

THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD: SUMMARY OF FORMS AND CLAUSE TYPES

R. A. LaFleur
(rev. May 2, 2022)

I. CONCEPT OF THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD (Definition)

You will recall from Wheelock Ch. 1 that “mood” (from Lat. **modus**) is the “manner” of expressing a verbal action or state of being. In Ch. 1 we encountered verbs in two of the three Latin moods, the indicative and the imperative. As you know, an imperative (from **imper re**, *to command*) emphatically commands someone to undertake an action that is not yet going on, while indicatives (from **indic re**, *to point out*) “indicate” real actions, i.e., actions that have in fact occurred (or have definitely not occurred) in the past, that are occurring (or are definitely not occurring) in the present, or that fairly definitely will (or will not) occur in the future.

In contrast to the indicative, the mood of actuality and factuality, the subjunctive is in general (though not always) the mood of potential, tentative, hypothetical, ideal, or even unreal action. An example in English is, “If the other student were here, he would be taking notes”; in this conditional sentence, which imagines actions that are contrary to the actual facts, English employs the auxiliaries “were” and “would” to indicate that the action described is only ideal. Among the other auxiliaries used in English to describe potential or hypothetical actions are “may,” “might,” “should,” “would,” “may have,” “would have,” etc.

Latin employs the subjunctive much more frequently than English, in a wide variety of clause types, and it uses special subjunctive verb forms rather than auxiliaries. There are two tasks involved in mastering the subjunctive: first, learning the new forms, which is a relatively simple matter; second, learning to recognize and translate the various subjunctive clause types, which is also quite easily done, if your approach is systematic.

II. SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES (Formation/Recognition)

There are only four tenses in the subjunctive mood. The present subjunctive is introduced in Ch. 28 and has rules for formation that vary slightly for each of the four conjugations; rules for forming the imperfect (Ch. 29), perfect, and pluperfect (Ch. 30) are the same for all four conjugations.

PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE: resembles present indicative, but with the vowel changes signalled in the mnemonic WE FEAR A LIAR and the personal endings **-m**, **-s**, **-t**, etc.; sometimes translated with the auxiliary “may.”

IMPERFECT SUBJUNCTIVE: = 2nd principal part (present active infinitive), with the final **-e** lengthened, plus personal endings **-m, -s, -t**, etc.; sometimes translated with “might.”

PERFECT SUBJUNCTIVE: ACTIVE = the perfect active stem (from 3rd principal part) + **-erim, -er s**, etc. (resembles future perfect indicative except **-erim** not **-er** and **- -** long in **-er s, -er mus, -er tis**; sometimes translated with “may have.” PASSIVE = perfect passive participle (4th principal part) + **sim, s s**, etc. (i.e., subjunctive equivalent of **sum**); sometimes translated with “may have been.”

PLUPERFECT SUBJUNCTIVE: ACTIVE = perfect active infinitive (from 3rd principal part) + **-m, -s, -t**, etc.; sometimes translated with “might have.” PASSIVE = perfect passive participle (4th principal part) + **essem, ess s**, etc. (i.e., subjunctive equivalent of **eram**); sometimes translated with “might have been.”

SYNOPSIS

The following synopsis provides a useful overview of the entire Latin verb system, including all four subjunctive mood tenses:

Indicative Mood

	Pres.	Fut.	Impf.	Perf.	Fut.Perf.	Plupf.
Act.	d cit	d cet	d c bat	d xit	d xerit	d x e r a t
Pass.	d citur	d c tur	d c b tur	ductus est	ductus erit	ductus erat

Subjunctive Mood

	Pres.	Fut.	Impf.	Perf.	Fut.Perf.	Plupf.
Act.	d cat	----	d ceret	d xerit	----	d xisset
Pass.	d c tur	----	d cer tur	ductus sit	----	ductus esset

III. SUBJUNCTIVE CLAUSE TYPES

In Wheelock you are introduced to a series of subjunctive clause types: jussive and purpose clauses (Ch. 28), result clauses (29), indirect questions (30), **cum** clauses (31), proviso clauses (32), conditions (33, with three distinct subjunctive types), jussive noun clauses (36), relative clauses of characteristic (38), and fear clauses (40). You should systematically learn three details for each: (1) its **definition**, (2) how to **recognize** it in a Latin sentence, and (3) how to **translate** it into English.

1. JUSSIVE SUBJUNCTIVES (Wheelock Ch. 28)

Definition: an independent (main) clause expressing a command or exhortation (the only use of the subjunctive in a main clause formally introduced in Wheelock). E.g., “Let us study this lesson carefully.”

Recognition: easily recognized, since the sentence's main verb (and often its only verb) is subjunctive; negatives are introduced by **n** .

Translation: *let* (sometimes *may* or *should*) is the English auxiliary used in translation, followed by the subject noun or pronoun (in the objective case, i.e., *me, us, him, her, it, them*). E.g.,

C git m nunc d h c r , et tum n n err b .

Let me now think about this matter, and then I will not make a mistake.

Discipulus discat aut disc dat.

Let the student either learn or leave.

Disc mus magn cum d lect ti ne linguam Lat nam.

Let us learn the Latin language with great delight.

N id faci mus.

Let us not do this.

2. PURPOSE CLAUSES (Wheelock Ch. 28)

Definition: a subordinate clause explaining the purpose of the action in the main clause, i.e., answering the question “why?” E.g., “we study Latin *so that we may learn more about ancient Rome*” or “we study Latin *to improve our English*.”

Recognition: introduced by **ut** if purpose is stated positively, by **n** if negative, with a subjunctive verb at the end, and answering the question “why?”

Translation: there are often several options, including translating **ut** + the subjunctive together as an infinitive; other more formal options include using the auxiliary “may” for the present subjunctive and “might” for the imperfect. E.g.:

Hoc dicit ut eis iuvet.

*He says this to help them.
in order to help them.
that he may help them.
so that he may help them.
in order that he may help them.*

The first two translation options given above are more colloquial, the others more formal.

Hoc dixit ut eis iuvaret.

*He said this to help them.
in order to help them.
that he might help them.
so that he might help them.
in order that he might help them.*

3. RESULT CLAUSES (Wheelock Ch. 29)

Definition: a subordinate clause explaining the result of the action in the main clause, i.e., answering the question “what is (was) the *outcome*?” E.g., “It is raining so hard *that the streets are flooding*” and “Vicky studied Latin so diligently *that she knew it like a Roman.*”

Recognition: introduced by **ut** and concludes with a subjunctive verb; if negative, contains some negative word (**non, numquam**, etc.); and answers the question “what is (was) the *outcome*?” Main clause usually contains a signal word indicating degree (**tam, tantus, ita, sic**). Easily distinguished from a purpose clause by sense and context, by the signal word in the main clause, and, if negative, by the presence of some negative word within the clause (vs. a negative purpose clause, which is introduced by **ne**).

Translation: translate **ut** as “that” and translate the subjunctive *as an indicative*, i.e., without an auxiliary (no “may” or “might”). E.g.:

Tam multum studet ut Latine bene discat.

He studies so much that he learns (is learning) Latin well.

Tam multum studuit ut Latine bene disceret.

He studied so much that he learned Latin well.

4. INDIRECT QUESTIONS (Wheelock Ch. 30)

Definition: a subordinate clause which reports some question indirectly, i.e., not via a direct quotation. E.g., “They asked what Gaius was doing” vs. “They asked, ‘What is Gaius doing?’”

(comparable in conception to an indirect statement, which reports indirectly, not a question, but some affirmative statement and uses an infinitive with accusative subject, not a subjunctive).

Recognition: introduced by an interrogative word (**quis, quid, c r, ubi, utrum...an** [*whether...or*], **-ne** [attached to the clause's first word, = *whether*]) and ends with a subjunctive; the verb in the main clause is ordinarily a verb of speech, mental activity, or sense perception (the same verbs that introduce indirect statements, listed in Ch. 25)

Translation: translate the subjunctive as an indicative (as with result clauses, no “may” or “might”). Compare the following direct and indirect questions:

Quid Gaius facit?	<i>What is Gaius doing?</i>
Rogant quid Gaius faciat.	<i>They ask what Gaius is doing (sometimes may do).</i>
Rog v runt quid Gaius faceret.	<i>They asked what Gaius was doing (sometimes might/would do).</i>
Quid Gaius f cit?	<i>What did Gaius do?</i>
Rogant quid Gaius f cerit.	<i>They ask what Gaius did.</i>
Rog v runt quid Gaius f cisset.	<i>They asked what Gaius had done.</i>
Quid Gaius faciet?	<i>What will Gaius do?</i>
Rogant quid Gaius fact rus sit.	<i>They ask what Gaius will do (is about to do).</i>
Rog v runt quid Gaius fact rus esset.	<i>They asked what Gaius would do (was about to do).</i>

FUTURE ACTIVE PERIPHRASTIC: **Fact rus sit/esset** in the last two examples is the “future active periphrastic,” occasionally employed to indicate future time in certain types of clauses, including indirect questions (Wheelock, p. 247-48).

SEQUENCE OF TENSES: The above examples clearly indicate the rule for sequence of tenses, i.e., a primary tense main verb (present or future) is followed by a primary tense subjunctive (present = time same or later than main verb, perfect = time before main verb), a secondary (historical) tense main verb (any past tense) is followed by a secondary tense subjunctive (imperfect = time same or later than main verb, pluperfect = time before main verb); see Wheelock pp. 247-48, where a few exceptions are briefly discussed.

5-7. *Cum* CLAUSES (Wheelock Ch. 31)

Definition: a subordinate clause introduced by **cum** meaning when/since/although and describing an action somehow associated with the action in the main clause. **FOUR TYPES:** **TEMPORAL/cum** = “when” = an action occurring at the same exact time as the action in the main

clause; CIRCUMSTANTIAL/**cum** = “when” = some general circumstances under which action in main clause occurred; CAUSAL/**cum** = “since” = a cause/reason for action in main clause; ADVERSATIVE/**cum** = “although” = an action contrary to what might be expected, in view of the action in the main clause. E.g., When he saw her that day, he was happy (temporal); when he studies, he does well (circumstantial); since he studied hard, he did well (causal); although he studied hard, nevertheless he did not do well (adversative).

Recognition: introduced by **cum** (WITHOUT an ablative noun following—in which case **cum** would be functioning as a preposition = “with”), with a verb—either subjunctive or indicative—at the end, and usually set off from the main clause by comma(s); of the four types, the TEMPORAL is recognized by its INDICATIVE verb and the ADVERSATIVE is usually recognized by the presence of **tamen** (“nevertheless”) in the main clause; the other two types are recognized by context.

Translation: translate the verb in ALL FOUR TYPES as an INDICATIVE (i.e., with NO AUXILIARY such as “may” or “might”); translate **cum** as: “when,” if the verb is indicative; “although,” if **tamen** is in the main clause; otherwise as “when” or “since,” depending on context. E.g.:

INDICATIVE TYPE

Cum TEMPORAL

Cum in urbem illi di v nit, t v dit. *WHEN he CAME into the city that day, he saw you.*

SUBJUNCTIVE TYPES:

5. **Cum** CIRCUMSTANTIAL

Cum studeat, bene agit. *WHEN (whenever) he STUDIES, he does well.*

6. **Cum** CAUSAL

Cum hoc sciret, potuit eis iuvare. *SINCE he KNEW this, he was able to help them.*

7. **Cum** ADVERSATIVE

Cum hoc sciret, tamen non potuit eis iuvare. *ALTHOUGH he KNEW this, he was nevertheless unable to help them.*

8. PROVISO CLAUSES (Wheelock Ch. 32)

Definition: a subordinate clause introduced by **dummodo** meaning “provided that/so long as” and describing an action on which the action in the main clause is contingent. E.g., “So long as he sees her tomorrow, he will be happy”; “Provided that you enjoy Latin, you won't mind studying.”

Recognition: introduced by **dummodo**, with a subjunctive verb at the end, and usually set off from the main clause by comma(s).

Translation: translate **dummodo** as “provided that” or “so long as,” and translate the verb as an INDICATIVE (i.e., with NO AUXILIARY such as “may” or “might”). E.g.:

Bene ag s, dummodo stude s.

You will do well, provided that you study.

Semper eris f l x, dummodo Lat nam am s.

So long as you love Latin, you will be happy.

9-11. **CONDITIONAL CLAUSES (Wheelock Ch. 33)**

Definition: a basic sentence type consisting of one clause stating a condition or premise, called the “protasis,” introduced by **s**, “if,” or **nisi**, “if not/unless,” and a second clause called the “apodosis,” which states an outcome if the action in the protasis is realized. There are six basic types, three that take the indicative because they describe conditions that are likely to be realized, and three that take the subjunctive because they describe conditions that are less likely to be realized or even contrary to the actual facts of the situation. E.g., “If you study, you will learn.”

Recognition: two clauses, one introduced by **s** or **nisi** and both USUALLY with verbs in same mood and tense.

Translation: depends on which of the six clause types, as follows:

INDICATIVE TYPES:

SIMPLE FACT PRESENT

S stud s, discis. *If you are studying, you are learning.*

SIMPLE FACT FUTURE/FUTURE MORE VIVID

S stud bis, disc s. *If you (will) study, you will learn.*

SIMPLE FACT PAST

S studuist, didicist. *If you studied, you learned.*

S stud b s, disc b s. *If you were studying, you were learning.*

SUBJUNCTIVE TYPES:

9. FUTURE LESS VIVID/SHOULD-WOULD

S stud s, disc s. *If you should study, you would learn.*

10. CONTRARY TO FACT PRESENT

S stud r s, discer s. *If you were studying, you would be learning.*

11. CONTRARY TO FACT PAST

S studuiss s, didiciss s. *If you had studied, you would have learned.*

12. JUSSIVE NOUN CLAUSES (Wheelock Ch. 36)

Definition: a subordinate clause that reports indirectly, not in a direct quotation, what someone has ordered (hence the term “jussive”), commanded, urged, persuaded, begged, etc.—i.e., an expression of someone's will or desire. Comparable to indirect statements/indirect questions in conception. E.g., “He orders/urges/persuades/begs/asks/advises you to do this.”

Recognition: identical to a purpose clause, introduced by **ut/n** + subjunctive verb, but follows a verb of ordering etc. and answers the question “what” rather than “why?”

Translation: translate **ut** + subjunctive simply as an infinitive, add *not* with **n** .

T hortor ut cum c r stude s.

I urge you to study carefully.

13. RELATIVE CLAUSE OF CHARACTERISTIC (Wheelock Ch. 38)

Definition: a subordinate relative clause that describes--NOT a SPECIFIC characteristic--but some GENERAL quality of an antecedent that is itself either GENERAL, INDEFINITE, INTERROGATIVE, or NEGATIVE. E.g., “She was the SORT of person who would do this.” “Who is there who would do this?” “There is no one who would do this.”

Recognition: begins with a relative pronoun and ends with a subjunctive verb.

Translation: “would” sometimes used as auxiliary, sometimes no auxiliary; “the sort of/kind of” often supplied to make clear that antecedent is indefinite.

Corn lia est discipula quae Lat nam amet.

Cornelia is a student who would love Latin/the sort of student who loves Latin.

Quis est qui Lat nam n n amet.

Who is there who does/would not love Latin?

14. FEAR CLAUSE (Wheelock Ch. 40)

Definition: a subordinate clause that describes an action that someone in the main clause fears. E.g., “I fear that they may not believe this.”

Recognition: main clause has a fear of fearing (e.g., **time** , **metu** , **vereor**) and fear clause begins with **n** if positive and **ut** if negative.

Translation: Translate **n** as “that” and **ut** as “that...not,” and supply “may/will” for present subjunctive, “might/would” for imperfect, “has/(may) have” for perfect subjunctive, “had/might have” for pluperfect.

Time ut Lat nam am s.

I fear that you may/will not love Latin.

Timu runt n Hannibal R mam in ret.

They were afraid that Hannibal might/would enter Rome.

Metuit ut discipul studuissent.

He feared that the students had not/might not have studied.