

Konjunktiv II (Conditional Subjunctive): Explanation

What is mood?

There are three "moods" which apply to verbs: indicative, imperative, and subjunctive. Although you may not realize it, you have already learned tenses in the indicative and imperative moods. To review:

Indicative: a verb is in the indicative mood when it is used to express a "real" situation in the past, present or future:

Ich <u>bin</u> hier.	<i>I am here.</i>
<u>Kam</u> er gestern zur Schule?	<i>Did he come to school yesterday?</i>
Morgen <u>wird</u> es <u>regnen</u> .	<i>It will rain tomorrow.</i>

Imperative: a verb is in the imperative mood when it is used to express an order or a request.

<u>Sei</u> still!	<i>Be quiet!</i>
<u>Rufen</u> Sie mich an!	<i>Call me!</i>

What is the subjunctive mood?

A verb is in the subjunctive mood when it is used to express wishes, probabilities, or conditions which are contrary to fact. This form of the subjunctive is called *Konjunktiv II* in German.

Ich <u>wünschte</u> , dass ich da sein <u>könnte</u> .	<i>I wish I could be there.</i>
Wenn ich nur da <u>gewesen wäre</u> !	<i>If only I had been there!</i>
Wenn er hier <u>wäre</u> , <u>würde</u> er es uns helfen.	<i>If he were here, he would help us.</i>

If you've learned another foreign language such as French or Spanish, please do not apply the rules for subjunctive use in those languages to German: they have very little in common. German *Konjunktiv II* could more properly be called the 'conditional', since that is its primary use. (Next year you will learn a different subjunctive tense that is used in other, relatively rare, situations.)

Forming the Konjunktiv II

The easiest form of the subjunctive in German is the *würde*-subjunctive, which is exactly equivalent to the English "would do" formation.

Ich <u>würde</u> die Museen in Berlin <u>besuchen</u> .	<i>I would visit the museums in Berlin.</i>
<u>Würdest</u> du mir bitte <u>helfen</u> ?	<i>Would you please help me?</i>
Wenn er nur <u>kommen würde</u> !	<i>If only he would come!</i>

You may notice that *würde* looks like the verb *werden*: indeed, it is based off of the simple past form of *werden* --> *wurde* --> *würde*. The full conjugation is as follows:

ich würde	wir würden
du würdest	ihr würdet
er/sie/es würde	sie/Sie würden

All other verbs in German also have their own subjunctive forms -- like *würde*, they are based off of the simple past tense forms. In every case, these subjunctive forms mean exactly the same thing as "würde + infinitive." (Thus you can substitute the "würde + infinitive" form for the true subjunctive. However, in class and on the quiz we will be requiring you to use a handful of the true subjunctive forms, and you will certainly see and hear them in Germany.)

The subjunctive of regular (weak) verbs is identical to the simple past tense.

Wenn ich eine Zeitung <u>kaufte</u> , würde ich lesen.	<i>If I bought a newspaper, I would read.</i>
Wenn du <u>kochtest</u> , würden wir nicht essen.	<i>If you cooked, we wouldn't eat.</i>
Es wäre schön, wenn ihr das Bett <u>machtet</u> .	<i>It would be nice if you made the bed.</i>

The subjunctive of mixed verbs (like *bringen*, *denken*, and *haben*) takes the simple past tense form and adds an umlaut if the root vowel is a, o, or u.

Wenn ich nur mehr Geld <u>hätte</u> !	<i>If only I had more money!</i>
Wenn ich so <u>dächte</u> , würdest du es wissen.	<i>If I thought that, you would know.</i>

The subjunctive forms of modal verbs are similar to mixed and weak verbs, but show slight variations: namely, those modals that had an umlaut in their original infinitive forms show one in the subjunctive; if there was no umlaut in the infinitive (*sollen* and *wollen*), then there is none in the subjunctive. It's best just to memorize these forms:

Ich <u>könnte</u> gehen, wenn ...	<i>I could go, if ...</i>
Ich <u>müsste</u> gehen, wenn ...	<i>I would have to go, if ...</i>

Ich dürfte gehen, wenn ...
Ich möchte gehen, wenn ...
Ich sollte gehen, wenn ...
Ich wollte gehen, wenn ...

*I would be allowed to go, if ...
I would like to go, if ...
I should go, if ...
I would want to go, if ...*

The subjunctive of strong verbs is slightly more difficult. Like the others, it takes the simple past form, and then adds an umlaut if the root vowel is a, o, or u. In addition, it adds -e for the first and third person singular.

Ich ginge morgen, wenn ich Zeit hätte.
Ich käme zu spät.
Wenn ich nur reich wäre!

*I would go tomorrow, if I had time.
I would come too late.
If only I were rich!*

The endings for the subjunctive of strong verbs are:

ich wäre	wir wären
du wärest	ihr wäret
er/sie/es wäre	sie/Sie wären

Common Ways to Use the Subjunctive

a) IF-THEN CLAUSES and conditional statements. Using the conjunction *wenn* to mean "if", these sentences use the subjunctive in both clauses.

Wenn ich Zeit hätte, würde ich lesen.
Wenn er spräche, würde ich nicht zuhören.
Wenn du dich beeilen würdest, könnten wir anfangen.
Ich würde kommen, wenn du mich einladen würdest.

*If I had time, I would read.
If he spoke, I wouldn't listen.
If you hurried, we could start.
I would come if you invited me.*

Note 1: While English cannot normally use "would + infinitive" in the if-clause, in German you can use the *würde*-form OR the true subjunctive form of the verb in both the "if" and the "then" clause. It is more common to see the *würde*-form in the "then" clause (like English), but both are grammatically correct.

Note 2: You will occasionally see these "if-then" statements without the conjunction *wenn*. For example: *Hätte ich Zeit, käme ich mit* (= "Had I time, I would come"). In that case, ellipsis occurs, so that the verb is placed first. (You aren't required to know this, but it will come up if you continue on to German 203.)

b) WISHES. The phrase "wenn ich nur" means "If only I ..." and needs the subjunctive. Also, the phrase "ich wünschte" means "I wish ..." and also requires the subjunctive.

Wenn ich nur Spanisch sprechen könnte!
Wenn es nur regnen würde!
Ich wünschte, ich hätte mehr Erfahrung.
Wir wünschten, dass er kommen würde.

*If only I could speak Spanish!
If only it would rain.
I wish I had more experience.
We wish he would come.*

c) CONTRARY TO FACT statements, irreality. When expressing what would happen, but is not actually happening, the subjunctive is needed. We almost always use "would" for this in English.

Ich würde meine Hausaufgaben machen, aber es ist schon Mitternacht.

I would do my homework, but it's already midnight.

Er käme mit, aber er muss das Haus aufräumen.

He would come along, but he has to clean the house.

d) POLITE REQUESTS. This is a very common use of the subjunctive in both English and German. The subjunctive in these types of requests can be *würde* + infinitive, or a modal verb or *hätte*.

Würden Sie mir bitte helfen?

(not: Helfen Sie mir bitte! = imperative)

Könnten Sie mir sagen, wo die Post ist?

(not: Können Sie mir sagen ... = indicative)

Hätten Sie Zeit, mit mir zu sprechen?

(not: Haben Sie Zeit ... = indicative)

Ich möchte eine Tasse Kaffee.

(not: Ich will eine Tasse Kaffee = indicative)

Would you help me, please?

(not: Help me, please! = imperative)

Could you tell me where the post office is?

(not: Can you tell me ... = indicative)

Might you have time to speak with me?

(not: Do you have time ... = indicative)

I would like a cup of coffee.

(not: I want a cup of coffee = indicative)