

Grammar: The sequence of tenses

Many Latin constructions take the subjunctive in the subordinate clauses (e.g. purpose clauses, verbs of fearing, indirect commands and indirect questions). The tense of this subjunctive is not random, but is governed by the rules laid down by the sequence of tenses:

Primary		Historic	
Indicative	Subjunctive	Indicative	Subjunctive
Present	Present	Imperfect	Imperfect
Future	Perfect	Pluperfect	Pluperfect
Perfect (with 'have')		Perfect (without 'have') ¹	
Future Perfect			

¹ In indirect questions, the primary takes the present subjunctive of *esse* with the future participle and the historic takes the imperfect subjunctive of *esse* with the future participle to create a periphrastic future subjunctive.

Within the **primary sequence**, the *present* subjunctive is used to express something that happens at the same time or after the action of the indicative verb. The *perfect* subjunctive is used to express something that happens prior to the indicative verb.

Within the **secondary sequence**, the *imperfect* subjunctive is used to express something that happens at the same time or after the action of the indicative verb. The *pluperfect* subjunctive is used to express something that happens prior to the indicative verb.