Using the Subjunctive

The subjunctive is used if:

- ❑ The sentence contains two different clauses with two different subjects.
- ❑ The clauses are joined by *que* (that), which is followed by the subjunctive.
- ❑ The main clause shows wishing, need, emotion, or doubt, among other things.

A *clause* is a group of words (containing a subject and a verb) that is part of a sentence. An independent, or main, clause can stand by itself as a simple sentence. A dependent, or subordinate, clause cannot stand by itself.

The Subjunctive after Expressions of Wishing, Emotion, Need, and Doubt (Impersonal expressions)

The subjunctive is used after impersonal expressions that show wishing, emotion, need, and doubt. Impersonal expressions begin with *es* (it is), followed by an adjective, and then *que* (to express "that" before the dependent clause):

Expression	Spanish
it is absurd that	es absurdo que
it is amazing that	es asombroso que
it is amusing that	es divertido que
it is bad that	es malo que
it is better that	es mejor que
it is curious that	es curioso que
it is doubtful that	es dudoso que
it is essential that	es esencial que
it is fair that	es justo que
it is imperative that	es imperativo que
it is important that	es importante que
it is impossible that	es imposible que
it is improbable that	es improbable que
it is incredible that	es increíble que
it is indispensable that	es indispensable que
it is necessary that	es necesario que
it is possible that	es posible que
it is preferable that	es preferible que
it is probable that	es probable que
it is regrettable that	es lamentable que
it is unfair that	es injusto que
it is urgent that	es urgente que
it is useful that	es útil que

When using the subjunctive in English, people often omit the word "that." In Spanish, however, *que* must always be used to join the two clauses:

Es importante que ellos lleguen a tiempo.	It is important (that) they arrive on time.
Es urgente que Ud. me llame.	It is urgent (that) you call me.

Certain impersonal expressions show certainty and, therefore, require the indicative:

English	Spanish
it is certain, it is sure	es cierto
it is clear	es claro
it is evident	es evidente
it is exact	es exacto
it is sure	es seguro
it is true	es verdad

Es claro que él es muy inteligente.	It is clear that he is very inteligent.
Es cierto que ellas vendrán.	It is certain that they will come.

In the negative, however, these expressions show doubt or denial and, thus, require the subjunctive:

No es claro que él sea muy inteligente.	It is not clear that he is very intelligent.
No es cierto que ellas vengan.	It is uncertain that they will come.

Example Problems

Describe a business trip. Combine the clauses by using the subjunctive, if necessary.

> Example: es urgente/nosotros/encontrar al presidente de la sociedad
> Es urgente que nosotros encontremos al presidente de la sociedad.

1. es probable/yo/ir a la conferencia

   Answer: Es probable que yo vaya a la conferencia.

   Add *que* after *es probable,* which requires the subjunctive because it shows doubt. *Ir* has an irregular subjunctive stem (*vay-*), which must be memorized. Add *-a* as the subjunctive ending for *yo.*

2. es seguro/Uds./querer asistir a las reuniones

   Answer: Es seguro que Uds. quieren asistir a las reuniones.

   Add *que* after *es seguro,* which requires the indicative because it shows certainty. *Querer* has an internal stem change in the present tense: *-i* changes to *-ie* in all forms but *nosotros* and *vosotros.* Drop the *-er* infinitive ending and add *-en* for *Uds.*

The Subjunctive after Verbs of Wishing, Emotion, Need, and Doubt

The subjunctive is used in the dependent clause introduced by *que* when the main clause expresses not only wishing, emotion, need, and doubt, but also other related activities, such as advice, command, demand, desire, hope, permission, preference, prohibition, request, suggestion, and wanting, as shown below:

Spanish	English
aconsejar	to advise
alegrarse (de)	to be glad, to be happy
desear	to desire, to wish, to want
dudar	to doubt
enfadarse	to become angry
enojarse	to become angry
esperar	to hope
exigir	to require, to demand
insistir	to insist
lamentar	to regret
mandar	to command, to order
necesitar	to need
negar	to deny
ordenar	to order
pedir	to ask for, to request
permitir	to permit
preferir	to prefer
prohibir	to forbid
querer	to wish, to want
recomendar	to recommend
rogar	to beg, to request
sorprenderse de	to be surprised
sugerir	to suggest
temer	to fear
tener miedo de	to fear

Here are a couple of examples in sentences:

Ella quiere que yo vaya al supermercado.	She wants me to go to the supermarket.
Mi madre insiste en que yo haga mi tarea ahora.	My mother insists that I do my homework now.

Example Problems

Using the subjunctive, express how people feel in the following situations, using the appropriate verb from the box below.

alegrarse de	lamentar	sorprenderse de	temer

Example: Yo ganaré mucho dinero trabajando. Mi familia . . .
Mi familia se alegra de que yo gane mucho dinero trabajando.

1. Un huracán se formará mañana. Nosotros . . .

   Answer: Nosotros tememos que un huracán se forme mañana.

   Add *temer* after the subject to express "we fear that the hurricane will break out tomorrow." To conjugate the regular *-er* verb *temer,* drop the *-er* ending and add *-emos* for the subject, *nosotros*. Add *que* to join the two clauses. To conjugate regular *-ar* verbs in the present subjunctive, drop the *-ar* ending and add *-e* as the ending for *un huracán (él)*.

2. El número de robos disminuye. La policía . . .

   Answer: La policía se sorprende de que el número de robos disminuya.

   Add *sorprenderse de* after the subject to express "the police are surprised that the number of robberies has diminished." To conjugate the regular *-er* verb *sorprenderse,* drop the *-er* ending and add *-e* for the subject, *la policía (ellas)*. The *-se* ending indicates that the verb *sorprenderse* is reflexive. Place the reflexive pronoun *se,* which agrees with the subject, before the conjugated verb. Add *que* to join the two clauses. Because *disminuir* is a stem-changing verb, a *y* is inserted after the *u* in all forms of the present subjunctive for verbs ending in *-uir*. Add *-a* as the subjunctive ending for *el número (él)*.