The Subjunctive In English

C2

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Present subjunctive

- In certain set phrases:
  - I see what you mean. Be that as it may, I can't agree with you.
  (=even so, still) *sea como fuere
  - Come what may, I will not resign!
  (=whatever happens) *pase lo que pase
  - "I am a Jedi. Like my father before me." "So be it... Jedi."
  (=it's okay with me, I accept this) *que así sea
  - I do not want to bore you; suffice it to say, we finally got a full refund.
  (=it is sufficient to say) *basta decir
- In exclamations that express a wish or hope:
  - Rest in peace!
  - Bless you!
  - God save the King!

Present subjunctive

- After adjectives such as IMPORTANT, ESSENTIAL, VITAL etc
  - It is/it was + adjective + that can be followed by a present subjunctive if the adjective expresses importance or necessity or that something should be done:
    - It is vital that everybody get there before the examination begins.
    - It is desirable that Mr Hanson hand in his resignation.
    - It is important that you be at home when the lawyers arrive.
    - It is essential that the car be waiting at the airport.
    - It is imperative that products be tested carefully.
  - In such sentences, the present subjunctive can be replaced with the less formal should + infinitive:
    - It is vital that everybody should get there before the examination begins.

- After verbs such as INSIST, SUGGEST, RECOMMEND etc.
    - Mike insisted that I try his new muffin recipe.
    - I suggest that your cousin apply at once.
    - Carl was injured last week, and the doctor recommended that he not play in the next match.
  - Again, the present subjunctive can be replaced with should + infinitive in less formal styles:
    - I suggest that your cousin should apply at once.

Past subjunctive

- The past subjunctive has the same form as the past simple tense except in the case of the verb be. Traditionally, the past subjunctive form of be is were for all persons, including the first and third person singular. However, today I/he/she/it was is more common while were is mainly used in formal styles and in the set phrase if I were you.

- The past subjunctive is used in subordinate clauses and refers to unreal or improbable present or future situations:
  - If I were you, I would apply right now. (=I am not you.)
  - What would you do if you won the lottery? (=You probably won't win the lottery.)
  - It's time the kids were in bed. (=The kids are not in bed.)
  - I wish you were here. (=You are not here.)
  - I'd rather your boyfriend stopped calling you in the middle of the night. (=Your boyfriend keeps calling you.)
  - He looks as if he knew the answer. (=He gives the impression that he knows the answer, but he probably doesn't.)

Past perfect subjunctive

- The past perfect subjunctive has the same form as the past perfect tense: HAD + PAST PARTICIPLE
- It is used in subordinate clauses and expresses unreal past situations:
  - I wish they had arrived on time. (=They didn't arrive on time.)
  - I would've bought the dress if there hadn't been such a queue. (=There was a long queue, so I didn't buy the dress.)
  - She would rather I had gone to bed earlier. (=I didn't go to bed early.)
  - He seems as if he hadn't slept for days. (=He seems not to have slept for days, but he has.)