunctive

The form in the present tense is exactly the same as the base form in all persons of the verb. That is, there is no **-s** on the 3rd person singular. The subjunctive is used, in very formal English, in subordinate clauses that follow verbs expressing a desire, a demand, a formal recommendation, or a resolve.

- *I only ask that he **cease** behaving in this extraordinary manner.*
- *It is vital that they **be** stopped at once.*
- *Is it really necessary that she **work** all hours of the day?*
- *I demand that he **do** something to make up for this.*

The clause containing the subjunctive is linked to the main clause with *that*.

- This use of the subjunctive is more common in American English than in British English. British speakers usually take advantage of other ways of expressing the same message, especially in less formal speech.
- *I only ask that he **should cease** behaving in this extraordinary manner.*
- *It is vital that they **are** stopped at once.*
- *It is vital **to stop** them at once.*
- *Is it really necessary **for her to work** all hours of the day?*
- *I demand that he **does** something to make up for this.*

### The past subjunctive

In written English and in very formal speech, the past subjunctive form **were** is sometimes used with the 1st and 3rd person singular, in place of the normal past form **was**. The past subjunctive may be used:

- after *if* or *I wish*, to express regret or longing
- *If your father **were** alive he would help you.*
- *If I **were** rich I would buy a Ferrari.*
- *I wish I **were** taller.*
- *If only he **were** here now!*
- after *as if/as though* and similar expressions, to express doubt or improbability.
- *You talk to him as if he **were** your slave!*
- *Some people behave as though dogs **were** human.*

Many people prefer to use the normal form of the past in this type of sentence. This is quite acceptable in ordinary English.

- *If your father **was** alive he would help you.*
- *If I **was** rich I would buy a Ferrari.*
- *I wish I **was** tall.*

- If only he *was* here now!
- You talk to him as if he *was* your slave!

**Write the corrections using the present subjunctive.**

1. Her doctor ordered her remain in bed. that she
2. The commander ordered that the thief is arrested. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The police asked them avoid driving during the storm. \_\_\_\_\_
4. It is necessary we'll pack enough food for the hiking trip. \_\_\_\_\_
5. The waiter's recommendation was she order the pancakes. \_\_\_\_\_
6. The bank manager demanded that he pays the debt on time. \_\_\_\_\_

**Unscramble the sentences.**

1. suggested / I / they / scenic / route. / the / take    I suggested they take the scenic route.
2. students / the / be / recommend / I / that / polite.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. a / new / start / He / proposed / that / she / hobby.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. citizens / taxes. / The / insists / that all / pay / government  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. imperative / students / It / to do / properly. / that / research / learn / is  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. demanded / The father / a traditional / have / wedding. / daughter / his / that  
\_\_\_\_\_