

Le subjonctif présent

Grammatical mood

One way that verbs conjugate or change is to indicate grammatical mood. This doesn't mean that the verb expresses happiness or sadness. Instead, a verb's mood tells the audience a little about the speaker's or writer's attitude about the action that's being done. Most verbs are in the indicative mood, which means that they discuss events that are either real or not real ("Je mange" or "I eat"). French also has the conditional mood ("Je mangerais" or "I would eat") and the imperative mood ("Mange!" or "Eat!"). There's also the subjunctive mood, which is the subject of this handout.

Usage

The subjunctive mood ("le subjonctif") is usually found in subordinate clauses, typically the second half of a sentence. It discusses events that are not necessarily real, often involving uncertainty. The acronym WEDDINGS can assist in memorization of when to use the subjunctive. Note the following examples, in which the subjunctive verbs are in bold type:

Catégorie	Exemple
Will	Je veux que vous soyez heureux.
Emotion	Elle est fâchée qu'il aille à la fête
Doubt	Nous ne croyons pas que tu sois prêt.
Desire	Je désire qu'elle m' épouse .
Interrogatives	Existe-t-il un garçon qui soit charmant et beau ?
Negatives	Il n'a pas l'impression que la femme ait beaucoup d'argent.
General statements	Il faut que vous fassiez les devoirs !
Superlatives	Marc est le plus bel homme que je connaisse .

Take a closer look at the first example from the table above.

Je veux que vous soyez heureux.

1. The first part of this sentence is in the present, indicative conjugation. In this case, it means "I want," which indicates will or desire.
2. The words *que* or *qui* usually act to combine the two parts of the sentence.
3. The second subject needs to be somebody or something different from the first one, although the pronoun can be the same.
4. The verb *soyez* is *être* in the present subjunctive.

In English

The biggest reason that French language-learners struggle with the subjunctive is that we don't use it the same way in English. We wouldn't usually say, as in the above example, "I want that you be happy" (although it would be correct). This construction is standard, though, in French, no matter the level of formality.

Nonetheless, it does exist. Consider the difference between "God blesses you" and "God bless you." In the former, the speaker is using the indicative, stating something he or she believes as fact. In the latter, he or she is wishing someone goodwill after sneezing, in a sense saying, "I want that God bless you." That's desire, so *bless* is in the subjunctive.

En español

The Spanish subjunctive (*subjuntivo*) is quite similar to the French version. The example sentence above would be rendered as "Yo quiero que ustedes sean felices." The reasoning is the same, with the verb *ser* conjugated to the present subjunctive (*sean*) in the subordinate clause.

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Formation

There are four main sets of subjunctive conjugations: regulars, irregulars, verbs with irregular stems and verbs with two stems.

Regulars

To conjugate a regular verb to the subjunctive, remove the *ent* ending of the present, indicative, third-person plural (*ils*) form and add the following endings:

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	e	ions
2e	es	iez
3e	e	ent

Here are paradigms from the first two groups and the verb *vendre*, conjugated to the present subjunctive:

« Parler »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	parle	parlions
2e	parles	parliez
3e	parle	parlent

« Finir »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	finisse	finissions
2e	finisses	finissiez
3e	finisse	finissent

« Vendre »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	vende	vendions
2e	vendes	vendiez
3e	vende	vendent

Irregulars

Only *avoir* and *être* are fully irregular in the present subjunctive. They are conjugated as follows:

« Avoir »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	aie	ayons
2e	aies	ayez
3e	ait	aient

« Être »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	sois	soyons
2e	sois	soyez
3e	soit	soient

Verbs with irregular stems

The verbs *faire*, *pouvoir* and *savoir* have irregular stems but use the regular endings. They are conjugated as follows:

« Faire »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	fasse	fassions
2e	fasses	fassiez
3e	fasse	fassent

« Pouvoir »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	puisse	puissions
2e	puisses	puissiez
3e	puisse	puissent

« Savoir »

	Singulier	Pluriel
1re	sache	sachions
2e	saches	sachiez
3e	sache	sachent

Verbs with two stems

These verbs have one stem for the L-pattern (listed first here) and another for the *nous* and *vous* forms. They use the regular endings. Here is a list of common verbs with two stems:

Verbe	Anglais	Terminaisons
aller	to go	aill/all
boire	to drink	boiv/buv
croire	to believe	croi/croy
devoir	must; to owe	doiv/dev
prendre	to take	prenn/pren

Verbe	Anglais	Terminaisons
recevoir	to receive	reçoiv/recev
tenir	to hold	tienn/tien
venir	to come	vienn/ven
voir	to see	voi/voy
vouloir	to want	veuill/voul