

Subjunctive and conditional

Subjunctive is used in the following circumstances:

- to express what is imagined („Let's imagine that he were here today");
- to express what is wished („I wish that he were here today");
- to express what is possible („if only that were possible!").

It is usually the same as the ordinary form of the verb except in the third person singular (*he, she, it*), where the normal -s ending is omitted. For example, you should say *face* rather than *faces* in the sentence „the report recommends that he face the tribunal".

The situation is slightly different when using the verb *to be*. The subjunctive for *to be* when using the present tense is *be*, whereas the ordinary present tense is *am, are* or *is*. For example, „the report recommends that he be dismissed". When using the past subjunctive form of *to be*, you should use *were* instead of *was*. For example, „I wouldn't try it if I were you".

Conditional is used to express a condition; or to put it another way, to express that something is dependent on something else. For example:

- I would go if I felt better (I would in fact go if I felt better).
- I could go if I felt better (I would be able to go if I felt better).
- I should go if I felt better (I would in fact go if I felt better).
- □ I should go if I feel better (I ought to go if I feel better in the future).

When used for the conditional, *should* goes with *I* and *we*, and *would* goes with *you, he, she, it* and *they*. However, this rule is often disregarded even by well-educated English native speakers. Consequently, using the wrong word is not a very serious error. A mistake often made by non-native speakers is to use the conditional instead of the subjunctive in a sentence in which both forms should be used. Consequently, the sentence, „I wouldn't try it if I were you" is often wrongly expressed.

Exercises

Insert the correct subjunctive or conditional forms in the sentences below.

(1) _____ I to suggest this course of action, it is unlikely that it _____ be accepted.

(2) The committee recommends that he _____ (face) an enquiry.

(3) We think it best that the machinery _____ (to be) tested by an expert.

(4) We _____ be happier _____ you to agree to reduce the price by 20%.

(5) If we _____ to raise the price, we _____ afford to wait longer for payment.

(Forum Legal:English by lawyers for lawyers)