

Imperfect Subjunctive

Spanish · British English › Spanish

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The Imperfect Subjunctive (El Subjuntivo Imperfecto)

Hello! Today, we're diving into the world of the Spanish **Imperfect Subjunctive** (*el Subjuntivo Imperfecto*). This is a crucial tense that allows you to express **wishes, emotions, doubts, advice, or hypothetical situations in the past**. Remember, the Subjunctive always appears in subordinate clauses and is 'governed' by the verb in the main clause.

Don't worry, forming it is simpler than you might think! There are two common forms of this tense (-ra and -se), but the most frequently used and practical is the one ending in **-ra**. We'll focus mainly on this one.

Here's a handy trick to remember the -ra form: Take the verb in the **3rd person plural of the Preterite (El Pretérito Indefinido)** (e.g., **hablaron, comieron, vivieron**). Then, remove the ending **-ron**, and to that stem, add the Imperfect Subjunctive endings: **-ra, -ras, -ra, -ramos, -rais, -ran**!

Stem from 3rd person plural Preterite (minus -ron) + **endings -ra, -ras, -ra, -ramos, -rais, -ran**

Person	Hablar (-ar)	Comer (-er)	Vivir (-ir)	Ser / Ir (irregular)
yo	hablara	comiera	viviera	fuera
tú	hablaras	comieras	vivieras	fueras
él/ella/usted	hablara	comiera	viviera	fuera
nosotros/as	habláramos	comiéramos	viviéramos	fuéramos
vosotros/as	hablarais	comierais	vivierais	fuerais
ellos/ellas/ustedes	hablaran	comieran	vivieran	fueran

It's worth knowing that there's also an **-se** form (e.g., *hablase, comiese, viviese*). Both forms are correct and generally interchangeable, although the **-ra** form is much more common in everyday speech. You don't need to memorise both; just focus on one!

When do we use the Imperfect Subjunctive?

- To express wishes, emotions, doubts, or advice concerning the past or present, when the main verb is in a past tense (e.g., Preterite, Imperfect, Conditional).
- In type 2 conditional sentences (hypothetical, less probable situations in the present or future), after **si** (**Si + Imperfect Subjunctive, Simple Conditional**).
- After the expression **como si** (as if), which always requires the Imperfect Subjunctive.
- For polite requests or suggestions, especially with the verbs *querer, poder, deber* in the Conditional (e.g., *Quisiera...*).

Mis padres querían que yo estudiara más.

My parents wanted me to study more.

Si tuviera tiempo, iría al cine.

If I had time, I would go to the cinema.

Ella me miraba como si no me conociera.
She looked at me as if she didn't know me.

Be careful not to confuse the Imperfect Subjunctive with other past tenses! A common mistake is using the **Preterite** or the **Indicative Imperfect** instead of the Subjunctive in subordinate clauses after verbs expressing emotions, doubts, etc., when the main verb is in a past tense. Always remember the **sequence of tenses**!

Esperaba que **vinieras**.

~~Esperaba que venías.~~

After a verb expressing hope in the past (*esperaba*), we use the Imperfect Subjunctive (*vinieras*) in the subordinate clause, not the Indicative Imperfect (*venías*).

Practise regularly, and the Imperfect Subjunctive will quickly become your ally in expressing complex thoughts in Spanish! ¡Mucho ánimo!

Part 1 – Choose the correct word

Circle the option that correctly fills each gap.

1. Era difícil que lo _____.

It was difficult for them to achieve it.

A) consiguieran B) conseguirían C) consigan D) consiguieron

2. Era una pena que no _____.

It was a shame it didn't snow.

A) nieve B) nevó C) nevaría D) nevara

3. Le _____ que _____ la verdad.

I suggested you tell the truth.

Gap 1: A) sugeriré B) sugerí C) sugiero D) sugiera

Gap 2: A) dice B) diría C) decía D) dijera

4. Si él _____ ejercicio, se _____ mejor.

If he exercised, he would feel better.

Gap 1: A) haría B) haga C) hizo D) hiciera

Gap 2: A) siente B) sentiría C) sentirá D) sienta

5. Mi madre _____ que yo _____ más.

My mum wanted me to read more.

Gap 1: A) querrá B) quiera C) quería D) quiere

Gap 2: A) lea B) leí C) leeré D) leyera

6. Me hubiera gustado que le _____.

I would have liked him to like it.

A) guste B) gustara C) gustaría D) gustó

7. Te _____ que me _____ un café.

I asked you to bring me coffee.

Gap 1: A) pediré B) pedí C) pido D) pida

Gap 2: A) trajiste B) trajeras C) traigas D) traerías

8. Esperaba que _____ pronto.

I hoped that you would write soon.

- A) escribiste B) escribirás C) escribieras D) escribías

Part 2 – Fill in the gap

Write the missing word or phrase on the line.

1. Él me _____ que _____ ayuda.

He advised me to ask for help.

2. Era importante que _____ bien.

It was important for them to serve well.

3. Me hubiera gustado que le _____.

I would have liked him to like it.

4. No me gustó que _____ la puerta.

I didn't like that they opened the door.

5. Era vital que _____ positivamente.

It was vital that they influenced things positively.

6. _____ que yo _____ más claro.

He wanted me to speak more clearly.

Part 3 – Translate

Write each word in Spanish on the line.

1. to have › _____

2. to become › _____

3. to destroy › _____

4. to pay › _____

5. to follow › _____

6. to prefer › _____

Part 4 – Match the pairs

Write the letter of the matching translation next to each term.

Term	Translation
1. sentir	A to build
2. sentir (plural)	B to feel
3. reír	C to laugh
4. conocer	D there to be
5. saber	E to know

6. construir
7. haber (impersonal)
8. conducir

- F to drive
- G to know
- H to feel

Answer Key

Part 1 — Choose the correct word

1. A) consiguieran
2. D) nevara
3. Gap 1: B) sugerí; Gap 2: D) dijera
4. Gap 1: D) hiciera; Gap 2: B) sentiría

Part 2 — Fill in the gap

1. aconsejó; pidiera
2. sirvieran
3. gustara

Part 3 — Translate

1. tener
2. ponerse
3. destruir

Part 4 — Match the pairs

1. B (to feel)
2. B (to feel)
3. C (to laugh)
4. E (to know)

5. Gap 1: C) quería; Gap 2: D) leyera
6. B) gustara
7. Gap 1: B) pedí; Gap 2: B) trajeras
8. C) escribieras

4. abrieran
5. influyeran
6. Quería; hablara

4. pagar
5. seguir
6. preferir

5. E (to know)
6. A (to build)
7. D (there to be)
8. F (to drive)