

SECTION I

Subjunctives and Unreal Past

1 PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE

Present subjunctive (see Overview) is common in formal British English. In less formal English, we use a Present tense form (but not if the rest of the sentence is in the past), and we can also use *should*. (The examples below give alternative forms.)

We use Present subjunctive:

- in *that*-clauses after report verbs, adjectives or nouns to express plans, urgency, intentions or suggestions:
The police insisted the car (should) be moved immediately. The police insist the car is / be moved immediately.
- Words often followed by a Present subjunctive are:
Verbs: *insist, suggest, request, order, recommend, propose, think*
Adjectives: *advisable, essential, desirable, preferable*
Nouns: *decision, insistence, demand, requirement, condition*
- after *if*: *If he (should) be found / is found guilty, he'll be jailed for ten years.*
- after *whether*: *Whether she (should) agree / agrees or not, we're going to have to go ahead.*
- after *whatever*: *Whatever his reasons be / are, they are insufficient to excuse him.*
- The Present subjunctive is common in particular phrases:
Far be it from me... So be it. Be that as it may... Suffice it to say... Come what may... Heaven forbid! Long live the Queen.

2 PAST SUBJUNCTIVE

We use the Past subjunctive (*were* in all persons) in formal English:

If the minister were here, he would no doubt refute the allegations. (= formal)

- However, it's more common to use *was* and *were* in their usual ways:
I wish he wasn't such a bighead. (= informal)
- *Were* is more common only in the phrase *if I were you*, and for all persons in the pattern *were* + subject + infinitive:
*I wouldn't argue with her if I were you.
Were the vote to go against me, I'd resign.*

3 UNREAL PAST

We use Unreal Past (including Past Perfect) to discuss imaginary situations, to express impossible wishes, and to make proposals and polite requests. We can also use Past subjunctive:

- after *if* when we think it is unlikely or impossible that the condition will be fulfilled:
If she were to eat / ate fish more often, she might get to like it.
- to replace an *if*-clause when we imagine past, present or future events being different:
*Had he agreed, he'd have become the team captain.
Were he to agree, he'd probably become the next coach.*
- after *if only* to express regrets and frustration:
*If only he were / was more adventurous.
If only I hadn't drunk so much coffee! (= but I did)*
- after *wish* when we are wishing for the virtually impossible. For more reasonable wishes, we commonly use *would* or *could*:
I wish I weren't / wasn't having the injection tomorrow (= but I am) I wish I'd listened to you. (= but I didn't) I wish you wouldn't shout all the time.
- after *would rather* and *would sooner* to express preferences:
*Do you mean you'd sooner I weren't / wasn't here?
I'd rather you hadn't spoken so rudely to him.*
- After *as if* and *as though* we use Present and Past Perfect forms to suggest something is likely to be true. Past forms suggest it is unlikely or untrue:
The man speaks as if he has / had never heard of the place. He acts as though he owns / owned the place.
- after imperative *suppose* and *imagine* (Present tense is also possible):
Imagine he were to tell you / told you / tells you his most personal secrets. Suppose she were to have followed / had followed your advice. (= but she didn't)
- after *it's time...:*
*It's time I wasn't here. (Past subjunctive is not possible)
It's time we left. / It's time to leave.*

? check

Which sentence does not contain a Present or Past subjunctive, or Unreal Past tense?

- I propose that this street be closed to cars.
- If I was in his shoes, I'd give up.
- I'm suggesting that he reconsider my proposals.
- Imagine you are going to fall asleep.
- You talk as if you really meant it.

Practice

1 Fill each of the gaps with one suitable word. (In this exercise, words such as *didn't* and *weren't* count as one word.)

Example: Imagine we *hadn't* met all those years ago!

- I can't tell you how much I wish the architect here to see the results of his work.
- It's time you able to take full responsibility for your own actions.
- If he so self-righteous, he'd realise he was wrong.
- Imagine you completely blind: how would it affect your life?
- He looked for all the world as though he been sleeping in his clothes.
- I really wish I always in so much of a hurry these days.
- If only she so impossibly beautiful.
- I'd rather you talk so loudly, if you don't mind.

2 Rewrite each of the following sentences using the Present subjunctive.

Example: The commanding officer gave the order for them to go forward.

The commanding officer gave the order that they go forward.

- Their decision that he should be promoted is a good one.
- It is essential that we are kept fully informed of any developments.
- The UN's insistence that he accepts the terms of the cease-fire seemed inflexible.
- Whether the referee is right or not, the decision cannot be overturned.
- Whatever she decides, we cannot change our plans.
- She insisted that I didn't talk to anyone else about what I saw.

3 Add one of these common phrases to each of the sentences.

*come what may suffice it to say be that as it may God forbid
so be it far be it from me*

- If , , you were to die, who'd run the business?
- I don't want to explain. Aunt Sarah is coming to stay after all.
- If you really want to drop out of college, then
-, I'm determined to finish decorating my room this weekend.
- to tell you what to do, but you'd be mad to marry him.
- 'This medicine tastes horrible!' '....., it will cure your cough.'

4 Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible in meaning to the sentence printed before it.

Example: I'll get annoyed if you keep asking me every time you have a problem.

I'd rather you didn't keep asking me every time you have a problem.

- Should they strike the consultant off, she'll never work again.
If she be
- Our neighbour talks as if he owned half the county, doesn't he?
To hear our
- That cocky new boy talks like someone with ten years' experience.
That cocky new boy talks as
- Could you work this out without that calculator?
Suppose
- It's you not thinking carefully that caused us to have these problems.
If

5 Fill each of the numbered blanks in the passages with one word.

a

Thank you for your e-mail. I agree that it is essential you be fully (1) with the facts of the case. They are as follows. It was agreed six months ago that, come what (2), the above residence (3) decorated inside and out before the end of June. This has not happened and my solicitor has recommended I (4) with legal action forthwith.

May I suggest that you (5) me as a matter of some urgency.

b

Just (1) you (2) not eaten for a week or two and (3) absolutely starving and the only food that (4) available to you was a trapped rat that you (5) no way of cooking, would you be tempted?

c

Dear Maria,
I'm afraid I've got some bad news. I know we agreed it was advisable that Stavros (1) the summer holidays with you. Unfortunately my parents have changed their minds and are now insisting he (2) to Athens to stay with Aunt Sotiria. (3) it to say, they are not allowing any discussion! Athens it is, although he really wishes he (4) at least share the period between you and his aunt. Dimos is going to England for the summer. If only life (5) so simple for all of us.
Kind regards,

SECTION 2

Likely conditionals in the past, present and future

1 VERB FORMS IN THE IF-CLAUSE

Present or future

To talk about conditions in the present or future that we think are likely to happen, we use Present tenses or modals. This is the most common form of conditional sentence:

If he comes into the room, don't mention the party this evening. Can I leave early today? If you must.

- To talk about the future, we can also use going to in the if-clause.

Even if we're not going to go swimming, we'd still better take a towel.

- Can for ability is also common in if-clauses: *Assuming you can leave work early, we'll be able to make the 6.30 performance.*

Past

To talk about events in the past, we can use Present Perfect or Past Simple / Continuous. This suggests that either we are not sure if something happened, or we are assuming it did and want to draw a conclusion from it (see Overview for false conditionals, and see Section 4 for unlikely conditionals in the past):

If he's read that report, he'll know what all the fuss is about.

If you've been telling the truth, we need to act quickly.

Provided that she caught her flight, she'll be landing any moment now.

2 WILL/WON'T IN THE IF-CLAUSE

We sometimes use will and won't in the if-clause with the meanings of refusal (won't), polite request (will), or strong disapproval at someone's insistence on doing something (will):

If he won't go, there is nothing you can do about it.
(= refusal)

If you'll hold this end, I'll take the other one.
(= request)

If you will drive so fast, you must expect to have accidents. (= insistence)

watch out!

Apart from the meanings above, we don't normally use will in if-clauses to indicate the future:

✗ *If the weather will be fine tomorrow, we can go for a walk.*

✓ *If the weather is fine tomorrow, we can go for a walk.*

3 VERB FORMS IN THE MAIN CLAUSE

Verb forms in the main clause follow the normal rules for tense and modal use. Some of the most common are:

Present to indicate certainty of the result:

Simple will *If you mix blue and red, you get purple.*
to predict future events, make promises, etc:
Provided I see him, I'll tell him.

will have to predict what will have happened:
The train will have left if we don't get there soon.

can to express ability, permission, etc:
You can do it that way if you like, but I wouldn't recommend it.

going to for predictions or intentions:
If you do that again, I'm going to leave.

4 MIXING TIME REFERENCES

It is sometimes possible to have an if-clause referring to the present or future, and a main clause referring to the past, especially with must have and can't have for deductions:

If he's here already, he must have set off very early.

5 FALSE CONDITIONALS

False conditionals (see Overview) are very common when mixing time references:

I don't eat red meat. Well, if that's a problem we'll have to find another restaurant.

? check

Tick (✓) the sentence that is incorrect.

- We'd better get ready if he's coming round soon.
- If I have to, I'm going to tell him what I think of him.
- If the film will be uninteresting, we can leave before the end.
- If you don't understand, why didn't you ask me?
- If you'll just wait a moment, I'll see if he's in.

Practice

1 In each of the following sentences, cross out any of the underlined verb forms that we cannot use.

- a If you leave / will leave your things lying around, you shouldn't be surprised if you lose / will lose them.
- b If you wait / will wait here a moment, I'll tell Mr Brown you're here – assuming he's / will be in.
- c If you trust / will trust me, I take / will take the money to him, providing you have / will have it with you now.
- d If the unit fits / will fit in the corner there, I think it is / will be the best place, unless you can / will think of anywhere else.
- e If you help / will help me work out whether we need to make another order at the moment, I spend / will spend some time tomorrow helping you with your statistics, if you like / will like.

2 Either two or all three of the main clauses (a–c) can complete the sentences (1–6). Put a cross (X) next to those that cannot.

- 1 Do that again and
 - a I'm leaving.
 - b I can't help you.
 - c you would be sorry.
- 2 Assuming you're going to see him,
 - a tell him about the meeting.
 - b will you give him a message from me?
 - c he can't be a complete recluse.
- 3 If the boss is feeling relaxed,
 - a we all feel the same way.
 - b the inspection will go all right.
 - c it would be a bad sign.
- 4 If Paul's been to Australia,
 - a he'll probably have acquired an accent.
 - b I think you should go there.
 - c he would certainly go to New Zealand.
- 5 If you're still not sure,
 - a you hadn't been following.
 - b you can't have been concentrating.
 - c it's clear you weren't listening.
- 6 If you will gossip about other people,
 - a you've got to expect people to gossip about you.
 - b people are gossiping about you.
 - c you can't expect others not to gossip about you.

3 Fill each of the numbered blanks in the passage with one word.

'A cat? ... All right,' I said, 'on (1) that you look after it, (2) that you feed it and as (3) as you don't expect me to clear up after it.' If (4) I had been more firm! The animal is never fed (5) I do it; (6) for me, it would have starved to death months ago. (7) I know that the children's interest in the beast would wane as soon as it arrived, I would have answered differently. The poor thing is ignored by them (8) if it springs into their laps. (9) I to kidnap the thing, I don't think they would notice. Should they (10) ask for a dog, I think I've got my answer ready.

4 Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible in meaning to the sentence printed before it.

Example: Having been to London, you should be able to tell us what it's like.

If you've been to London, you should be able to tell us what it's like.

- a Assuming everything goes according to plan, we'll be with you by six o'clock. Unless
- b The Finn is almost certain to win, unless his engine blows out during the race. The only way
- c I'll lend you my car for your holiday on condition you get it serviced afterwards. If you'll pay for
- d You giving him your number suggests you did want to see him again. Why did you
- e You'll find your dinner in the oven. If you
- f There's clearly nothing I can do to stop you leaving. If you're determined
- g I think I'll go swimming after school, despite the likelihood of rain at that time. Even if



SECTION 3

Unlikely conditionals in the present and future

1 VERB FORMS IN THE IF-CLAUSE

Present

When we talk about unlikely or impossible situations in the present, we use Past subjunctive or Unreal Past (see Sections 1.2 and 1.3) in the *if*-clause to indicate that the opposite is true:

- If I **didn't** know you so well, I'd say you were lying.*
(= but I do know you well)
- If only he **weren't** so stubborn, he'd agree with us.*
(= but he is stubborn)

Future

When talking about the future, we use an Unreal Past tense in the *if*-clause to indicate that we are talking hypothetically and think the condition is unlikely to be fulfilled:

- If you **told** him, he'd never believe you.* (= I don't think you will tell him)
- Suppose your car **broke** down, what would you do?*

2 VERB FORMS IN THE MAIN CLAUSE

We commonly use *would* and *could* in the main clause when there is an Unreal Past or Past subjunctive in the *if*-clause:

- If I **weren't** so busy, I'd take a long holiday.*
- If you **lent** me £10, I **could** buy it today.*

- We also use *might*:
*She **might** stay longer if you asked her nicely.*

3 WOULD IN IF-CLAUSES

We use *would* and *wouldn't* in *if*-clauses for polite requests and strong wishes that someone would do something:

- If you **would** be kind enough to lend me a hand, we could finish this very quickly.* *If you **would** just calm down for a moment, you'd see what I'm talking about.*

watch out!

We don't use *would* in *if*-clauses to indicate simple future:

- ✗ *I think you'd be mad if you **would** give up your job.*
- ✓ *I think you'd be mad if you **gave** up your job.*

4 SHOULD IN IF-CLAUSES

We can use *should* in *if*-clauses instead of a Present or Unreal Past. It suggests that the condition is possible but unlikely. We use *will* or *would* or other modals in the main clause:

*If they **should** agree the contract, we'd have to work twice as hard.*

- This structure is formal and roughly equivalent to the phrase *by any chance*:
*If **by any chance** they do turn up, we'd better tell them what happened.*
- In more formal contexts we can also omit *if* or other conditional words and start the sentence with *Should*:
***Should** you change your mind, please let me know.*

5 IF ... ARE TO/WERE TO

We use *be to* in a fairly formal way to express conditions. It suggests that the speaker has no influence over whether the condition will be fulfilled or not. *Are to*, *am to*, and *is to* suggest the condition may be fulfilled. *Were to* (or, informally, *was to*) emphasises that the condition is very unlikely:

- If we **are to** get rid of him, who will tell him?*
*Supposing you **were to** win the lottery, how would you spend the money?*

- We can omit *if* or other conditional words and start the sentence with *Were*. This is not possible with *are*:
***Were** we to take on more staff, how could we afford to pay them?*

? check

Which of the following sentences refer to conditions in the present (P), and which to the future (F)?

	present	future
a If you asked him nicely, he'd let you have the day off.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b If you were a bit more considerate, you'd offer me a seat.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c Should you change your job, what would you do?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d If I were to say what I really think, I'd upset a lot of people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e If I thought he was dishonest, I wouldn't have offered him the job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Practice

1 Fill each of the numbered blanks with one suitable word.

In accordance with your recent request, we are pleased to supply the following reference. Miss Baiocci (1), I am sure, be a real asset to your organisation, knowing as she does a great deal about the way a company such as yours operates. There are very few duties here that I could (2) confidently entrust her with, and if she were (3) join you, you (4) soon come to (5) her organisational and interpersonal skills. If it (6) not clear that she is determined to move away from this area, we would (7) everything we (8) to keep her here. Assuming we (9) to lose her, I (10) be happy to know that she (11) being taken on by a company with a reputation such as you enjoy. (12) any further information be required, please do not hesitate to contact me.

2 Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible in meaning to the sentence printed before it.

Example: I don't know if we're late because I don't have a watch.

If I had a watch, I'd know whether we were late.

- a Nico's not very good at maths so he can't become an accountant.
Were
- b Should anything happen to make you change your mind, let me know.
If by
- c Supposing the world was going to end tomorrow, what would you do tonight?
Were
- d Kindly calm down so I can explain what I mean.
If you would
- e I can't go and work in France because I can't speak French very well.
If
- f I think you should complain to the manager.
If
- g Supposing we do go ahead with the building, it can't be before June.
If we are
- h I think not having school on Mondays and having shorter holidays sounds quite a good idea.
I think it might be quite nice if



3 Fill each of the blanks with a suitable word or phrase.

- a If this scheme ground, everyone will have to pull their weight.
- b Your brakes are making an odd noise; I to if I were you.
- c Supposing someone told you that you weren't fit to do your job, react?
- d Considering his age and the seriousness of the operation, it would be a survived it.
- e Should you ever of a helping hand, remember where I am.
- f If that wisdom tooth is giving you trouble, I out.
- g If by any into Mrs Hebden while you're out, could you give her this note?
- h If we Friday deadline, some overtime may be necessary.

4 Match a sentence from the left (1-8) with a response on the right (a-h).

Examples: 9 + j 10 + i

- | | |
|--|---|
| 9 Would it be all right if we sat here? | i Thank you. |
| 10 Should you need me, I'll be next door. | j Yes, please do. |
| 1 Would you mind if I asked them along? | a Well, actually, I'd rather we didn't. |
| 2 I'm sorry I couldn't make it. | b I wish you had. |
| 3 Do you think it might be best if I said yes? | c If only I had! |
| 4 Could you let me know if you change your mind? | d I suppose it is. |
| 5 You'd feel better if you got some fresh air. | e I'm sure you would. |
| 6 Why didn't you tell me? | f Far be it from me to discourage you. |
| 7 Don't you think it's time we were leaving? | g Of course I will. |
| 8 I would if I could, you know. | h Perhaps I would. |

SECTION 4

Past conditionals

1 VERB FORMS IN THE IF-CLAUSE

We use Unreal Past Perfect in the *if*-clause to indicate that we know what happened but are speculating about what would have happened if the opposite had been true. This is sometimes called the 'Third' conditional:

If she'd known my number, she would have phoned.
(= but she didn't know it)

If I hadn't been standing outside the supermarket, we might never have met.

- We can omit *if* and start with *Had*:

Had I believed her for one moment, I wouldn't have refused to help.

- Occasionally, something that is generally true – although we wish it wasn't – can have results in the past:

If I wasn't / weren't such an idiot, I wouldn't have done that.

If it hadn't been for...

This phrase means 'without her, your, etc. help, interference, etc.'. We can use the phrase *If it weren't / wasn't for...* to refer to the present, though if the time reference is clear, it can occasionally refer to the past:

If it wasn't for the parking problem, I'd drive to work.

If it hadn't been for you, we'd never have got there on time.

Had it not been for Wagner, modern classical music would sound very different.

If it wasn't for / hadn't been for those delays on the motorway we'd never have missed the wedding.

Were

In formal English we can use conditional structures beginning with *Were* + Perfect infinitive:

Were you to have stopped and considered, you'd have seen the error of your ways.

2 VERB FORMS IN THE MAIN CLAUSE

- For Past conditionals that have results in the past, we use modal Perfects (*would / could / might have*, etc.):

Had you told me earlier, I could have done something about it.

- For Past conditionals that have results in the present or future, we use mainly *would*, *could* or *might*:

If you'd listened more carefully to his directions, you wouldn't be lost now.

If only I'd entered politics earlier, I could be Prime Minister now.

- With false conditionals in the past, we use Past tenses in the main clause. We don't use Unreal Past Perfect in the *if*-clause:

If you were in the area, why didn't you come and visit?

3 WOULD HAVE ... WOULD HAVE

The use of *would have* in both *if*-clause and main clause is becoming very common in spoken and even written English. It's still considered incorrect by some people:

If I'd have known how expensive it was, I wouldn't have gone.

- It's sometimes difficult to hear Past conditionals spoken at speed because of short forms:

I'd've come at once if only you'd've rung me.

4 PAST CONDITIONALS WITHOUT CONDITIONAL WORDS

We often use a Past conditional structure without using a conventional 'conditional word' like *if* or *unless*:

But for your help, we'd never have managed.

We'd have been completely lost without you.

You should have come – you'd have loved it.

The film would have been just as effective in black and white.

? check

Tick (✓) the sentence that has both an *if*-clause and a main clause which refer to the past.

- If I wasn't so tired all the time, I wouldn't have made such an elementary mistake.
- If you had driven faster, we'd be there by now.
- I'd have rung you if I'd known you were at home.
- I wouldn't be going to London if you hadn't told me about the exhibition.
- If you were right about the weather, we're going to get wet.

Practice

1 For each of the following sentences, say whether a or b, or both, can complete the sentence. Tick (✓) any that we can use, put a cross (X) for any that we cannot use.

Example: If President Kennedy hadn't been assassinated in 1963

a the Cold War might have ended sooner. ✓

b America will be very different. X

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 If it hadn't been for the awful weather, | a we'd have spent more time sailing. |
| | b we would go there again. |
| 2 If I'd realised you weren't coming, | a I wouldn't be so angry. |
| | b I can do something. |
| 3 If he had told you the truth, | a you shouldn't have got angry with him. |
| | b you wouldn't be in this predicament. |
| 4 If you liked Greece, | a you should have come with us to Naxos. |
| | b why didn't you come with us to Naxos? |
| 5 Had they explained their reasons, | a they're stupid. |
| | b you'd understand. |

2 Fill each of the blanks with a suitable word or phrase.

- a If for the postal strike, the cheque would have arrived today.
- b In those days you would have been breaking ID card on you at all times.
- c If you had been in my shoes, done?
- d Had we misinformed about the bus times, we wouldn't have been late.
- e In retrospect you might advised to get a lawyer.
- f If Ioannis stayed that long at the party, been having a good time.
- g But fire alarm alerting us, the building would have gone up in flames.

3 Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible in meaning to the sentence printed before it.

Example: The young lad wasn't looking where he was going and tripped over that wire.

If the young lad had been looking where he was going, he would not have tripped over the wire.

- a The only thing that made the show worth watching was the visual effects.
If it
- b I would never have got so far if my parents hadn't encouraged me.
Had it
- c You're lying in this hospital bed because you forgot the most basic rule of Safety First.
If you
- d Taking that job would have meant her working from eight till eight every day.
She
- e But for the goalkeeper's brilliance, we could have lost by many more.
If the

f Turning left at the lights would have got you here ten minutes earlier.

Were you

g The only reason the child hasn't been prosecuted is the fact that he's only twelve.

Were it

h The police showed great restraint and avoided a potentially very ugly incident.

There could

4 Write sentences that are a part of a chain, as in the examples.

Examples: I cheated from him in the entry test. We finished up in the same class.

If I hadn't cheated from him in the entry test, we wouldn't have finished up in the same class.

We used to do our homework together.

If we hadn't finished up in the same class, we wouldn't have done our homework together.

- a We started to find out quite a lot about each other. (Begin: *If we ... homework together, ...*)
- b We discovered that we had a lot in common.
- c He invited me to go to the National Gallery.
- d We saw the most incredible paintings.
- e I'm a true art-lover now.
- f I went to the National Gallery again yesterday.
- g I met another art-lover there.
- h I'm going out to dinner tonight.
- i I didn't phone you.
- j You haven't warned me yet about going out with art-lovers.