

subjunctive mood overview

grimm **grammar**♣ **Verbs : Der Konjunktiv - Übersicht**

The subjunctive mood (in contrast to the indicative mood - such as statements) is used for hypothetical statements (if, what if, if only...), politeness (especially with modal verbs), and reported, indirect speech.

♣ **Usage****Hypothetical statements (if, what if, if only...)**

- ▶ Wenn die Zwerge **arbeiten würden, hätten** sie hoffentlich umweltfreundlichere Jobs!

If the dwarves **would work**, hopefully they **would have** environmentally safer jobs!

Politeness (especially with modal verbs)

- ▶ **Könnten** Sie Schneewittchen bitte nicht **vergiften**?

Could you please not **poison** Snow White?

Reported, indirect speech

- ▶ Die böse Königin hat versprochen, dass sie Schneewittchen nicht **vergiften werde**. Juchuh!

The evil queen promised that she would not poison snow white. Yeay!



There are two main types of subjunctive:

1. **Konjunktiv I** (*indirect speech*)
2. **Konjunktiv II** (*hypothetical situations, politeness*)

Konjunktiv II is used much more commonly, so that is where we begin.

♣ **Forming the subjunctive: Konjunktiv II**

Konjunktiv II can be used in the present tense or in the past, and with subjunctive forms of the verbs or with the würde + infinitive construction. It is formed from the simple past forms of the verbs (the 2nd form, hence *Konjunktiv II*).

1. Present tense: würde + infinitive

This is the easiest subjunctive form for native speakers of English, as it directly corresponds to the 'would + infinitive' construction. This construction is used with all **regular verbs** and with most irregular verbs as well (with a few exceptions, covered below).

- ▶ Wenn die Königin Schneewittchen **vergiften würde, würden** die Zwerge gegen die Autorin

If the queen **were to poison** Snow White, the dwarves **would protest** against the

dieses Märchens **demonstrieren!**

author of this fairy tale!

2. Present tense subjunctive

The present tense subjunctive has the same meaning as the '**würde + infinitive**' construction; it is used with high-frequency irregular verbs, such as haben (**hätte**), sein (**wäre**), wissen (**wüsste**), geben (**gäbe**), and the modal verbs.

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| <p>▶ Wenn die Zwerge nur wüssten!</p> <p>Die böse Königin gäbe Schneewittchen gerne einen anderen vergifteten Apfel, wenn sie könnte!</p> | <p>If the dwarves only knew!</p> <p>The evil queen would gladly give Snow White another poisoned apple, if she could!</p> |
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3. Past tense subjunctive

The **past tense of the subjunctive** is formed with the participle form of the **verb** and either **hätte** or **wäre**, depending on the verb (i.e., verbs that take a direct object take hätte, intransitive verbs take wäre).

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| <p>▶ Aber ganz ehrlich, wenn die Königin Schneewittchen nicht so sehr gehasst hätte, hätten die Zwerge das junge Mädchen nicht kennengelernt! Das wäre traurig gewesen!</p> | <p>Truth be told, though, if the queen hadn't hated Snow White that much, the dwarves would have never met the young girl! That would have been sad!</p> |
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When modal verbs are involved, the past tense subjunctive is formed with **hätte**, plus the modal verb and the original main verb both in their infinitive forms. In a *subordinate clause*, the word-order gets pretty exciting!

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| <p>▶ Wenn die Königin Schneewittchen nicht hätte vergiften können, hätte der Prinz die junge Königstochter nicht mit einem Kuss retten müssen! Was für ein Märchen wäre das gewesen??</p> | <p>If the queen hadn't been able to poison Snow White, the prince would not have had to rescue her with a kiss! What kind of a fairy tale would that have been??</p> |
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❖ Forming the subjunctive: Konjunktiv I

Konjunktiv I can be used in the present tense or in the past. It is formed from the present forms of the verbs (the 1st form, hence the name Konjunktiv I). Konjunktiv I transforms an original (present or inferred) statement from a direct quote to an indirect report of that statement.

This structure is used typically only in formal writing in modern German; you'll read it in journal articles, but rarely will anybody say it in conversation or electronic communication! They use the regular present or past tenses instead. It is also only used to report what a third person has said (i.e., not for *I said I would do it!*). For first and second persons, use **würde + infinitive** or the **Konjunktiv II** forms of the verbs! In the following example, you can read the evil queen's original promise and then the way the seven dwarves (ok, only six) report it, using **Konjunktiv I**.

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| <p>▶ <i>die böse Königin</i> Ich gebe Schneewittchen keinen vergifteten Apfel! Ich verspreche es! (indicative, direct quote)</p> | <p>I won't give Snow White a poisoned apple! I promise!</p> |
| <p><i>Brumbär</i> Das ist ja mega geil! Die Königin sagte, sie vergifte Schneewittchen nicht! (subjunctive, indirect/reported speech)</p> | <p>That's totally cool! The queen said she wouldn't poison Snow White!</p> |

1. Present tense

The present tense Konjunktiv I is used when the original statement (the one that is quoted) is in the present or future tense.

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| <p>▶ Eines Tages hat Schneewittchen Magenschmerzen! Alle Schlossbewohner meinen, dass es die böse Königin sei!</p> <p>Ich habe gehört, dass es jemanden gebe, der diese Tat der bösen Königin anhängen wolle!</p> | <p>One day Snow White has stomach pains! All residents of the castle think that it is the evil queen!</p> <p>I've heard that there was supposed to be somebody, who was going to frame the queen for this act!</p> |
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2. Past tense

The past tense *Konjunktiv I* is used when the original statement (the one that is quoted) is in the simple past,

present perfect (conversational past) or past perfect tense. *Konjunktiv I* in the past tense is formed by using **habe** or **sei** plus the participle form of the main verb (or two infinitives if a modal verb is present).

- ▶ Ein Augenzeuge hat berichtet, er **habe** die Königin Freitag Abend in der Wohnung von Schneewittchen und dem Prinzen **gesehen**!
- An eye witness reported that he **saw** the queen Friday night in the apartment of Snow White and the prince!
- Er setzte fort, sie **sei** sehr schnell auf einem nagelneuen Besen **geflogen**! Oh oh, das war nicht die Königin, oder?!?!
- He continued that she **flew** quickly on a brand new broom! Oh, oh! That was not the queen, was it?!?!