

0087-1

This is well on the way to handling the difficult topic -  
You note the important areas: function, context (though somewhat  
vaguely), difference between comprehension & production, difference  
among modalities (except no mention of listening - which is important,  
since they must hear the emotions of the subjunctive and  
also the difference between *war/wäre*).

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What's missing is: 1) understanding that the subjunctive  
extends over several proficiency levels; 2) insight into the  
problematic aspect of **The Treatment of the Subjunctive**  
in **Komm mit! Level 3**  
3) realization that **Komm mit!** may have a grammatical ceiling that is much too high.

But that's  
food for  
discussion!

Using the subjunctive in German requires familiarity with a host of basic German language skills and rules of grammar. At the minimum, students need to be familiar with the present tense, modals, verbs, their conjugated forms and at least some basic vocabulary to express their ideas. High school students who study German as a foreign language often do not learn how to construct the conjunctive until their third year of German classes, when they have already been introduced to the present tense, past tense and future tense forms of German. Textbooks tend to introduce the subjunctive as a way to express ideas, plans for the future, giving advice and hypothesizing and offer exercises and stories to reinforce those uses of the subjunctive.

*This may be the problem*

According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), third year foreign language learners at the high school level fall into the intermediate learner range, assuming students begin learning the foreign language during their freshman year. ACTFL Performance Guidelines require that intermediate language learners have acquired basic German language skills and thus built the building blocks to master the subjunctive and its underlying components in the following ways:

Did they state this explicitly, or did you derive it by observation?

**Present tense:**

- **Comprehensibility:** - Are able to meet practical writing needs such as short letters and notes, by recombining learned vocabulary and structures demonstrating full control of present time and some control of other time frames.

- Frequently derive meaning of unknown words by contextual clues.
- **Communication Strategies:** Use circumlocution when faced with difficult syntactic structures; problematic spelling, or unfamiliar vocabulary.
- **Cultural Awareness:** Use some culturally appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.

The third-year German textbook *Komm mit! Level 3*, by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., addresses the subjunctive and the components necessary to construct it in several chapters throughout the book. The focus of teaching and reviewing the subjunctive appears to be on chapter 9, although chapters before and after address or use its use at least briefly. The following chart illustrates the journey the subjunctive takes in the textbook, while pointing out which ACTFL Guidelines are covered and addressed.

| Use of the subjunctive in <i>Komm mit! Level 3</i>  | ACTFL Performance Guidelines  |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kapitel 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hypothesizing</li> <li>- Explanation of "hätte" and "würde"</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formulate oral and written presentations of familiar topics, using a range of sentences and strings of sentences primarily in present time, but also, with preparation, in past and future time.</li> <li>- Use some culturally appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kapitel 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talking about what is possible</li> <li>- Explanation of "könnte"</li> <li>- Introduction and explanation of the phrases "Ich hätte gern..." and "Ich wäre gern..."</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formulate oral and written presentations of familiar topics, using a range of sentences and strings of sentences primarily in present time, but also, with preparation, in past and future time.</li> <li>- Comprehend messages that include</li> </ul>                                      |

*Is this really the right sequence?*

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distinction between "hätte" and "wäre"</li> </ul>  | <p>some unfamiliar grammatical structures.</p>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kapitel 9</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offering solutions: "könnte, müsste and sollte."</li> <li>- Subjunctive forms of "können, müssen, dürfen, sollen and sein" with a brief explanation of how and for what purposes the subjunctive is used.</li> <li>- Using the subjunctive to make polite requests.</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are able to meet practical writing needs such as short letters and notes, by recombining learned vocabulary and structures demonstrating full control of present time and some control of other time frames.</li> </ul>                             |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kapitel 10</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grammar summary on the passive voice addresses the subjunctive (i.e. "die Karten könnten/müssten/sollten abgeholt werden.").</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use contextual clues to assist in comprehension.</li> </ul>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kapitel 11</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subjunctive is used in the story "Wenn ich mal dreißig bin."</li> <li>- Expressing wishes</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehend general concepts and messages about familiar and occasionally unfamiliar topics.</li> <li>- Use vocabulary from a variety of thematic word groups.</li> <li>- Frequently derive meaning of unknown words by contextual clues.</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kapitel 12</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expressing surprise and disappointment (i.e. "Ich hätte nicht geglaubt, daß...")</li> <li>- Offering solutions: "könnte, müsste and sollte."</li> <li>- Hypothesizing</li> <li>- Reference box that points students to the grammar section in the back of the textbook</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use some culturally appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.</li> <li>- Use contextual clues to assist in comprehension.</li> </ul>  |

Why not earlier?

Which ACTFL level is this?

Comparing the ACTFL Guidelines for the use and construction of the subjunctive in the textbook to the guidelines suggested for the components it is based on, it appears that the textbook addresses a number of guidelines that are similar to those covered by the individual components. The textbook also does a good job of introducing, reviewing and reusing the material at several points throughout the book, which gives students a chance to learn and further internalize the material. While some chapters include an exercise or two about the subjunctive in conjunction with a small grammar box and sample phrases and expression, others challenge students' comprehension skills by including the subjunctive in stories, while yet others clearly focus on the subjunctive as one of the main learning objectives.

However, while the textbook recycles the material quite well, it rarely lets students know that they are working with the subjunctive, which may be advantageous on one hand and disadvantageous on another. Not overwhelming students with technical and grammatical terms on a consistent basis but focusing on how the language is used in context instead seems to provide more of a practical focus. However, it also prevents students from realizing what they are learning and what they already know. Although terminology can make language seem theoretical, it also appears worthwhile to teach, at least to some extent. So while the textbook successfully addresses and meets many of the ACTFL Guidelines suggested for third-year intermediate language learners as far as the subjunctive is concerned, it neglects teaching students some of the terminology that might be helpful later on in the course of their language classes.

*good point!*

*a big question!*