

EPISTOLARY TENSES

479. In Letters, the Perfect Historical or the Imperfect may be used for the present, and the Pluperfect for any past tense, as if the letter were *dated* at the time it is supposed to be *received*:—

neque tamen, haec cum scribēbam, eram nescius quantis oneribus premerere (Fam. v. 12. 2), *nor while I write this am I ignorant under what burdens you are weighed down.*

ad tuās omnis [epistulās] rescripseram pridīc (Att. ix. 10. 1), *I answered all your letters yesterday.*

cum quod scriberem ad tē nihil habērem, tamen hās deī litterās (Att. ix. 16), *though I have nothing to write to you, still I write this letter.*

NOTE.—In this use these tenses are called the Epistolary Perfect, Imperfect, and Pluperfect. The epistolary tenses are not employed with any uniformity, but only when attention is particularly directed to the *time of writing* (so especially scribēbam, dabam, etc.).

TENSES OF THE SUBJUNCTIVE

480. The tenses of the Subjunctive in Independent Clauses denote time in relation to the time of the speaker.

The Present always refers to *future* (or *indefinite*) time, the Imperfect to either *past* or *present*, the Perfect to either *future* or *past*, the Pluperfect always to *past*.

481. The tenses of the Subjunctive in Dependent Clauses were habitually used in certain fixed connections with the tenses of the main verb.

These connections were determined by the time of the main verb and the time of the dependent verb together. They are known, collectively, as the *Sequence of Tenses*.

NOTE.—The so-called Sequence of Tenses is not a mechanical law. Each tense of the subjunctive in dependent clauses (as in independent) originally denoted its own time in relation to the time of the speaker, though less definitely than the corresponding tenses of the indicative. Gradually, however, as the complex sentence was more strongly felt as a unit, certain types in which the tenses of the dependent clause seemed to accord with those of the main clause were almost unconsciously regarded as regular, and others, in which there was no such agreement, as exceptional. Thus a pretty definite system of correspondences grew up, which is codified in the rules for the Sequence of Tenses. These, however, are by no means rigid. They do not apply with equal stringency to all dependent constructions, and they were frequently disregarded, not only when their strict observance would have obscured the sense, but for the sake of emphasis and variety, or merely from carelessness.

Sequence of Tenses

482. The tenses of the Subjunctive in Dependent Clauses follow special rules for the Sequence of Tenses.

With reference to these rules all tenses when used in *independent* clauses are divided into two classes,—*Primary* and *Secondary*.

1. PRIMARY. — The *Primary Tenses* include all forms that express *present or future* time. These are the Present, Future, and Future Perfect Indicative, the Present and Perfect Subjunctive, and the Present and Future Imperative.

2. SECONDARY. — The *Secondary Tenses* include all forms that refer to *past* time. These are the Imperfect, Perfect, and Pluperfect Indicative, the Imperfect and Pluperfect Subjunctive, and the Historical Infinitive.

NOTE. — To these may be added certain forms less commonly used in independent clauses:—(1) Primary: Present Infinitive in Exclamations; (2) Secondary: Perfect Infinitive in Exclamations (see §§ 462, 485. a. n.).

The Perfect Definite is sometimes treated as primary (see § 485. a).

For the Historical Present, see § 485. e; for the Imperfect Subjunctive in Apodosis, see § 485. h.

483. The following is the general rule for the Sequence of Tenses:—¹

In complex sentences a Primary tense in the main clause is followed by the Present or Perfect in the dependent clause, and a Secondary tense by the Imperfect or Pluperfect:—

PRIMARY TENSES

rogō,	<i>I ask, am asking</i>	} quid faciās, <i>what you are doing.</i>	
rogābō,	<i>I shall ask</i>		} quid feceris, <i>what you did, were doing,</i> <i>have done, have been doing.</i>
rogāvī (sometimes),	<i>I have asked</i>		
rogāverō,	<i>I shall have asked</i>	} quid factūrus sis, <i>what you will do.</i>	
scrībit,	<i>he writes</i>	} ut nōs moneat, <i>to warn us.</i>	
scrībet,	<i>he will write</i>		
scrībe (scrībitō),	<i>write</i>	ut nōs moneās, <i>to warn us.</i>	
scrībit,	<i>he writes</i>	quasi oblītus sit, <i>as if he had forgotten.</i>	

¹ The term is sometimes extended to certain relations between the tenses of subordinate verbs in the indicative and those of the main verb. These relations do not differ in principle from those which we are considering; but for convenience the term Sequence of Tenses is in this book restricted to subjunctives, in accordance with the usual practice.

SECONDARY TENSES

rogābam,	<i>I asked, was asking</i>	} quid facerēs, <i>what you were doing.</i> quid fecissēs, <i>what you had done, had been doing.</i> quid factūrus essēs, <i>what you wou'd do, ut nōs monēret, to warn us.</i> quasi oblitus esset, <i>as if he had forgotten.</i>
rogāvī,	<i>I asked, have asked</i>	
rogāveram,	<i>I had asked</i>	
scrīpsit,	<i>he wrote</i>	
scrīpsit,	<i>he wrote</i>	

484. In applying the rule for the Sequence of Tenses, observe—

(1) Whether the main verb is (*a*) primary or (*b*) secondary.

(2) Whether the dependent verb is to denote completed action (i.e. past with reference to the main verb) or incomplete action (i.e. present or future with reference to the main verb). Then—

a. If the leading verb is *primary*, the dependent verb must be in the *Present* if it denotes *incomplete action*, in the *Perfect* if it denotes *completed action*.

b. If the leading verb is *secondary*, the dependent verb must be in the *Imperfect* if it denotes *incomplete action*, in the *Pluperfect* if it denotes *completed action*:—

(1) *He writes* [primary] *to warn* [incomplete act on] *us*, *scrībit ut nōs moneat.*
I ask [primary] *what you were doing* [now past], *rogō quid feceris.*

(2) *He wrote* [secondary] *to warn* [incomplete] *us*, *scrīpsit ut nōs monēret.*
I asked [secondary] *what you were doing* [incomplete], *rogāvī quid facerēs.*

c. Notice that the Future Perfect denotes action completed (at the time referred to), and hence is represented in the Subjunctive by the Perfect or Pluperfect:—

He shows that if they come (shall have come), *many will perish*, *dēmōnstrat, si vēnerint, multōs interitūrōs.*

He showed that if they should come (should have come), *many would perish*, *dēmōnstrāvit, si vēnissent, multōs interitūrōs.*

485. In the Sequence of Tenses the following special points are to be noted:—

a. The Perfect Indicative is ordinarily a secondary tense, but allows the primary sequence when the present time is clearly in the writer's mind:—

ut satis esset praesidi prōvisum est (Cat. ii. 26), *provision has been made that there should be ample guard.* [Secondary sequence.]

addūxī hominem in quō satisfacere exteris nātiōnibus possētis (Verr. i. 2), *I have brought a man in whose person you can make satisfaction to foreign nations.* [Secondary sequence.]

est enim rēs iam in eum locum adducta, ut quamquam multum intersit inter eōrum causās quī dīmicant, tamen inter victōriās nōn multum interfutūrum putem (Fam. v. 21. 3), *for affairs have been brought to such a pass that, though there is a great difference between the causes of those who are fighting, still I do not think there will be much difference between their victories.* [Primary sequence.]

ea adhibita doctrīna est quae vel vitiōsissimam nātūram excolere possit (Q. Fr. i. 1. 7), *such instruction has been given as can train even the faultiest nature.* [Primary sequence.]

NOTE.—The Perfect Infinitive in exclamations follows the same rule:—
quemquamne fuisse tam scelerātum qui hōc fingeret (Phil. xiv. 14), *was any one so abandoned as to imagine this?* [Secondary.]
adeōn rem redīsse patrem ut extimēscam (Ter. Ph. 153), *to think that things have come to such a pass that I should dread my father!* [Primary.]

b. After a primary tense the Perfect Subjunctive is regularly used to denote *any past action*. Thus the Perfect Subjunctive may represent—

1. A Perfect Definite:—

nōn dubitō quin omnēs tuī scripserint (Fam. v. 8), *I do not doubt that all your friends have written.* [Direct statement: scripsērunt.]

quā rē nōn ignōrō quid accidat in ultimīs terrīs, cum audierim in Ītaliā que-rellās civium (Q. Fr. i. 1. 33), *therefore I know well what happens at the ends of the earth, when I have heard in Italy the complaints of citizens.* [Direct statement: audīvi.]

2. A Perfect Historical:—

mē autem hīc laudat quod rettulerim, nōn quod patefēcerim (Att. xii. 21), *me he praises because I brought the matter [before the senate], not because I brought it to light.* [Direct statement: rettulit.]

3. An Imperfect:—

sī forte cecidērunt, tum intellegitur quam fuerint inopēs amicōrum (Lael. 53), *if perchance they fall (have fallen), then one can see how poor they were in friends.* [Direct question: quam inopēs erant?]

quī status rērum fuerit cum hās litterās dedi, scire poteris ex C. Titio Strabōne (Fam. xii. 6), *what the condition of affairs was when I wrote this letter, you can learn from Strabo.* [Direct question: quī status erat?]

quam civitātī cārus fuerit maerōre fūneris indicātum est (Lael. 11), *how dear he was to the state has been shown by the grief at his funeral.* [Direct question: quam cārus erat?]

ex epistulis intellegi licet quam frequēns fuerit Platōnis auditor (Or. 15), *it may be understood from his letters how constant a hearer he was of Plato.* [Direct question: quam frequēns erat?]

NOTE.—Thus the Perfect Subjunctive may represent, not only a Perfect Definite or a Perfect Historical of a direct statement or question, but an Imperfect as well. This comes from the want of any special tense of the subjunctive to express continued action after a primary tense. Thus, *miror quid fēcerit* may mean (1) *I wonder what he has done*, (2) *I wonder what he did* (hist. perf.), or (3) *I wonder what he was doing*.

c. In clauses of Result, the Perfect Subjunctive is regularly (the Present rarely) used after secondary tenses: —

Hortēnsius ardēbat dicendi cupiditate sic ut in nullō unquam flagrantius studium viderim (Brut. 302), *Hortensius was so hot with desire of speaking that I have never seen a more burning ardor in any man.*

[Siciliam Verrēs] per triennium ita vexavit ac perdidit ut ea restitui in antiquum statum nullō modō possit (Verr. i. 12), *for three years Verres so racked and ruined Sicily that she can in no way be restored to her former state.* [Here the Present describes a state of things actually existing.]

videor esse cōsecutus ut nōn possit Dolabella in Italiam pervenire (Fam. xii. 14. 2), *I seem to have brought it about that Dolabella cannot come into Italy.*

NOTE 1. — This construction emphasizes the result; the regular sequence of tenses would subordinate it.

NOTE 2. — There is a special fondness for the Perfect Subjunctive to represent a Perfect Indicative: —

Thorius erat ita nōn superstitiosus ut illa plurima in suā patriā et sacrificia et fana contemneret; ita nōn timidus ad mortem ut in aciē sit ob rem publicam interfectus (Fin. ii. 63), *Thorius was so little superstitious that he despised [contemnēbat] the many sacrifices and shrines in his country; so little timorous about death that he was killed [interfectus est] in battle, in defence of the state.*

d. A general truth after a past tense follows the sequence of tenses:

ex his quae tribuisset, sibi quam mutabilis esset reputabat (Q. C. iii. 8. 20), *from what she (Fortune) had bestowed on him, he reflected how inconstant she is.* [Direct: mutabilis est.]

ibi quantum vim ad stimulandos animos ira haberet apparuit (Liv. xxxiii. 37), *here it appeared what power anger has to goad the mind.* [Direct: habet.]

NOTE. — In English the original tense is more commonly kept.

e. The Historical Present (§ 469) is sometimes felt as a *primary*, sometimes as a *secondary* tense, and accordingly it takes either the primary or the secondary sequence: —

rogat ut curet quod dixisset (Quinct. 18), *he asks him to attend to the thing he had spoken of.* [Both primary and secondary sequence.]

NOTE. — After the historical present, the subjunctive with cum temporal must follow the secondary sequence: —

quō cum venisset cognoscit (B. C. i. 34), *when he had come there he learns.*

cum esset pugnatum horis quinque, nostrique gravius premerentur, impetum in cohortis faciunt (id. i. 46), *when they had fought for five hours, and our men were pretty hard pressed, they make an attack on the cohorts.*

f. The Historical Infinitive regularly takes the secondary sequence: —

interim cotidie Caesar Haeduos frumentum, quod essent polliciti, flagitare (B. G. i. 16), *meanwhile Caesar demanded of the Haedui every day the grain which they had promised.*

g. The Imperfect and Pluperfect in conditions contrary to fact (§ 517) and in the Deliberative Subjunctive (§ 444) are not affected by the sequence of tenses:—

quia tāle sit, ut vel sī ignōrārent id hominēs vel sī obmutuissent (Fin. ii. 49),
because it is such that even if men WERE ignorant of it, or HAD BEEN
silent about it.

quaerō ā tē cūr C. Cornēlium nōn dēfenderem (Vat. 5), I ask you why I was
not to defend Caius Cornelius? [Direct: cūr nōn dēfenderem?]

h. The Imperfect Subjunctive in present conditions contrary to fact (§ 517) is regularly followed by the secondary sequence:—

sī alii cōsulēs essent, ad tē potissimum, Paule, mitterem, ut eōs mihi quam
amicissimōs redderēs (Fam. xv. 13. 3), if there were other consuls, I should
send to you, Paulus, in preference to all, that you might make them as
friendly to me as possible.

sī sōlōs eōs dicerēs miserōs quibus moriendum esset, nēmīnem exciperēs
(Tusc. i. 9), if you were to call only those wretched who must die, you
would except no one.

i. The Present is sometimes followed by a secondary sequence, seemingly because the writer is thinking of past time:—

sed sī rēs cōget, est quiddam tertium, quod neque Seliciō nec mihi displicē-
bat: ut neque iacere rem paterēmur, etc. (Fam. i. 5 a. 3), but if the case
shall demand, there is a third [course] which neither Selicius nor myself
disapproved, that we should not allow, etc. [Here Cicero is led by the
time of displicēbat.]

sed tamen ut scīrēs, haec tibi scribō (Fam. xiii. 47), but yet that you may know, I
write thus. [As if he had used the epistolary imperfect scribēbam (§ 479).]
cūius praecepti tanta vis est ut ea nōn hominī cuiquam sed Delphicō deō
tribuerētur (Legg. i. 58), such is the force of this precept, that it was
ascribed not to any man, but to the Delphic god. [The precept was an
old one.]

j. When a clause depends upon one already dependent, its sequence may be secondary if the verb of that clause expresses past time, even if the main verb is in a primary tense:—

sed tamen quā rē acciderit ut ex meis superiōribus litteris id suspicārē nesciō
(Fam. ii. 16), but yet how it happened that you suspected this from my
previous letter, I don't know.

tantum profēcisse vidēmur ut ā Graecis nē verbōrum quidem cōpiā vincerē-
mur (N. D. i. 8), we seem to have advanced so far that even in abundance
of words we ARE not surpassed by the Greeks.

NOTE.—So regularly after a Perfect Infinitive which depends on a primary tense (§ 585. a).