

## Reading Latin Subjunctives through section 4G.

I do not review forms of the subjunctive here, just their uses. Do learn the forms.

When asked about a subjunctive, you will generally need to think about both the **mood** (i.e., why is the subjunctive used here rather than the indicative) and the **tense** (why this tense of the subjunctive rather than another).

### 1. *Cum* clauses (Cf. GVE 124, 141)

*Cum* as a preposition takes the ablative and means "with." But as a conjunction it can mean "when", "since", or "although", and usually takes a subjunctive verb.

With past tenses in the main clause:

- Pluperfect subjunctive for prior action: *Cum Verres aduenisset, Sextium uidit.* When Verres had arrived (i.e., after he had arrived), he saw Sextius.
- Imperfect subjunctive for simultaneous action: *Cum Verres adueniret, Sextium uidit.* When Verres was arriving (i.e., as he arrived), he saw Sextius.

With present or future tenses in the main clause:<sup>1</sup>

- Present subjunctive for simultaneous action: *Cum Verres adueniat, Sextium uidit.* When Verres arrives (i.e., as he arrives) he sees Sextius.
- [Perfect subjunctive for prior action (we haven't seen this yet). *Cum Verres aduenerit, Sextium uidit.* When Verres has arrived (i.e., after he arrived), he sees Sextius.]

To make it clear that you want the subordinate clause to be concessive ("although"), you may put a *tamen* ("nevertheless") in the main clause, or use *quamuis* instead of *cum*.

### 2. Indirect commands + *ut/ne* (Cf. GVE 134)

Many Latin verbs meaning *command*, *urge*, *beg* and the like (see the list on GVE page 280) take *ut/ne* + subjunctive. With present and future tense main verbs, use the present subjunctive (**primary sequence**); with past tenses use the imperfect (**secondary sequence**).

### 3. *Accidit* + *ut/ut non*<sup>2</sup> (Cf. GVE 135)

"It so happens that/that not." Present subjunctive with a present or future main verb (primary sequence), imperfect with past tenses (secondary sequence).

### 4. *Perfacio* + *ut/ne*<sup>3</sup> (Cf. GVE 135)

"I bring it about that/that not." Present subjunctive with a present or future main verb (primary sequence), imperfect with past tenses (secondary sequence).

<sup>1</sup> When *cum* is used in a **purely temporal sense** with a main clause verb in the present or future, we use the indicative instead of a subjunctive. "Purely temporal" means that the clause simply marks the time, rather than giving the circumstances. "When day breaks, I'm still sound asleep" would use the indicative. But "when it rains, I take an umbrella" would be a subjunctive, as the rain explains why you take the umbrella. Cf. GVE 141, though they exaggerate somewhat by saying *cum* + present subjunctive never means "when".

<sup>2</sup> A technical name for such clauses, if you must: consecutive noun clause. "Consecutive" means that the clause refers to what follows, the result; "noun" because the clause plays the role of a substantive, here as the subject of the verb. *accidit ut pluvet*: "It happens that it rains" // "rain happens". For other result clauses, cf. GVE 144.

<sup>3</sup> "Final noun clauses". "Final" because they refer to the end or purpose (the Latin *finis*; cf. GVE 145). "Noun clauses" because they play the role of a substantive, here as the object of the verb. *Perfacio staturam* = I make a statue. *Perfacio ut Verres abeat*: "I bring it about that Verres leaves" // "I bring about Verres' departure". The fact that these clauses work differently in the negative (*ne* in place of *ut non*) shows that they are different from those with *accidit ut* in origin and so are better considered separately.

## 5. Conditions (cf. GVE 139)

**Future less vivid.** Present **subjunctive** in both clauses: *si Lilybaeum advenias, Verrem caedas*. "If you were to go to Lilybaeum, you'd beat Verres." You could go to Lilybaeum, though it doesn't seem particularly likely. Why less vivid? Glad you asked:

**Future more vivid.** Future **indicative** in both clauses. *si Lilybaeum advenies, Verrem caedes*. "If you go to Lilybaeum (as you may well do), you will beat Verres." Note that Latin uses the future in the if clause, where English uses the present.

**Present contrary to fact.** Imperfect subjunctive<sup>4</sup> in both clauses. *si Lilybaeum advenires, Verrem caederes*. "If you were going to Lilybaeum, you'd beat Verres." But you're not.

## 6. Relative clauses (cf. GVE 140)

Most relative clauses (*qui/quae/quod* etc.) use the indicative. The relative clause serves to identify (i.e., *indicate*) the person or thing referred to. When a speaker uses the subjunctive, something slightly different is going on.

*Generic relative clauses.* You're identifying the sort of people involved, not particular individuals.

**Indicative:** *Imperator est vir qui pugnat*. "The general is the man who is fighting." Perhaps you've been asked which man is the general.

**Subjunctive:** *Imperator est vir qui pugnet*. "The general is a man (the sort of man) who fights." You're describing his character, not just a fact about him. Perhaps he isn't fighting just now, but he's a real fighter.

*Causal relative clauses.* These are really just extensions of the generic sense. Here the sort of person the antecedent is explains what's going on in the main clause. *Quippe* can "signpost" this usage.

*Gaius, <quipped> qui pugnet, imperator factus est*. "Gaius, <in as much as he's> the sort of man who fights, was made general." That is, "Gaius was made general because he's a fighter."

*Concessive relative clauses.* These are similar to causal ones—though the meaning is opposite. Compare how *cum* can mean "since" or "although". *Tamen* may signpost.

*Gaius qui pugnet imperator tamen non factus est*. "Gaius, although he's a fighter, was not made general."

You cannot bring out the force of the subjunctive in causal or concessive relative clauses with an English relative clause, so are better off using a different sort of clause (with "since" or "although").

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<sup>4</sup> Jones and Sidwell point out, truthfully but unhelpfully, that the imperfect subjunctive is sometimes used for things not true in the past. The pluperfect subjunctive is far more common, in what is called a *past contrary to fact*. But they haven't introduced that construction yet.

## 7. Subjunctive in subordinate clauses in indirect speech (cf. GVE 142)

In indirect speech, main clauses take the accusative and infinitive. All subordinate clauses, whether they were indicative or subjunctive to start with, go into the subjunctive. The chart on page 294 tells you which tense to use.

### Overview of subjunctive tenses.

The following chart helps with many uses of the subjunctive. But keep in mind that indirect commands and subjunctives with *perfacio* or *accidit* will never—or almost never—refer to prior action. You can't really order someone today to have done something yesterday. With those clauses then (numbers 2, 3, and 4 above) saying "sequence of tenses" is enough to explain the tense of the subjunctive, as only the present or imperfect subjunctive (the column on the far right below) are used.

Main verb	Prior action	Simultaneous or subsequent action
Present or future (= Primary sequence)	[perfect subjunctive: not yet covered]	Present subjunctive
Past <sup>5</sup> (= Secondary sequence)	Pluperfect action	Imperfect subjunctive

### So what does the subjunctive mean? (cf. GVE 138; 152 & 153 in section 5)

The indicative is used when the speaker simply notes something as a matter of fact. The subjunctive in main clauses (which we've not covered yet) marks something as *willed*, *wished*, or *opined* by the speaker. In these main clauses we will indeed use English modals like *may*, *might*, and *should* to render the subjunctive.

We can derive the origin of most usages of the subjunctive in subordinate clauses from these independent usages, but in many cases the subjunctive has come to be used simply to mark the clauses as subordinate. Such subjunctives are routinely used of **facts** (not only of what some speaker wants to happen or suspects may be the case). In such cases it is usually **incorrect** to translate the subjunctive by *may*, *might*, *should*, and the like.

### When subjunctives really matter

In most subordinate clauses, the subjunctive mood adds nothing essential to the meaning. As long as you know what sort of clause you've got, the subjunctive doesn't tell you anything you didn't already know, and if you try to translate the subjunctive "literally" with *may*, *might* and the like, you'll actually screw things up. Even in such clauses, however, the **tense** of the subjunctive might matter. It is **in relative clauses and conditions that it is crucial** that you note the presence of the subjunctive mood. Conditions can refer to possible or impossible events, depending on the mood of the verbs. Relative clauses may simply identify someone, or explain why she's doing what she's doing.

### A bottom line

*You can't translate a Latin subjunctive unless you know what sort of clause it's in.*

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<sup>5</sup> The perfect indicative counts as past when it is to be translated as a simple past ("I blanked"). When translated as a present perfect ("I have blanked"), it counts as present tense and hence takes primary sequence. *Romam uēni ut linguae Latinae studerem.* "I went to Rome to study Latin." *Romam uēni ut linguae Latinae studeam.* "I've come to Rome to study Latin."