

Indirect discourse, or “reported speech” is used when you don’t want to directly quote someone (using quotation marks), but instead want to repeat what someone said within a normal sentence.

Direct speech: John said, “I **am** sick.”

Indirect speech: John said **he was** sick.

In English, we just put the reported speech into the **past tense** (“I **am** sick” turns into the past tense ‘he **was** sick’). **German has two different options** for reported speech, but the **past tense is NOT one of them**.

German reported speech will either use the Konjunktiv II that you learned last chapter, OR the other type of subjunctive in German (called the **Konjunktiv I or ‘special subjunctive’**) which is used **only for this purpose**, and nothing else.

Direkte Rede: John sagte: »Ich **bin** krank.«

Indirekte Rede: John sagte, er **wäre** krank. (*Konjunktiv II, ‘conditional’*)

or: John sagte, er **sei** krank. (*Konjunktiv I, ‘special subjunctive’*)

There isn’t really any difference in meaning between using “**wäre**” or “**sei**” above, and in general, the version you already know (“**wäre**”) is more common in **spoken German**. But the **special subjunctive (“sei”)** is used in more **formal settings**, and **always used in newspaper reporting**.

By using the **special subjunctive**, German can indicate something that we can’t do in English: the “**sei**” form of the sentence above indicates that **the reporter does not hold an opinion** on whether John is actually sick or not; John could be lying but the reporter is taking no stance and giving no personal feelings away. It’s a way of distancing oneself when reporting, repeating only what was said but not indicating any sort of viewpoint, only objectivity.

You already learned the **normal subjunctive or conditional (“wäre”)** forms in earlier chapters.

Remember that forms like “**käme**” or “**ginge**” or “**spielte**” can be used in a variety of situations. If you continue to use those forms for reported speech, that is perfectly acceptable in casual German, but **professional and academic writers will usually use the special subjunctive instead**. So you’ll need to become familiar with the special subjunctive and how to form it.

Forming the special subjunctive (Konjunktiv I) is actually very simple: it is based purely off the **stem of the infinitive verb**, with a set of endings used only for this purpose. Remember that the stem of any verb is simply **the infinitive without the -en** (***mach-***, ***komm-***, ***hab-***, ***wander-***, etc.).

The **endings added to the stem in the special subjunctive** (Konjunktiv I) are:

ich	-e	wir	-en
du	-est	ihr	-et
er/sie/es	-e	sie/Sie	-en

Regular verbs in the special subjunctive won’t look very different from the present tense, but **irregular verbs will lose all irregularity**, because the new forms are drawn only from the **unchanged infinitive**.

Consider the following verbs in the special subjunctive (Konjunktiv I):

kommen (stem is “**komm-**”)

ich	komme	wir	kommen
du	kommest	ihr	kommet
er	komme	sie	kommen

spielen (stem is “**spiel-**”)

ich	spiele	wir	spielen
du	spielest	ihr	spielet
er	spiele	sie	spielen

geben (stem is "geb-")

ich	gebe	wir	geben
du	gebest	ihr	gebet
er	gebe	sie	geben

fahren (stem is "fahr-")

ich	fahre	wir	fahren
du	fahrest	ihr	fahret
er	fahre	sie	fahren

können (stem is "könn-")

ich	könne	wir	können
du	könnest	ihr	könnet
er	könne	sie	können

wissen (stem is "wiss-")

ich	wisse	wir	wissen
du	wisest	ihr	wisset
er	wisse	sie	wissen

haben (stem is "hab-")

ich	habe	wir	haben
du	habest	ihr	habet
er	habe	sie	haben

sein (*irregular forms!*)

ich	sei	wir	seien
du	seiest	ihr	seiet
er	sei	sie	seien

Remember that **these forms are ONLY used when reporting what someone else has said.**

Also note that if there is **any confusion** that might arise from using the special subjunctive, the alternative is to **use the normal subjunctive/conditional (Konjunktiv II)**. For example, since the **"they" plural forms of most verbs** in the special subjunctive **looks the same as the present tense**, it's better to use the **Konjunktiv II forms for "they" subjects**.

Direct Speech: John und Mary sagten: »Wir **haben** keine Zeit.«

Konjunktiv I: John und Mary sagten, sie **haben** keine Zeit. (*bad: looks the same as present tense*)

Konjunktiv II: John und Mary sagten, sie **hätten** keine Zeit. (*best option for clarity*)

The verb sein is by far the **most important** 'special subjunctive' form to learn. Other verbs will mostly be used in newspapers and academic writing.

The special subjunctive in the **past tense** simply uses the **Perfekt tense participle**, combined with **subjunctive versions of the helping verbs "haben" or "sein"**.

Direct Speech: John sagte: »**Ich habe gearbeitet.**«

Indirekte Rede: John sagte, er **habe** gearbeitet.

Direct Speech: John sagte: »**Ich bin nach Hause gekommen.**«

Indirekte Rede: John sagte, er **sei** nach Hause gekommen.

There is **no change to the participle ge-form** — **only the helping verb** is in the subjunctive mood.

For **singular subjects** (he/she/it), you will **always use 'habe' or 'sei'** combined **with the ge-form (participle)** of the verb. (Remember that 'change of location and condition' verbs use SEIN as a helping verb!)

For **plural subjects** (they), because **'haben'** looks the same as the present indicative, the **"hätten" form is used instead:**

Direct Speech: John und Mary sagten: "**Wir haben gearbeitet.**"

Indirekte Rede: John und Mary sagten, sie **hätten** gearbeitet.