

Super-Simple Spanish Subjunctive Rule Book!

Soon It'll Be Second Nature...



A Notes In Spanish Special Report

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We Already Know The Subjunctive!

If there's one thing that drives Spanish learners to distraction, or better still, has them trembling in their boots, *at any level...* it's our good friend **The Subjunctive**.

Most people don't want to know anything about it, and who can blame them? Aren't there enough NORMAL verb tenses to learn without complicating things even further?

It's not as if we have to deal with it in English! ...Or do we?

Yes we do! We just don't know it: ***If I were rich I'd live in Barcelona...*** - there's a Subjunctive in that sentence that English speakers use all the time!

*I wish **it were** sunny...* There's another subjunctive!

These hypothetical subjunctive clauses are present in English and common in all languages. It just goes to show that our brains already know how to process, feel, and express a little bit of subjunctive already!

Knowing that our brains are already set up for the subjunctive is the key to *Ben's Big Subjunctive Secret*, which we'll get onto right now...

Ben's Big Subjunctive Secret - Please Read!

As well as all of the usual tenses in Spanish (*present, future, imperfecto, pretérito etc*), there are also two **Moods** (also called Voices): the **Indicative**, and the **Subjunctive**.

I (Ben) was taught a secret way to help you know exactly when to use each mood, by one of my first Spanish teachers in Spain, a crazy Argentinian lady called Liliana.

Liliana's clever 'illustration' of the subjunctive changed the way I was able to think about it, and learn it, forever. I hope it helps you too.

The Secret:

It's simple. Liliana told us that the Indicative Mood handles most everyday situations. It's a normal, businesslike, straightforward kind of a mood, for normal,

straightforward talk about what's real, and what's either going on right now, or definitely going to happen without a doubt.

Liliana drew a picture on the board for us, of a business man, and told us that **as a person**, the **Indicative** looks a bit like this, Mr. Straightforward, a regular guy:



You know all about the Indicative already - you've been learning these nice, businesslike indicative verb tenses since Day 1.

Next, Liliana drew another person on the board, and told us that **if the subjunctive mood were a person**, (and here's the secret!) *he'd look like this*:



That's right! The subjunctive, she said, is a spaced-out hippie, lodging happily in a world of **unreality and uncertainty**, always **subjectively** giving his hippie interpretation of reality and emotions, **philosophizing** all day long about **hypothetical** and interesting things that probably haven't happened yet!

Indicative = Mr. Normal ... **Subjunctive** = Hippie Dude

Seeing it like that did something to my brain that changed the way I thought about, *and knew when to use*, the subjunctive forever afterwards.

These days, when I notice that the next Spanish sentence coming out of my mouth 'feels a little bit hippie', I just dive in and use the subjunctive, and nine times out of ten, I get it right!

Just remember to think like that. If the situation, feeling, or thing you want to express feels a little bit 'off-center', 'hippie', or slightly *disconnected with reality*, then try throwing in a subjunctive. Works a treat ;)

Ummm... Aren't there any rules? Yes! BUT:

OK, all that hippie stuff is helpful (I promise!), but like all grammar, there are some rules that help you find your way through the subjunctive labyrinth.

This report brings you the most important, and largely simple rules that you need, as you press on in your mission to Total Spanish Fluency, BUT:

BUT 1:

Apart from the principal, most important rules listed below, there are still other minor subjunctive rules in Spanish that not even the Spanish know!

And guess what, ***they aren't bothered by that fact!*** ...So neither should you be!

Native Spanish speakers have just developed the subjunctive corner of their brains to a high degree, just as you will develop your subjunctive sixth sense as well over time!

BUT 2:

For some of the rules, there is a '***matiz***' - a twist on the rule for a very specific situation or set of circumstances, where the rule goes out of the window.

We'll discuss some of these, but not all of them... as each of us only has limited time on this earth, and there isn't enough of it to cover all the *matices* connected with the subjunctive!

The thing is though, that once you know the rules below, and once you recognize the hippie, other-worldly aspect of the Subjunctive discussed above (and as long as you've learned your subjunctive verbs tenses!), *the subjunctive will eventually become second nature.*

It will appear perfectly formed in your mouth when it should, without you even thinking about it. With time (and this is based on my personal experience) I can promise you that.

- Ben

***P.S.** The number of rules and examples below can look totally overwhelming. Please, don't feel pressured or rushed to learn too much subjunctive, too quickly.*

All the rules below might typically be taught over the space of a year or two in a normal class, so take your time, and keep having fun with the everyday, indicative side of Spanish for now, incorporating that hippie subjunctive stuff just a little at a time!

A Quick Note On Forming The Subjunctive

The Subjunctive mood is primarily used in the following three tenses: the present subjunctive, the present perfect subjunctive, and the imperfect subjunctive.

Here's an example of each (note, all the **subjunctives** in examples in this report are highlighted in **bold**):

Present Subjunctive

Es importante que **estudies** - *It's important that you study*

Present Perfect Subjunctive

Me alegro de que **hayas venido** - *I'm really glad you came*

The Imperfect Subjunctive

Si **hablara** español mejor, no tendría que ir a clase - *If I spoke Spanish better, I wouldn't have to go to class*

This special report concerned with **the rules** you need to know for when to use the subjunctive, so we are not going to spend time now on how to form every single subjunctive tense, or list every single verb/mood/tense combination of every single verb! You already have a good Spanish verb book for that, right?

If not, and you need to brush up on how to form the subjunctive, then I highly recommend these two excellent webpages from Indiana University:

1. Forms of the Present Subjunctive

<https://users.pfw.edu/jehle/courses/subjfrms.htm>

2. More Subjunctive Tenses (Present Perfect, Imperfect etc)

<https://users.pfw.edu/jehle/courses/pastsubj.htm>

For Acronym Fans

How to remember the irregular present subjunctives...

Here's a good way to remember which verbs are unkind enough to become irregular in the present subjunctive, easy for acronym lovers! You do the DISHES:

Dar..... dé,des etc

Ir..... vaya,vayas etc

Saber..... sepa,sepas etc

Haber.....haya,hayas etc

Estar..... esté,estés etc

Ser.....sea,seas. etc

OK, time to get down to our **Super-Simple Spanish Subjunctive Rules...**

Read on below!

Our Super-Simple Spanish Subjunctive Rules

Rule 1: The Subjunctive After ‘Que’

The subjunctive frequently follows ‘que’, and is used after verbs that express:

A. Wishes, hopes, and desires (For example: *esperar que*, *desear que*, *querer que*)

Quiero que **vengas** - *I want you to come*

Espero que **vayas** - *I hope you go*

B. Disbelief, doubt, and denial (For example: *no creer que*, *dudar que*, *negar que*)

No creo que **sea** verdad - *I don't think it's true*

Dudo que **venga** - *I doubt that he'll come*

Niego que ella **estuviera** allí - *I deny that she was there*

C. Possibility and hypothesis (For example: *ser posible que*, *ser probable que*)

Es posible que **vengan** - *It's possible they'll come*

Es probable que **vaya** - *It's likely that I'll go*

D. Requests and commands (For example: *pedir que*, *decir que*, *exigir que*)

Te pido, por favor, que me **vengas** a buscar esta tarde - *I'm asking you to come and collect me this afternoon*

Digo que no **llegues** tarde - *I ask that you don't get back late*

Te exijo que me **trates** con respeto - *I demand that you treat me with respect*

E. Opinions with adjectives and adverbs (For example: es fantástico que, es una vergüenza que, es injusto que, es bueno que, es malo que, está bien que, está mal que, el hecho de que)

Es importante que **estudies** - *It's important that you study*

Es normal que **vengan** - *It's normal that they come*

El hecho de que **vuelvas** a trabajar es una buena noticia - *The fact that you are going back to work is good news*

F. Obligations and suggestions with adjectives and adverbs (For example: Es mejor que, hace falta que, es necesario que, aconsejo que, recomiendo que)

Es mejor que **te vayas** - *It'd be better for you to go*

Hace falta que **aprendas** más - *You need to learn more*

Es necesario que **vuelvas** - *It's necessary that you return*

Te aconsejo que **tengas** cuidado - *I advise you to be careful*

Te recomiendo que te **levantes** pronto - *I recommend that you get up early*

G. Emotional reactions (For example: siento que, lamento que, me gusta que, me alegro (de) que, me extraña que, me sorprende que, tengo miedo (de) que)

Siento que no **quieras** venir - *I'm sorry you don't want to come*

Me gusta que ella **me ayude** - *I like it that she helps me*

Me alegro (de) que **te guste** - *I'm happy that you like it*

Me extraña que no **hayan aparecido** - *It's strange that they haven't shown up*

Me molesta que **te llamen** fuera de horas de trabajo - *It bothers me that they call you outside working hours*

H. “Negation of perception” (For example: **No veo que, no digo que, no me acuerdo que, no noto que**)

No veo que **me ayudes** - *I don't see that you're helping me*

No digo que **sea** verdad - *I'm not saying that it's true*

No me acuerdo de lo que **me dijeran** - *I don't remember what they told me*

No noto que **estén** tristes - *I can't tell that they're sad*

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Rule 2: Emphatic Expressions (Commands and Desires)

First up, we have the negative imperative commands in the informal *tu* and *vosotros* forms (basically, telling people **you know well** not to do something!):

¡No **te vayas!** / ¡No **os vayais!** - *Don't go!*

¡No **digas** eso! / ¡No **digáis** eso! - *Don't say that*

And secondly, the shortened wishes and desires that are usually delivered energetically, in a quick burst of speech, after a Que:

¡Que **tengas** un buen día! - *Have a good day!*

¡Que lo **pases** bien! - *Have a good time!*

¡Que **aproveche!** - *Enjoy your meal!*

¡Que te **vayas!** - *Leave already/Get out!*

¡Ojalá (que) **nieve** este año! - *Hopefully it will snow this year!*

Rule 3: With Imperatives And Usted and Ustedes

When we use the *usted* and *ustedes* form to address someone formally, a subjunctive is necessary when issuing commands (basically, telling people **you don't know well** to do something):

¡**Ponga** sus manos encima de la mesa! - *Put your hands on the table! (Delivered to someone you would address as Usted)*

¡**Salgan** por la puerta principal por favor! - *Leave by the main door please! (Said to a group of people you would address as Ustedes)*

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Rule 4. Required With Certain Conjunctions

Certain conjunctions are always followed by the subjunctive in Spanish, starting with this one, that you are likely to use most:

- Para que (so that)

Es para que no **te olvides** - *It's so that you don't forget*

- Sin que (without)

Vamos a entrar sin que nos **vean** - *We'll go in without them seeing us*

- A menos que (unless)

Iremos a menos que nos **digan** que no - *We'll go unless they tell us not to*

- **Con tal de que** (as long as)

Me da igual a que restaurante ir con tal de que **quedemos** a cenar - *I don't care which restaurant we go to as long as we meet for dinner*

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## Rule 5: When NOT To Use The Subjunctive

True statements **do not** take the subjunctive in affirmative sentences or questions, but **DO take it in the negative form**:

For example, with the verb creer:

**Affirmative** (Indicative): Creo que va a llover - *I think it's going to rain*

**Question** (Indicative): ¿Crees que va a llover? - *Do you think it's going to rain?*

**Negative (with subjunctive)**: No creo que **vaya** a llover - *I don't think it's going to rain.*

### This rule applies to all the following sets of verbs:

creer/pensar/opinar que - *to think/believe that*

suponer que - *to suppose that*

es evidente que - *it's evident that*

está claro que - *it's clear that*

es cierto que/es verdad que - *it's true that*

es que - *it's that*

sucede/ocurre que - *what's going on is that*

parece que - *it seems that*

está demostrado que - *it's shown that*

resulta que - *it turns out that*

(es) seguro que - *surely*

es obvio que - *it's obvious that*

**Also**, the following two constructions **do not** take the subjunctive, even though they look like they deserve one:

**No cabe duda de que** - *there's no doubt that*

No cabe duda de que tienes razon - *there is no doubt that you are right*

**Menos mal que** - *Thank goodness that*

Menos mal que vivimos en España - *Thank goodness we live in Spain*

Also **DO NOT use the subjunctive** (even though your brain feels like it should...) after the expressions **a lo mejor** and **seguramente**. Leave the verb in the indicative:

A lo mejor están aquí - *Perhaps they're here (están = Indicative)*

Seguramente me lo merezco - *I'm sure I deserve it (merezco = Indicative)*

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## **Rule 6: When To Use Present And Present Perfect Subjunctive, Or The Imperfect Subjunctive**

**A.** If the first verb is in the present, present perfect, future, or imperative, the second (dependent) verb will usually be in the present subjunctive or the present perfect subjunctive:

Quiero que **vengas** - *I want you to come (present subjunctive)*

Ella querrá que **vayamos** - *She'll want us to go (present subjunctive)*

Habla para que te **oigan** - *Speak so that they hear you (present subjunctive)*

Dudo que **haya comido** ya - *I doubt she's eaten already (present perfect subjunctive)*

Me alegro de que **hayas disfrutado** del video - *I'm delighted that you enjoyed the video (present perfect subjunctive)*

**B.** If the first verb is in any past tense or a conditional, the second verb will usually be in the imperfect subjunctive.

Me sorprendió que él no **hablara** inglés - *It surprised me that he didn't speak English (imperfect subjunctive)*

Me gustaría que **vinieras** - *I'd like you to come (imperfect subjunctive)*



## Rule 7: Non-existence!

The subjunctive gets a bit trickier in situations where you have to consider the speaker's attitude toward, certainty, or knowledge about, whatever he/she is talking about.

Less knowledge or certainty about something, for example, will often mean using the subjunctive.

Context is important here, as is the different meaning you can convey by using subjunctive, rather than indicative. *Confused?* Don't worry, here comes an example!

### The truth about non-existence!

We use the subjunctive when we don't specify, or are not sure, if a certain person, place, or thing exists. If you are sure the thing exists, you can use the indicative.

Imagine I want to buy a T-Shirt with a photo of Elvis on it, so I walk into a T-Shirt shop and say one of the following two things:

*Busco una camiseta que lleva una foto de Elvis (lleva = indicative)*

*Busco una camiseta que **lleve** una foto de Elvis (lleve = subjunctive)*

Both sentences mean the same: *I am looking for a T-Shirt with a photo of Elvis on...*

**BUT**, in the first sentence I use the Indicative, because I **KNOW** that this shop has such a T-Shirt, *because I saw it there last week*. Prior knowledge makes me feel solidly indicative.

But in the second sentence I **don't know** whether this shop has such a T-Shirt or not - and all that hopeful uncertainty, or lack of prior knowledge, brings out the subjunctive in me!

### **More subjunctive examples of the non-existence principle:**

*Busco una persona que **sea** responsable - I'm looking for a person who is responsible (but I don't have anyone in mind, hence subjunctive)*

*Busco unos zapatos que **sean** cómodos y no muy caros - I'm looking for some shoes that are comfortable and not very expensive (Not sure if you have any...)*

*Quiero vivir en una ciudad que tenga buen transporte público - I want to live in a city that has good public transport (I don't know any)*

*Pararemos donde **podamos** - We'll stop where we can (not sure where yet)*

*No hay nadie aquí que **tenga** una casa en la playa - There's no one here who has a house at the beach (no one meets the criteria = non-existence)*

*Cualquier cosa que **compres** les va a gustar - Whatever you buy, they're going to like (the gift still hasn't been decided yet)*

## Rule 8: Aunque - A Tricky Conjunction

'*Aunque*' (*even though*) can be used with the indicative or subjunctive; it depends on if what you're saying is a fact, or if it's not yet a fact, respectively.

You can think of this as if you are using 'aunque' to say 'although' or 'even though' (indicative) or if you're using it to say 'even if' (subjunctive):

Aunque me gusta, no lo voy a comprar - *Even though I like it, I'm not going to buy it (verb in indicative)*

Aunque **me gustara**, no lo compraría - *Even if I liked it, I wouldn't buy it (verb in subjunctive)*

Me gusta el azul aunque prefiero el verde - *I like the blue one although I prefer the green one (verb in indicative)*

Iré aunque **esté** muy cansada - *I'll go even if I'm very tired (verb in subjunctive)*

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## Rule 9: Time expressions

With time expressions like *cuando* (when) and *en cuanto que* (as soon as), we use the subjunctive when the action hasn't happened or been completed yet, and the indicative for things that have already happened.

Here are two examples that shows this in action:

### Subjunctive:

Entramos cuando la gente **deje** de aplaudir - *We'll go in when people stop clapping*

### Indicative:

Entramos cuando la gente dejó de aplaudir - *We went in when people stopped clapping*



**Subjunctive:**

En cuanto que lo **haya hecho**, te lo diré - *As soon as I've done it, I'll tell you*

**Indicative:**

En cuanto (que) salieron del barco, buscaron un bar - *As soon as they got off the boat, they looked for a bar*

**More time expressions that work like 'En Cuanto Que':**

*Apenas, nada más que, and tan pronto como* also mean 'as soon as' when followed by a verb (you can replace 'En cuanto que' with any of these in the example above.)

**And some MORE important time expressions...**

Below are five more important time expressions that use the subjunctive when the action hasn't happened or been completed yet, and the indicative for things that have already happened:

**1. Desde que - Since****Subjunctive:**

Desde que **empiece** la película no quiero oírlos hablar - *Once the film has started, I don't want to hear you talking*

**Indicative:**

Desde que empecé a hacer yoga no me ha vuelto a doler la espalda - *Since I started doing yoga, my back hasn't ached again*

**2. Después (de) que - after****Subjunctive:**

Después de que **comamos** me voy al parque a dar un paseo - *After we've eaten I'm going for a walk in the park*

**Indicative:**

Después de que llegué al cine no había entradas - *After I got to the cinema there were no tickets left*

3. *Hasta que - until*

**Subjunctive:**

No voy a ir al Museo del Prado hasta que **vengas** a Madrid - *I'm not going to the Prado museum until you come to Madrid*

**Indicative:**

No me tomo un café hasta que llego al trabajo - *I don't have a coffee until I get to work*

4. *Mientras que - while*

**Subjunctive:**

Mientras que **dejes** de fumar no me importa que tomes chicle - *While you stop smoking I don't mind that you chew gum*

**Indicative:**

Mientras que voy en el coche voy aprendiendo español - *While I'm in the car I learn Spanish*

5. *Siempre que - every time/whenever*

**Subjunctive:**

Siempre que **vengas** a Madrid, ven a vernos - *Whenever you come to Madrid, come and see us*

**Indicative:**

Siempre que voy a Madrid, voy a verles - *Every time I go to Madrid I go to see them*

**N.B. Antes de que (before) always** takes the subjunctive:

Lláname antes de que **te vayas** - *Call me before you go*

~ ~ ~

## Rule 10: Conditionals

For 'if' conditionals (with *si*) you use the **indicative** for likely conditions in the present or the future:

Si viene, dormirá aquí - *If he comes, he'll sleep here (all in the indicative).*

But you use the **subjunctive** for hypothetical, unlikely, or impossible conditions in the past, present, or future. **Hint:** If your sentence has 'would' somewhere in it in English, you'll probably use the imperfect subjunctive in Spanish.

Here are some examples of hypothetical 'if' sentences with 'would' that take the **imperfect subjunctive**:

Si **fuera** rico, viajaría por todo el mundo - *If I were rich, I'd travel all over the world*

Si **tuviera** un coche, podría evitar el Metro - *If I had a car, I could avoid the Metro*

And here are two examples where we talk about something that could, or might, have happened in the past, and use the pluperfect subjunctive:

Si me lo **hubieras dicho**, no habría ido - *If you had told me, I wouldn't have gone*

Si no **hubiera venido** a España, me habría ido a Francia - *If I hadn't come to Spain, I'd have gone to France*

**Note 1:** You NEVER use the **present subjunctive** after 'si' (if) in Spanish.

**Note 2:** Do you know what the Spanish is for 'Pluperfect Subjunctive'?...

**Pluscuamperfecto de Subjuntivo!** Try saying that fast five times in a row!

## Rule 11: Comparative Conditional Sentences

You also use the imperfect subjunctive in comparative conditional sentences with *como si* and *igual que si*:

Me trata como si **fuera** una niña - *He treats me like I'm a little girl*

Me habla igual que si **fuera** idiota - *He talks me as if I were an idiot*

~ ~ ~

## Rule 12: Como

We can use *como* in the indicative or the subjunctive, depending on what we want to say:

### Subjunctive:

Como **se retrasen**, nos vamos - *If they get delayed, we'll leave*

(We aren't sure if they're arriving or not, this is a conditional situation)

### Indicative:

Como se retrasan, nos vamos - *Since they're delayed, we're going to leave*

(We already know they're not arriving, they rang to say that they are delayed)

## A Note About Ojalá

If we use the expression 'ojalá' followed by present subjunctive, we believe something is a possibility:

¡Ojalá (que) **haya** entradas todavía! - *Hopefully there are still tickets!*

But if we use it with the imperfect subjunctive, we think it's impossible/improbable:

¡Ojalá (que) **fuera** rico! - *If only I were rich!*

## Cool Stuff and Expressions

Below are some common phrases and expressions that you often hear in Spain, that use the subjunctive. Using any of these appropriately will make you sound Super-Spanish!

*Note: We can't guarantee these will all work in Latin/South America.*

¡Tengo una movida en casa que no **veas**! - *Everything is crazy at home! (usually negative, e.g. because my son is ill/my husband has lost his job)*

¡Que **te vaya** todo muy bien! - *I hope everything goes well / Good luck!*

¡Que **te mejores**! - *Get well soon!*

¡Que **sueñes** con los angelitos! - *Sweet dreams! (Literally, I hope you sleep/dream with the angels!)*

¡Que **te cunda** mucho! - *I hope you get lots of work done!*

¡Que **me dejes** en paz! - *Leave me alone/in peace!*

¡Maldita **sea**! - *Damn it!*

¡Que **se besen**! - *Kiss each other! (Shouted to the bride and groom during the banquet at Spanish weddings!)*

## And Finally, Thanks!

Huge thanks go to Katie (who many of you will know through her invaluable help with our support system), for her many hours of research for this special report.



Katie has been living and teaching in Spain for many years, and uses the subjunctive like one of the locals - it was still hard work to organize it all so well on paper though!

Thanks Katie!

**- Ben and Marina, Notes in Spanish**