

24 The subjunctive mood

The 'mood' of a verb indicates the speaker's attitude towards what is said. The indicative mood (covered in sections 18 to 23) describes an action or a state as factual, true or at least possible. The subjunctive mood is used to express something which is unreal, hypothetical or not necessarily true. The subjunctive occurs in informal as well as formal German, and its use differs considerably from the use of the subjunctive in English.

24.1 Konjunktiv I and II

There are two types of subjunctive in German: **Konjunktiv I** and **Konjunktiv II**. **Konjunktiv I** is used mainly in indirect speech, whereas **Konjunktiv II** expresses hypothetical or imaginary concepts and actions. Both types exist in various tenses.

24.2 Konjunktiv II Gegenwart: formation

This, the 'base' tense of Konjunktiv II, is also referred to as the 'past subjunctive'. It has two alternative forms: the two-word construction and the one-word form. The meaning of both is the same, and the choice of one or the other is largely a matter of style.

■ **24.2.1** The two-word construction is the more common form and is generally used for all verbs apart from **haben**, **sein**, **werden** and the modal verbs, particularly in everyday language. It is formed from the **Konjunktiv II Gegenwart** of **werden** plus the infinitive of the verb.

Sing.	1. ich	würde	} gehen	I	} would go
	2. du	würdest		you	
	3. er/sie/es	würde		he/she/it	

Pl.	1. wir	würden	} gehen	we	} would go
	2. ihr	würdet		you	
	3. sie/Sie	würden		they/you (formal)	

■ **24.2.2** The one-word **Konjunktiv II Gegenwart** is derived from the simple past of the indicative, as follows.

a For weak verbs it is identical to the regular simple past (21.2). It is used only in formal language.

Und wenn Sie mehr Geld *And if you were earning*
verdienten? *more money?*

Compare the simple past:

Sie sind nur geblieben, *You only stayed because you*
weil Sie mehr Geld *were earning more money?*
verdienten?

b For irregular weak verbs (mixed verbs) it is the same as the simple past, but with an Umlaut or vowel change.

Infinitive	Simple past	Konjunktiv II
denken (to think)	ich dachte	ich dächte
rennen (to run)	ich rannte	ich rennte

c For strong verbs it is formed from the simple past by adding an Umlaut to the past tense stem of the verb where appropriate and adding the endings **-e**, **-est**, **-e**, **-en**, **-et**, **-en**. Some strong verbs are frequently used in the one-word form, including:

finden (to find): ich fände	kommen (to come): ich käme
geben (to give): ich gäbe	lassen (to leave): ich ließe
gehen (to go): ich ginge	sehen (to see): ich sähe
halten (to hold): ich hielte	tun (to do): ich täte
heißen (to be called): ich hieße	wissen (to know): ich wüsste