

# Sequence of Tenses Studied & Maybe Clarified

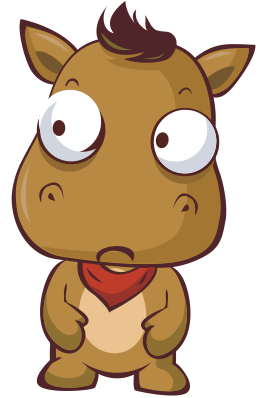
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## Sequence of Tenses

Except for the Hortatory/Jussive (“let us”), **subjunctive verbs always live in subordinate clauses**. “Subordinate” means we have a complex sentence that will include a main clause with a **main verb that rules how tense works in a sentence**. The subordinate subjunctive is therefore “under its rule” (as subordinates do). Only the tense of the main verb has to do with ‘real’ time.

The main verb may be *any* tense. Subjunctive verbs only exist in a total of FOUR tenses. All of these tenses are RELATIVE to the main verb ONLY.

There is *no need for subjunctive verbs to appear in all SIX tenses because subjunctive tenses are purely relative and never real*. **The tense of the main verb dictates the actual tense (the one based in reality) while the subordinate subjunctive relates to that tense in one of three possible ways: BEFORE, DURING, AFTER.** Why are there three possible relations to time (before, during, after) but four tenses of the subjunctive? Hold your horses, I’ll explain...



Look at these variations here in which reality tells us that Billy Bob is hungry. The underlined portion is hypothetical (I don’t think he is really going to eat that poor horse) and so, in Latin, we would express that clause in the subjunctive:

1. Billy Bob is so hungry **that he could eat a horse right now.**
2. Billy Bob is so hungry **that he might eat a horse later.**
3. Billy Bob is so hungry **that he could have eaten a horse a bit ago.**

Here, Billy Bob is hungry *right now in the present*. The horse, however, gets eaten at the same time he’s hungry in #1; sometime in the future in #2, and sometime prior in #3. Only the main verb expresses reality (the immediate hunger of Billy Bob). The subjunctive verb’s job is to appear in a tense that is *relative* to that main verb in one of those three ways.

I’ve listed here only three possible relationships to a main verb (before, during, after) while there are actually **four tenses of the subjunctive**. Let’s make sense of that reality right now.

Expressing a hypothetical relationship to reality with a subjunctive verb doesn’t always happen here and now does it? Afterall, we still have SIX perfectly good tenses of the indicative mood. Sometimes we can talk about things that have already happened. Sometimes we can talk about things that still might be. We therefore must come up with a combination of tenses to express those hypothetical relationships best.

**The name for combining certain tenses of the indicative (main verb) with certain tenses of the subjunctive (subordinate clause) in such a way that these relationships are clear is called the *sequence of tenses*.**

## What is the Sequence of Tenses?

Clever Roman authors divided main verb/subjunctive verb combinations into **2 orderly piles**. Latin-loving monks long ago then named them. I am campaigning to call these two piles “Frick and Frack”—or at the very minimum “group 1 and group 2,” but here’s what trendy and powerful Latin teachers came up with for the two names (BOH-ring!):

**The Primary and The Secondary (Historical) Sequence of Tenses.** Call them what you will, almost all subjunctive constructions in the Latin language will rely on one of these two sequences to express the time relationship between the hypothetical (subj.) and reality (indicative). You can even apply these sequences to subjunctive constructions that you’ve already learned so far.

The trick is this: the Latin expresses when a hypothetical thing might happen (subjunctive) compared to REALITY (the main verb). Your only three options for time relationship is **before, during or after** a real event takes place. In the mind of the ancient Romans, this was best accomplished in one of two ways:

1. Hypothetical events that take place **now or in the future**. (primary)
2. Hypothetical events that take place **sometime in the past** (secondary/historical)

| If your <b>main</b> verb is one of these tenses:                                   |                                | Then you will use these tenses of subjunctive to express one of the three time relationships |   |
|--|--------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Present or future</b><br>Present tense,<br>Future tense<br>Future perfect tense | <b>Primary</b><br>Sequence     | Future Periphrastic + <b>sim</b> →   | Time <b>after</b> (future)                |
|  |                                | Present →  | <b>Same</b> time OR <b>after</b> (now)    |
|  |                                | Perfect →  | Time <b>before</b> (past)                 |
| <b>Any past tense</b><br>(imperfect, perfect,<br>pluperfect)                       | <b>Secondary</b><br>Historical | Future Periphrastic + <b>essem</b> →   | Time <b>after</b> (future-like)           |
|  |                                | Imperfect →  | <b>Same</b> time or <b>after</b> (nowish) |
|  |                                | Pluperfect →   | Time <b>before</b> (past-like)            |

This chart describes the ‘SEQUENCE OF TENSES’— apply these time rules to purpose clauses, result clauses, indirect questions, etc.

### Primary Sequence –use for any present/future event in real time

- has a **present, future or future perfect** indicative main verb
- expresses the following time relationships:
  - **same time** as the main verb by using a **present** subjunctive subordinate verb
  - **future** to the main verb by
    - ...using a **present** subjunctive subordinate verb OR
    - ...using a **future periphrastic with a form of sim\***
  - **past** to the main verb by using a **perfect** subjunctive subordinate verb

### Secondary Sequence –use for any past event in real time

- has an **imperfect, perfect or pluperfect** indicative main verb
- expresses the following time relationships:

- same time as the main verb by using an **imperfect** subjunctive subordinate verb
- future to the main verb by
  - using an **imperfect** subjunctive subordinate verb OR
  - using a **future periphrastic with a form of essem\***
- past to the main verb by using a **pluperfect** subjunctive subordinate verb

## \*The Future Periphrastic Explained

**Periphrastic** is a “workaround.” The future periphrastic makes up for the fact that there is no future subjunctive tense. You might even say it is the future subjunctive that was invented long after the Romans had run out of other good ideas.

### How to build a future periphrastic (FP)

To build a FP for use in a primary sequence sentence, use a **future active participle** of any verb and then pair it with a **conjugated form of sum in the PRESENT subjunctive** (sim, sis, etc.)

To build a FP for use in a secondary sequence sentence, use a **future active participle** of any verb and then pair it with a **conjugated form of sum in the IMPERFECT subjunctive** (essem, esses, etc.)

Look at these two examples of indirect question.

- **Rogant** quid Gaius **facturus sit**= They ask what Gaius will do (a primary sequence example—notice that the –us ending agrees with Gaius, the subject of the subjunctive verb)
- **Rogaverunt** quid Gaius **facturus esset**=They asked what Gaius would do /was about to do. (a secondary sequence example)

## Indirect Questions use the Subjunctive Mood and the Sequence of Tense Rules

Look at these examples (analyze the tenses of verbs as you compare)

### Time Contemporaneous

| Primary Sequence (group 1)   | Secondary Sequence (group 2)   |
|--|--|
| <b>Nescio quid facias</b> , <i>I don't know what you're doing.</i>                   | <b>Nescivi quid faceres</b> , <i>I didn't know what you were doing.</i>                        |
| <b>Rogat veniantne nostri amici</b> , <i>he asks whether our friends are coming.</i> | <b>Rogaverunt venirentne nostri amici</b> , <i>they asked whether our friends were coming.</i> |

### Time Prior

| Primary Sequence (group 1)  | Secondary Sequence (group 2)   |
|---|--|
| <b>Nescio quid feceris</b> , <i>I don't know what you did.</i>                          | <b>Nescivi quid fecisses</b> , <i>I didn't know what you had done.</i>                   |
| <b>Rogat venerintne nostri amici</b> , <i>they are asking whether our friends came.</i> | <b>Rogaverunt venissentne nostri amici</b> , <i>they asked whether our friends came.</i> |

### Time Subsequent (After)

| Primary Sequence (group 1)  | Secondary Sequence (group 2)   |
|---|--|
| <b>Nescio quid facturus sis</b> , <i>I don't know what you will do (your going to do).</i>  | <b>Nescivi quid facturus esses</b> , <i>I didn't know what you were going to do (would do)</i>       |
| <b>Rogant sintne venturi nostri amici</b> , <i>they ask whether our friends are coming.</i> | <b>Rogaverunt essentne venturi nostri amici</b> , <i>they asked whether our friends were coming.</i> |

## Two Exceptions to the Sequence of Tenses

Read Note #1 on the bottom of Wheelock's page 248.

### 1. The Historical Present

This construction is used for vivid narrative writing like this: "I'm sitting in my room last night when suddenly I hear a knock at the door." In this odd situation, your main verb will be in the PERFECT tense followed by PRIMARY sequence subjunctives!

### 2. Purpose and Result Clauses don't normally use perfect or pluperfect main verbs

### Can you figure it out?

Stop! Print this page and FOLD this page in half (don't peek at the answers until you've given it all a try). Write the correct form of the indirect question, being careful to observe the sequence of tense as established by the tense of the main verb. (Use the future active periphrastic for indirect questions showing time subsequent)

| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Quid facies?             | rogo      |                   |
| Quid facis?              |           |                   |
| Quid fecisti?            |           |                   |
| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question |
| Quid facies?             | rogavi    |                   |
| Quid facis?              |           |                   |
| Quid fecisti?            |           |                   |
| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question |
| Venientne nostri amici?  | rogo      |                   |
| Veniuntne nostri amici   |           |                   |
| Veneruntne nostri amici? |           |                   |
| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question |
| Venientne nostri amici?  | rogavi    |                   |
| Veniuntne nostri amici   |           |                   |
| Veneruntne nostri amici? |           |                   |

Below are the answers to the above. See if you can figure out the top chart and then check your work below.

| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question           |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Quid facies?             | rogo      | Quid factururus sis.        |
| Quid facis?              |           | Quid facias.                |
| Quid fecisti?            |           | Quid feceris.               |
| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question           |
| Quid facies?             | rogavi    | Quid factururus esses.      |
| Quid facis?              |           | Quid faceres.               |
| Quid fecisti?            |           | Quid fecisses.              |
| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question           |
| Venientne nostri amici?  | rogo      | Sintne venture nostri amici |
| Veniuntne nostri amici   |           | Veniantne nostri amici      |
| Veneruntne nostri amici? |           | Venerintne nostri amici     |
| Direct Question          | Main Verb | Indirect Question           |
| Venientne nostri amici?  | rogavi    | Essentne nostri amici       |
| Veniuntne nostri amici   |           | Venerentne nostri amici     |
| Veneruntne nostri amici? |           | Venissentne nostri amici    |