

Voicing opinions: subjunctive or indicative

AP French Language and Culture · Lesson

Quick answer: In a French opinion statement, the indicative presents an idea as true or probable (Je pense que c'est juste), while the subjunctive marks doubt, wish, necessity or judgment (Je doute que ce soit juste). Negated or questioned opinion verbs usually switch to the subjunctive.

Level: AP French Language and Culture · **Standards:** AP French Language and Culture (College Board CED), Theme: Personal and Public Identities

Why does mood matter in an AP opinion essay?

Graders listen for control of mood when you defend a viewpoint on identity: who we are, what we owe our communities, how language shapes belonging. The choice depends on how certain the speaker sounds, not on the verb alone.

Rule: certainty versus doubt

Use the **indicative** when the opinion is presented as fact or likelihood. Use the **subjunctive** when the opinion expresses doubt, desire, necessity, emotion or evaluation.

INDICATIF = certitude

je pense que...
il est évident que...
je suis sûr(e) que...
il me semble que...

SUBJONCTIF = doute

je doute que...
il faut que...
il est dommage que...
je ne crois pas que...

Certainty goes left, doubt, will and judgment go right.

Indicative	Subjunctive
Je crois que la langue définit une culture. — I believe language defines a culture.	Je ne crois pas que la langue définisse tout. — I don't believe language defines everything.
Il est vrai que mon identité change .	Il est essentiel que chacun garde sa voix. — It is essential that everyone keep their voice.

How is the present subjunctive formed?

Take the ils form of the present, drop -ent, and add the endings below. Nous and vous keep the imperfect look.



que je parle · que tu parles · qu'il parle
que nous parlions · que vous parliez · qu'ils parlent

Stem from ils, then six endings.

Verb	Irregular stem	Example
être	soi- / soy-	Il faut que tu sois honnête.
avoir	ai- / ay-	Je veux qu'elle ait le choix.
aller, faire	aill- / fass-	Il est bon que nous fassions un effort.
pouvoir, savoir	puiss- / sach-	Je doute qu'il sache la réponse.

How do you pick the right opener in a persuasive essay?

Three stances, three moods

- *Strong conviction*: Il est incontestable que notre accent fait partie de nous. — Indicative.
- *Measured doubt*: Il n'est pas certain que les frontières définissent une identité. — Subjunctive.
- *Call to action*: Il est temps que les villes valorisent toutes leurs langues. — Subjunctive.

Mix the three stances across your paragraphs. A single indicative opener followed by two subjunctive ones already shows the examiner that you control both moods.

Common mistake

English speakers carry *I think that* over unchanged to the negative. French needs a shift: Je ne pense pas qu'il **ait** raison (not il a). Also never drop que, and use an infinitive when the subject does not change: Je veux parler, not je veux que je parle.

Culture note

The persuasive essay task on the AP French exam rewards writers who vary their stance verbs, so alternating indicative and subjunctive openers shows range.

Zoé's tip

Ask one question: « Am I sure, or am I feeling, wanting, doubting? » Sure means indicative. Anything else, subjunctive.

Key points to remember

- Affirmative je pense que, je crois que, il est clair que take the indicative.
- Il faut que, je veux que, je doute que, il est important que take the subjunctive.
- Negative or interrogative penser, croire, trouver often take the subjunctive.
- When both clauses share one subject, French uses an infinitive instead of que + subjunctive.

Voicing Opinions: Subjunctive or Indicative: frequently asked questions

Does je pense que always take the indicative?

In the affirmative, yes: Je pense que Zoé a raison. In the negative or the question form, the subjunctive is common because the speaker expresses doubt: Je ne pense pas que Zoé ait raison.

Why is espérer que followed by the indicative?

Hoping presents the outcome as possible and expected rather than doubtful, so French uses the indicative, often the future: J'espère qu'il viendra.

Can I always use the subjunctive after il est important que?

Yes. Expressions of necessity and evaluation such as il est important, essentiel, normal, dommage que always take the subjunctive.

When do I use an infinitive instead of que + subjunctive?

Use the infinitive when the main verb and the second verb share the same subject: Il faut partir or Je veux voter. Different subjects require que + subjunctive.

How do I avoid the subjunctive on the exam?

Use a noun phrase or an infinitive when it sounds natural, such as à mon avis. Still, a few correct subjunctives clearly raise the quality of a persuasive essay.