



I. Indicative.

This is the form you use without even thinking about what it is: *Parlez-vous français? Il a plu. J'avais faim. Nous avons eu un problème. Le film commencera à 8h00.* The *présent*, *passé composé*, *imparfait*, *plus-que-parfait* and *futur* are all in the indicative mood. The French, incidentally, speak of the indicative *mode*, that is, it's a manner of speaking, not a mood, per se. The indicative mood shows that the speaker is *indicating* something. There's no judgment, no hesitation, no doubt in the speaker's mind. He or she is just stating what *is* – as far as he or she knows.

Moods in French distinguish the relationship between the speaker, the statement and objective reality. One way to think of French *modes* that may be helpful is to consider them as giving signals. That is, in using one mood instead of another, the speaker is giving the listener a cue as to how to take what he or she is saying. Someone speaking in the indicative is showing that he or she is merely giving information. There is no emotional content, no judgment and no meaningful uncertainty. Just the facts.

II. Subjunctive.

The subjunctive is not used for simple statements of fact. But rather than depending on an objective condition, it depends on subjective perception. Use of the subjunctive cues the listener that the content of the phrase is strongly affected by the speaker's beliefs, thoughts, perceptions or emotions. One could say that it's all in the speaker's head, because in a way, it really is.

There are two ways that a phrase can be all in a speaker's head. The first of these is if the content of the phrase does not exist in reality, only in the imagining of the speaker:

I don't think he is coming. (*Je ne crois pas qu'il vienne.*)

It is unlikely she will have enough time to help us. (*Il est peu probable qu'elle ait assez de temps pour nous aider.*)

In both these examples, the second part of the sentence is not established fact. In the first, it's even believed to be false! That is, the gentleman's arrival and the lady's time are not things of which we are assured. They are hypotheticals postulated for the sake of the argument. Let's look at some more:

I doubt you're right. (*Je doute que vous ayez raison.*)

It is not certain that the president will decide that way. (*Il n'est pas certain que le président prenne cette décision.*)

Again, the speaker is not making statements of fact. These are things envisioned in the speaker's mind so that their likelihood can be discussed.

The second use of the subjunctive will seem the most bizarre to English speakers, and it is the reason one can characterize the subjunctive as the "all in your head" mood. In French, there are times when a speaker's attitude or view about something – even if it is factually known – is the overriding concern in the sentence:

I am happy she is coming. (*Je suis content qu'elle vienne.*)

She is sad that it is raining. (*Elle est triste qu'il pleuve.*)

I regret the fact that he is unhappy. (*Je regrette qu'il soit mécontent.*)

The primary clause in all these sentences indicates an emotion of the speaker/subject of the sentence. As a result, it is understood that the events in the second part exist not as independent information about the external world, but as imagined events that serve as emotional stimuli for the mind of the subject. For example, in the first sentence it

does not matter whether the girl is or is not coming. What matters is that her not coming would provoke sadness in me. Likewise, we can say of the girl in the second sentence that rain provoked sadness. Whether or not it is raining is not at issue; her response to the rain is. We could therefore go out on a limb and say that were it not raining, she might be happy (or might not) but that once rain started, unhappiness would necessarily ensue since the idea of it raining provokes sadness.

Our third use of the subjunctive mingles the first and second. It expresses things that may or may not be so and how the subject of the sentence would like to see them.

I wish that you would help me. (*Je veux que tu m'aides.*)

We ask that you would come as soon as possible. (*Nous vous demandons que vous **veniez** aussitôt que possible.*)

The subject is expressing what he/she/they would like to see the subject of the subjunctive clause do. We can imagine the subject of the sentence imagining the actions in question coming to pass and the good things that would result.

Now comes the recap, after which all will make sense. Right?

Indicative	Something the speaker takes to be true. <i>Il gagnera certainement le prix.</i> He will certainly win the prize. (= indicative, states facts)
Subjunctive	Something that effectively takes place in the subject's/speaker's mind because it is either a matter of envisioning a thing not known to be true or focusing on the emotion or feeling the thing provokes rather than the fact of the thing. <i>Je ne veux pas qu'il gagne.</i> I do not want him to win it. (= subjunctive, expresses wish)

Although this distinction between the indicative and the subjunctive moods may help to explain the existence of the subjunctive, it would be unsafe to apply it as a rule when choosing the appropriate verb formulation. It is far easier to just memorize which expressions trigger the use of the subjunctive in French. In the book, you have a list of expressions listed that trigger the subjunctive: "Il faut que", "Il est essentiel que", etc.

Is there a subjunctive mood in English? Yes, but there are only very few forms remaining. Here are a few examples:

If that be the case...

I urge that he reconsider...

I wish you were here.

Indicative (fact): Je sais que tu *es* généreux.

I know that you *are* generous.

Subjunctive (wish): Je souhaite que tu *sois* plus patient avec moi.

I wish that you *were* more patient with me.

There are 3 necessary things for a subjunctive to be used:

1. an expression that uses the subjunctive
2. "que" ["que" cannot be omitted in French]
3. a different subject after the "que"

The construction with a double clause using "...que..." cannot usually be used if both subjects refer to the same person/thing. Instead use an infinitive construction.

Je veux ~~que je fasse~~ ⇒ Je veux faire.

Nous regrettons ~~que nous ne soyons pas là.~~ ⇒ Nous regrettons de ne pas être là.

But: *Il faut qu'il vienne.* First "il" is impersonal; the second "il" is referring to a person.

Be careful: *Il veut qu'il fasse attention.* is correct if *il # 1* = one person / *il #2* = another person. (*Pierre veut que Paul fasse attention*)