

German Grammar: Subjunctive Mood

German Grammar – The Subjunctive Mood (Konjunktiv)

1. Overview

Aspect	Description
Name	Konjunktiv (subjunctive)
Purpose	Expresses unreality, indirect speech, wishes, polite requests, hypothetical situations, and unreal conditions. Konjunktiv?I – mainly for reported/indirect speech.
Two forms	Konjunktiv?II – for wishes, unreal conditions, polite requests, and many “would?... ” constructions.
Relation to other moods	Distinct from Indikativ (statement of fact) and Imperativ (command).

2. Formation

2.1 Konjunktiv?I

Verb type	Stem (present)	Endings	Example (verb <i>machen</i>)
Regular (weak)	stem of present <i>mach?</i>	?e, ?est, ?e, ?en, ?et, ?en	ich mache , du machest , er/sie/es mache , wir machen , ihr machet , sie machen
Irregular (strong)	stem of Präteritum (often with vowel change)	same endings	<i>sein</i> : ich sei , du seist , er sei , wir seien , ihr seiet , sie seien
Mixed verbs	combine stem change + weak endings	same endings	<i>haben</i> : ich habe , du habest , ...

Key point: If the Konjunktiv?I form is identical to the indicative (e.g., *ich mache*), the Konjunktiv?II is used instead to avoid ambiguity.

2.2 Konjunktiv?II

German Grammar: Subjunctive Mood

Verb type	Formation	Example (verb <i>machen</i>)
Weak verbs	Take the Präteritum stem, add ?e (or ?en) as a marker.	ich machte , du machtest , ...
Strong verbs	Use the Präteritum stem, apply the Umlaut (if possible), and add ?e (or ?en).	<i>gehen</i> ? ginge , <i>sehen</i> ? sähe , <i>finden</i> ? fände
Mixed verbs	Combine a vowel change with a weak ending.	<i>haben</i> ? hätte , <i>sein</i> ? wäre
Irregular forms	Some verbs have special subjunctive forms used especially in idiomatic expressions.	<i>kommen</i> ? käme , <i>wissen</i> ? wüsste

Alternative: For many strong verbs, a periphrastic construction with *würde* + infinitive is accepted, especially in spoken language: *ich würde gehen* (instead of *ich ginge*).

3. Uses

3.1 Konjunktiv?I – Indirect (reported) speech

Direct speech	Indirect speech (Konjunktiv?I)
Er sagt: „Ich komme morgen.“	Er sagt, er komme morgen.
Sie meint: „Wir haben das Problem gelöst.“	Sie meint, sie haben das Problem gelöst.

*If Konjunktiv?I coincides with the indicative, switch to Konj