

Verbal Moodswings

Verbs, like the rest of us, have various moods. These moods indicate the way a speaker or writer feels about the ideas (s)he expresses. Facts, opinions, and inquiries all use verbs in the **indicative** mood; requests and commands require the **imperative** mood; and wishes, requirements, and conditions contrary to fact are expressed in the **subjunctive** mood. For example:

- I burned the evidence. (**Indicative**)
- Burn the evidence. (**Imperative**)
- If I were to burn the evidence, I might escape justice. (**Subjunctive**)

The **indicative** is the most commonly used of the three moods. It is used to

1) state facts:

- Pigs cannot fly.

2) express opinions:

- She eats like a pig.

3) and pose questions:

- Do you think my new nose makes me look like a pig?

Imperative mood is used to voice

1) orders:

- Kiss me, you fool!

2) and requests:

- Please don't mind him; he reads too many romances.

Imperative statements always use the base form of the verb, and their subject, the understood "you" rarely appears in the sentence.

The **subjunctive** mood appears in four kinds of dependent clauses:

1) those expressing wishes:

- I wish I were a glamorous movie star.

2) those beginning with "if" and describing a situation that does not exist:

- If I could tell a better lie, I wouldn't be in this jam.

3) those beginning with "as if" and "as though:"

- He ate the ice cream slowly, as though it were his last meal.

4) and those beginning with "that" and expressing demands, requests, requirements, or suggestions:

- I suggest that you cease that annoying behavior immediately.

For suggestions and requirements, use the base form with all subjects:

- It is essential that he understand me.
- I suggest that you return her navy pumps immediately.

When expressing a desire or a condition contrary to fact in the present, use the past tense:

- I wish my boyfriend liked to dance.

For the verb "to be," use "were" no matter what the subject:

- If you were older, you would be less certain.
- I wish I were an Oscar Mayer wiener.

For past conditions contrary to fact, use the past perfect:

- If he had been on time, he would still have a job.