

The Subjunctive: Overview

FORM:

The **present subjunctive** is formed from the bare infinitive of a verb. This means there is no “to” in front of the verb.

to be (infinitive) ----- be (present subjunctive)

to help (infinitive) ----- help (present subjunctive)

The **past subjunctive** is formed from the simple past.

stood (simple past) ----- stood (past subjunctive)

ran (simple past) ----- ran (past subjunctive)

The verb “to be” is an exception to the rule for the **past subjunctive**. **I/he/she/it** can use either **was** or **were**. When the speaker wants to express doubt or uncertainty, **were** is more common than **was**.

USE:

- The **present subjunctive** is used in some exclamations to express a wish or hope.

God help us!

Long live the king!

- The **present subjunctive** can be used with certain verbs, nouns and adjectives followed by **that** (see Exercises 39 and 40).

They ordered that we evacuate the ship.

- The **past subjunctive** can be used after **as if** and **as though** to show doubt, unreality or improbability in the present.

The politician spoke as if he had won the election! (He didn't win the election.)

They act as though they were married. (They are not married.)

Fill in either the PRESENT or PAST SUBJUNCTIVE of the verbs given in brackets.

1. Heaven _____ (help) us finish this report in time!
2. The bully acts as though he _____ (be) the smartest person in the class.
3. The team coach praised us as if we _____ (come) first in the tournament.
4. _____ (give) us the strength to continue up this mountain!
5. Your boyfriend behaves as if he _____ (own) this house!
6. The secretary orders the staff around as though she _____ (be) in charge.