

The Italian Subjunctive and how to use it!

What is this CONGIUNTIVO?

The Italian **Subjunctive (CONGIUNTIVO)** is a verbal "mood" that is used in many situations in Italian, mostly in subordinate clauses and after certain expressions.

Most verbal tenses you already know (**presente, passato prossimo, imperfetto, futuro etc.**) are all tenses belonging to a verbal mood called "**INDICATIVO**".

Just like the INDICATIVO, the **CONGIUNTIVO** has its own selection of verbal tenses (**presente, passato, imperfetto and trapassato**).

What this means is that in some cases you are have to swap the tense that you think you should be using (say for example a present tense) for a the same tense, but from the CONGIUNTIVO mood.

▷ AN EXAMPLE:

1) *La ragazza è alta* - 2) *Io penso*

1) The girl is tall - 2) I think

The two statements above **both contain the present tense**, from the **INDICATIVO** mood, and they are quite correct. But if I wanted to merge them into a single sentence like "*I think (that) the girl is tall*" in Italian the second verb ("is") would not be the present tense of the INDICATIVO ("è") **but rather the present tense of the CONGIUNTIVO: "SIA"**.

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Io penso che la ragazza sia alta

I think (that) the girl is tall

▷ BUT WHY?

I suggest you don't go crazy over this, as it takes students if Italian **years** to get the **CONGIUNTIVO** right and **even native Italians** (some 50% of them!) **can't use it right!**

The main idea is that we use the **CONGIUNTIVO** when a statement **is not in the main clause, but** it's actually **dependant on the main clause**. In other words, we tend to use the CONGIUNTIVO in **subordinate clauses**.

MOST TYPICALLY this means in **clauses** that are **preceded by CHE** (or special words that just call for the CONGIUNTIVO - we'll see them later).

▷ ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

1) *Sam parla italiano* - 2) *Io non so*

1) Sam speaks Italian - 2) I don't know

Both sentences are **correct**, with the **Present Tense** of the **INDICATIVO**. **BUT if** we put them **together...**

Io non so se Sam parli italiano

I don't know whether Sam speaks Italian

That **PARLI**, as confusing as it is, is the **3rd person singular** ("*he/she*") of the **Present Tense** of the **CONGIUNTIVO** mood.

[The Present Tense **INDICATIVO** - the one you already know - would be **PARLA**, right?]

So what do I do about this **CONGIUNTIVO** madness?

Well, first of all, keep your cool and remember that it is **not essential** that you get it right, all the time. **Italians will still understand you** if you use the correct tense form from the **INDICATIVO** mood (the verbs that you already know), when you should in fact be using tenses from the **CONGIUNTIVO**.

It is **nice** to be using the **CONGIUNTIVO correctly** though, as it is a sign of an **educated person**. The best thing would be to **get ease** into it by using in the most common cases: with the verbs **ESSERE** and **AVERE**.

We use the **CONGIUNTIVO** in these situations:

- ▷ **IN SUBORDINATE CLAUSES**
- ▷ **AFTER VERBS OF OPINION**
- ▷ **AFTER CERTAIN EXPRESSIONS**

The **Subjunctive Mood** (**CONGIUNTIVO**) is a tricky beast. Be kind to yourself if you don't always get it right. The **more you hear** it, the **more you'll internalize** it.

Present Subjunctive of **ESSERE** (to be)

Che io sia	That I am
Che tu sia	That you are
Che lei/lui sia	That she/he/it is
Che noi siamo	That we are
Che voi siate	That you guys are
Che loro siano	That they are

Note how I am suggesting that you learn the verbs from the **CONGIUNTIVO** mood in this manner, with the "**CHE**" as part of the verb.

This will remind you that we **never** use a verb from the **CONGIUNTIVO as the main verb** of a sentence!

▷ **SOME EXAMPLES:**

È importante che voi siate pazienti

It is important that you are/be patient

Non so chi sia quella donna

I don't know who that woman is

Credo che loro siano brave persone

I believe (that) they are good people

Present Subjunctive of **AVERE** (to have)

Che io abbia	That I have
Che tu abbia	That you have
Che lei/lui abbia	That she/he/it have
Che noi abbiamo	That we have
Che voi abbiate	You you guys have
Che loro abbiano	That they have!

▷ **SOME EXAMPLES:**

Credo che lei abbia ragione

I believe (that) she is right ("to have reason" means "to be right" in Italian!)

Marco pensa che loro abbiano già comprato il dolce

Marco thinks (that) they have already bought dessert

PLEASE NOTE THAT **WHENEVER WE NEED TO USE THE SUBJUNCTIVE** WE TEND TO USE THE **SUBJECT PRONOUN** (which are **usually omitted** when we use verbs from the **Indicative Mood**).

Penso che TU sia bella

I think (that) you are beautiful

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This is because the verb **SIA** could be referring to several different subjects, namely **I , YOU, HE, SHE, or IT.**

▷ **And finally...**

There is a large range of expressions that demand the subjunctive. Many of them contain the word **CHE** so they'll be easier to spot, but many don't.

It's just a matter of learning which expressions use the subjunctive and which don't.

Here are some of the **most common** ones:

SEBBENE	Even though
NONOSTANTE	Notwithstanding (despite the fact that)
PURCHÉ	Provided that
BENCHÉ	Although
AFFINCHÉ	So that
MALGRADO	Even though, despite the fact that, despite
PRIMA CHE	Before

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▷ SOME EXAMPLES:

Nonostante Sara sia stanca, viene comunque alla festa

Despite the fact that she is tired, Sara is still coming to the party.

Despite being tired, Sara is still coming to the party.

Even though she's tired, Sara is still coming to the party.

I genitori di Stefano lavorano molto affinché lui possa andare all'università

Stefano's parents work a lot so that he can go to college.

Here **POSSA** is the **3rd person singular** of the verb **POTERE** in the **Present Tense Subjunctive**.

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▷ EXERCISES

Translate the first group of sentences into Italian and the second group into English.

1. I believe she is a good mum

2. They think (that) we are married

3. Marco thinks that Stefano and Lucia are married

4. It is important that you have your passport

5. Even though she has a lot of money, she is often sad

6. Nonostante oggi sia una giornata fredda, io vorrei andare al mare

7. È essenziale che gli studenti abbiano penna e quaderno per l'esame

8. Ti porto io all'aeroporto, purché tu paghi il parcheggio!

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9. Voi pensate che io sia stupido, ma non è così!



10. Tu credi che io abbia paura?



▷ ANSWERS

Here are some possible translations for the exercises.

1. Credo che lei sia una buona mamma
2. (Loro) pensano che noi siamo sposati
3. Marco pensa che Stefano e Lucia siano sposati
4. È importante che tu abbia il tuo passaporto
5. Nonostante lei abbia molti soldi, è spesso triste
6. Despite the fact that today is a cold day, I would like to go to the beach
7. It is essential that the students have pen and notebook for the exam
8. I'll take you to the airport, as long as you pay for the parking!
9. You (guys) think I'm stupid, but it's not so.
10. Do you think I am scared?

▷ YOUR NOTES