

The subjunctive

The subjunctive is becoming much less common in modern English. However, in the past, this structure was used to express ideas such as desirability and possibility. In modern English, we are more likely to express the same ideas using modal auxiliary verbs like would, should or must.

That said, subjunctive is still used in certain situations.

Examples are given below.

I recommend that he consult a doctor immediately.

The judge ordered that she be sent to prison.

I feel that you write to him as soon as possible.

It is important that Martin be present when we sign the papers.

Now here are the important points to note.

The subjunctive has no -s in the third person singular.

He insisted that he get his due. (NOT He insisted that he gets his due.)

In modern English, we are more likely to express the same idea using should + infinitive.

I recommend that he should consult a doctor immediately.

The judge ordered that she should be sent to prison.

I feel that you should write to him as soon as possible,

He insisted that he should get his due.

Note that the forms I were, he/she/it were used after if is also a form of the subjunctive.

I wish I were prettier.

If I were you I wouldn't let this happen.

I wish it were Sunday.