



The Spanish Subjunctive

Spanish Lesson

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Video transcript

Hey there and welcome to Ablas! In this video, we're going to cover the Spanish subjunctive, including when to use it, and how to conjugate it with a short story. Be sure to download the PDF of today's lesson from the link in the description!

What is the subjunctive?

So what actually is the Spanish subjunctive?

The Spanish subjunctive, *el subjuntivo*, is a grammatical mood rather than a tense. It's used to express your feelings towards an action or event. Unlike the indicative mood, which is the one we use most often to talk about facts and objective truths, the subjunctive focuses on subjectivity, uncertainty and possibility.

In English, the subjunctive is rarely used for only a few expressions like, "if I were you", but in Spanish, it's very common in both informal and formal settings.

When do we use it?

Let's explore the situations that require the subjunctive.

The first one is when you wish or hope for something.

- Quiero que vengas a la fiesta. "I want you to come to the party." Notice that *vengas* is in the subjunctive present tense here.
- Espera que lleguemos pronto. "She hopes we arrive soon."
- Ojalá haga buen tiempo. "I hope the weather is nice."

We also need the subjunctive to express emotion and feelings.

- Me alegro de que estés aquí. "I'm glad that you're here."
- Tiene miedo de que suspenda el examen. "He's afraid that he'll fail the exam."
- Es una lástima que no puedas quedarte. "It's a shame that you can't stay."

We also use it when expressing doubt or talking about a possibility of something happening.

- Dudo que sea verdad. "I doubt that it is true."
- No creo que tenga razón. "I don't think that he is right."
- Es posible que llueva esta tarde. "It is possible that it will rain this afternoon."

You might have noticed that most of the time the subjunctive follows the word "que". This is a good clue to look out for when figuring out if the subjunctive should be used. There are some other cases that require the subjunctive; for example:

- El médico recomienda que descanse más. "The doctor recommends that he rest more." Recommendations and requests also trigger the subjunctive.
- Es importante que estudiemos cada día. "It is important that we study every day." Notice that impersonal expressions like es importante always trigger the subjunctive too.

How does it work?

Now we know when the subjunctive can occur, let's dive in and conjugate some verbs!

Unfortunately, there's no single rule we can apply to every verb to get the subjunctive, but there is a pattern when it comes to the verb endings. Let's look at two common irregular verbs, starting with "ser" (to be).

And let's also look at a verb ending in -ar which follows different verb endings: "estar" is a good example.

	ser	estar
yo	sea	esté
tú, vos	seas	estés
él, ella, usted	sea	esté
nosotros, nosotras	seamos	estemos
vosotros, vosotras	seáis	estéis

ellos, ellas, ustedes	sean	estén
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If you feel like going a step further, you can try conjugating the past subjunctive. Let's just look at a couple of examples for today.

- Quería que fuera más paciente. "I wanted him to be more patient." Notice that the past subjunctive of ser is fuera.
- Me alegró que viniera a la reunión. "I was glad that he came to the meeting." Viniera is the past subjunctive of venir, triggered by the emotion verb alegró.

Story

Now let's put the subjunctive into practice with a short story!

English	Spanish
It was the first day of August and the sun was already burning at eight in the morning.	Era el primer día de agosto y el sol ya quemaba a las ocho de la mañana.
Javier, Miguel and Elena had arrived at the Bardenas Reales the night before.	Javier, Miguel y Elena habían llegado a las Bardenas Reales la noche anterior.
They set off early, before the heat became unbearable.	Salieron pronto, antes de que el calor fuera insostenible.
The path was dry and without shade.	El camino era seco y sin sombra.
It was important that each person carry enough water.	Era importante que cada persona llevara suficiente agua.
The rocks were enormous and orange in colour.	Las rocas eran enormes y de color naranja.
Elena walked slowly so that her friends could keep up with her pace.	Elena caminaba despacio para que sus amigos pudieran seguirle el ritmo.

English	Spanish
Javier took photos at every moment.	Javier sacaba fotos a cada momento.
At midday, they looked for a spot with some shade.	A mediodía, buscaron un sitio con algo de sombra.
There was not much to choose from to sit down, but they found a large flat rock.	No había mucho donde eligieran sentarse, pero encontraron una roca grande y plana.
The heat was hard to describe.	El calor era difícil de describir.
In the afternoon, they drove north to the Roncal Valley.	Por la tarde, condujeron hacia el norte, al Valle de Roncal.
It was a path between very high mountains and a cold river.	Era un camino entre montañas altísimas y un río frío.
Elena doubted that Miguel was ready for twelve kilometres of hiking.	Elena dudaba de que Miguel estuviera listo para doce kilómetros de senderismo.
That night, they slept in a small hostel.	Esa noche durmieron en un albergue pequeño.
Before they turned off the light, all three looked at the map together.	Antes de que apagaran la luz, los tres miraron el mapa juntos.
It was possible that the path would be difficult.	Era posible que el camino fuera difícil.
But that was exactly what they wanted.	Pero eso era exactamente lo que querían.

It's quiz time!

So, did you spot the subjunctive mood in that story? Feel free to leave us a comment with any questions. But we're not done yet – it's quiz time!

Which one typically triggers the subjunctive?

- A. Sé que
- B. Ya que
- C. Para que

The correct answer is... para que.

How do you conjugate the verb 'to do' in the first-person subjunctive present tense?

- A. Haga
- B. Haiga
- C. Hago

The correct answer is... haga.

Which of these does NOT trigger the subjunctive?

- A. Estoy seguro de que
- B. Es importante que
- C. Ojalá que

The correct answer is... Estoy seguro de que.

Your task

Well done for getting this far!

Now your task is to write a conversation between the three friends from our story earlier during their trip to the Bardenas Reales. Try to throw in some examples of the subjunctive where possible.

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