

Advanced 3
Unit 1 Language Focus 2
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The Subjunctive Structure

If adjectives of urgency and verbs of urgency are followed by a that-clause, we have to use the simple form of the verb inside the that-clause and we call it the subjunctive form of the verb.

The subjunctive structure of the verb in that clauses which follow adjectives of urgency or verbs of urgency is the base form of the verb, regardless of the subject or the tense of the main clause. The base form of the verb is the same as the infinitive without the word “to”. For example, the base form of “to be” is “be”, and the base form of “to write” is “write”.

Adjectives of Urgency: necessary, essential, important, crucial, desirable, vital, advisable, ...

Verbs of Urgency: ask, request, suggest, recommend, propose, insist, advise, beg, ...

Here are some examples of the subjunctive structure in that clauses after adjectives of urgency:

It is urgent that he see a doctor. (not sees)

It was vital that she report the incident. (not reported)

It is imperative that they not leave the building. (not do not leave)

Here are some examples of the subjunctive structure in that clauses after verbs of urgency:

I insist that you be quiet. (not are)

She demanded that he apologize. (not apologized)

They requested that we wait for them. (not waited)

More Examples:

It is essential that Tom study hard.

It is necessary that Tom not be lazy.

The teacher suggests that Tom study hard.

The teacher recommends that Tom not waste his time.

It was advisable that Mary give up smoking.

It was vital that Mary not smoke cigarettes.

The doctor advised that Mary give up smoking.

The doctor insisted that Mary not smoke cigarettes.

Point:

If other types of adjectives or verbs are followed by a that-clause, we mustn't use the subjunctive structure.

Examples:

It is clear that Tom studies hard.

It is obvious that Tom isn't lazy.

I know that Tom studies hard.

I know that Tom doesn't waste his time.

Point:

The subjunctive structure is more frequent in American English than British English. In Britain, people tend to use "should" and the simple form of the verb instead.

Examples:

The teacher suggests that Tom should study hard.

The teacher recommends that Tom shouldn't be lazy.

The teacher advises that Tom shouldn't waste his time.

The doctor advised that Mary should give up smoking.

The doctor insisted that Mary shouldn't smoke cigarettes.

Source:

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