The Latin subjunctive is a mood of hypothetical verbal activity, including ideas of uncertainty, potential, will, desire and the like.

The term “subjunctive” (literally, “subjoining” or “subordinating”) is a slight misnomer in that it suggests that the mood’s primary function is as the verb of dependent (i.e. subordinate) clauses. Historically, the uses of the subjunctive in subordinate clauses (e.g. purpose, indirect command, indirect question, etc.) grew out of a few basic uses of the subjunctive in independent (i.e. main) clauses, as below.

As the mood of hypothetical verbal activity, the subjunctive is directly opposed to the indicative, the mood of facts, simple assertions, etc. It is also generally the case that whereas a speaker or writer uses the indicative mood to relate a (perceived or actual) fact without overtly expressing his or her own personal feeling in the matter, the speaker or writer using the subjunctive in independent clauses is less detached, e.g. he or she may want or will something to happen, or in other words the subjunctive is subjective.

1. The Jussive subjunctive expresses what the speaker or writer believes should be done; in the second and third person this amounts to a command or (with the negative) a prohibition. In the first person (where it is a matter of self-exhortation), this use is usually called the Hortatory subjunctive.

   a. tenses: the present and (more rarely and especially in prohibitions) the perfect are used to express what should or is to be done in the present; the imperfect and (more rarely) the pluperfect express what was to be done or what should have been done in the past.

   b. negative: nē

   c. examples [vocab.: incendō, incendere, incendī, incensus, “burn”]:

      incendāmus urbem, “let us burn the city.”
      incendās urbem, “you must burn the city.”
      incenderint urbem, “let them burn the city.”
      incenderēmus urbem, “we should have burned the city.”
      nē incendissēs urbem, “you should not have burned the city.”

2. The Optative Subjunctive is used to express wishes. It often occurs with the particle utinam (“Oh that/would that ...”), sometimes with ut (“How ...”) or Ō sī (“Oh if ...”).

   a. tenses: the present is used of wishes that something may happen in the future; the imperfect came to be used of wishes unfulfilled in the present; the pluperfect of wishes not fulfilled in the past.
b. negative: nē

c. examples [vocab.: canis, canis m. & f. “dog”]:

- **canēs cīvem malum interficiant**, “may that the dogs kill the bad citizen!” , “I wish that the dogs would kill the bad citizen!”
- **utinam cīvem malum interficerēmus**, “would that/we wish that we were killing the bad citizen!”
- **utinam nē cīvem malum interfēcissēs**, “would that [i.e. “if only ...”] you had not killed the bad citizen!”

3. The **Potential** Subjunctive expresses action that the speaker or writer believes is conceivable, possible, likely or certain. The second person singular is commonly used in generalizations (i.e. “you may ...” = “one may ...”, “a person may ...”).

a. tenses: the present and (sometimes) the perfect refer to the immediate future; the imperfect to what could or might have happened in the past, and can no longer happen.

b. negative: nōn

c. examples:

- **aliquis dīcat**, “someone may say ...”
- **aliquis dīceret**, “someone might have said ...”
- **cīvem malum interficiāmus**, “we can kill the bad citizen.”
- **cīvem malum interficerēmus**, “we might/could have killed the bad citizen.”
- **canēs urbem nōn incendant**, “the dogs may not burn the city.”
- **crēdās canēs urbem incendere**, “you would/one would/may think that the dogs are burning the city.”
- **crēderēs canēs urbem incendere**, “you/one would/might have thought that the dogs were burning the city.”

4. The **Deliberative** subjunctive is used in (often rhetorical) questions. Deliberative questions commonly indicate the speaker’s doubt, hesitation, indignation, surprise, or helplessness.

a. tenses: usually present (for deliberation in the present) or imperfect (for deliberation in the past).

b. negative: nōn

c. examples:

- **quid faciam**, “what am I to do/what shall/should I do?”
- **quid facerēmus**, “what were we to do?”
- **cīvemne interficiāmus**, “shall/should we kill the citizen?”
- **cīvemne interficerem**, “was I to kill the citizen?”
quid canēs incenderent, “what were the dogs to burn?”