

Composition #2: What if? (*Barbara*, 2012, dir. Christian Petzold)

Due: April 1, 2019, at 11:59 p.m., on D2L

Purpose:

The ability to talk about possibilities and likelihoods is one of the hallmarks of advanced language proficiency. To communicate “what if’s” in German, one must master what is called the subjunctive mood. In this assignment, you will practice the subjunctive mood by reflecting on the open-ended nature of the film we watched and discussed in class, *Barbara*. Only through practicing grammatical concepts frequently can you master them. Writing is a particularly important form of practice because it, unlike speaking, allows you to work through a new grammar concept at your own pace. In this composition, you will use the subjunctive case to analyze the film’s unresolved ending. You will also write a short plot summary using the present tense, since a solid understanding of characters’ tendencies and the film’s situational context is necessary to identify likely alternate endings.



Skills: This assignment will help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course and in communicating effectively in the German language generally:

1. Synthesizing key aspects from the plot of a two-hour-long film into a clear, focused, and concise summary;
2. Applying your knowledge of the present- or past-subjunctive mood to communicate hypotheticals and logical possibilities in German;
3. Interpreting the ending of the film by applying your knowledge of characters and plot either to create a logical alternate ending or analyze an actual alternate ending.

Knowledge: This assignment will also help you increase your familiarity with the following important content knowledge in German Studies:

1. The history of the GDR (1949-89) and, in particular, the role of the Stasi within East German society as reflected in the film *Barbara* and in our course lectures.

On the pages below you will find the resources and information you need to succeed on this assignment. You may also use the hyperlinks to advance to the appropriate page:

- [Task](#)
- [12 Steps for Writing Successfully in a Foreign Language](#)
- [Criteria for Success](#)

To help you succeed, we will also do the following activities in class: (1) collaboratively analyze an example of good work; (2) examine indicators of successful work; (3) discuss how excellent work differs from adequate work; (4) provide peer feedback using the “Criteria for Success” checklist; and (5) practice the “12 Steps for Writing Successfully in a Foreign Language.” After your assignment has been graded by the instructor, we will also reflect and comment on our completed work with a focus on changes to our learning strategies that might improve our work.

Task:

You should compose an original essay that:

1. is 500-600 words in length, entirely in German, and double-spaced (with the word count on the top of page 1);
2. is uploaded to D2L as a pdf., .doc, .docx, or .odt by April 1, 2019, at 11:59 p.m.;
3. demonstrates the ability to summarize (present tense) and conjecture (present or past subjunctive mood) accurately and effectively;
4. demonstrates interpretive abilities in the context of the film *Barbara*.

Required Content and Grammar. The essay consists of two required parts:

Part 1 (200-300 words): Summarize the ending of the film *Barbara* using your own words and the present tense. (Please consult chapter 2 for a thorough review of the present tense.). You may want to start your summary like this:

- *Der Film Barbara (dir. Christian Petzold, 2012) **handelt von** einer ostdeutschen Ärztin, die zwangsmäßig in einer Klinik in der Provinz **arbeitet**.*
- *In dem Film Barbara (dir. Christian Petzold, 2012) **geht es um** die menschliche Fähigkeit, anderen zu vertrauen. Vor allem **findet** Barbara, eine ostdeutsche Ärztin, es schwierig, denn sie...*

Part 2 (200-400 words): Select one of the following sub-topics and use either the present or past subjunctive mood (*Konjunktiv II*) with and without modal verbs to create or analyze a logical, alternate ending. (Please consult chapter 21 for a thorough review of the present and past subjunctive and chapter 9 for a review of modal verbs.)

- a. **Option 1 – A new ending (past subjunctive).** Small changes can cause significantly different outcomes. Analyze an alternate, possible ending for the film that would be logical in the context of your understanding of GDR history, the film plot, and the film characters' personal inclinations. Use the past subjunctive both with and without modal verbs. For instance:
 - *Wenn Stella nicht **zurückgekommen wäre**, **wäre** Barbara doch nach Dänemark **geflohen**.*
 - *Barbara **hätte** nach Dänemark **fliehen wollen**, wenn Stella nicht **zurückgekommen wäre**.*
 - ***Hätte** sich André nicht in Barbara **verliebt**, **wäre** sie ihm gegenüber misstrauisch **geblieben**.*
- b. **Option 2 – The unresolved ending (present subjunctive):** A good film can sometimes provide viewers more questions than answers. Using the present subjunctive (*Konjunktiv II Gegenwart*) both with and without modal verbs, compose a creative explanation of how the plot could logically continue after the end of the film *Barbara*. For instance:
 - *André **würde** Barbara nicht mehr **heiraten**, sonst **würde** er seine Arbeitsstelle **verlieren**.*
 - *Jörg **wäre** enttäuscht, weil er keine Hoffnung mehr auf ein Wiedersehen mit Barbara **hätte**. Aber...*
 - *Barbara **müsste** ins Gefängnis **landen** und daher in der DDR **bleiben**. Dennoch...*
- c. **Option 3 – The script (present or past subjunctive):** "The book was better than the film" is something one often says. But is the script better than the film? In the attachment labelled "script," you will find two excerpts from the film script that show differences between the planned script and the actual film. In the first, André initiates the kiss by taking two steps forward. In the second, the film ends with a dialogue rather than silence and the sound of breathing. How would the film be different, if it had followed the script more closely? Use either the present or the past subjunctive both with and without modal verbs. For instance:
 - *Wenn André Barbara zuerst **genähert** und dadurch den Kuss **initiiert hätte**, **hätte** der Film uns eine Botschaft **vermittelt**, nämlich... Es **wäre**...*
 - ***Hätte** André am Ende des Films **gesprochen**, **würden** wir als Zuschauer ein ganz anderes Gefühl **bekommen**, nämlich...*

12 Steps for Writing Successfully in a Foreign Language:

Writing in a foreign language is a process that takes time and patience. You simply cannot write an essay the same way you would in English. I recommend, therefore, a multi-step approach:

1. Review the “academic integrity” policies in the syllabus before beginning and, when in doubt, ask your instructor questions about these policies. Remember that translation services (such as, but not limited to, Google Translate) and native speakers of German may not be used to write any portion of this assignment.
2. Read the topic description(s) and assignment requirements, then brainstorm ideas on a sheet of paper for at least two of the potential topics (in part 2) before choosing your subtopic.
3. Write your ideas in German first (no dictionary yet!). Use English or leave blanks as needed to keep the flow of ideas coming and to keep your mind thinking in German. You want to build momentum, not interrupt it by switching back-and-forth between German and English.
4. When you get stuck, re-read the topic above as needed to generate more ideas.
5. Once you have at least 100-200 words written per part, start revising and adding content.
6. First, review your writing and the textbook with a focus on the major grammar requirements listed on the rubric below. Assess: Am I using present- or past-subjunctive? Is it correct? Am I confusing past and present forms? Am I using modal verbs as well? Am I using present tense frequently and correctly? Add/change as needed.
7. Second, review your writing and the textbook with a focus on the minor grammar requirements listed on the rubric below. Assess: Am I using enough conjunctions from the textbook? Is my word order correct after *wenn* and *weil*? What about after *und*? etc.
8. Open a dictionary for first time (I strongly recommend <http://dict.cc> because it lists options in order of frequency). Fill in missing words/phrases and replace temporary English placeholders. See where you can add description and look up descriptive adjectives, adverbs, etc. to make sure that your composition is detailed.
9. Check spelling and noun genders (<http://dict.cc>) throughout the essay. It does not take long with an online dictionary and will save you many points if you do. At the 3000 level, you should be able to catch and correct these errors on your own.
10. Check grammar forms (<http://canoo.net>). Enter any word, then click on “Wortformen,” and you will find what you are looking for: tenses, cases, endings, etc. Double-check your use of subjunctive mood and present tense.
11. Check word choice using <http://dict.cc>. You can avoid (sometimes embarrassing) usage errors by doing the following:
 - a. Don’t select translations at random. If you are looking up an adverb, your translation should be an adverb. Don’t use “Kittel” (a piece of clothing) when you mean “overall” (generally).
 - b. Refer to categories listed next to each word (e.g., “aviat.,” “archi.,” “sports”) to determine the proper word. For instance, while English uses the same word—“wing”—for part of an airplane, part of a building, *and* a sports position, German uses three different terms.
 - c. Once you have narrowed your choices, reverse look-up the word in the German side of the dictionary to confirm your selection. If you see unexpected results, try again.
12. Continue to revise and add as needed. To identify and correct your own grammatical errors, focus on only one type of error (e.g., present tense or word order) at a time for most effective results. Doing so will actually save you both time and points!

Criteria for Success:

The writing assignment is worth 10% of your total grade in this course. Each essay will be graded for its content and format (30 points) and for its proper use of prescribed grammatical concepts (70 points). You may revise your essay for up to a 10% increase in your original score. Revisions are due one week after you receive instructor or peer feedback.

Content and Format (30 points):

Is the summary in Part 1:

- informative (5)? (i.e., concise summary of at least one key scene in the film)
- descriptive and detailed (5)? (e.g., adjectives, adverbs, specific scenes and plot details)
- well-written (5)? (i.e., proper word choice with the help of a dictionary)

Does the creative interpretation in Part 2 demonstrate:

- an understanding of characters and plot? (5) (i.e., logical possibilities in the context of the film)
- descriptive and detailed language (5)? (e.g., adjectives, adverbs, specific scenes and plot details)
- attention to word choice (5)? (i.e., proper word choice with the help of a dictionary)

Grammatical Focus and Correctness (70 points):

1. Does the essay use the present tense (*das Präsens*, chapter 2) frequently and accurately in part 1?

- never (0)
- rarely or mostly incorrectly (5)
- often but with many errors (7)
- often but with a few errors (9)
- always (10)

2. Does the essay use the present or past subjunctive mood (*den Konjunktiv II*, chapter 21) frequently and accurately in part 2?

- never (0)
- rarely or mostly incorrectly (18)
- often but with many errors (23)
- often but with a few errors (27)
- always (30)

3. Does the essay demonstrate proper German word order (*die Wortstellung*, chapter 1) and appropriate variation of word order in parts 1 and 2 (such that at least one-third of sentences do not start with the subject)?

- rarely, mostly incorrectly, or without variation (5)
- often but with many errors or little variation (7)
- often but with a few errors (9)
- always (10)

4. Does the essay incorporate conjunctions (*die Konjunktionen*, Reference 2) frequently and accurately in parts 1 and 2?

- never (0)
- rarely or mostly incorrectly (5)
- often but with many errors (7)
- often but with a few errors (9)
- always (10)

5. Does the essay use proper spelling, capitalization, and noun genders in parts 1 and 2?

- no, many avoidable errors in spelling, capitalization, and noun genders (0)
- no, many avoidable errors in two of the three categories (3)
- no, many avoidable errors in one of the three categories (5)
- no, a few errors in one or more categories (7)
- yes, always (10)