The subjunctive El subjuntivo

The subjunctive in one line: it's the verb mood for wishes, feelings, doubt and things that aren't real yet. The forms you already know, the indicative, state facts: **Viene** mañana, he's coming tomorrow. Wrap the same idea in a wish and it switches: Quiero que **venga** mañana, I want him to come tomorrow. On this sheet the **subjunctive is pink** and the **indicative is orange**.

Build it in three steps: **hablo** → habl → **hable**

take the yo form of the present, drop the -o, then swap the vowel: -ar verbs take e, -er and -ir verbs take a

	hablar speak	comer eat	vivir live
yo I	hable	coma	viva
tú you	hables	comas	vivas
él, ella, usted he, she, you (polite)	hable	coma	viva
nosotros we	hablemos	comamos	vivamos
vosotros you all · Spain only	habléis	comáis	viváis
ellos, ellas, ustedes they, you all	hablen	coman	vivan

The opposite vowel

hablas → **hables**
comes → **comas**
vives → **vivas**

yo and él share one form: que yo **hable**, que él **hable**. The rest of the sentence tells you who.

A whole page of these looks scary, but you'll mostly hear a handful: **sea**, **vaya**, **tengas**, **quieras**, **puedas**.

An odd yo form carries over

tenga tener, **tengo**	**haga** hacer, **hago**	**diga** decir, **digo**	**salga** salir, **salgo**	**conozca** conocer, **conozco**	**ponga** poner, **pongo**	**venga** venir, **vengo**	**vea** ver, **veo**

All six persons keep it: **tengamos**, **hagáis**, **digan**. Even ver keeps its e: **veamos**.

So do stem changes

	yo	tú	él	nosotros	vosotros	ellos
querer want, love	quiera	quieras	quiera	queramos	queráis	quieran
poder can	pueda	puedas	pueda	podamos	podáis	puedan
pedir ask for	pida	pidas	pida	pidamos	pidáis	pidan
dormir sleep	duerma	duermas	duerma	durmamos	durmáis	duerman

nosotros and vosotros stay plain: **queramos**, **podamos**. In -ir verbs they change too, e to i and o to u: **pidamos**, **durmamos**.

Six irregulars

	yo	tú	él	nosotros	vosotros	ellos
ser be	sea	seas	sea	seamos	seáis	sean
estar be	esté	estés	esté	estemos	estéis	estén
ir go	vaya	vayas	vaya	vayamos	vayáis	vayan
haber have (done)	haya	hayas	haya	hayamos	hayáis	hayan
saber know	sepa	sepas	sepa	sepamos	sepáis	sepan
dar give	dé	des	dé	demos	deis	den

Spelling and accents: to keep the sound before e, c becomes qu, g becomes gu and z becomes c: buscar **busque**, llegar **llegue**, pagar **pague**, empezar **empiece**. **dé** has an accent so it isn't read as de, of.

When to use it ¿Cuándo se usa?

The key rule: two different people, joined by que

Quiero **ir**.
I want to go. One person: the infinitive.

Quiero que **vayas**.
I want you to go. Two people: que + subjunctive.

Espero **llegar** pronto.
I hope to get there soon.

Espero que **llegues** pronto.
I hope you get there soon.

One person wanting, hoping or needing something for themselves takes the infinitive. Once someone else comes in after que, the second verb goes into the subjunctive.

The triggers

Wishes and wants
querer que, esperar que, preferir que

Quiero que **vengas** conmigo.
I want you to come with me.

Espero que te **guste**.
I hope you like it.

Prefiero que nadie lo **sepa**.
I'd rather nobody knew.

Feelings
me alegra que, me molesta que, siento que

Me alegra que **estés** aquí.
I'm glad you're here.

Me molesta que siempre **llegues** tarde.
It bugs me that you're always late.

Siento que no **puedas** venir.
I'm sorry you can't come.

sentir que + indicative means to sense: Siento que algo **va** mal, I feel something's wrong.

It's important that...
es importante que, es mejor que

Es importante que **duermas** bien.
It's important that you sleep well.

Es mejor que se lo **digas** tú.
It's better if you tell him yourself.

Es posible que **llueva** esta tarde.
It might rain this afternoon.

Facts don't: Es verdad que **es** caro, it's true that it's expensive. Also está claro que, es obvio que.

Asking and advising
pedir que, recomendar que, decir que

Te pido que me **escuches**.
I'm asking you to listen to me.

Te recomiendo que **veas** esta serie.
I recommend you watch this show.

Dile que me **llame**.
Tell her to ring me.

decir que reports with the indicative: Dice que **viene**, she says she's coming. As an order it takes the subjunctive: Dile que **venga**.

Doubt and denial
dudar que, no creer que, no es verdad que

Dudo que **tenga** tiempo.
I doubt he's got time.

No creo que **venga** hoy.
I don't think she's coming today.

No estoy seguro de que **sea** buena idea.
I'm not sure it's a good idea.

Ojalá
I hope, if only: always the subjunctive

Ojalá **haga** sol mañana.
I hope it's sunny tomorrow.

Ojalá **tengas** razón.
I hope you're right.

Ojalá que **salga** bien.
I hope it goes well.

The que after ojalá is optional.

Sure of it? Then it's the indicative

Creo que **viene**.
I think he's coming.

No creo que **venga**.
I don't think he's coming.

Estoy segura de que lo **sabe**.
I'm sure she knows.

Dudo que lo **sepa**.
I doubt she knows.

Es verdad que **está** lejos.
It's true that it's a long way.

No es verdad que **esté** lejos.
It's not true that it's a long way.

Teachers call these WEIRDO: wishes, emotions, impersonal phrases, recommendations, doubt, ojalá. Handy, but the real test is simpler: a fact takes the indicative; something wanted, felt about, doubted or not real yet takes the subjunctive.

Linking words Cuando, para que, aunque

cuando asks one question: has it happened, or does it happen as a rule? Then the indicative. Is it still ahead of you? Then the subjunctive, because it isn't real yet.

Not yet: subjunctive

Cuando **llegues**, llámame.
When you get there, ring me.

Cuando **sea** mayor, quiero ser médica.
When I grow up, I want to be a doctor.

Te lo explico cuando nos **veamos**.
I'll explain when we see each other.

A habit, or the past: indicative

Cuando **llego** a casa, como algo.
When I get home, I eat something.

Cuando **llueve**, me quedo en casa.
When it rains, I stay in.

Cuando **llegué**, ya no **estaba**.
When I got there, she wasn't there any more.

Never the future after cuando: Cuando **llegues**, not cuando llegarás. The question word ¿cuándo? is different: ¿Cuándo **vienes**?, when are you coming?

Other time words work the same way

En cuanto **sepa** algo, te aviso.
As soon as I know anything, I'll let you know.

Espera aquí hasta que **vuelva**.
Wait here until I get back.

Esperé hasta que **volvió**.
I waited until she got back.

en cuanto, as soon as, and hasta que, until, work just like cuando: still ahead takes the subjunctive; a habit, or something that has happened, takes the indicative.

Always the subjunctive

para que so that

Habla más alto para que te **oigan**.
Speak up so that they can hear you.

Same person? The infinitive: Lo hago para **aprender**. I do it to learn.

antes de que before

Vete antes de que te **vean**.
Go before they see you.

Same person? The infinitive: Llámame antes de **salir**. Ring me before you leave.

sin que without

Entra sin que nadie te **oiga**.
Get in without anyone hearing you.

Same person? The infinitive: Se fue sin **decir** nada. He left without saying anything.

a menos que, con tal de que unless, as long as

Te llamo mañana, a menos que **pase** algo.
I'll ring you tomorrow, unless something comes up.

Te lo dejo con tal de que me lo **devuelvas**.
I'll lend it to you as long as you give it back.

aunque: two moods, two meanings

Aunque **llueve**, voy a salir.
Although it's raining, I'm going out.
It is raining: a fact, so the indicative.

Aunque **llueva**, voy a salir.
Even if it rains, I'm going out.
It may or may not rain: the subjunctive.

Aunque **sea** tu hermano, no tiene razón.
He may be your brother, but he's wrong.
A known fact, brushed aside as beside the point: the subjunctive too.

From shows En las series

4 · lines you'll hear every day

A wish on its own: many of these start with que and nothing before it. Espero, I hope, is simply left out: (Espero) que te **vaya** bien.

Que te **vaya** bien.
Hope it goes well. Take care.
said when someone heads off

¡Que **aproveche**!
Enjoy your meal!
to people eating; buen provecho is the other way, and the usual one in Latin America

Que **descanses**.
Sleep well. Get some rest.
at bedtime, or after a long day

Que **tengas** un buen día.
Have a nice day.
also que **tengas** buen día, without un

Que te **mejores**.
Get well soon.
to someone who's ill

¡Que lo **pases** bien!
Have a good time!
pasarlo bien, to have a good time

¡Que te **diviertas**!
Have fun!
divertirse, to have fun

¡Que **cumplas** muchos más!
Many happy returns!
on someone's birthday

Como **quieras**.
As you like. Suit yourself.
whatever you end up wanting

Lo que **sea**.
Whatever. Anything.
anything at all, or a shrug

Sea lo que **sea**.
Whatever it is.
whatever it turns out to be

Que yo **sepa**, no.
Not that I know of.
as far as I know

Ojalá.
I hope so. If only.
on its own, as an answer

¡**Vaya**!
Wow! Oh dear!
the subjunctive of ir as a word on its own: surprise, good or bad

¡Que no!
I said no!
no verb at all: this que just insists. With a verb it's the subjunctive: ¡Que te **calles**!, I said be quiet!

Commands that borrow the subjunctive

usted and ustedes polite, and for groups

Pase, **pase**.
Come in, come in.

Siéntese, por favor.
Have a seat, please.

Perdone.
Excuse me. Sorry.

Oiga.
Excuse me! To get someone's attention.

Tenga.
Here you are.

Disculpen.
Excuse me, to a group.

Pronouns go on the end, with an accent to keep the stress: **siente** + se = **siéntese**. For a group: **siéntense**.

Don't, to one friend no + tú

No te **preocupes**.
Don't worry.

No **digas** eso.
Don't say that.

No **tengas** miedo.
Don't be scared.

No me **mires** así.
Don't look at me like that.

No me **digas**.
You don't say! Word for word, don't tell me.

No **hagas** ruido.
Don't make any noise.

Saying do to a friend has its own forms. Saying don't uses the subjunctive:

habla → No **hables** · ven → No **vengas** · dime → No me **digas** · preocúpate → No te **preocupes**

vosotros in Spain works the same way: no **habléis**.

A past subjunctive Imperfecto de subjuntivo

Just so you recognise it: Spanish has a second, past set of subjunctive forms. You'll hear them in shows from the start, so here are the main ones and what they do. A full guide comes later; for now, knowing them when you hear them is plenty.

Build it from the preterite

hablaron → habla → **hablara**

take the ellos form of the preterite, drop -ron, add -ra. The irregular preterites come along: **tuvieron** → **tuviera**, **fueron** → **fuera**

	yo I	tú you	él he, she, you (polite)	nosotros we	vosotros you all	ellos they, you all
hablar speak	hablara	hablaras	hablara	habláramos	hablarais	hablaran
comer eat	comiera	comieras	comiera	comiéramos	comierais	comieran
tener have	tuviera	tuvieras	tuviera	tuviéramos	tuvierais	tuvieran
ser, ir be, go	fuera	fueras	fuera	fuéramos	fuerais	fueran

Two sets of endings: **hablase**, **comiese**, **tuviese**, **fuese** mean exactly the same. The -ra forms are the ones you'll hear most; -se turns up more in Spain and in writing.

A few more to recognise: estar **estuviera**, poder **pudiera**, hacer **hiciera**, decir **dijera**, saber **supiera**, haber **hubiera**.

Where you'll hear it

After a past trigger

quiero que becomes quería que

Quería que **vinieras**.
I wanted you to come.

Me pidió que la **ayudara**.
She asked me to help her.

Quiero que **vengas** is now; quería que **vinieras** is the same wish, told in the past.

If it isn't true

si + this form, then would

Si **tuviera** tiempo, iría contigo.
If I had time, I'd go with you.

Si yo **fuera** tú, no lo haría.
If I were you, I wouldn't do it.

A real chance takes the indicative: Si **tengo** tiempo, te llamo, if I have time, I'll ring you. Never si + the present subjunctive.

A polite want

quisiera, I'd like

Quisiera un café, por favor.
I'd like a coffee, please.

Quisiera hablar con usted.
I'd like to speak to you.

Softer than quiero. In a shop or on the phone, you'll hear it all the time.

Wishing it were so

ojalá and como si

Ojalá **estuvieras** aquí.
I wish you were here.

Habla como si lo **supiera** todo.
He talks as if he knew everything.

Ojalá **estés** bien, I hope you're well, could be true. Ojalá **estuvieras** aquí, I wish you were here, isn't. como si always takes a past subjunctive.

Practice Práctica

6 · twenty lines · answers at the bottom

How: put the verb in brackets into the right form: indicative or subjunctive? Say the line out loud, then check the answers in small print at the bottom.

1 Quiero que me _____ con los deberes.
(ayudar) I want you to help me with my homework.

2 Creo que Marta _____ razón.
(tener) I think Marta's right.

3 Cuando _____ a Madrid, mándame una foto.
(llegar) When you get to Madrid, send me a photo.

4 Me alegra que _____ mejor.
(estar) I'm glad you're feeling better.

5 Cuando _____ calor, vamos a la playa.
(hacer) When it's hot, we go to the beach.

6 Es importante que _____ mucha agua.
(beber) It's important that you drink lots of water.

7 No creo que Luis _____ a la cena.
(venir) I don't think Luis is coming to dinner.

8 Es verdad que el piso _____ muy caro.
(ser) It's true that the flat is very expensive.

9 Ojalá no _____ mañana.
(llover) I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow.

10 Te pido que me _____ la verdad.
(decir) I'm asking you to tell me the truth.

11 Sé que _____ mucho trabajo, perdona.
(tener) I know you've got a lot of work, sorry.

12 Dudo que ellos _____ la respuesta.
(saber) I doubt they know the answer.

13 Recoge todo antes de que _____ tus padres.
(volver) Tidy up before your parents get back.

14 Te lo explico para que lo _____.
(entender) I'll explain it so that you understand.

15 Aunque _____ cansada, voy a ir.
(estar) Although I'm tired, I'm going to go.

16 Aunque no te _____, pruébalo.
(gustar) Even if you don't like it, try it.

17 Es mejor que _____ temprano.
(salir) It's better if we leave early.

18 Mi madre dice que la cena _____ lista.
(estar) My mum says dinner's ready.

19 Mi madre me dice que _____ la mesa.
(poner) My mum's telling me to lay the table.

20 Si _____ más dinero, me compraría un coche.
(tener) If I had more money, I'd buy a car.

Answers

1 **ayudes** a wish, two people
2 **tiene** creo que: what you believe
3 **llegues** cuando, not yet
4 **estés** a feeling
5 **hace** cuando, a habit
6 **bebas** es importante que
7 **venga** no creo que: doubt
8 **es** es verdad que: a fact
9 **llueva** ojalá
10 **digas** asking someone
11 **tienes** sé que: a fact
12 **sepan** dudo que: doubt
13 **vuelvan** antes de que
14 **entiendas** para que
15 **estoy** aunque, and it's true
16 **guste** aunque, even if
17 **salgamos** es mejor que; from salgo
18 **está** decir que, reporting
19 **ponga** decir que, an order
20 **tuviera** si, and it isn't true

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.