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2nd Edition

French

Essentials

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Improve your
French grammar

Gain confidence in
verb conjugation

Grasp tenses and
sentence structure

Laura K. Lawless
Zoe Erotopoulos, PhD

Experienced authors and
French language educators

French Essentials For Dummies®

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2nd Edition

by Laura K. Lawless and
Zoe Erotopoulous, PhD

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dummies[®]
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French Essentials For Dummies[®], 2nd Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2025945066

ISBN 978-1-394-37319-2 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-394-37321-5 (ebk); ISBN
978-1-394-37320-8 (ebk)

Introduction

Whether you're taking a French class or studying on your own, this handy reference book can help you recall grammar rules, verb conjugations, crucial differences between French and English, and much more. If the idea of snuggling up with your textbook in advance of a big exam makes you queasy, take heart: This book is a focused, straightforward review of the key material covered in introductory and intermediate French courses. This second edition of *French Essentials For Dummies* can help you reach your goals painlessly and effortlessly as you enhance your French language skills.

French Essentials For Dummies provides you with all the basic grammar you need to know to understand the language and to communicate it clearly. With the help of this book, you'll find it a snap to have a conversation about topics other than your name and the weather. And that's quite an achievement!

About This Book

We designed this book to be as accessible as possible. Each self-contained chapter presents a different topic that allows you to master essential French skills. We cover just the basics of each topic, so you can get a quick refresher of what you've learned in your coursework. Plus, we include plenty of examples to reinforce the rules so that you're exposed to colloquial, everyday, correct French that native speakers expect to hear from someone using their language.

To make this book as easy to use as possible, we use two important conventions throughout:

- » French words and sentences, as well as endings we want to highlight, are set in **boldface** to make them stand out.
- » English equivalents, set in *italic*, follow the French examples.

Foolish Assumptions

We wrote this book with the following assumptions in mind:

- » You've taken — or are taking — an introductory French class either at the high school or college level.
- » You want to review what you've already learned so you can pass a test for your course or excel on a college placement exam.
- » You want a thorough book, but one that isn't so advanced that you get bogged down by the rules. We try to explain French grammar as simply as possible without using too many technical terms.
- » You use French at work or school and want to improve your writing or speaking skills. Maybe a family member or significant other is studying French, and you want to help (even though you haven't looked at a verb conjugation for years). Or you're planning a trip to France or another French-speaking country and want to put your French into practice.

Icons Used in This Book

Like all *For Dummies* books, this one uses icons to indicate certain kinds of content. You can see them in the left-hand column throughout the book. Here's what they mean:



REMEMBER The Remember icon points out important concepts that you need to store in the back of your mind because you'll use them regularly.



TIP We use Tip icons to give you time-saving information that makes your studies quick and effective.



WARNING This icon points out certain differences between English and French that you may find confusing.

Where to Go from Here

French Essentials For Dummies is organized to let you read only what you want to read. Each chapter stands on its own and doesn't require that you complete any of the other chapters in the book. This setup saves you a lot of time if you've mastered certain topics but feel a bit insecure about others. Take a look at the table of contents or index, pick a topic, and go! Or you may want to proceed methodically by starting at the very beginning. It's up to you!

Go ahead! Jump right in and get your feet wet. If you don't know where to begin, take time to look at the table of contents and choose the topic that seems to best fit your abilities and needs. If you're timid because you feel that your background hasn't prepared you enough, you can start at the very beginning and work your way through the book.

No matter how you choose to read *French Essentials For Dummies*, we're confident that it can help you improve your French writing and speaking skills. Of course, you shouldn't let your practice end here. Write to a French pen pal, visit French websites and social media, stream foreign movies, attempt conversations with your French-speaking friends, or try to translate song lyrics into French while you're stuck in traffic. And when you have a grammar question, come back here and look it up. Pretty soon, the thoughts running through your head may take on a decidedly French flair. **Bon courage !** (*Good luck!*)

Chapter 1

Getting Down to Basics

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Using cardinal and ordinal numbers
 - » Expressing dates
 - » Telling time
 - » Reviewing parts of speech
-

Being able to use cardinal and ordinal numbers and recognizing parts of speech are essential French skills. Knowing these basics will help you perfect your oral and written French.

Using Numbers

Numbers are one of the most basic and useful parts of language. In addition to simple counting, you need cardinal numbers for communicating dates, time, prices, phone numbers, addresses, and so much more. You use ordinal numbers to express the number of a floor or the order of a person in a race or competition. We discuss these numbers here.

Counting with cardinal numbers

Cardinal numbers are for counting, and the low numbers are easy. You may already know them backwards and forwards, but if not, all you need to do is memorize them. The higher numbers get a bit more complicated. Check out the following lists of French numbers, starting with easy ones and moving on to more difficult ones.

<hr/> <hr/>			
<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>
0	zéro	5	cinq

<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>
1	un, une	6	six
2	deux	7	sept
3	trois	8	huit
4	quatre	9	neuf

Here are the easier double digits:

<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>
10	dix	40	quarante
11	onze	41	quarante et un quarante-et-un
12	douze	42	quarante-deux
13	treize	43	quarante-trois
14	quatorze	44	quarante-quatre
15	quinze	45	quarante-cinq
16	seize	46	quarante-six
17	dix-sept	47	quarante-sept
18	dix-huit	48	quarante-huit
19	dix-neuf	49	quarante-neuf
20	vingt	50	cinquante
21	vingt et un	51	cinquante et un cinquante-et-un
22	vingt-deux	52	cinquante-deux
23	vingt-trois	53	cinquante-trois
24	vingt-quatre	54	cinquante-quatre
25	vingt-cinq	55	cinquante-cinq
26	vingt-six	56	cinquante-six
27	vingt-sept	57	cinquante-sept
28	vingt-huit	58	cinquante-huit
29	vingt-neuf	59	cinquante-neuf

<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>
30	trente	60	soixante
31	trente et un trente-et-un	61	soixante et un soixante-et-un
32	trente-deux	62	soixante-deux
33	trente-trois	63	soixante-trois
34	trente-quatre	64	soixante-quatre
35	trente-cinq	65	soixante-cinq
36	trente-six	66	soixante-six
37	trente-sept	67	soixante-sept
38	trente-huit	68	soixante-huit
39	trente-neuf	69	soixante-neuf



REMEMBER The conjunction **et** (*and*) is used only for the numbers 21, 31, 41, 51, 61, and 71, with or without hyphens. For all other compound numbers through 99, use just a hyphen between the separate words.

Here are the trickier double digits:

<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>
70	soixante-dix	85	quatre-vingt-cinq
71	soixante et onze	86	quatre-vingt-six
72	soixante-douze	87	quatre-vingt-sept
73	soixante-treize	88	quatre-vingt-huit
74	soixante-quatorze	89	quatre-vingt-neuf
75	soixante-quinze	90	quatre-vingt-dix
76	soixante-seize	91	quatre-vingt-onze
77	soixante-dix-sept	92	quatre-vingt-douze

<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>
78	soixante-dix-huit	93	quatre-vingt-treize
79	soixante-dix-neuf	94	quatre-vingt-quatorze
80	quatre-vingts	95	quatre-vingt-quinze
81	quatre-vingt-un	96	quatre-vingt-seize
82	quatre-vingt-deux	97	quatre-vingt-dix-sept
83	quatre-vingt-trois	98	quatre-vingt-dix-huit
84	quatre-vingt-quatre	99	quatre-vingt-dix-neuf

And here are the big numbers:

<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>French</i>
100	cent	200	deux cents
1.000	mille	2.000	deux mille
1.000.000	un million	2.000.000	deux millions
1.000.000.000	un milliard	2.000.000.000	deux milliards
1.000.000.000.000	un billion	2.000.000.000.000	deux billions



REMEMBER Note the following about cardinal numbers:

» **Un** becomes **une** before a feminine noun:

trente et un hommes (*31 men*)

trente et une femmes (*31 women*)

» **Quatre-vingts** and the plural **cents** drop the –s before another number:

quatre-vingt-trois pages/deux cent trois pages (*83/203 pages*)

but not before another noun.

quatre-vingts pages/deux cents pages (*80/200 pages*)

» The indefinite article **un/une** doesn't precede **cent** and **mille**:

cent planètes (*100 planets*)

mille idées (*1,000 ideas*)

» **Mille** doesn't change in the plural:

Six mille étoiles (*6,000 stars*)

» **Mille** is sometimes written as **mil** in dates:

Il est né en deux mille douze/deux mil douze. (*He was born in 2012.*)

» **Million, milliard** (*billion*), and **billion** (*trillion*) are nouns. They're preceded by **un** (or another number) and are followed by **de** before another noun:

Un million de livres (*1,000,000 books*)

Deux milliards de dollars (*2 billion dollars*)



TIP

With numerals and decimals, French uses commas where English uses periods, and vice versa:

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>
6,000	6.000
0.75	0,75
14.99	14,99

Assigning rank with ordinal numbers

You use *ordinal numbers* — those used to express numbers in a series — far less frequently than cardinal numbers, but they still have some very important applications in everyday life. [Table 1-1](#) presents the French ordinal numbers:

TABLE 1-1 French Ordinal Numbers

<i>English Ordinal</i>	<i>French Ordinal</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
1 st	premier, première	1 ^{er} , 1 ^{re}
2 nd	deuxième second, seconde	2 ^e 2 ^d , 2 ^{de}
3 rd	troisième	3 ^e
4 th	quatrième	4 ^e
5 th	cinquième	5 ^e
6 th	sixième	6 ^e
7 th	septième	7 ^e
8 th	huitième	8 ^e
9 th	neuvième	9 ^e
10 th	dixième	10 ^e

Here's what you need to remember when using ordinal numbers in French:

- » **Premier** and **second** are the only ordinal numbers that have a feminine form: **première** and **seconde**:
 - **le premier garçon** (*the first boy*)
 - **la première fille** (*the first girl*)
 - **le second acte** (*the second act*)
 - **la seconde pièce** (*the second play*)
- » **Second(e)** usually replaces **deuxième** in a series that doesn't go beyond two:
 - **son deuxième livre** (*his second book* — there are more than two)
 - **son second livre** (*his second book* — he wrote only two)

- » Except for **premier** and **second**, ordinal numbers are formed by adding **–ième** to the cardinal numbers. The silent **e** at the end of **quatre**, **onze**, and so on is dropped: **quatre** → **quatrième**.
- » Two additional spelling changes: **u** is added for **cinquième** and **f** changes to **v** for **neuvième**.

Setting the Date

Knowing French calendar words and how to say what day it is makes it easier for you to make appointments, break dates, and plan outings. Here we delve deeper into dates.

Naming the days of the week

The days of the week end in **-di**, except for Sunday, which begins with those two letters.



WARNING In French, the week starts on Monday, not Sunday, and you don't capitalize the names of days. Here are **les jours de la semaine** (*the days of the week*):

- » **lundi** (*Monday*)
- » **mardi** (*Tuesday*)
- » **mercredi** (*Wednesday*)
- » **jeudi** (*Thursday*)
- » **vendredi** (*Friday*)
- » **samedi** (*Saturday*)
- » **dimanche** (*Sunday*)

If you want to know what day of the week it is, ask **Quel jour sommes-nous ?** or **C'est quel jour aujourd'hui ?** You can answer such a question with any of the following phrases followed by the day of the week: **Nous sommes** or **On est**.

Nous sommes mardi. (*It's Tuesday.*)

To say that something happens once on a certain day, you just use that day with no preposition or article.

Je vais à la banque lundi. (*I am going to the bank on Monday.*)

To say that something regularly happens on a certain day, you use the definite article.

Je vais à la banque le vendredi. (*I go to the bank on Fridays.*)

Here are some other useful words related to days and weeks:

- » **hier** (*yesterday*)
- » **aujourd'hui** (*today*)
- » **demain** (*tomorrow*)
- » **la semaine dernière/passée** (*last week*)
- » **cette semaine** (*this week*)
- » **la semaine prochaine** (*next week*)

Using the months of the year

You need to know the names of the months in French when writing a letter or making a date. This list shows you the months of the year, which, like the days of the week, aren't capitalized.

- » **janvier** (*January*)
- » **février** (*February*)
- » **mars** (*March*)
- » **avril** (*April*)
- » **mai** (*May*)
- » **juin** (*June*)

- » **juillet** (*July*)
- » **août** (*August*)
- » **septembre** (*September*)
- » **octobre** (*October*)
- » **novembre** (*November*)
- » **décembre** (*December*)

To say that something happened or will happen in a given month, use the preposition **en**:

J'ai acheté ma voiture en juin. (*I bought my car in June.*)

Expressing the date

Every event takes place on a particular date. So if you want to invite or if you're invited, you need to know how to express the date. The first thing to know is the question:

Quelle est la date (d'aujourd'hui) ? (*What's the date [today]?*)

To answer, you can say **Nous sommes**, **On est**, or **C'est** followed by **le** + *cardinal number* + *month* + *year (optional)*. Notice that the day comes before the month and its number has to be preceded by the definite article **le**. For example:

On est le 22 février 2025 [deux mille vingt-cinq]. (*It's February 22, 2025.*)

If you include the day of the week, the article goes before it:

C'est le lundi 3 mai. (*It's Monday May 3.*)



WARNING Use a cardinal number to say the date in French, except when you're talking about the first day of the month. For that, you use **premier**:

C'est le 1^{er} [premier] décembre. (*It's December 1st.*)



WARNING In French, when dates are written as numbers, they follow the sequence day/month/year, which may prove confusing to English speakers — especially for dates on or before the 12th of the month. You write *February 9th* as 2/9 in English, but in French it's 9/2!

Telling Time

When writing and speaking French, knowing and telling the time is an important concept, especially when you have an appointment or a train to catch. The first thing you need to know is how to ask what time it is: **Quelle heure est-il ?** The response may be one of the following:

Il est une heure. (*It's one o'clock.*)

Il est deux/quatre/sept heures. (*It's two/four/seven o'clock.*)

Il est midi/minuit. (*It's noon/midnight.*)



WARNING In France, the 24-hour system is used in public announcements and timetables. So the morning hours are 1 to 12, and the afternoon and evening hours are 13 to 24. To convert back to a 12-hour clock, subtract 12 from any time greater than 12:

Il est quinze heures. (*It's 3 p.m.*)

To express the time after the hour, the number of minutes is added after **heures**:

Il est onze heures dix. (*It's 11:10.*)

Il est quatre heures quarante. (*It's 4:40.*)

Use **et** (*and*) with **quart** and **demie**:

Il est dix heures et quart. (*It's 10:15.*)

Il est une heure et demie. (*It's 1:30.*)

To express the time for the second half of the hour, the number of minutes is subtracted from the next hour:

Il est cinq heures moins vingt. (*It's 4:40.*)

Il est deux heures moins cinq. (*It's 1:55.*)

If it's 15 minutes before the hour, you can also use **moins le quart**:

Il est six heures moins le quart. (*It's quarter to six.*)

If you want to ask at what time an event is taking place, use **à quelle heure**:

À quelle heure est la téléconférence ? (*[At] What time is the conference call?*)

To answer, you just start with that event and add **à** and the time:

La téléconférence est à midi. (*The conference call is at noon.*)

The following shows how to express various times after and before the hour.

<i>Time</i>	<i>French</i>
-------------	---------------

<i>Time</i>	<i>French</i>
1:00	une heure
2:05	deux heures cinq
3:10	trois heures dix
4:15	quatre heures et quart
5:20	cinq heures vingt
6:25	six heures vingt-cinq
7:30	sept heures et demie
7:35	huit heures moins vingt-cinq or sept heures trente-cinq
8:40	neuf heures moins vingt or huit heures quarante
9:45	dix heures moins le quart or neuf heures quarante-cinq
10:50	onze heures moins dix or dix heures cinquante
10:55	onze heures moins cinq or dix heures cinquante-cinq
noon	midi
midnight	minuit



REMEMBER To express half past noon or midnight, use **et demi**:

Il est midi et demi/minuit et demi. (*It's half past noon/half past midnight.*)

Et demie is used to express *half past* with all other times:

Il est une heure et demie. (*It's 1:30.*)

Il est trois heures et demie. (*It's 3:30.*)



TIP

In French, an **h** (short for **heures**) is used where English uses a colon:

14h00 (2:00 p.m.)

8h30 (8:30 a.m.)

Understanding the Parts of Speech

Language is made up of parts of speech — nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on. Each of these building blocks has its own function and rules, and understanding them is key to using them correctly, particularly with a foreign language. If you don't know the difference between the parts of speech in English, you probably won't understand them in French, either.

Identifying things with nouns and articles

Nouns are people, places, things, and ideas. They're the concrete and abstract things in your sentences, the *who* and the *what* that are doing something or having something done to them. Take a look at the example:

Marie veut vraiment visiter les musées célèbres. (*Marie really wants to visit the famous museums.*)



WARNING

Unlike English nouns, all French nouns have a gender (masculine or feminine). All words you use to qualify or describe a noun must agree with the noun with respect to gender. We discuss this subject in more detail in [Chapter 2](#).

An article is a very particular part of speech that you can use only with a noun. French has three kinds of articles, which we explain in detail in

Chapter 2.

Replacing with pronouns

Pronouns are easy to understand; they replace nouns. That is, pronouns also refer to people, places, things, and ideas, but they let you avoid repeating the same words over and over. The following list outlines the pronouns we discuss in this book:

- » *Subject pronouns* (see [Chapter 3](#)) are followed by the verb expressing the main action in the sentence (**Je, tu, il, elle, on, nous, vous, ils, elles**):

Tu es sympathique. (*You are nice.*)

- » *Direct object pronouns* (see [Chapter 2](#)) replace direct object nouns; they answer who or what the subject is acting upon. The direct object pronouns are **me, te, le, la, nous, vous, and les**:

Il te voit. (*He sees you.*)

- » *Indirect object pronouns* (see [Chapter 2](#)) replace indirect object nouns; they explain to or for whom something is done. They are **me, te, lui, nous, vous, and leur**:

Il lui a écrit. (*He wrote to her/him.*)

- » *Adverbial pronouns* (see [Chapter 2](#)) **y** and **en** have numerous uses that are explained in detail in [Chapter 2](#).

- » *Reflexive pronouns* (see [Chapter 3](#)) show that the subject is acting upon itself (**me, te, se, nous, and vous**):

Elle se regarde dans le miroir. (*She is looking at herself in the mirror.*)

- » *Prepositional pronouns*, also called stressed pronouns (see [Chapter 5](#)), are commonly used after prepositions: **moi, toi, lui, elle, nous, vous, eux, and elles**:

Ils vont au cinéma sans moi. (*They're going to the movies without me.*)

- » *Interrogative pronouns* (see [Chapter 6](#)) ask a question (*who, which, what*, and so on):

Qui est-ce ? (*Who* is that?)

Moving along with verbs

A verb is a part of speech that describes an action or a state of being. In French, verbs change from their infinitive form (in other words, they're *conjugated*) as follows:

- » To agree with the person performing the action (I, you, he, she, it, we, they).
- » To indicate the time when the action was performed (past, present, future).
- » To indicate the mood (subjunctive, imperative, conditional, indicative) of the action.

French verbs are classified by how they're conjugated:

- » Regular verbs: **-er** verbs, **-ir** verbs, and **-re** verbs
- » Spelling-change verbs
- » Stem-changing verbs
- » Irregular verbs
- » Pronominal verbs



REMEMBER The *infinitive* of the verb is its basic form — its “to” form before it's conjugated: **danser** (*to dance*), **finir** (*to finish*), **répondre** (*to answer*). Regular French infinitives have three different endings, and you conjugate them according to these endings (**-er**, **-ir**, and **-re**). We give you lots more information about verbs in [Chapters 3](#), [7](#), [8](#), and [9](#).

Modifying with adjectives

Adjectives may be flowery words that describe nouns:

Je veux visiter les musées célèbres. (*I want to visit the famous museums.*)

But adjectives aren't only descriptive; they come in many other useful varieties:

- » Demonstrative adjectives: **ce, cet, cette** (*this/that*), **ces** (*these/those*) — see [Chapter 2](#)
- » Possessive adjectives: **mon** (*my*), **ton** (*your*), **son** (*his/her/its*), and so forth — see [Chapter 2](#)
- » Interrogative adjectives: **quel, quelle, quels, quelles** (*which/what*) — see [Chapter 6](#)



WARNING Unlike English adjectives, French adjectives have masculine, feminine, singular, and plural forms so that they can agree with nouns. ([Chapter 4](#) tells you lots of other interesting details about adjectives.)

Qualifying with adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. In this example sentence, *really* modifies the verb *want*:

Je veux vraiment aller en France. (*I really want to go to France.*)

English adverbs often end in *-ly* and indicate how the action of a verb is occurring: happily, quickly, rudely. Most of these words are *adverbs of manner*. The other kinds of adverbs are

- » Adverbs of frequency: **jamais** (*never*), **souvent** (*often*)
- » Adverbs of place: **ici** (*here*), **partout** (*everywhere*)

- » Adverbs of quantity: **beaucoup** (*a lot*), **très** (*very*)
- » Adverbs of time: **avant** (*before*), **demain** (*tomorrow*)
- » Interrogative adverbs: **quand** (*when*), **où** (*where*)

Read [Chapter 4](#) thoroughly to understand more about French adverbs.

Connecting with prepositions

A *preposition* is the part of speech you put in front of a noun or pronoun to show the relationship between that word and another word or phrase. Prepositions tell you how verbs and nouns fit together. Prepositions may be one word (to, at, about) or part of a group of words (next to, in front of, on top of):

Je veux aller en France. (*I want to go to France.*)

Prepositions aren't like a vocabulary list that you can just memorize. Instead, they're grammatical terms with various functions that you have to study and practice. [Chapter 5](#) explains all about prepositions.

Chapter 2

Putting Grammar to Work

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding articles
 - » Describing with adjectives
 - » Exploring gender and number
 - » Expressing possession
 - » Using object and adverbial pronouns
-

In French, all nouns have a gender, which makes more of a difference than you can possibly imagine. A noun's gender determines which form of articles, adjectives, pronouns, and sometimes past participles you have to use, so knowing the gender is vital to speaking and writing French.

In this chapter, we help you to correctly mark the gender of a noun by using definite articles (which express *the*), indefinite articles (which express *a*, *an*, or *some*), partitive articles (which express *some* or part of a thing), and demonstrative adjectives (which express *this*, *that*, *these*, or *those*). You can also read up on two different ways to show possession of things, how to replace direct and indirect object nouns with their respective pronouns, and how to use the adverbial pronouns **y** and **en**.

Defining the Definite Articles

Definite articles indicate that the noun they're presenting is specific. In English, the definite article is *the*. French definite articles tell you that the noun is masculine or feminine, singular or plural.

The following table lists the French definite articles with an example sentence. Note that if the noun is plural, the article is **les**, no matter what

gender the noun is.

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	le (l')	la (l')
Plural	les	Les

Le livre est intéressant. (*The book is interesting.*)

La maison est jolie. (*The house is pretty.*)

Les enfants jouent dans le jardin. (*The children are playing in the garden.*)



REMEMBER If a singular noun begins with a vowel or mute *h*, the definite article **le** or **la** contracts to **l'**:

l'amitié (*the friendship*)

l'eau (*the water*)

l'homme (*the man*)

The following sections delve deeper into the basics of definite articles.

Using definite articles

You may come across many instances in French where you use the definite article even though you may or may not use it in English. The following list explains how you use the definite articles in French:

» With nouns in a general or abstract sense:

L'amour est divin. (*Love is divine.*)

J'aime le vin blanc. (*I like white wine.*)

» With names of languages (except after the verb **parler** and after the prepositions **de** and **en**):

J'aime le français. (*I like French.*)

Où est mon livre de français ? (*Where's my French book?*)

Écris-moi en français. (*Write to me in French.*)

- » With parts of the body (when the possessor is clear) in place of the possessive adjective:

Je me lave les cheveux. (*I'm washing my hair.*)

Il s'est cassé la jambe. (*He broke his leg.*)

- » With titles and ranks when you aren't addressing the person:

Le docteur Caron est prêt. (*Doctor Caron is ready.*)

but

Bonjour, Docteur Caron. (*Hello, Doctor Caron.*)

- » With last names:

Les Ricard habitent à Paris. (*The Ricards live in Paris.*)

- » With days of the week referring to recurring situations:

Je ne travaille pas le samedi. (*I don't work on Saturdays.*)

- » With dates:

C'est le cinq mai. (*It's May 5th.*)

- » With the names of many geographical locations, except after the preposition **en**:

La France est belle. (*France is beautiful.*)

but

Nous allons en France. (*We're going to France.*)

Contracting with definite articles

The preposition **à** can mean *to*, *in*, or *at*, and *de* means *of* or *from*. When these prepositions are followed by the masculine singular article (**le**) or the plural article (**les**), they must contract. [Table 2-1](#) explains these contractions.

TABLE 2-1 Combining Definite Articles with the Preposition **à or **de****

Preposition + Article	Combination	Example
à + le	au	Je parle au professeur. (<i>I'm talking to the professor.</i>)
à + les	aux	Je parle aux étudiants. (<i>I'm talking to the students.</i>)
de + le	du	Je parle du professeur. (<i>I'm talking about the professor.</i>)
de + les	des	Je parle des étudiants. (<i>I'm talking about the students.</i>)



REMEMBER There is no contraction when the article is **la** or **l'**:

Je parle à la dame. (*I'm talking to the woman.*)

Je parle de l'étudiant. (*I'm talking about the student.*)

Generalizing with Indefinite Articles

An *indefinite article*, which usually expresses the English words *a*, *an*, or *some*, refers to persons or objects not specifically identified (such as “a boy” or “some books”). Just as with definite articles, indefinite articles can tell you whether a noun is masculine or feminine and singular or plural.

Three French indefinite articles correspond to *a*, *an*, and *one* in the singular and to *some* in the plural. The following table, followed by examples, presents these articles:

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	un	une
Plural	des	des

Elle a acheté un manteau. (*She bought a coat.*)

C'est une belle maison. (*It's a beautiful house.*)

Il me faut des crayons. (*I need some pencils.*)



TIP Although “some” may be implicit in English, in French the indefinite article **des** must always be used:

J'ai des amis qui parlent français. (*I have [some] friends who speak French.*)



REMEMBER As with definite articles, the indefinite article precedes the noun it modifies and agrees with that noun in number and gender.

When you negate a sentence with an indefinite article, the article changes to **de** (**d'** before a vowel), meaning (*not*) *any*:

J'ai des questions. (*I have some questions.*)

Je n'ai pas de questions. (*I don't have any questions.*)

Il n'y a pas d'excuse. (*There's no excuse.*)

See [Chapter 6](#) for more information about negation.

Understanding Partitive Articles

The *partitive article*, which doesn't exist in English, expresses part of a whole and may be translated as *some* or *any* in English. The partitive is equivalent to **de** + the definite article, as shown in [Table 2-2](#), followed by some example sentences:

TABLE 2-2 Partitive Articles

Partitive	Used Before
du (de + le)	Masculine singular noun beginning with consonant or h aspiré
de la	Feminine singular noun beginning with a consonant or h aspiré
de l'	Any singular noun beginning with a vowel or h muet
des (de + les)	Any plural noun

Il boit du café. (*He's drinking coffee.*)

Veux-tu de la salade ? (*Do you want some salad?*)

Avez-vous de l'argent ? (*Do you have any money?*)

Je vais manger des épinards. (*I'm going to eat some spinach.*)



WARNING Although implicit in English, the partitive can't be omitted in French. In fact, it's repeated before each noun:

Veux-tu du jus de fruits ou de l'eau ? (*Do you want [some] juice or [some] water?*)

Like the indefinite article, the partitive is reduced to **de (d')** in the negative:

Il n'y a pas de soleil aujourd'hui. (*There's no sun today.*)

Je n'ai pas d'argent. (*I don't have any money.*)

With adverbs and nouns of quantity, and with expressions with **de**, don't use the partitive; instead, use **de** (or **d'**) alone:

Elle a beaucoup de cousins. (*She has a lot of cousins.*)

J'ai besoin d'assistance. (*I need help.*)

The partitive is used to express some or a part of a whole, and the definite article is used with nouns in a general sense (to express an entire

amount). Compare the following:

J'ai acheté du chocolat. (*I bought some chocolate.*)

J'ai acheté le chocolat. (*I bought the chocolate.*)

Je veux du gâteau. (*I want some cake.*)

Je veux le gâteau. (*I want the cake.*)

Using Demonstrative Adjectives

You use demonstrative adjectives when you want to talk about specific entities, such as *this*, *that*, *these*, or *those*. The demonstrative adjective goes in front of a noun to indicate that you're referring to this or that particular noun. Like other French adjectives, demonstrative adjectives have different forms depending on the gender and number of the noun they precede. In addition, you use a special form with masculine singular nouns that begin with a vowel or mute *h* — see [Table 2-3](#) and the examples that follow:

TABLE 2-3 Demonstrative Adjectives

Gender	Singular (This/That)	Plural (These/Those)
Masculine	ce	ces
Masculine + vowel / mute <i>h</i>	cet	ces
Feminine	cette	ces

Masculine: **Ce livre est intéressant.** (*This/That book is interesting.*)

Masculine + vowel: **Qui a écrit cet article ?** (*Who wrote this/that article?*)

Masculine + mute *h*: **Cet homme est grand.** (*This/That man is tall.*)

Feminine: **Cette maison est bleue.** (*This/That house is blue.*)

Ce, **cet**, and **cette** can all mean *this* or *that* — French doesn't have separate words to make this distinction. You can usually tell by context,

but to be explicit, you can add the suffixes **-ci** (*here*) and **-là** (*there*) to the end of the noun:

Ce livre-ci est intéressant. (*This book [here] is interesting.*)

Ce livre-là est stupide. (*That book [there] is stupid.*)

The plural demonstrative adjective **ces** can mean *these* or *those*; again, you can use **-ci** and **-là** to clarify, if necessary:

Ces maisons sont vertes. (*These/Those houses are green.*)

Ces maisons-ci sont grises. (*These houses [here] are gray.*)

Ces maisons-là sont jaunes. (*Those houses [there] are yellow.*)



REMEMBER French has only one plural demonstrative adjective. You use **ces** for all plurals: masculine, masculine + vowel/mute *h*, and feminine.

Grasping Grammatical Gender

A basic, singular noun refers to just one of something: a book, the cheese, my house. In English, that's about all there is to know about singular nouns. French, however, adds a little more to it: Every noun has a gender — *genre* in French — either masculine or feminine. The following sections spell out the need-to-know details about gender.

Examining noun gender

Most nouns that refer to people have a logical gender. **Homme** (*man*), **garçon** (*boy*), and **serveur** (*waiter*) are masculine, and **femme** (*woman*), **fil** (*girl*), and **serveuse** (*waitress*) are feminine. But in most cases, there's no way to just look at a word and know its gender — you simply have to memorize the gender of each word as you learn it.



TIP

The best way to remember the gender of nouns is to make sure your vocabulary lists include an indefinite article for each noun because these articles don't change in front of vowels.

Making nouns feminine

Nouns that refer to people often have a masculine “default” form that can be made feminine (see [Table 2-4](#) for examples). Here's how to make the gender switch:

- » To make most of these nouns feminine, just add **-e** to the end.
- » If a masculine noun ends in **-en** or **-on**, add **-ne** for the feminine form.
- » Nouns that end in **-er** change to **-ère** for the feminine.
- » Nouns that end in **-teur** change to **-trice** and those that end in **-eur** change to **-euse**.
- » Nouns that end in **-e** in the masculine form have no change for the feminine (other than in the article, which changes to **une**, **la**, or **de la**).

TABLE 2-4 Masculine and Feminine Nouns

<i>English</i>	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>
<i>lawyer</i>	un avocat	une avocate
<i>electrician</i>	un électricien	une électricienne
<i>boss</i>	un patron	une patronne
<i>cashier</i>	un caissier	une caissière
<i>translator</i>	un traducteur	une traductrice
<i>salesperson</i>	un vendeur	une vendeuse
<i>tourist</i>	un touriste	une touriste

Determining gender by noun ending

A few word endings usually indicate whether a noun is masculine or feminine (see [Table 2-5](#) as a guide):

TABLE 2-5 Word Endings of Masculine and Feminine Nouns

<i>Ending</i>	<i>Masculine Noun</i>	<i>Ending</i>	<i>Feminine Noun</i>
-acle	le spectacle	-ade*	la limonade
-age*	le garage	-alle	la balle
-al	le journal	-ance	l'enfance
-eau*	le bureau	-ence	la conférence
-et	le bracelet	-ette	la baguette
-ier	le dossier	-ique	la musique
-isme	le tourisme	-oire	l'histoire
-ment	le gouvernement	-sion	l'excursion
		-tion	la portion

*Note these common exceptions:

- **le stade** (*stadium*)
- **une image** (*image*)
- **la page** (*page*)
- **la plage** (*beach*)
- **l'eau (f.)** (*water*)
- **la peau** (*skin*)

Being inclusive

French nouns and many pronouns have a gender, either masculine or feminine; however, some people don't identify as male or female and therefore don't relate to the subject pronouns **il** (*he*) or **elle** (*she*).

Instead, they choose to use the invented French pronoun **iel** (singular

they). This combination pronoun is commonly found among younger people, in LGBTQI+ communities, and in progressive or academic environments, but it's not universally recognized and can be controversial.

Iel was added to **Le Robert** dictionary in 2022 but as of today hasn't been added to **Le Larousse** dictionary, and it's not officially recognized by the **Académie française**, which regulates the French language.

Things get trickier when using words that need to agree with the subject pronoun, such as adjectives.

In standard French, you might say

Il est content. (*He is happy.*)

Elle est contente. (*She is happy.*)

With **iel**, however, neither **content** nor **contente** is correct. The controversial solution is **l'écriture inclusive** (*inclusive writing*), which uses a **point médian** (*mid-dot*) to allow for both possible genders:

Iel est content·e. (*They are happy.*)

Inclusive writing can also be used when talking about groups of people in general:

Mes ami·e·s sont intelligent·e·s. (*My friends are smart.*)

Inclusive writing is extremely controversial and shouldn't be used in formal situations, unless you're sure it will be appreciated.

Pluralizing Nouns

In addition to masculine and feminine forms, most nouns also have singular and plural forms. Making a noun plural in French is very similar to making a noun plural in English: You usually just add an **-s**: changing **un livre** (*a book*) to **deux livres** (*two books*) and **la page** (*the page*) to

les pages (*the pages*). The final **s** is silent, which means that the singular and plural forms of these nouns are pronounced the same way. But you can tell that the noun is plural because the article or number changes.

French often has masculine and feminine words for nouns referring to people, like **un ami** (*male friend*) and **une amie** (*female friend*).

However, if you have a group of mixed masculine and feminine nouns, you always default to the masculine: **des amis**. The only time you can say **des amies** is when you're talking about a group of just girl friends, with not a single male in the bunch. The same idea applies if you're talking about one person whose gender you don't know, such as *one tourist* — if you don't know whether it's a man or woman, you always default to the masculine: **un touriste**.

This section explains how to form a plural when you can't simply add an **-s**.

Plural patterns

Though most French nouns just add an **-s** for plurals, a few take an **-x**, possibly with some other letter changes/additions. These nouns always end in one of the following letter combinations, which let you know that **-x** marks the (plural) spot. See [Table 2-6](#) for some examples.

TABLE 2-6 Plural Patterns

English	French Singular	Singular Ending	French Plural	Plural Ending
<i>work</i>	le travail	-ail	les travaux	-aux
<i>newspaper</i>	le journal	-al	les journaux	-aux
<i>coat</i>	le manteau	-eau	les manteaux	-eaux
<i>jewel</i>	le bijou	-ou*	les bijoux	-oux
<i>game</i>	le jeu	-eu**	les jeux	-eux

* Six other nouns ending in **-ou** add **-x** in the plural: **les cailloux** (*pebbles*), **les choux** (*cabbages*), **les genoux** (*knees*), **les hiboux** (*owls*), **les joujoux** (*toys*), and **les poux** (*lice*). All other nouns ending in **-ou** add **-s** in the plural: **les trous** (*holes*).

** Two important exceptions to this rule are **les pneus** (*tires*) and **les bleus** (*bruises*).

Irregular plurals

Some French nouns don't have distinct plural forms. When a noun ends in **-s**, **-x**, or **-z**, you don't add anything to make the word plural; the singular and plural forms are identical. To tell the difference between the singular and plural, you have to pay special attention to the article:

» **le mois** (*month*) becomes **les mois**

» **le prix** (*price*) becomes **les prix**

» **le nez** (*nose*) becomes **les nez**



REMEMBER Don't add **-s** to pluralize family names: **les Ricard** (*the Ricards*).

A few French nouns have irregular plurals; see [Table 2-7](#) to memorize the most common ones.

TABLE 2-7 Irregular Plurals

English	French Singular	French Plural
eye	un œil	des yeux
ma'am/Mrs.	madame	mesdames
Miss	mademoiselle	mesdemoiselles
sir/Mr.	monsieur	messieurs
sky	le ciel	les cieux



REMEMBER The plurals of **madame**, **mademoiselle**, and **monsieur** add an **-s** at the end of the word, which is normal, but they also change from the singular possessive adjective (**mon** or **ma**, which means *my*) at the beginning to the plural possessive adjective (**mes**, which means *my*). See the section “[Using possessive adjectives](#)” later in this chapter for more info.

Always plural nouns

Some nouns are used mainly in the plural, including:

- » **les cheveux (m.)** (*hair [on one's head]*)
- » **les gens (m. or f.)** (*people*)
- » **les lunettes (f.)** (*eyeglasses*)
- » **les meubles (m.)** (*furniture*)
- » **les vacances (f.)** (*vacation*)

Confirming Possession

French has different ways to express ownership: by using the preposition **de** and with possessive adjectives. The following sections explain both so you can make sure that everyone knows whose is whose.

Owning with de

In English, when you want to say that something belongs to someone or something, you use an apostrophe with s: either 's or s'. French is completely different. You have to reverse the order of the nouns and join them with the preposition **de**. In other words, start with the thing that's owned and then add **de** and the owner:

la maison de Michel (*Michel's house*; Literally: *the house of Michel*)

les chaussures d'Aurélie (*Aurélie's shoes*; Literally: *the shoes of Aurélie*)

l'idée de l'étudiant (*the student's idea*; Literally: *the idea of the student*)

la chambre de mes sœurs (*my sisters' room*; Literally: *the room of my sisters*)



REMEMBER When **de** precedes the definite articles **le** or **les**, they contract to make **du** and **des**, respectively (find out more about these contractions in the section “[Contracting with definite articles](#)” earlier in this chapter):

le lit [de + le] du chien (*the dog’s bed; literally, the bed of the dog*)

la chambre [de + les] des enfants (*the kids’ room; literally, the room of the kids*)

Using possessive adjectives

Possessive adjectives go in front of nouns to tell you who or what those nouns belong to. In French, there are different forms for masculine, feminine, singular, and plural possessive adjectives. In order to use the correct one, you need to consider the gender and number of the noun possessed. To say *my house*, you need to remember that **maison** (*house*) is feminine and singular, so you want to use the feminine singular form of the adjective (**ma**): **ma maison**. See [Table 2-8](#) for the different forms of French possessive adjectives.

TABLE 2-8 Possessive Adjectives

English	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
<i>my</i>	mon	ma	mes
<i>your (tu form)</i>	ton	ta	tes
<i>his/her/its</i>	son	sa	ses
<i>our</i>	notre	notre	nos
<i>your (vous form)</i>	votre	votre	vos
<i>their</i>	leur	leur	leurs

Singular subjects

The possessive adjectives for first-, second-, and third-person singular subjects have three forms, depending on the gender, number, and first

letter of the noun they're used with — see [Table 2-9](#).

TABLE 2-9 Singular-Subject Possessive Adjectives

<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Feminine (before a Vowel)</i>	<i>Plural</i>
mon docteur (<i>my doctor</i>)	ma serveuse (<i>my waitress</i>)	mon avocate (<i>my [female] lawyer</i>)	mes professeurs (<i>my teachers</i>)
ton docteur (<i>your doctor</i>)	ta serveuse (<i>your waitress</i>)	ton avocate (<i>your [female] lawyer</i>)	tes professeurs (<i>your teachers</i>)
son docteur (<i>his/her doctor</i>)	sa serveuse (<i>his/her waitress</i>)	son avocate (<i>his/her [female] lawyer</i>)	ses professeurs (<i>his/her teachers</i>)



REMEMBER In English, the choice of *his* or *her* depends on the gender of the person/thing that possesses the object: *Tom's sister* becomes *his sister*, and *Jane's sister* becomes *her sister*.

But in French, the gender of the thing possessed determines whether to say **son** or **sa**: *His sister* and *her sister* are both translated as **sa sœur** because **sœur** is feminine.

Likewise, *his brother* and *her brother* are both translated as **son frère** because **frère** is masculine.

But if you really need to be clear about whether you mean *his* or *her*, you can add **à lui** or **à elle**:

C'est son frère à lui (*It's his brother.*)

C'est son frère à elle (*It's her brother.*)

You use **ma**, **ta**, and **sa** only with a feminine noun that begins with a consonant. When a feminine noun begins with a vowel or mute *h*, you have to use the masculine adjective (**mon**, **ton**, or **son**).

Plural subjects

First-, second-, and third-person plural subjects have only two forms of the possessive adjective: singular and plural. Whether the noun being possessed is masculine or feminine and whether it starts with a consonant or vowel don't matter. See [Table 2-10](#).

TABLE 2-10 Plural-Subject Possessive Adjectives

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
notre père (<i>our father</i>)	nos amis (<i>our friends</i>)
votre père (<i>your father</i>)	vos amis (<i>your friends</i>)
leur père (<i>their father</i>)	leurs amis (<i>their friends</i>)



TIP

Possessive adjectives aren't used with parts of the body (see [Chapter 3](#) for more on pronominal verbs):

Il se lave les mains. (*He's washing his hands.*)

Substituting with Object Pronouns

Direct object pronouns replace *direct object nouns*, and *indirect object pronouns* replace *indirect object nouns*. Despite the objectified nature of the word, objects aren't always just things like books and trees — they can, and often do, refer to people and animals. The following sections spell out how to use direct object and indirect object pronouns so everyone clearly knows what they're writing or talking about.

Presenting direct object pronouns

To use a *direct object pronoun*, you first need to identify the direct object noun. Do this by asking “whom” or “what” the subject is acting upon. For example, in the sentence **Lise connaît les athlètes** (*Lise knows the athletes*), Lise is the subject of the sentence. To find the direct object, ask, “Whom does Lise know?” **Athlètes** is the object — the people she knows. You can replace the direct objects **les athlètes** with a direct

object pronoun, and to choose the right one, consider the gender and number of the noun you're replacing. [Table 2-11](#) lists the direct object pronouns in French.

TABLE 2-11 Direct Object Pronouns

<i>Singular Pronouns</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Plural Pronouns</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
me (m')	<i>me</i>	nous	<i>us</i>
te (t')	<i>you (informal)</i>	vous	<i>you (formal, plural)</i>
le (l')	<i>him, it</i>	les	<i>them</i>
la (l')	<i>her, it</i>	les	<i>them</i>



REMEMBER Unlike in English, French direct object pronouns precede the verb.

Here are some examples with French direct object pronouns:

Lise les connaît. (*Lise knows them.*)

Mon frère déteste cette recette. Il la déteste. (*My brother hates this recipe. He hates it.*)

Je vous aime. (*I love you.*)



REMEMBER **Me, te, le, and la** become **m', t', and l'** whenever they precede a vowel, a mute **h**, or the adverbial pronouns **y** and **en**.

Giving you indirect object pronouns

Indirect object nouns or pronouns refer only to people (and to beloved pets); they answer the question “To or for whom is the subject doing something?” And just as with direct object pronouns, indirect object pronouns generally are placed before the conjugated verb. For example,

Je lui écris un e-mail. (*I'm writing [to] him/her an email.*)

Il nous achète une voiture. (*He is buying [for] us a car.*)

[Table 2-12](#) presents the indirect object pronouns in French.

TABLE 2-12 French Indirect Object Pronouns

<i>Singular Pronouns</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Plural Pronouns</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
me	(to/for) me	nous	to/for us
te	(to/for) you (informal)	vous	to/for you (formal, plural)
lui	to/for him, her	leur	to/for them



TIP

Note that the invariable indirect object **leur** shouldn't be confused with the possessive adjective **leur/leurs**, which we discuss in the section "[Using Possessive Adjectives](#)" earlier in the chapter:

Elle leur parle. (*She's talking to them.*)

Je leur achète des livres. (*I'm buying [for] them some books.*)

Lui is the indirect object pronoun for both men and women:

Il téléphone à David. Il lui téléphone. (*He's calling David. He's calling him.*)

Je parle à ma mère. Je lui parle. (*I'm talking to my mother. I'm talking to her.*)



TIP

A clue that may indicate that you need an indirect object pronoun is the use of the preposition **à**, which means *to* or *for*,

followed by the name of or reference to a person.



REMEMBER Although you may use the prepositions *to* and *for* in English, you omit these prepositions in French sentences before an indirect object pronoun:

Je t'achète un cadeau. (*I'm buying a present for you; I'm buying you a present.*)

Ils m'écrivent. (*They are writing to me; They are writing me.*)

Differing objects in French and English

Some verbs that take an indirect object in English take a direct object in French. The most common are

- » **attendre [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to wait for [someone/something]*)
- » **écouter [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to listen to [someone/something]*)
- » **chercher [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to look for [someone/something]*)
- » **payer [quelque chose]** (*to pay for something*)
- » **regarder [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to look at [someone/something]*)

Here are some examples:

Il attend Anne. Il l'attend. (*He's waiting for Anne. He's waiting for her.*)

Nous écoutons le prof. Nous l'écoutons. (*We're listening to the teacher. We're listening to him.*)

Sa mère paie le repas. Sa mère le paie. (*His mother pays for the meal. His mother pays for it.*)

French verbs followed by the preposition **à** take an indirect object, but some of their English equivalents take a direct object. The following are the most common:

- » **désobéir à [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to disobey [someone/something]*)
- » **obéir à [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to obey [someone/something]*)
- » **rendre visite à [quelqu'un]** (*to visit someone*)
- » **répondre à [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to answer [someone/something]*)
- » **ressembler à [quelqu'un/quelque chose]** (*to resemble [someone/something]*)
- » **téléphoner à [quelqu'un]** (*to phone, call [someone]*)

Here are some examples:

J'obéis à mes parents. Je leur obéis. (*I obey my parents. I obey them.*)

Elle répond à Luc. Elle lui répond. (*She's answering Luc. She's answering him.*)

Figuring Out Adverbial Pronouns

Adverbial pronouns may replace a prepositional phrase or a noun that follows a number or an adverb of quantity. The following sections give you the lowdown on the adverbial pronouns **y** and **en** and how to use them correctly.

Getting there with y

You can use the adverbial pronoun **y** to replace prepositions that show location, such as **à**, **chez**, **dans**, and **en** + [a place] to express “there.” The adverbial pronoun **y** goes in exactly the same place as direct and indirect object pronouns:

Je vais à la plage. J'y vais. (*I'm going to the beach. I'm going there.*)

Elle passe deux jours en France. Elle y passe deux jours. (*She is spending two days in France. She is spending two days there.*)

You can also use **y** to replace **à** + [a noun] with verbs that require the preposition **à**:

Je réponds à la lettre. J'y réponds. (*I'm answering the letter. I'm answering it.*)

Ils restent à la maison. Ils y restent. (*They are staying at the house. They are staying there.*)



REMEMBER The indirect object tells you to or for whom something is being done, but **y** tells you *what* something is being done to. In French, indirect object pronouns can replace only people; you have to replace places and things with the adverbial pronoun **y**:

Je pense à l'amour. J'y pense. (*I'm thinking about love. I'm thinking about it.*)

Nous obéissons aux lois. Nous y obéissons. (*We obey the laws. We obey them.*)

but

Nous obéissons à nos parents. Nous leur obéissons. (*We obey our parents. We obey them.*)

Understanding more of it with en

The adverbial pronoun **en** usually translates to *some (of it/them)*, *about it/them*, *from it/them*, or *from there*. The word order for **en** is the same as for object pronouns and the adverbial pronoun **y**. You can use **en** to replace

» **De + noun**

- **Je viens de New York. J'en viens.** (*I come from New York. I come from there.*)

» Partitive article **du, de la, or des + noun**

- **Elle boit du café. Elle en boit.** (*She's drinking coffee. She's drinking some [of it].*)

» A noun after a number

- **Il a deux voitures. Il en a deux.** (*He has two cars. He has two [of them].*)

» An expression of quantity

- **J'ai assez d'argent. J'en ai assez.** (*I have enough money. I have enough [of it].*)

En replaces de + noun

With the preposition **de** and the partitive article (**du, de la, de l', or des**), **en** replaces the article as well as the noun following it:

Je veux des fraises. J'en veux. (*I want some strawberries. I want some [of them].*)

En with numbers

When you use **en** with a number + noun, it replaces only the noun — you still need to put the number after the verb:

Il a trois voitures. Il en a trois. (*He has three cars. He has three [of them].*)

J'ai acheté une douzaine de livres. J'en ai acheté une douzaine. (*I bought a dozen books. I bought a dozen [of them].*)

En with adverbs of quantity

Likewise, when you use **en** with an adverb of quantity, it replaces only **de + the noun** — you still need to put the adverb after the verb:

Avez-vous beaucoup de temps ? En avez-vous beaucoup ? (*Do you have a lot of time? Do you have a lot [of it]?*)



REMEMBER **En** is always required in French, even if its equivalent isn't expressed in English:

As-tu des questions ? (*Do you have any questions?*)

Oui, j'en ai. (*Yes, I do [have some].*)

Positioning Pronouns

How do you decide where to place an object pronoun or an adverbial pronoun in a French sentence? Generally, you place them before the conjugated verb:

Je t'aime. (*I love you.*)

Me prêtes-tu ta chemise ? (*Will you lend me your shirt?*)

Elle n'y va pas. (*She isn't going there.*)

Nous en avons assez. (*We have enough.*)

In compound tenses like the **passé composé** (see [Chapter 7](#)), the pronoun goes before the helping verb:

Je ne l'ai pas fait. (*I didn't do it.*)

In sentences with two verbs (conjugated verb + infinitive) that follow one subject, place the object pronoun before the verb of which it is the object, usually the infinitive (for more about verbs, see [Chapter 3](#)):

Veux-tu le faire ? (*Do you want to do it?*)

Je veux le faire. (*I want to do it.*)

Je ne veux pas le faire. (*I don't want to do it.*)

In an affirmative command (see [Chapter 9](#)), the word order is different. Like reflexive pronouns (see [Chapter 3](#)), direct object pronouns follow the verb and are attached to it with hyphens; in addition, **me** changes to **moi** and **te** changes to **toi** respectively:

Trouvez-le. (*Find it.*)

Écoute-moi ! (*Listen to me!*)



REMEMBER In a negative command, the pronoun precedes the verb:

Ne les cherche pas. (*Don't look for them.*)

N'y va pas. (*Don't go there.*)

Lining up double pronouns

The word order of pronouns in French is non-negotiable: When you have two, they have to go in a certain order.

Object and adverbial pronouns, as well as reflexive pronouns (see [Chapter 3](#)), all go in the same place: in front of a conjugated verb or an infinitive — except in an affirmative command. But when you have two of them, which one goes first? The following clarifies the order.

Understanding the standard pronoun order

Using any two object, adverbial, or reflexive pronouns together requires a very specific word order. Here's the order before a verb in every tense and mood, except affirmative commands (see the next section):

me, te, se, nous, vous → le, la, les → lui, leur → y → en



TIP

Coincidentally, the object pronouns **le, la, les**, and **lui** and **leur** are always placed in alphabetical order.

Check out the following examples of correctly placed pronouns:

Il m'a donné le livre. Il me l'a donné. (*He gave me the book. He gave it to me.*)

Elle nous en parle. (*She's talking to us about it.*)

Je vais le lui montrer. (*I'm going to show it to him.*)

Il y en a trois. (*There are three [of them].*)

Using pronouns in commands

Negative commands maintain the same word order:

Ne me le donne pas. (*Don't give it to me.*)

Ne les y mettez pas. (*Don't put them there.*)

But in affirmative commands, the pronoun placement and order are different: The pronouns follow the verb and are joined to it with hyphens. Here's the slightly different double-pronoun order that applies to affirmative commands:

le, la, les → moi, toi, lui, nous, vous, leur → y → en

Note: The pronouns **me** and **te** change to **moi** and **toi** respectively in affirmative commands (see [Chapter 3](#)).

The key difference here is that the direct objects **le, la, and les** now come first, and **me, te, se, nous, and vous** come second:

Donnez-nous-en. (*Give us some.*)

Va-t'en! (*Go away!*)

Montrez-le-lui. (*Show it to him.*)

Chapter 3

Here and Now: The Present Tense

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Selecting the appropriate subject pronoun
 - » Classifying types of verbs
 - » Conjugating regular and irregular verbs in the present
 - » Getting to know pronominal verbs
 - » Using the present participle
-

In French, you use the present tense in everyday conversation. In fact, it's the foundation for forming sentences and expressing thoughts. In French, the present tense is also important because the stem of other tenses and moods, such as the imperfect and the subjunctive, are derived from it.

In this chapter, we classify the three types of regular verbs, discuss verbs with spelling changes, explain pronominal verbs, and show you verbs that are completely irregular.

Choosing Subject Pronouns

Before you can start conjugating your verb, you need a *subject* — a person or thing doing that action. A *subject pronoun* is a word used in place of a subject noun. *I, you, he, she, it, we, and they* are the English subject pronouns. They indicate who or what is performing the action, and they dictate the form of the verb you must use. In English, he *shops*, but they *shop*. [Table 3-1](#) shows the French subject pronouns.

TABLE 3-1 French Subject Pronouns

Person	Singular	Meaning	Plural	Meaning
1st person	je	<i>I</i>	nous	<i>we</i>
2nd person	tu	<i>you</i> (informal)	vous	<i>you</i> (formal, plural)
3rd person	il	<i>he</i>	ils	<i>they</i>
	elle	<i>she</i>	elles	<i>they</i>
	on	<i>one, you, we, they, people</i>		

Unlike the English subject pronoun *I*, which is always capitalized, the French pronoun **je** is capitalized only at the beginning of a sentence. **Je** becomes **j'** before a vowel or mute **h**. Here are some examples:

Je parle français. (*I speak French.*)

Tu sais, je ne parle pas espagnol. (*You know, I don't speak Spanish.*)

J'aime le tennis. (*I like tennis.*)

Tu versus vous

Tu and **vous** both mean *you*, but French distinguishes between different kinds of you:

- » **Tu** is singular and informal. You use it only when you're talking to one person you know well — such as a family member, friend, classmate, or colleague — or to a child or animal.
- » **Vous** can be singular (formal) or plural (formal and informal). You have to use it:
 - When talking to one person you don't know or to whom you wish to show respect, such as your teacher, doctor, or boss.
 - When you're talking to more than one person, whether or not you know them.



TIP If you're not sure whether to use **tu** or **vous**, be respectful and opt for **vous**.

Il and elle

Il and **elle** mean *he* and *she*, respectively. They also mean *it* when referring to a thing, according to the gender of the noun (see [Chapter 2](#) for details on noun gender):

Il a deux sœurs. (*He has two sisters.*)

Je vois mon livre. Il est sur la table. (*I see my book. It's on the table.*)

Elle veut travailler ici. (*She wants to work here.*)

Je vois la voiture. Elle est dans la rue. (*I see the car. It's in the street.*)

On and nous

On is an indefinite pronoun that literally means *one*:

On ne doit pas dire cela. (*One shouldn't say that.*)

But **on** can also mean *you* or people in general:

On ne sait jamais. (*You just never know.*)

On ne fait plus attention. (*People don't pay attention anymore.*)

In addition, **on** can mean *we* informally; the formal equivalent is **nous**:

Nous allons partir à midi./On va partir à midi. (*We're going to leave at noon.*)

Ils and elles

Ils and **elles** mean *they*. **Ils** refers to more than one male (or masculine noun) or to a combined group of males and females (or masculine and feminine nouns), no matter the number of each gender present:

Paul et David (ils) habitent à Bruxelles. (*Paul and David [they] live in Brussels.*)

Je vois mes gants. Ils sont dans ta chambre. (*I see my gloves. They're in your room.*)

Lise et Robert (ils) partent ensemble. (*Lise and Robert [they] are leaving together.*)

Elles refers to a group of females or feminine nouns only:

Ma mère et ma sœur (elles) aiment danser. (*My mother and sister [they] like to dance.*)

Je vois tes clés. Elles sont sur mon bureau. (*I see your keys. They're on my desk.*)

Communicating in the Present Tense

You use the present tense to indicate what a subject is doing or does customarily. It can also indicate a state of being:

Nous regardons la télévision après le dîner. (*We watch television after dinner.*)

Il chante sous la douche. (*He sings in the shower.*)



WARNING The English helping verbs *am*, *are*, and *is* aren't used in French, so be careful not to include them when translating:

Je danse. (*I am dancing.*)

In French, you can also use the present tense to ask for instructions, to make a proposal, or to discuss an action that will take place in the future:

Je fais le lit ? (*Shall I make the bed?*)

Je te vois demain. (*I'll see you tomorrow.*)

You also use the present tense with the expression **depuis** + an expression of time to show that an action started in the past and is continuing into the present. The question is expressed as: **Depuis combien de temps... ?** + present tense or **Depuis quand... ?** + present tense:

Depuis combien de temps étudies-tu le français ? (*How long have you been studying French?*)

Depuis quand étudies-tu le français ? (*Since when have you been studying French?*)

J'étudie le français depuis deux ans/depuis 2023. (*I've been studying French for two years/since 2023.*)

Conjugating regular verbs

Regular verbs are groups of verbs that are all conjugated the same way, so when you know how to conjugate one, you can conjugate them all — kind of a package deal. Verbs that aren't conjugated are in their *infinitive* form (the one you find in the dictionary), and the three groups of regular verbs are classified by their infinitive endings: **-er**, **-ir**, and **-re**. This section shows you how to get them in shape.



REMEMBER The French present tense has three different English equivalents. For example, **je parle** means not only *I speak* but also *I am speaking* and *I do speak*.

Here's how it works: Take the infinitive and drop its ending (**-er**, **-ir**, or **-re**) and then add the endings for the subject pronouns as indicated in [Table 3-2](#), then take a look at the examples:

TABLE 3-2 Regular Verb Conjugation in the Present

Subject	-er Verbs	-ir Verbs	-re Verbs
	parler (to speak)	finir (to finish)	vendre (to sell)
je	parle	finis	vends
tu	parles	finis	vends
il, elle, on	parle	finit	vend
nous	parlons	finissons	vendons
vous	parlez	finissez	vendez
ils, elles	parlent	finissent	vendent

Tu parles français ? (*Do you speak French?*)

Elle finit ses devoirs. (*She is finishing her homework.*)

Les Robert vendent leur voiture. (*The Roberts are selling their car.*)

The patterns in the preceding table apply to all regular verbs. Next we list some common regular verbs that you may encounter in everyday life. First up are common regular **–er** verbs:

-er Verb	Meaning	-er Verb	Meaning
adorer	<i>to adore</i>	habiter	<i>to live [somewhere]</i>
aider	<i>to help</i>	jouer	<i>to play</i>
aimer	<i>to like, to love</i>	marcher	<i>to walk</i>
arriver	<i>to arrive</i>	monter	<i>to climb, to go up</i>
chanter	<i>to sing</i>	penser	<i>to think</i>
chercher	<i>to look for</i>	porter	<i>to wear, to carry</i>
danser	<i>to dance</i>	regarder	<i>to watch, to look at</i>
demander	<i>to ask</i>	rencontrer	<i>to meet</i>
donner	<i>to give</i>	téléphoner (à)	<i>to call</i>
écouter	<i>to listen to</i>	tomber	<i>to fall</i>

-er Verb	Meaning	-er Verb	Meaning
enseigner	<i>to teach</i>	travailler	<i>to work</i>
étudier	<i>to study</i>	trouver	<i>to find</i>
gagner	<i>to win, to earn</i>	visiter	<i>to visit [a place]</i>

Next are common regular **-ir** verbs:

-ir Verb	Meaning	-ir Verb	Meaning
agir	<i>to act</i>	maigrir	<i>to lose weight</i>
applaudir	<i>to applaud</i>	obéir (à)	<i>to obey</i>
bâtir	<i>to build</i>	punir	<i>to punish</i>
choisir	<i>to choose</i>	réagir	<i>to react</i>
établir	<i>to establish</i>	réfléchir (à)	<i>to reflect, to think [about]</i>
finir	<i>to finish</i>	remplir	<i>to fill</i>
grandir	<i>to grow [up]</i>	réunir	<i>to unite, to gather, to meet</i>
grossir	<i>to gain weight</i>	réussir (à)	<i>to succeed [in]</i>

Here are examples of common regular **-re** verbs:

-re Verb	Meaning	-re Verb	Meaning
attendre	<i>to wait for</i>	mordre	<i>to bite</i>
confondre	<i>to confuse</i>	perdre	<i>to lose, to waste</i>
descendre	<i>to go down</i>	rendre	<i>to give back, to return</i>
entendre	<i>to hear</i>	répondre (à)	<i>to answer</i>
fondre	<i>to melt</i>	vendre	<i>to sell</i>

Preserving Pronunciation with Spelling-Change Verbs

Some verbs that end in **-er** have, for reasons of pronunciation, a slight spelling change in certain conjugations. This section helps you conjugate them.

Working with -cer verbs

In French, the letter **c** has two sounds: hard, like the *c* in coal, and soft, like the *c* in celery. The French **c** is:

- » Hard when it precedes the vowels **a, o, or u**.
- » Soft when it precedes **e, i, or y**.

The **c** at the end of **-cer** verbs is soft because it precedes **e**, which means you have to keep it soft in all conjugated forms. To make it soft, the **c** changes to **ç** before **a, o, or u**. Take a look at the following verb table:

prononcer <i>(to pronounce)</i>	
je prononce	nous prononçons
tu prononces	vous prononcez
il/elle/on prononce	ils/elles prononcent
Nous prononçons bien le français. <i>(We pronounce French well.)</i>	

French has dozens of **-cer** verbs, including the following:

- » **annoncer** *(to announce)*
- » **avancer** *(to advance)*
- » **commencer** *(to begin)*
- » **effacer** *(to erase)*
- » **influencer** *(to sway, influence)*
- » **lancer** *(to throw)*
- » **remplacer** *(to replace)*

Managing -ger verbs

The letter **g** also has two sounds in French: hard, like the *g* in glass, and soft, like the *g* in massage. The French **g** is

» Hard when it precedes *a, o, or u*.

» Soft when it precedes *e, i, or y*.

The **g** at the end of **-ger** verbs is soft, so it has to be soft in all its conjugated forms. To avoid the hard **g** in the present-tense **nous** form of the verb, you add an **e**. See the following table for an example:

bouger (to move)	
je bouge	nous bougeons
tu bouges	vous bougez
il/elle/on bouge	ils/elles bougent
Je ne bouge pas de chez moi ce soir. (I'm staying at home tonight [not moving from my house].)	

French has dozens of **-ger** verbs, including these:

-ger Verb	Meaning	-ger Verb	Meaning
arranger	<i>to arrange</i>	échanger	<i>to exchange</i>
changer	<i>to change</i>	encourager	<i>to encourage</i>
corriger	<i>to correct</i>	exiger	<i>to demand, insist</i>
déménager	<i>to move [house]</i>	manger	<i>to eat</i>
déranger	<i>to disturb</i>	nager	<i>to swim</i>
diriger	<i>to direct</i>	partager	<i>to share</i>
divorcer	<i>to divorce</i>	voyager	<i>to travel</i>

Dissecting Stem-Changing Verbs

Stem-changing verbs take the same endings as regular **-er** verbs, but they have two different stems (the infinitive minus **-er**). There are five types of stem-changing verbs, but the patterns in their conjugations are

the same: The **nous** and **vous** forms of the verb take the regular stem, and the singular forms and third-person plural have a stem change. The following sections take a closer look at the five types.

Tackling -yer verbs

Verbs that end in **-yer** have two stems:

- » A regular stem with **y** for the **nous** and **vous** conjugations.
- » An irregular stem with **i** in place of **y** for the other conjugations.



REMEMBER This stem change is required for verbs that end in **-oyer** and **-uyer**. Here we conjugate **employer** (*to employ*).

employer (<i>to employ, make use of</i>)	
j' emploie	nous employons
tu emploies	vous employez
il/elle/on emploie	ils/elles emploient
Tu emploies bien ton temps. (<i>You make good use of your time.</i>)	

There are dozens of **-yer** verbs, such as

- » **ennuyer** (*to bore, annoy*)
- » **envoyer** (*to send*)
- » **essuyer** (*to wipe*)
- » **nettoyer** (*to clean*)
- » **tutoyer** (*to address someone using tu*)
- » **vouvoyer** (*to address someone using vous*)

This change is optional for verbs that end in **-ayer**, like **payer** (*to pay*). **Je paie** and **je paye** are equally acceptable. Similar verbs are **effrayer**

(to frighten) and **essayer** (to try).

Figuring out -eler verbs

Most verbs that end in **-eler** have a regular stem with a single **l** in the **nous** and **vous** conjugations and an irregular **ll** for the other conjugations. This example shows the conjugation for **épeler** (to spell).

épeler (to spell)	
j'épelle	nous épelons
tu épelles	vous épelez
il/elle/on épelle	ils/elles épellent
Vous épelez bien. (You spell well.)	

There are only a few **-eler** verbs:

» **appeler** (to call)

» **rappeler** (to call back, recall)

» **renouveler** (to renew)



TIP

The verbs **geler** (to freeze) and **peler** (to peel) don't follow this pattern of doubling the **l**. You conjugate them like **-e*er** verbs. (See the “Looking at -e*er verbs” section later in this chapter for more info.)

Focusing on -eter verbs

Most verbs that end in **-eter** have a regular stem with a single **t** in the present-tense **nous** and **vous** conjugations and an irregular **tt** for the other conjugations. Here's how to conjugate **jeter**:

jeter (to throw)	
je jette	nous jetons
tu jettes	vous jetez

il/elle/on **jette**

ils/elles **jettent**

Elle jette Marc à l'eau. (*She's throwing Marc in the water.*)

The most common **-eter** verbs are

» **feuilleter** (*to leaf through*)

» **projeter** (*to project*)

» **rejeter** (*to reject*)



REMEMBER The verb **acheter** (*to buy*) is an exception; it's conjugated like **e*er verbs**, which we discuss next.

*Looking at -e*er verbs*

Verbs that end in **-e*er** have an unstressed **e** + a consonant in the syllable before the infinitive ending. Conjugated, these verbs have a regular present-tense stem with an unaccented **e** (for **nous** and **vous**) and an irregular stem with an **è** (for all other subject pronouns). Consider the following example:

mener (<i>to lead</i>)	
je mène	nous menons
tu mènes	vous menez
il/elle/on mène	ils/elles mènent
Ils mènent les débats. (<i>They're leading the debates.</i>)	

French has many common **-e*er** verbs (including the exceptions to the **-eler** and **-eter** verbs we mention previously in this chapter). Some of these verbs include the following:

-e*er Verb	Meaning	-e*er Verb	Meaning
acheter	<i>to buy</i>	geler	<i>to freeze</i>
amener	<i>to take [someone] [somewhere]</i>	lever	<i>to lift, raise</i>

-e*er Verb	Meaning	-e*er Verb	Meaning
élever	<i>to bring up, raise</i>	peler	<i>to peel</i>
emmener	<i>to take [someone] [away]</i>	peser	<i>to weigh</i>
enlever	<i>to remove</i>	promener	<i>to walk</i>

*Dealing with -é*er verbs*

Verbs that end in **-é*er** have a regular stem that keeps the acute accent **é** for present-tense **nous** and **vous** and an irregular stem that changes **é** to **è**. The following example shows the conjugations for **gérer**:

gérer (to manage)	
je gère	nous gérons
tu gères	vous gérez
il/elle/on gère	ils/elles gèrent
Nous gérons le projet. (We're managing the project.)	

Here are some **-é*er** verbs:

- » **célébrer** (*to celebrate*)
- » **completer** (*to complete*)
- » **considerer** (*to consider*)
- » **exagérer** (*to exaggerate*)
- » **espérer** (*to hope*)
- » **posséder** (*to possess*)
- » **preferer** (*to prefer*)
- » **répéter** (*to repeat*)
- » **suggérer** (*to suggest*)
- » **tolérer** (*to tolerate*)

Recognizing Irregular Verbs

As if all the different regular verb patterns weren't enough to remember, French also has numerous irregular verbs, which have either unique conjugations or patterns limited to just a few verbs. You just have to memorize these conjugations, which you can find in the Appendix, and practice until they feel natural. Here are the four most important irregular verbs conjugated in the present tense.

avoir (to have)	
j' ai	nous avons
tu as	vous avez
il/elle/on a	ils/elles ont
J'ai une idée. (I have an idea.)	

être (to be)	
je suis	nous sommes
tu es	vous êtes
il/elle/on est	ils/elles sont
Tu es très intelligent. (You are very smart.)	

aller (to go)	
je vais	nous allons
tu vas	vous allez
il/elle/on va	ils/elles vont
Nous allons en France. (We're going to France.)	

Faire (to make, do) and all its derivatives share a conjugation pattern, although we can't offer you an easy way to explain what happens here — you just need to memorize these forms and apply them to other verbs that end in **-faire**.

faire (to make, do)	
je fais	nous faisons

tu fais	vous faites
il/elle/on fait	ils/elles font
Il fait le lit. (<i>He's making the bed.</i>)	

Similarly conjugated verbs include **défaire** (*to undo*), **refaire** (*to redo*), and **satisfaire** (*to satisfy*). Here are more irregular verbs; you can see their conjugations in the Appendix.

<i>Irregular Verb</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Irregular Verb</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
boire	<i>to drink</i>	partir	<i>to leave</i>
conduire	<i>to drive</i>	pouvoir	<i>to be able to, can</i>
connaître	<i>to know</i>	prendre	<i>to take</i>
courir	<i>to run</i>	recevoir	<i>to receive</i>
croire	<i>to believe</i>	rire	<i>to laugh</i>
devoir	<i>to have to, must</i>	savoir	<i>to know [how or facts]</i>
dire	<i>to say, tell</i>	sentir	<i>to feel, to smell</i>
dormir	<i>to sleep</i>	sortir	<i>to go out</i>
écrire	<i>to write</i>	suivre	<i>to follow</i>
lire	<i>to read</i>	venir	<i>to come</i>
mettre	<i>to put [on]</i>	vivre	<i>to live</i>
offrir	<i>to offer</i>	voir	<i>to see</i>
ouvrir	<i>to open</i>	vouloir	<i>to want</i>

Expressing Yourself with Idiomatic Expressions

The irregular verbs **aller** (*to go*), **avoir** (*to have*), **être** (*to be*), and **faire** (*to make, do*) are commonly used in everyday French in various idiomatic expressions (see [Table 3-3](#)):

TABLE 3-3 Common Expressions

Verbs and Expressions	Examples
aller	
aller + adverb (to feel, to be; to express one's well-being)	Comment allez-vous ? (How are you?) Je vais bien. (I'm fine.)
aller + infinitive (to express the near future)	Ils vont étudier. (They are going to study.)
avoir	
avoir ... ans (to be ... years old)	Quel âge as-tu ? (How old are you?) J'ai vingt ans. (I'm 20 years old.)
avoir besoin de (to need)	J'ai besoin d'un couteau. (I need a knife.)
avoir de la chance (to be lucky)	Tu as de la chance ! (You are lucky!)
avoir chaud/froid (to be hot/cold)	J'ai chaud/froid. (I'm hot/cold.)
avoir faim/soif (to be hungry/thirsty)	J'ai faim/soif. (I'm hungry/thirsty.)
avoir honte [de] (to be ashamed)	J'en ai honte. (I'm ashamed of it.)
avoir peur [de] (to be afraid)	J'ai peur de ça. (I'm afraid of that.)
avoir raison/tort (to be right/wrong)	J'ai raison/tort. (I'm right/wrong.)
avoir envie de (to feel like)	J'ai envie de danser. (I feel like dancing.)
avoir lieu (to take place)	La fête a lieu chez elle. (The party is taking place at her house.)
avoir mal à + body part (to have an ache)	Il a mal à la tête. (He has a headache.)
avoir sommeil (to be sleepy)	J'ai sommeil. (I'm sleepy.)

Verbs and Expressions	Examples
avoir l'occasion de (to have the opportunity to)	As-tu l'occasion de voyager ? (<i>Do you have the opportunity to travel?</i>)
avoir l'habitude de (to be in the habit of, to be accustomed to)	Il a l'habitude de dormir jusqu'à midi. (<i>He's in the habit of sleeping until noon.</i>)
être	
être à (to belong to)	Ce livre est à moi. (<i>This book belongs to me.</i>)
être en train de (to be in the process [of doing something])	Ils sont en train de manger. (<i>They are eating [right now].</i>)
faire	
faire + weather condition	Quel temps fait-il ? (<i>How's the weather?</i>) Il fait bon (beau, mauvais, froid, chaud, frais, lourd, du vent, du soleil). (<i>It's good [beautiful, bad, cold, hot, cool, humid, windy, sunny].</i>)
faire + sport (to play a sport)	Je fais du tennis. (<i>I play tennis.</i>)
faire attention (à) (to pay attention to, to watch out for)	Je fais attention à ma prononciation. (<i>I pay attention to my pronunciation.</i>)
faire la connaissance de (to meet [for the first time])	Il a fait la connaissance de mon frère. (<i>He met my brother.</i>)
faire la queue (to form a line)	On fait la queue devant le cinéma. (<i>We're in line in front of the movie theater.</i>)
faire un voyage (to take a trip)	Faites-vous un voyage en France ? (<i>Are you taking a trip to France?</i>)
faire une promenade (to take a walk)	Nous faisons toujours une promenade le soir. (<i>We always take a walk in the evening.</i>)

Identifying Pronominal Verbs

Pronominal verbs have a reflexive pronoun that provides additional information about the meaning of the verb and who or what it's affecting.

You can recognize a pronominal verb by the reflexive pronoun **se** that precedes the infinitive: **se coucher** (*to go to bed*), **se laver** (*to wash oneself*), and so on. [Table 3-4](#) shows examples of pronomial verbs and the reflexive pronoun for each subject.

TABLE 3-4 Properly Using Reflexive Pronouns

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Reflexive Pronoun</i>	<i>Verb</i>
se laver (<i>to wash oneself</i>)	je	me	lave
se lever (<i>to get up</i>)	tu	te	lèves
se raser (<i>to shave</i>)	il, elle, on	se	rase
se coucher (<i>to go to bed</i>)	nous	nous	couchons
se reposer (<i>to rest</i>)	vous	vous	reposez
se promener (<i>to go for a walk</i>)	ils, elles	se	promènent



TIP

The reflexive pronouns **me**, **te**, and **se** become **m'**, **t'**, and **s'** before a vowel or a mute **h**:

Je m'amuse. (*I'm having fun.*)

Tu t'inquiètes trop. (*You worry too much.*)

Mes enfants s'habillent. (*My children are getting dressed.*)



WARNING

Don't forget to conjugate the verb according to its regular/irregular/spelling-change pattern:

Je me lève. (*I get up.*)

The reflexive pronoun doesn't necessarily change the meaning of the verb but tells you that the verb falls into one of three categories.

Reflexive verbs: Acting on oneself

With reflexive verbs, the subject is performing the action of the verb on himself or herself. Whenever you look at yourself in the mirror or buy yourself something, you're involved in a reflexive action. In English, reflexive actions can be a little tricky because so much is considered as understood. French, however, requires the use of a reflexive verb to specify a reflexive action.

Here are some common reflexive verbs and two examples:

- » **s'arrêter** (*to stop oneself*)
- » **s'habiller** (*to get dressed*)
- » **se baigner** (*to bathe [oneself]*)
- » **se brosser** (*to brush [one's hair, teeth]*)
- » **se coiffer** (*to style one's hair*)
- » **se coucher** (*to go to bed*)
- » **se couper** (*to cut oneself*)
- » **se laver** (*to wash up*)
- » **se lever** (*to get up*)
- » **se maquiller** (*to put makeup on [oneself]*)
- » **se peigner** (*to comb one's hair*)
- » **se promener** (*to go for a walk, to stroll*)
- » **se raser** (*to shave [oneself]*)
- » **se réveiller** (*to wake up*)

Je m'habille. (*I'm getting dressed.*)

Tu dois te coucher. (*You have to go to bed.*)

Reciprocal verbs: What you do to each other

With *reciprocal verbs*, two or more subjects are performing the same action on one another. The following list shows common verbs that may show reciprocal action, followed by two example sentences:

- » **s'aimer** (*to love each other*)
- » **s'écrire** (*to write to each other*)
- » **s'embrasser** (*to kiss each other*)
- » **se comprendre** (*to understand each other*)
- » **se connaître** (*to know each other*)
- » **se disputer** (*to argue with each other*)
- » **se parler** (*to speak to each other*)
- » **se promettre** (*to promise each other*)
- » **se quitter** (*to leave each other*)
- » **se regarder** (*to look at each other*)
- » **se rencontrer** (*to meet each other*)
- » **se retrouver** (*to find each other*)
- » **se téléphoner** (*to call each other*)
- » **se voir** (*to see each other*)

Nous nous écrivons tous les jours. (*We write to each other every day.*)

Ils se voient souvent. (*They see each other often.*)

Idiomatic pronominal verbs: Figuratively speaking

Some pronominal verbs have an idiomatic meaning, different from the meaning they have without the pronoun, as shown in [Table 3-5](#):

TABLE 3-5 Different Verb Meanings

Normal Verb	Translation	Idiomatic Verb	Translation
amuser [quelqu'un]	<i>to amuse, to entertain</i> [someone]	s'amuser	<i>to have fun</i>
débrouiller [quelque chose]	<i>to disentangle</i> [something]	se débrouiller	<i>to manage (to do)</i>
demander [quelque chose]	<i>to ask</i> [something]	se demander	<i>to wonder</i>
dépêcher [quelqu'un/quelque chose]	<i>to send</i> [someone/ something]	se dépêcher	<i>to hurry, to be in a hurry</i>
douter de [quelqu'un/quelque chose]	<i>to doubt</i> [someone/ something]	se douter de	<i>to suspect</i>
ennuyer [quelqu'un]	<i>to bother</i> [someone]	s'ennuyer	<i>to get/be bored</i>
inquiéter [quelqu'un]	<i>to disturb</i> [someone]	s'inquiéter	<i>to worry</i>
mettre [quelque chose]	<i>to put</i> [something]	se mettre à	<i>to begin (to do something)</i>
occuper [quelqu'un/quelque chose]	<i>to occupy,</i> [someone/something], <i>to keep</i> [someone] busy	s'occuper de	<i>to be in charge of, to take care of, to deal with</i>
passer [quelque chose]	<i>to pass</i> [something] on	se passer	<i>to happen</i>
rappeler [quelqu'un/quelque chose]	<i>to call</i> [someone] back, <i>to remind of</i> [someone/something]	se rappeler	<i>to remember, to recall</i>
servir [quelqu'un/quelque chose]	<i>to serve</i> [someone/something]	se servir de	<i>to use</i>
tromper [quelqu'un]	<i>to deceive, to disappoint, to cheat on</i> [someone]	se tromper de	<i>to be wrong</i>

Je m'appelle Laura. (*My name is Laura.*)

Il s'amuse bien. (*He's having a good time.*)

You can use most pronominal verbs without the reflexive pronoun, but then the meaning changes: Alone, **laver** means to wash (someone/something else). Used reflexively, it means to wash oneself or a part of oneself. For example,

Je lave la voiture. (*I'm washing the car.*)

Je me lave. (*I'm washing up, washing myself.*)

Je me lave les mains. (*I'm washing my hands.*)



TIP

When you use a part of the body with a reflexive verb, you need the definite article before the part of the body, not the possessive adjective. Literally, you're saying "I'm washing the face, the hands ... of myself."

Je me lave la figure. (*I'm washing my face.*)

Just as with direct and indirect object pronouns (refer to [Chapter 2](#)), you generally place reflexive pronouns before the conjugated verb.

Elle se dépêche. (*She's hurrying.*)

Je me suis levé à 6h00. (*I got up at 6 a.m.*)

When you have a conjugated verb followed by an infinitive, the reflexive pronoun goes in front of the infinitive.

Nous allons nous acheter des glaces. (*We're going to buy ourselves some ice cream.*)

Negatives are placed around the conjugated verb. (See [Chapter 6](#) for more about negation.)

Elle ne va pas se maquiller. (*She's not going to put on makeup.*)

When you use inversion to ask questions with pronominal verbs, the reflexive pronoun precedes the inverted verb-subject. (See [Chapter 6](#).)

Te douches-tu le matin ou le soir ? (*Do you shower in the morning or at night?*)

Vous êtes-vous levés avant 7h00 ? (*Did you get up before 7 a.m.?*)

The only time you don't put the reflexive pronoun right in front of the pronominal verb is in the affirmative imperative. In affirmative commands, you place the reflexive pronoun after the verb and connect the two words with hyphens (note that **te** changes to **toi** — see [Chapter 9](#)):

Lève-toi. (*Get up.*)

Dépêchez-vous. (*Hurry up.*)

Understanding the -ing Family

In English, the present participle is a verb form that ends in *-ing*. It can act as a verb, gerund, adjective, or noun. In comparison, French present participles end in **-ant**.

Forming the present participle

In English, the present participle always ends in *-ing*: singing, walking, and so on. In French, the present participle ends in **-ant**: **chantant** (*singing*) and **marchant** (*walking*).

Forming the present participle is easy for regular verbs and the vast majority of irregular verbs. Simply take the **nous** form of any present-tense verb, drop the **-ons** ending, and add **-ant**. [Table 3-6](#) shows the present participle for some regular, irregular, stem-changing, and spelling change verbs:

TABLE 3-6 Forming the Present Participle

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Nous Form</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Nous Form</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>
aller (to go)	allons	allant (going)
appeler (to call)	appelons	appelant (calling)
commencer (to begin)	commençons	commençant (beginning)
faire (to do, to make)	faisons	faisant (doing, making)
finir (to finish)	finissons	finissant (finishing)
manger (to eat)	mangeons	mangeant (eating)
parler (to speak)	parlons	parlant (speaking)
partir (to leave)	partons	partant (leaving)
préférer (to prefer)	préférons	préférant (preferring)
prendre (to take)	prenons	prenant (taking)
vendre (to sell)	vendons	vendant (selling)
venir (to come)	venons	venant (coming)
voir (to see)	voyons	voyant (seeing)

Only three verbs have an irregular present participle. They are

- » **avoir** (to have): **ayant** (having)
- » **être** (to be): **étant** (being)
- » **savoir** (to know): **sachant** (knowing)

Putting the present participle to good use

You can use the present participle as an adjective, noun, or verb:

- » **Adjectives:** Many past participles can be used as adjectives:
 - **C'est une histoire intéressante.** (It's an interesting story.)
 - **Où est la table pliante ?** (Where is the folding table?)
- » **Nouns:** Many past participles can refer to people doing the action of the verb the participle comes from.
 - **passer** (to pass): **Ils regardent les passants.** (They are watching the passersby.)

- **étudier** (*to study*): **Les étudiants sont en classe.** (*The students are in class*)

» **Verbs:** The present participle can indicate why something is happening:

- **Ayant de l'argent, elle a pu voyager.** (*Having some money, she was able to travel.*)

Describing with gerunds

A French gerund is the present participle preceded by **en**, which means *while, as, or by* in English. Because the gerund modifies another verb, it's essentially acting as an adverb. To use the present participle as a gerund, just put **en** in front of it:

La fille chante en marchant. (*The girl sings while walking.*)

J'écoute la radio en travaillant. (*I listen to the radio while working.*)

You can also use the gerund to express circumstances:

En entrant dans le bâtiment, j'ai vu Paul. (*Upon entering the building, I saw Paul.*)

J'ai compris la situation en lisant les journaux. (*I understood the situation by reading the newspapers.*)



REMEMBER

A French present participle, unlike an English gerund (an *-ing* verb acting as a noun), may not be used as a noun subject or after a conjugated verb:

La natation est mon sport préféré. (*Swimming is my favorite sport.*)

Je préfère rester à la maison. (*I prefer staying at home.*)

Chapter 4

Describing and Comparing with Flair

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding adjectives
 - » Using adverbs correctly
 - » Making comparisons
-

While nouns and verbs are the building blocks and actions of language, adjectives and adverbs are the colors, shapes, sizes, speeds, frequencies, and styles that bring those blocks and actions to life. So adjectives and adverbs provide detail and clarification to the nouns, verbs, and other words they modify. This chapter explains all about adjectives and adverbs, including how to use them, where to put them in the sentence, the different types, and how to make comparisons.

Coloring with Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns. Is the house *big*? Are the trees *green*? You can use adjectives so that people will have enough information about, and the best possible understanding of, what you want to describe. This section focuses on what you need to know about adjectives.

Making adjectives agree

In French, adjectives have to agree with their noun or pronoun in gender and number. Most of the rules for making adjectives feminine and plural are the same as those for making nouns feminine and plural (see [Chapter 2](#)).



REMEMBER The masculine singular is the default form of the adjective — that's what you'd look up in the dictionary. Your dictionary likely doesn't have entries for the feminine equivalents or plurals, except when they're irregular.

Feminizing adjectives

In order to make a masculine adjective feminine, all you have to do for many adjectives is add an **-e** to the end of the masculine singular form. If the masculine adjective already ends in a silent **-e**, the feminine form is identical. Consider the following examples:

Masculine	Feminine
petit (<i>small</i>)	petite
joli (<i>pretty</i>)	jolie
préféré (<i>favorite</i>)	préférée
bleu (<i>blue</i>)	bleue
grave (<i>serious</i>)	grave
rouge (<i>red</i>)	rouge

For masculine adjectives that end in **-x**, change **-x** to **-se**:

Masculine	Feminine
curieux (<i>curious</i>)	curieuse
délicieux (<i>delicious</i>)	délicieuse
heureux (<i>happy</i>)	heureuse
paresseux (<i>lazy</i>)	paresseuse
sérieux (<i>serious</i>)	sérieuse

For masculine adjectives that end in **-f**, change **-f** to **-ve**:

Masculine	Feminine
------------------	-----------------

Masculine	Feminine
actif (<i>active</i>)	active
attentif (<i>attentive</i>)	attentive
naïf (<i>naive</i>)	naïve
sportif (<i>athletic</i>)	sportive
vif (<i>lively</i>)	vive

For masculine adjectives ending in **-er**, change **-er** to **ère**:

Masculine	Feminine
cher (<i>dear, expensive</i>)	chère
dernier (<i>last</i>)	dernière
entier (<i>entire, whole</i>)	entière
fier (<i>proud</i>)	fière
léger (<i>light</i>)	légère

Masculine adjectives that end in **-l** or **-n**, and two that end in **-s** double that final consonant before adding **-e**:

Masculine	Feminine
ancien (<i>old, former, ancient</i>)	ancienne
bas (<i>low</i>)	basse
bon (<i>good</i>)	bonne
européen (<i>European</i>)	européenne
formel (<i>formal</i>)	formelle
gentil (<i>nice</i>)	gentille
gros (<i>fat</i>)	grosse
intellectuel (<i>intellectual</i>)	intellectuelle
italien (<i>Italian</i>)	italienne
mignon (<i>cute</i>)	mignonne
pareil (<i>similar</i>)	pareille

<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>
tel (<i>such</i>)	telle



WARNING Unlike in English, adjectives that refer to nationalities and religions aren't capitalized in French:

J'ai une correspondante française. (*I have a French pen pal.*)

French also has several other irregular feminine forms. The most common are shown here:

<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>	<i>English</i>
blanc	blanche	<i>white</i>
complet	complète	<i>complete</i>
doux	douce	<i>sweet, soft, mild, gentle</i>
faux	fausse	<i>false</i>
favori	favorite	<i>favorite</i>
frais	fraîche	<i>fresh, cool</i>
long	longue	<i>long</i>
public	publique	<i>public</i>
sec	sèche	<i>dry</i>
secret	secrète	<i>secret</i>
travailleur	travailleuse	<i>hardworking, industrious</i>

Six French adjectives have an extra form that precedes a masculine singular noun or a masculine singular adjective that begins with a vowel or mute ***h***. This is to make pronunciation easier so you don't have to say back-to-back vowel sounds (see [Table 4-1](#), followed by examples).

TABLE 4-1 Adjectives with Special Masculine Singular Forms

<i>English</i>	<i>Masc. Singular</i>	<i>Masc. Singular before a Vowel or Mute h</i>	<i>Fem. Singular</i>	<i>Masc. Plural</i>	<i>Fem. Plural</i>
<i>beautiful</i>	beau	bel	belle	beaux	belles
<i>new</i>	nouveau	nouvel	nouvelle	nouveaux	nouvelles
<i>crazy</i>	fou	fol	folle	fous	folles
<i>soft</i>	mou	mol	molle	mous	molles
<i>old</i>	vieux	vieil	vieille	vieux	vieilles
<i>this, that</i>	ce	cet	cette	ces	ces

un bel homme (*a handsome man*)

mon nouvel avocat (*my new lawyer*)

Making adjectives plural

In order to make most French adjectives plural, whether they are masculine or feminine, regular or irregular, all you do is add an **-s**:

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
poli (<i>polite [m]</i>)	polis
polie (<i>polite [f]</i>)	polies
fatigué (<i>tired [m]</i>)	fatigués
fatiguée (<i>tired [f]</i>)	fatiguées
blanc (<i>white [m]</i>)	blancs
blanche (<i>white [f]</i>)	blanches
bon (<i>good [m]</i>)	bons
bonne (<i>good [f]</i>)	bonnes
actif (<i>active [m]</i>)	actifs
active (<i>active [f]</i>)	actives

Singular adjectives ending in **-s** or **-x** don't change in the plural:

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
gris (<i>gray</i>)	gris
heureux (<i>happy</i>)	heureux

Most adjectives that end in **-al** change **-al** to **-aux** in the plural:

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
génial (<i>great</i>)	géniaux
loyal (<i>loyal</i>)	loyaux



REMEMBER The masculine singular adjective **tout** (*all*) is irregular and becomes **tous** in the masculine plural:

Tous les garçons jouent au tennis. (*All the boys are playing tennis.*)



REMEMBER Use the masculine plural form of the adjective when describing nouns of different genders:

Ma sœur et mon frère sont blonds. (*My sister and my brother are blond.*)

La maison et l'appartement sont beaux. (*The house and the apartment are beautiful.*)

Positioning adjectives

In French, most adjectives follow the noun they modify, but a few precede it. The placement depends on the type of adjective being used, the connotation the speaker wants to convey, and the emphasis desired. The following sections dig deeper into these topics.

Most adjectives follow the noun

Most descriptive French adjectives — that is, adjectives that describe the nature or appearance of a noun, such as color, shape, or origin — follow the nouns they modify:

une voiture verte (*a green car*)

un garçon mince (*a slender boy*)

des vêtements européens (*European clothing*)

une fille heureuse (*a happy girl*)

In addition, present and past participles used as adjectives always follow nouns (see [Chapters 3](#) and [7](#) for more on participles):

des yeux étincelants (*sparkling eyes*)

une histoire compliquée (*a complicated story*)

Adjectives that precede the noun

A few descriptive adjectives come before nouns. Descriptive adjectives that refer to the following qualities generally come in front of the nouns they modify (you can remember them with the acronym BAGS):

» Beauty (**beau, joli**):

- **une jolie femme** (*a pretty woman*)

» Age (**nouveau, jeune, vieux**):

- **une nouvelle voiture** (*a new car*)
- **un jeune homme** (*a young man*)

» Goodness and badness (**bon, mauvais**):

- **une bonne idée** (*a good idea*)

» Size (**court, long, gros, petit, grand**):

- **de petits appartements** (*some small apartments*)

Note that **des** becomes **de** in front of an adjective preceding a noun:

- **J'ai reçu de mauvaises nouvelles.** (*I received some bad news.*)
- **On a visité de petits appartements.** (*We visited some small apartments*)

The following are some other common adjectives that precede the noun with a couple of example sentences:

- » **autre** (*other*)
- » **chaque** (*each*)
- » **dernier** (*last*)
- » **plusieurs** (*several*)
- » **premier** (*first*)
- » **quelque** (*some*)
- » **tel** (*such*)
- » **tout** (*all, every*)

J'ai plusieurs questions. (*I have several questions.*)

As-tu un autre stylo ? (*Do you have another pen?*)

Identifying adjectives that have changing meanings

Some French adjectives have different meanings depending on whether they precede or follow the noun. When these adjectives have a literal meaning, you place them after the noun. When they have a figurative meaning, you place them before the noun:

un ancien médecin (*a former doctor*)

un médecin ancien (*an old doctor*)

la pauvre femme (*poor, wretched woman*)

la femme pauvre (*poor, penniless woman*)

See [Table 4-2](#) for some common French adjectives with meaning changes.

TABLE 4-2 Adjectives Whose Meanings Change

<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Meaning before Noun</i>	<i>Meaning after Noun</i>
brave	<i>good, decent</i>	<i>brave</i>
cher	<i>dear (cherished)</i>	<i>expensive</i>
curieux	<i>odd, strange</i>	<i>inquisitive</i>
dernier	<i>final, latest</i>	<i>previous</i>
franc	<i>real, genuine</i>	<i>frank</i>
pauvre	<i>unfortunate</i>	<i>poor (without money)</i>
premier	<i>first</i>	<i>basic, primary</i>
prochain	<i>next (in a series)</i>	<i>next, following (day, week ...)</i>
propre	<i>(my, his, our) own</i>	<i>clean</i>
sale	<i>dirty (nasty)</i>	<i>dirty (soiled)</i>
triste	<i>sorry, pathetic</i>	<i>sad</i>

Using Adverbs Accurately

Different types of adverbs have different purposes, and their position depends in part on the type of adverb you're using. We explain these purposes and positions in the following sections.

Identifying types of adverbs

The type of adverb you use depends on what you want to say: Are you talking about how often something happens, where it happens, when ...? Here are the different kinds of adverbs that can help you say anything.

Adverbs of manner

Many adverbs are formed from adjectives, in both French and English. These adverbs express how something happens, and they usually end in -

ly in English (*clearly, quickly, frankly*), and in **-ment** in French (**clairement, rapidement, franchement**).

The rules for turning adjectives into adverbs are fairly straightforward. For masculine adjectives that end in a single vowel, just add **-ment**.

<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Adverb</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
poli	<i>polite</i>	poliment	<i>politely</i>
carré	<i>square</i>	carrément	<i>squarely</i>
triste	<i>sad</i>	tristement	<i>sadly</i>

Other words need a little more tweaking. Keep the following rules in mind when forming adverbs:

- » When the masculine adjective ends in a consonant (except for **-ant** or **-ent**) or multiple vowels, take the feminine form of the adjective and add **-ment**:

<i>Masc. Adj.</i>	<i>Fem. Adj.</i>	<i>Adverb</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
certain	certaine	certainement	<i>(certainly)</i>
heureux	heureuse	heureusement	<i>(happily, fortunately)</i>
dernier	dernière	dernièrement	<i>(lastly, recently)</i>
nouveau	nouvelle	nouvellement	<i>(newly)</i>

- » For adjectives that end in **-ant** or **-ent**, replace that ending with **-amment** or **-emment**:

<i>Masc. Adj.</i>	<i>Adverb</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
constant	constamment	<i>(constantly)</i>
évident	évidemment	<i>(evidently)</i>
intelligent	intelligemment	<i>(intelligently)</i>
récent	récemment	<i>(recently)</i>

However, remember a few specific exceptions to the preceding rules:

- » **énorme** (*enormous*) becomes **énormément** (*enormously*)
- » **gentil** (*nice, kind*) becomes **gentiment** (*nicely, kindly*)
- » **lent** (*slow*) becomes **lentement** (*slowly*)
- » **vrai** (*true*) becomes **vraiment** (*truly*)

Some French adverbs of manner don't end in **-ment**:

- » **bien** (*well*)
- » **debout** (*standing up*)
- » **exprès** (*on purpose*)
- » **mal** (*poorly, badly*)
- » **mieux** (*better*)
- » **pire** (*worse*)
- » **vite** (*quickly*)
- » **volontiers** (*gladly*)

Here are some examples with adverbs of manner:

Elle parle très poliment. (*She speaks very politely.*)

Tu l'as fait exprès ! (*You did it on purpose!*)

Adverbs of frequency

Adverbs of frequency express how often or how consistently something happens:

- » **encore** (*again*)
- » **jamais** (*ever*)
- » **parfois** (*sometimes*)
- » **quelquefois** (*sometimes*)
- » **rarement** (*rarely*)
- » **souvent** (*often*)

» **toujours** (*always, still*)

Check out some examples:

Je vais souvent aux musées. (*I often go to museums.*)

Habites-tu toujours au Québec ? (*Do you still live in Quebec?*)

Adverbs of place

Adverbs of place tell you where something happens:

» **autour** (*around*)

» **dedans** (*inside*)

» **dehors** (*outside*)

» **derrière** (*behind, in back*)

» **dessous** (*below*)

» **dessus** (*above*)

» **devant** (*in front*)

» **en bas** (*below, down[stairs]*)

» **en haut** (*up[stairs]*)

» **ici** (*here*)

» **là** (*there*)

» **là-bas** (*over there*)

» **loin** (*far away*)

» **partout** (*everywhere*)

» **près** (*near*)

» **quelque part** (*somewhere*)

Take a look at some example sentences:

Je préfère m'asseoir derrière. (*I prefer sitting in the back.*)

Qui habite en haut ? (*Who lives upstairs?*)



REMEMBER Many adverbs of place are also prepositions. The difference is that an adverb acts by itself to modify a verb — **J’habite loin.** (*I live far away.*) — while a preposition joins its object (the noun that follows it) with another word — **J’habite loin de Paris.** (*I live far from Paris.*) See [Chapter 5](#) for more information about French prepositions.

Adverbs of time

Adverbs of time explain when something happens:

- » **actuellement** (*currently*)
- » **après** (*after*)
- » **aujourd’hui** (*today*)
- » **aussitôt** (*immediately*)
- » **autrefois** (*formerly, in the past*)
- » **avant** (*before*)
- » **bientôt** (*soon*)
- » **d’abord** (*first, at first*)
- » **déjà** (*already*)
- » **demain** (*tomorrow*)
- » **depuis** (*since*)
- » **enfin** (*at last, finally*)
- » **ensuite** (*next, then*)
- » **hier** (*yesterday*)
- » **immédiatement** (*immediately*)
- » **longtemps** (*for a long time*)
- » **maintenant** (*now*)
- » **puis** (*then*)

» récemment (*recently*)

» tard (*late*)

» tôt (*early*)



REMEMBER **Actuellement** means *currently*, not *actually*. **En fait** means *actually*.

Here are some sentences with adverbs of time:

Nous allons partir demain. (*We're going to leave tomorrow.*)

J'ai enfin visité Paris. (*I finally visited Paris.*)

Adverbs of quantity

Adverbs of quantity tell you how many or how much of something:

» assez (**de**) (*quite, fairly, enough [of]*)

» autant (**de**) (*as much [as], as many [as]*)

» beaucoup (**de**) (*a lot [of], many*)

» combien (**de**) (*how many [of], how much [of]*)

» moins (**de**) (*less [of], fewer*)

» pas mal de (*quite a few*)

» peu (**de**) (*few, little*)

» un peu (**de**) (*a little*)

» la plupart de (*most*)

» plus (**de**) (*more*)

» tant (**de**) (*so much, so many*)

» très (*very*)

» trop (**de**) (*too much, too many*)

The parentheses around **de** in many of these phrases indicate that the **de** is required only if followed by a noun. For example,

C'est combien ? (*How much is it?*)

Combien de voitures avez-vous ? (*How many cars do you have?*)



TIP

You use these adverbs of quantity to modify nouns:

Il y a trop de circulation. (*There's too much traffic.*)

Il a beaucoup d'amis. (*He has a lot of friends.*)

Positioning adverbs

The position of French adverbs depends on what they're modifying and the type of adverb. Read on.

After the verb

When French adverbs modify a verb, they usually follow it:

Je le ferai volontiers ! (*I'll gladly do it!*)

Nous voyageons souvent en été. (*We often travel in the summer.*)

If there are two verbs, the adverb goes after the conjugated verb, not after the infinitive or past participle (see [Chapter 7](#)):

J'aime beaucoup nager. (*I really like swimming.*)

Il a déjà mangé. (*He already ate.*)

When you negate a sentence that has an adverb following the verb, the second part of the negative structure (explained in [Chapter 6](#)) comes before the adverb:

Je ne me sens pas bien. (*I don't feel well.*)

Il ne travaille jamais vite. (*He never works quickly.*)

In other places

You can put adverbs that refer to a point in time, like **aujourd'hui** (*today*) and **hier** (*yesterday*), at the beginning or at the end of the sentence:

Aujourd'hui, je dois travailler./Je dois travailler aujourd'hui.
(*I have to work today.*)

The same is true for long adverbs:

Je me lève à 7h00, normalement./Normalement, je me lève à 7h00. (*I usually get up at 7 a.m.*)

The best place for adverbs of place is after the direct object or, if there isn't one, after the verb:

Tu trouveras tes valises en haut. (*You'll find your suitcases upstairs.*)

J'aimerais vivre ici. (*I'd like to live here.*)

Adverbs that modify adjectives or other adverbs go in front of those words:

Elle est très belle. (*She is very beautiful.*)

J'habite ici depuis assez longtemps. (*I've lived here for a fairly long time.*)

Comparing Things

The two kinds of comparisons you can make in French are *comparatives* and *superlatives*. Comparatives say that something is *more* _____ *than*, *less* _____ *than*, or *as* _____ *as* something else; superlatives proclaim that something is *the most* _____ or *the least* _____ of all. The following sections explore comparisons in greater detail.

Relating two things with comparatives

You use **plus** (*more*) or **moins** (*less*) in French to indicate inequality with either adjectives or adverbs. An optional **que** (*than*) introduces the object of the comparison.

Adjectives are compared as follows:

Diane est belle. (*Diane is beautiful.*)

Sophie est plus belle. (*Sophie is more beautiful.*)

Anaïs est plus belle que moi. (*Anaïs is more beautiful than I am.*)

Robert est stricte. (*Robert is strict.*)

Franck est moins stricte. (*Franck is less strict.*)

Timothée est moins stricte que Michel. (*Timothée is less strict than Michel [is].*)

Comparative forms of adjectives agree in number and gender with the noun at the beginning of the comparative:

Paul est plus grand que Monique. (*Paul is taller than Monique.*)

Élisabeth est plus grande que David. (*Élisabeth is taller than David.*)

You express equality with **aussi** + adjective or adverb + **que** in French (this is equivalent to *as ... as* in English):

Le sport est aussi important que la nutrition. (*Exercise is as important as nutrition.*)

Tu t'entraînes aussi durement que moi. (*You train as hard as I do.*)

In French comparatives, you use a stressed pronoun after **que** (*than*). The stressed pronouns are

Singular Plural	
moi (<i>me</i>)	nous (<i>we</i>)
toi (<i>you</i>)	vous (<i>you</i>)

Singular	Plural
lui (him)	eux (them)
elle (her)	elles (them)

Supersizing with superlatives

In superlatives, you say that someone or something is *the most* or *the least* [something]. Use the definite article plus the comparative adverb **plus** or **moins**:

Ma fille est la plus belle. (*My daughter is the most beautiful.*)

Son oncle est le moins généreux. (*Her uncle is the least generous.*)



REMEMBER Note that in the superlative, the definite article and adjective must agree in number and gender with the subject:

Suzanne et Lucie sont les plus grandes. (*Suzanne and Lucie are the tallest.*)

In French superlatives, you use the preposition **de** to express *in* or *of*:

La France est le plus beau pays du monde. (*France is the most beautiful country in the world.*)

Daniel est le moins timide de nos amis. (*Daniel is the least shy of our friends.*)

Adjectives that go before the noun can maintain that position in the superlative, or they can go after the noun. Note that you repeat the definite article when the superlative goes after the verb:

C'est une belle maison. (*It's a beautiful house.*)

C'est la plus belle maison./C'est la maison la plus belle. (*It's the most beautiful house.*)

Likewise, adjectives that go after the noun maintain this position in the superlative and need to repeat the article:

Pierre est le professeur le plus stricte. (*Pierre is the strictest teacher.*)

You can also make comparisons with two adjectives.

Je suis plus agacé que fâché. (*I'm more annoyed than [I am] angry.*)

For better or worse: Irregular forms

Two French adjectives have special forms in the superior comparative and superlative — **bon** (*good*) and **mauvais** (*bad*):

The superior comparative of **bon** is **meilleur** (*better*) and the superior superlative is **le meilleur** (*the best*). Like all adjectives, these special forms have to agree with the nouns they modify:

Ton vélo est meilleur que le mien. (*Your bike is better than mine.*)

Mes idées sont les meilleures. (*My ideas are the best.*)



REMEMBER The inferior comparative/superlative and the equal comparative for these adjectives keep the regular form and follow the normal rules:

Leurs idées sont moins bonnes. (*Their ideas are less good/aren't as good.*)

C'est la solution la moins bonne. (*This is the least good solution.*)

Ta cuisine est aussi bonne que la mienne. (*Your cooking is as good as mine.*)

Mauvais has two superior comparative and superlative forms. You can say **plus mauvais** (*more bad*) or **pire** (*worse*):

Le temps est plus mauvais que l'année dernière./Le temps est pire que l'année dernière. (*The weather is worse than last year.*)

Ils sont les plus mauvais étudiants./Ils sont les pires étudiants. (*They are the worst students.*)

The inferior comparative/superlative and the equal comparative of **mauvais** have only one form, following the normal rules:

Cette possibilité est moins mauvaise que l'autre. (*This possibility is less bad than/not as bad as the other.*)

C'est vin le moins mauvais de la sélection. (*This is the least bad wine in the selection.*)

Ils sont aussi mauvais que tes élèves. (*They're as bad as your students.*)

Adverbs are compared as follows:

» **Positive: Je conduis vite.** (*I drive quickly.*)

» **Comparative: Je conduis plus/moins vite que toi.** (*I drive more/less quickly than you.*)

» **Superlative: Je conduis le plus/le moins vite de tous mes amis.** (*I drive the most/the least quickly of all my friends.*)

The preposition **de** or any of its contracted forms (**du, de l', de la, des**) may follow the superlative adverb to mean *in* or *of*:

De tous les ouvriers, Franck travaille le plus soigneusement. (*Of all the workers, Franck works the most carefully.*)

The article in the superlative is always **le** because there is no agreement here:

Marie parle le plus vite de tous les élèves. (*Marie speaks the most quickly of all the students.*)

Here are the few adverbs that have irregular superior comparatives and superlatives, followed by some examples:

Adverb	Comparative	Superlative
bien (<i>well</i>)	mieux (<i>better</i>)	le mieux (<i>[the] best</i>)
mal (<i>badly</i>)	plus mal (<i>worse</i>)/ pire (<i>worse</i>)	le plus mal/le pire (<i>[the] worst</i>)
beaucoup (<i>a lot</i>)	plus (<i>more</i>)	le plus (<i>[the] most</i>)
peu (<i>[a] little</i>)	moins (<i>less</i>)	le moins (<i>[the] least</i>)

Philippe comprend mieux que moi. (*Philippe understands better than I do.*)

C'est en France que je me sens le mieux. (*It's in France that I feel best.*)

But the inferior comparative and superlative follow the regular rules:

Tu écris moins bien. (*You write less well./You don't write as well.*)

Il comprend le moins bien de la classe. (*He understands the least well in the class.*)

Chapter 5

Connecting with Prepositions

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Putting common prepositions to work
 - » Joining prepositions with places
 - » Recognizing verbs that require prepositions
-

Prepositions are joining words — they connect nouns to other nouns or to verbs in order to show the relationship between those words. In this chapter, we introduce you to common French prepositions and explain how to select the appropriate preposition for your sentences.

Identifying Common Prepositions

Knowing how to use prepositions is not a simple matter of translation. You have to understand not only what prepositions mean but also how you use them in French. [Table 5-1](#) lists the most common prepositions:



REMEMBER The prepositions **à** and **de** contract with the definite articles **le** and **les** to form **au**, **aux** and **du**, **des** respectively.

Il va au bureau. (*He's going to the office.*)

Nous parlons des règles. (*We're talking about the rules.*)

TABLE 5-1 Common French Prepositions

<i>Preposition</i> <i>Meaning</i>		<i>Preposition</i> <i>Meaning</i>	
à	to, at, in	entre	between, among

<i>Preposition</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Preposition</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
après	<i>after</i>	par	<i>by, through</i>
avant	<i>before</i>	parmi	<i>among</i>
avec	<i>with</i>	pendant	<i>during</i>
chez	<i>at/to the home/office of</i>	pour	<i>for</i>
contre	<i>against</i>	sans	<i>without</i>
dans	<i>in</i>	sauf	<i>except</i>
de	<i>of, from, by, about</i>	selon	<i>according to</i>
depuis	<i>since, for [amount of time]</i>	sous	<i>under</i>
derrière	<i>behind</i>	sur	<i>on</i>
en	<i>in, to</i>	vers	<i>toward</i>

Going Places with Prepositions

In French, you use various prepositions with places, depending on the nature and direction of movement, as well as the type of place itself. These sections clarify the rules so you can figure out which preposition to use the next time you're traveling or talking about a specific place.

Expressing “to” or “in” a place

The prepositions **à**, **au**, **aux**, and **en** are used to express *to* or *in* before the names of places as follows:

- » **en**: Use with feminine countries (**en France**), continents (**en Europe**), feminine provinces (**en Lorraine**), and masculine countries beginning with a vowel (**en Israël**).
- » **au (à + le)**: Use with masculine countries beginning with a consonant (**au Canada, au Brésil**).
- » **aux (à + les)**: Use with plural countries (**aux États-Unis**).
- » **à**: Use with cities (**à Paris, à Angers**).

Here are some examples:

Je vais en Italie. (*I'm going to Italy.*)

Ils séjournent au Portugal. (*They are staying in Portugal.*)

Mon ami vient aux Philippines. (*My friend is coming to the Philippines.*)

Nous avons des amis à Québec. (*We have friends in Quebec City.*)

Most countries that end in **-e** are feminine. Here are the exceptions:

- » **le Belize** (*Belize*)
- » **le Cambodge** (*Cambodia*)
- » **le Mexique** (*Mexico*)
- » **le Mozambique** (*Mozambique*)
- » **le Suriname** (*Suriname*)
- » **le Zaïre** (*Zaire*)
- » **le Zimbabwe** (*Zimbabwe*)

Countries that end in any other vowel or any consonant are all masculine:

- » **le Canada** (*Canada*)
- » **l'Iran** (*Iran*)



TIP **En** can also be used to express that someone is traveling around a country:

Il voyage en France en ce moment. (*He's traveling around France at the moment.*)

Coming “from” a place

The prepositions **de**, **du**, and **des** are used to express *from* before the names of places as follows:

- » **de**: Use with feminine countries (**de France**), feminine provinces (**de Lorraine**), and cities (**de Paris**).
- » **d'**: Use with all countries, continents, provinces, and cities that begin with a vowel (**d'Uruguay**, **d'Égypte**, **d'Europe**, **d'Annecy**).
- » **du** (**de + le**): Use with masculine countries beginning with a consonant (**du Canada**).
- » **des** (**de + les**): Use with plural countries (**des États-Unis**).

For example,

Nous sommes de Suisse. (*We are from Switzerland.*)

Il vient du Pérou. (*He is from Peru.*)

Arrivent-ils des Philippines ? (*Are they arriving from the Philippines?*)

Giving Verbs the Prepositions They Need

Many French verbs need a preposition when they're followed by an infinitive or noun. This section points out the most common of these verbs and the prepositions that go with them.

Verbs with à

Many French verbs require the preposition **à**. To use these verbs, just conjugate them, follow them with the preposition **à**, and then add an infinitive or noun:

- » **aider à** (*to help [someone] to*)
- » **s'amuser à** (*to enjoy [doing]*)
- » **apprendre à** (*to learn to [do]*)

- » **arriver à** (*to manage to [do]*)
- » **s'attendre à** (*to expect to [do]*)
- » **chercher à** (*to try to [do]*)
- » **commencer à** (*to begin to [do]*)
- » **continuer à** (*to continue to [do]*)
- » **se décider à** (*to make up one's mind to [do]*)
- » **s'habituer à** (*to get used to [something, doing]*)
- » **hésiter à** (*to hesitate to [do]*)
- » **s'intéresser à** (*to be interested in [something, doing]*)
- » **se mettre à** (*to begin to [do]*)
- » **penser à** (*to think about/of [something, doing]*)
- » **se préparer à** (*to get ready [for something, to do]*)
- » **réussir à** (*to succeed in [doing]*)
- » **servir à** (*to be used for [something, doing]*)
- » **tenir à** (*to value [something], to insist upon [doing]*)

For example,

Elle apprend à nager. (*She's learning to swim.*)

Ce couteau sert à couper la viande. (*This knife is used for cutting meat.*)



REMEMBER The French infinitive after **à** often translates more naturally as the present participle in English:

Je m'amuse à regarder les touristes. (*I enjoy watching the tourists.*)

Il pense à déménager en Europe. (*He's thinking about moving to Europe.*)

Verbs with de

Many French verbs require the preposition **de**. To use these verbs, just conjugate them, follow them with the preposition **de**, and then add an infinitive or noun:

- » **accepter de** (*to agree [to do]*)
- » **s'arrêter de** (*to stop [doing]*)
- » **cesser de** (*to stop/cease [doing]*)
- » **choisir de** (*to choose to [do]*)
- » **décider de** (*to decide to [do]*)
- » **se dépêcher de** (*to hurry to [do]*)
- » **empêcher de** (*to prevent from [doing]*)
- » **essayer de** (*to try to [do]*)
- » **s'excuser de** (*to apologize for [doing]*)
- » **finir de** (*to finish [doing]*)
- » **mériter de** (*to deserve to [do]*)
- » **s'occuper de** (*to take care of [something, doing]*)
- » **offrir de** (*to offer to [do]*)
- » **oublier de** (*to forget to [do]*)
- » **refuser de** (*to refuse to [do]*)
- » **regretter de** (*to regret [doing]*)
- » **remercier de** (*to thank [someone] for [doing]*)
- » **rêver de** (*to dream of [something, doing]*)
- » **se souvenir de** (*to remember [something, doing]*)
- » **venir de** (*to have just [done something]*)

For example,

Elle finit de préparer le dîner. (*She finishes preparing dinner.*)

Ils viennent d'arriver. (*They [have] just arrived.*)



REMEMBER À and de don't contract with the direct objects **le** and **les** (see [Chapter 2](#)):

Elle a appris à le faire. (*She learned to do it.*)

Il m'a dit de le regarder. (*He told me to watch it.*)

Verbs with à and de

Some verbs follow the pattern of **à** + person + **de** + infinitive. These important verbs include

- » **commander à...de** (*to order someone to do something*)
- » **conseiller à...de** (*to advise someone to do something*)
- » **défendre à...de** (*to forbid someone to do something*)
- » **demander à...de** (*to ask someone to do something*)
- » **dire à...de** (*to tell someone to do something*)
- » **interdire à... de** (*to forbid someone to do something*)
- » **ordonner à...de** (*to order someone to do something*)
- » **permettre à...de** (*to permit someone to do something*)
- » **promettre à...de** (*to promise someone that you'll do something*)

For example,

Il conseille à ses amis de voyager en France. (*He advises his friends to travel to France.*)

Je te défends de porter cette robe ! (*I forbid you to wear that dress!*)



TIP The word that comes after **à** in the preceding list is an indirect object:

Elle promet à ses parents de faire ses devoirs. (*She promises her parents that she'll do her homework.*)

Elle leur promet de faire ses devoirs. (*She promises them that she'll do her homework.*)

Verbs with à and à

A few verbs that follow the pattern **à** + person + **à** + infinitive are as follows, with an example sentence:

» **apprendre (à...à)** (*to teach [someone] to*)

» **encourager (à...à)** (*to encourage [someone] to*)

» **enseigner (à...à)** (*to teach [someone] to*)

J'apprends/J'enseigne à mon ami à plonger. (*I'm teaching my friend to dive.*)

Verbs with no preposition

Some French verbs are followed directly by the infinitive or direct object. The following lists them along with a few example sentences:

» **aimer** (*to like/love [to do]*)

» **aimer mieux** (*to prefer [doing]*)

» **compter** (*to intend [to do]*)

» **désirer** (*to wish/want [something, to do]*)

» **détester** (*to hate [doing]*)

- » **devoir** (*must, to have to [do]*)
- » **espérer** (*to hope [for something, to do]*)
- » **faillir** (*to almost [do something]*)
- » **falloir** (*to be necessary to [do]*)
- » **laisser** (*to let/allow [someone] to [do]*)
- » **nier** (*to deny [doing]*)
- » **oser** (*to dare to [do]*)
- » **pouvoir** (*can, to be able to [do]*)
- » **préférer** (*to prefer [something, doing]*)
- » **savoir** (*to know [something, how to do]*)
- » **sembler** (*to seem to do*)
- » **souhaiter** (*to wish [for something, to do]*)
- » **valoir mieux** (*to be better to [do]*)
- » **vouloir** (*to want [something, to do]*)

Je compte rester chez moi ce soir. (*I intend to stay home tonight.*)

Elle aime mieux sortir. (*She prefers going out.*)

Savez-vous jouer du piano ? (*Do you know how to play the piano?*)

Chapter 6

Asking and Answering Questions

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Requesting and receiving a “yes” or a “no” answer
 - » Getting and giving information
-

In any language, being able to ask questions is vital. Questions can range from very simple (requesting a “yes” or “no” answer) to more complex (those requiring detailed information, such as the date, time, and location for your party). Furthermore, you can use many styles to ask questions, ranging from informal and conversational (How ya doin’?) to formal styles, which you use mostly in writing and in official situations (May I inquire as to your health?). So the way you ask a question depends on the circumstances and the environment you’re in.



WARNING When writing in French, make sure you add a space between the question and the question mark (this also applies to an exclamation point, colon, and semi-colon, but not a period or comma), such as

Ça va ? (*Are you okay?*)

This chapter explains how to ask and answer different types of questions and provides all the interrogative vocabulary that goes along with them.

Oui ou Non: Asking Yes/No Questions

French has four main ways to ask questions. They are as follows:

- » **Intonation:** The most common and conversational way of asking a question, you simply raise your voice at the end of the sentence:

Tu regardes la télé ? (*Are you watching television?*)

- » **N'est-ce pas:** Another conversational way you can ask a question, when you're fairly sure the answer is yes, is by adding **n'est-ce pas** at the end of the sentence:

Nous déjeunons ensemble, n'est-ce pas ? (*We're having lunch together, right?*)

- » **Est-ce que:** A third way to ask a question is by putting **est-ce que** at the beginning of a sentence:

Est-ce que tu cherches tes clés ? (*Are you looking for your keys?*)

- » **Inversion:** The fourth and most formal way to ask a question is by inverting the subject pronoun and the verb and adding a hyphen in between:

Allez-vous au cinéma ce soir ? (*Are you going to the movies this evening?*)



REMEMBER When the verbs *am*, *are*, *is*, *do*, and *does* are used with another verb, they don't have a French equivalent. In French, these words are included in the meaning of the conjugated verb:

Ils viennent aujourd'hui ? (*Are they coming today?*)

Est-ce que tu veux un café ? (*Do you want a coffee?*)

Inversion is a little bit more complicated than the informal question styles, and because it's more formal, it's the better option in a business setting. Here's what it looks like when you make these changes:

Il est prêt ? → Est-il prêt ? (*Is he ready?*)

Elle sait nager ? → Sait-elle nager ? (*Does she know how to swim?*)

You can invert only subject pronouns, not nouns. So when you ask a question with a noun as subject, such as **Pierre** or **la grenouille** (*the frog*), you have to either replace the noun with a pronoun or start the question with the noun, then follow it with the inverted verb and subject pronoun:

Pierre est-il prêt ? (*Is Pierre ready?*)

La grenouille sait-elle nager ? (*Does the frog know how to swim?*)

When the verb ends in a vowel and is followed by a third-person singular pronoun (**il, elle, on**), you have to add **t-** between them:

Parle-t-elle français ? (*Does she speak French?*)

A-t-on de l'argent ? (*Do we have any money?*)

Inversion is a little trickier with pronominal verbs, because you also need the reflexive pronoun (see [Chapter 3](#)). Keep the reflexive pronoun exactly where it is — in front of the verb — and invert the subject pronoun with the verb, as in the following examples:

Se rase-t-il ? (*Is he shaving?*)

Te lèves-tu de bonne heure ? (*Do you get up early?*)

Remember that in the **nous** and **vous** conjugations, the subject pronouns and reflexive pronouns look exactly the same. This can seem redundant, but you do need both:

Nous aimons-nous ? (*Do we love each other?*)

If a sentence has two verbs, you invert the conjugated verb with the subject pronoun and follow with the infinitive:

Tu veux sortir. (*You want to go out.*)

Veux-tu sortir ? (*Do you want to go out?*)

The same holds true for the passé composé (see [Chapter 7](#)): Invert the subject pronoun with the conjugated helping verb and follow that with the past participle:

Tu es sorti. (*You went out.*)

Es-tu sorti ? (*Did you go out?*)

When asking a negative yes/no question using inversion, **ne** precedes the conjugated verb, and a negative expression (see the section “[Being Negative](#)” later in this chapter) follows the subject pronoun, as in the following examples:

Ne vendent-ils pas leur maison ? (*Aren't they selling their house?*)

Ne parle-t-il jamais français ? (*Doesn't he ever speak French?*)

Corinne ne veut-elle pas venir avec nous ? (*Doesn't Corinne want to come with us?*)

Asking Who, What, Which, When, Where, Why, and How Questions

Some questions ask for information, such as who, when, where, why, and how. French has three types of question words, and you need to understand how they differ in order to get the information you need.

Understanding interrogative adjectives

You use the interrogative adjective **quel ?** (*which?/what?*) before a noun when that noun can be counted or measured. **Quel ?** has different forms to agree in number and gender with the noun it's asking about.

	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>
Singular	quel ?	quelle ?
Plural	quels ?	quelles ?

Here are examples of **quel ?** in use:

Quelle chemise préfères-tu ? (*Which shirt do you prefer?*)

Quels livres est-ce que tu veux ? (*Which books do you want?*)



TIP

If you want to know what time something happens, use **à quelle heure ?** (*at what time?*).

Using interrogative adverbs

Interrogative adverbs ask for more information about something. The interrogative adverbs are as follows:

» **combien (de)** (*how much/many*)

» **comment** (*how*)

» **où** (*where*)

» **pourquoi** (*why*)

» **quand** (*when*)

Here are a couple of these adverbs at work:

Comment as-tu fait ça ? (*How did you do that?*)

Quand va-t-il en France ? (*When is he going to France?*)

You can ask questions with interrogative adverbs and adjectives plus **est-ce que** by putting the question word at the beginning of the question, followed by **est-ce que**, the subject, and then the verb:

Où est-ce que tu vas ? (*Where are you going?*)

Pourquoi est-ce qu'il aime le jazz ? (*Why does he like jazz?*)

Quand est-ce que Laure va arriver ? (*When is Laure going to arrive?*)

To ask an information question with inversion, just put the interrogative word at the beginning and follow it with the inverted verb and subject:

Où vas-tu ? (*Where are you going?*)

Pourquoi aime-t-il le jazz ? (*Why does he like jazz?*)

Quand Laure va-t-elle arriver ? (*When is Laure going to arrive?*)



TIP The question **est-ce qu'il y a** or the inverted **y a-t-il** may be used to ask the question *is/are there?*

Est-ce qu'il y a/Y a-t-il un bon restaurant par ici ? (*Is there a nice restaurant around here?*)

Combien d'élèves est-ce qu'il y a/y a-t-il dans cette classe ? (*How many students are in this/that class?*)

Use **il y a** (*there is/are*) to answer the question:

Il y a un bon restaurant en face. (*There's a good restaurant across the street.*)

Il y en a trente. (*There are thirty [of them].*)

Getting information with interrogative pronouns

Interrogative pronouns ask **qui** (*who*) and **que** (*what*):

Qui travaille aujourd'hui ? (*Who is working today?*)

Que voulez-vous ? (*What do you want?*)

Asking questions with *who* or *what*, plus **est-ce que** is more complicated. The following shows you how these question words combine.

<i>Pronoun</i>	<i>Subject of Question</i>	<i>Object of Question</i>
<i>Who</i>	Qui est-ce qui*	Qui est-ce que
<i>What</i>	Qu'est-ce qui	Qu'est-ce que

You can use **Qui est-ce qui** for *who*, but that construction is a bit awkward; it's typical and perfectly correct to just say **Qui ?**



REMEMBER The phrases **qui est-ce qui** and **qu'est-ce qui** serve as the subject of the question and are followed by verbs:

Qui est-ce qui est tombé ?/Qui est tombé ? (*Who fell?*)

Qu'est-ce qui est tombé ? (*What fell?*)

The phrases **qui est-ce que** and **qu'est-ce que** are the object of the question and are followed by nouns or subject pronouns + verbs:

Qui est-ce que tu cherches ? (*Whom are you looking for?*)

Qu'est-ce que tu cherches ? (*What are you looking for?*)



REMEMBER **Que + est-ce que** has to contract to **qu'est-ce que**. **Qui** doesn't contract with **est-ce que** or any other word.

Answering Questions

Knowing how to ask questions is important, and so is knowing how to answer them. This section gives you an overview of responding to different types of questions.

Answering yes/no questions

Yes/no questions aren't hard to answer. You can take the easy road and just answer **oui** (yes) or **non** (no):

Est-ce qu'il est prêt ? Oui. (*Is he ready? Yes.*)

Avez-vous mangé ? Non. (*Have you eaten? No.*)

French has another word for yes, **si**, which you use when someone says something in the negative but you want to respond in the affirmative:

N'est-il pas prêt ? Si (il est prêt). (*Isn't he ready? Yes [he is ready].*)

Tu ne veux pas savoir. Si (je veux savoir). (*You don't want to know. Yes [I do want to know].*)



REMEMBER **Si** (yes) never contracts, unlike **si** (if), which contracts with **il**: **s'il vous plaît** (if you please).

Answering informational questions

Informational questions ask for details, so your answer needs to provide them. Remember these important points:

- » When you see a question with **comment ?** (*how? what?*), give the information or the explanation that's requested:

Comment t'appelles-tu ? (*What's your name?*)

Suzanne. (*Suzanne.*)

- » To answer a question with **combien (de) ?** (*how much? how many?*), offer a number, an amount, or a quantity (see [Chapter 1](#)):

Combien coûte cette voiture ? (*How much does this car cost?*)

20.000 €. (*€20,000*)

- » For a question with **quand ?** (*when?*), you answer with a specific time or an expression of time:

Quand est-ce que le film commence ? (*When does the film begin?*)

À 15h30. (*At 3:30 p.m.*)

- » To answer a question with **où ?** (*where?*), you state a place:

Où vas-tu ? (*Where are you going?*)

À Genève. (*To Geneva.*)

- » When you have a question with **pourquoi ?** (*why?*), answer with **parce que** (*because*) + a reason:

Pourquoi ne travaille-t-elle pas ? (*Why isn't she working?*)

Parce qu'elle est malade. (*Because she's sick.*)

- » When you see a question with **qui ?** (*who? whom?*), answer with a person:

Qui parle au téléphone ? Anne. (*Who's speaking on the phone? Anne.*)



REMEMBER If the question contains a preposition — **à, de, avec, pour,** and so on — you generally use that same preposition in the answer:

À qui écrivez-vous ? (*To whom are you writing?*)

À mon petit ami. (*To my boyfriend.*)

Avec qui habites-tu ? (*With whom do you live?*)

Avec mes parents. (*With my parents.*)

- » When you see a question with **que ?** (*what?*), answer according to the situation. As with the preceding bullet, if the question contains a preposition, you probably need to use that same preposition in the answer. Note that **que** becomes **quoi** after a preposition:

Que fais-tu ? (*What are you doing?*)

Je lis. (*I'm reading.*)

Avec quoi écris-tu ? (*With what are you writing?*)

Avec un crayon. (*With a pencil.*)

Being Negative

Sometimes you have to refuse to do something or express your dislike for something or someone. To do this, you use the negative. This section explains different ways to be negative in French.

The most common French negative is **ne ... pas**, which is equivalent to *not*. [Table 6-1](#) lists the additional negatives in French.

TABLE 6-1 Additional Negatives in French

<i>French</i>	<i>English Equivalent</i>
ne ... ni ... ni	<i>neither ... nor</i>
ne ... jamais	<i>never, (not) ever</i>
ne ... personne	<i>no one, nobody</i>
ne ... plus	<i>no longer</i>
ne ... que	<i>only</i>
ne ... rien	<i>nothing</i>

The negative consists of two parts:

- » **ne:** Place it before the conjugated verb and pronouns (direct, indirect, adverbial, and reflexive pronouns).
- » **pas:** Place it (or another negative word) after the conjugated verb.

Je ne parle pas italien. (*I don't speak Italian.*)

Ils ne mangent rien. (*They aren't eating anything.*)

Nous ne nous amusons pas. (*We're not having fun.*)

With inversion, the second part of the negative follows the subject pronoun:

Ne voulez-vous pas manger ? (*Don't you want to eat?*)

Note the following special rules regarding the negative:

- » Partitive articles (**du, de la, des**) and indefinite articles (**un, une, des**) change to **de** after negation (see [Chapter 2](#)).

J'ai un frère. (*I have a brother.*)

Je n'ai pas de frère. (*I don't have a brother.*)

- » When the verb begins with a vowel or a mute **h**, **ne** and **de** change to **n'** and **d'**, respectively:

Elle n'habite pas à Paris. (*She doesn't live in Paris.*)

Je n'ai pas d'enfant. (*I don't have any kids.*)

- » **Personne** and **rien** may be used as subjects, followed by **ne** and then the verb:

Personne ne répond. (*Nobody is answering.*)

Rien n'est trop difficile. (*Nothing is too difficult.*)

- » **Jamais**, when used independently, can mean *ever* or *never*:

Avez-vous jamais voyagé en Europe ? Non, jamais ! (*Have you ever traveled to Europe? No, never!*)

- » In front of an infinitive, **ne** and the second negative word stay together, except for **personne** (see the next bullet):

Il a choisi de ne rien dire. (*He chose to say nothing.*)

J'ai peur de ne pas réussir. (*I'm afraid of not succeeding.*)

- » **Personne** follows the infinitive or the past participle (see [Chapter 7](#)):

Nous n'avons rencontré personne au cinéma. (*We didn't meet anyone at the movies.*)

Je ne peux voir personne. (*I can't see anyone.*)

» **Que** precedes the word being stressed:

Je n'ai qu'une sœur. (*I have only one sister.*)

Je ne vais le dire qu'une fois. (*I'm only going to say it once.*)

» **Ni** is repeated in front of each item:

Il ne fait ni chaud ni froid. (*It's neither hot nor cold.*)

Je n'ai ni frères ni sœurs ni cousins. (*I have neither brothers nor sisters nor cousins.*)

» **Personne** and **rien** can be used alone:

Qui est là ? Personne. (*Who's there? Nobody.*)

Qu'est-ce que tu fais ? Rien. (*What are you doing? Nothing.*)

When used in questions, some words require that you use negative words of opposite meaning in the responses. [Table 6-2](#) presents these words, followed by some examples.

TABLE 6-2 Affirmatives and Their Negatives

<i>Affirmative</i>	<i>Negative Equivalent</i>
quelqu'un (<i>someone</i>)	ne ... personne (<i>no one, nobody</i>)
quelque chose (<i>something</i>)	ne ... rien (<i>nothing</i>)
toujours (<i>always</i>)	ne ... jamais (<i>never</i>)
toujours (<i>still</i>)	ne ... plus (<i>no longer</i>)

Tu vois quelque chose ? (*Do you see something?*)

Non, je ne vois rien. (*No, I don't see anything.*)

Elle fume toujours ? (*Does she still smoke?*)

Non, elle ne fume plus. (*No, she no longer smokes.*)

Chapter 7

Using the Past

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Using the *passé composé* to express completed actions
 - » Investigating habitual actions with the imperfect
 - » Choosing the best way to communicate the past
-

What's past is past. Or is it? The past tense can be a little murky in French. Sometimes, an action in the past is complete: It's done, over. In other cases, past action is a little vaguer: It doesn't relate to a specific event but to a past action that was continuous, ongoing, or habitual — something you “used to do” or “were doing,” for example. In order to understand and correctly use the different past tenses in French, you need to become aware of their differences, and this chapter helps you do just that.

Understanding the Recent Past

To talk about something that just happened, you can use a very simple construction called the *recent past*. It consists of the verb **venir** (*to come*) conjugated for the appropriate subject in the present tense (see [Chapter 3](#)), followed by the preposition **de** and then the infinitive of the action verb. Here are three examples:

Je viens de partir. (*I just left.*)

Nous venons de voir Sandrine. (*We just saw Sandrine.*)

Ils viennent d'arriver il y a une heure. (*They just arrived an hour ago.*)

Remembering with the *Passé Composé*

The compound past (the **passé composé**) recounts events that have already taken place, at a specific time in the past. For example, with this tense you can recount what you've done and accomplished, where you've been, and the people you met yesterday, last week, last month, or even years ago.

The following sections show you how to form the **passé composé** for regular, irregular, and pronominal verbs, as well as the many ways to use it.

Finding past participles

The *past participle* is the form of the verb that's used to create the *passé composé* and other compound (two-verb) tenses. It's usually equivalent to **-ed** or **-en** in English.

To form the past participle of **-er** verbs, such as **parler** (*to speak*), simply drop the **-er** and add **-é**: **parlé** (*spoken*).

Stem-changing and spelling-change verbs (see [Chapter 3](#)) follow the same rule (see [Table 7-1](#)).

TABLE 7-1 Stem-Changing and Spelling-Change Verbs and Their Past Participles

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
acheter (<i>to buy</i>)	acheté
appeler (<i>to call</i>)	appelé
espérer (<i>to hope</i>)	espéré
essayer (<i>to try</i>)	essayé
jeter (<i>to throw</i>)	jeté
lever (<i>to raise</i>)	levé
manger (<i>to eat</i>)	mangé

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
placer (<i>to place</i>)	placé

And so does the irregular verb **aller** (*to go*): **allé**.

For regular **-ir** verbs, such as **finir** (*to finish*), drop the **-ir**, add **-i**, and voilà: **fini** (*finished*).

Finally, for regular **-re** verbs, like **vendre** (*to sell*), drop the **-re** and add **-u** to get **vendu** (*sold*).

So much for regular verbs and their regular past participles; however, many French verbs have irregular past participles that can be grouped by ending. [Table 7-2](#) lists irregular verbs with past participles that end in **-u**.

TABLE 7-2 Irregular Verbs and Their Past Participles Ending in u

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
avoir (<i>to have</i>)	eu
boire (<i>to drink</i>)	bu
connaître (<i>to know</i>)	connu
courir (<i>to run</i>)	couru
croire (<i>to believe</i>)	cru
devenir (<i>to become</i>)	devenu
devoir (<i>to owe, to have to</i>)	dû
falloir (<i>to be necessary, to have to</i>)	fallu
lire (<i>to read</i>)	lu
paraître (<i>to appear</i>)	paru
pleuvoir (<i>to rain</i>)	plu
pouvoir (<i>to be able to</i>)	pu
recevoir (<i>to receive</i>)	reçu
revenir (<i>to come back</i>)	revenu
savoir (<i>to know</i>)	su

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
tenir (<i>to hold</i>)	tenu
venir (<i>to come</i>)	venu
vivre (<i>to live</i>)	vécu
voir (<i>to see</i>)	vu
vouloir (<i>to want</i>)	voulu

Note that you create the past participle the same way for any verb that ends in **-venir** or **-tenir**.

Some verbs have past participles that end in **-t** (see [Table 7-3](#)).

TABLE 7-3 Irregular Verbs and Their Past Participles Ending in t

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
conduire (<i>to drive</i>)	conduit
construire (<i>to construct, to build</i>)	construit
couvrir (<i>to cover</i>)	couvert
dire (<i>to say</i>)	dit
écrire (<i>to write</i>)	écrit
faire (<i>to do, to make</i>)	fait
mourir (<i>to die</i>)	mort
offrir (<i>to offer</i>)	offert
ouvrir (<i>to open</i>)	ouvert
souffrir (<i>to suffer</i>)	souffert

Other verbs that end in **-frir**, **-uire**, and **-vrir** follow these same patterns.

Some past participles of irregular verbs end in **-i** (see [Table 7-4](#)).

TABLE 7-4 Irregular Verbs and Their Past Participles Ending in i

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
partir (to leave)	parti
rire (to laugh)	ri
sortir (to go out)	sorti
sourire (to smile)	souri
suivre (to follow)	suivi

Some verbs have past participles ending in **-s**:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
mettre (to put, to place)	mis
prendre (to take)	pris

Note that you create the past participle the same way for any verb that ends in **-mettre** or **-prendre**.

And finally, the last two irregular verbs have an irregular past participle ending in **-é**:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
être (to be)	été
naître (to be born)	né

Choosing your helper: avoir or être

To form the **passé composé**, in addition to the past participle of the main verb you found in the previous section, you need the present tense of a *helping verb*, also known as an *auxiliary verb* — either **avoir** or **être**.

Here are the present-tense conjugations for these helping verbs that you use to conjugate the **passé composé**:

- » **avoir**: j'ai, tu as, il/elle/on a, nous avons, vous avez, ils/elles ont
- » **être**: je suis, tu es, il/elle/on est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils/elles sont

Most verbs need **avoir** as their helping verb; here are some examples of regular verbs fully conjugated in the **passé composé**:

parler (to speak)	
j'ai parlé	nous avons parlé
tu as parlé	vous avez parlé
il/elle/on a parlé	ils/elles ont parlé
Nous avons parlé aux enfants. (We spoke to the children.)	

finir (to finish)	
j'ai fini	nous avons fini
tu as fini	vous avez fini
il/elle/on a fini	ils/elles ont fini
Elle a fini ses devoirs. (She finished her homework.)	

vendre (to sell)	
j'ai vendu	nous avons vendu
tu as vendu	vous avez vendu
il/elle/on a vendu	ils/elles ont vendu
Les étudiants ont vendu leurs livres. (The students sold their books.)	

Most verbs need **avoir** as their helping verb, but some that don't have a direct object instead need **être**.



TIP

To remember which verbs take **être (to be)**, picture a house. Many of the verbs that take **être** are verbs of movement. You can go, come, return, enter, arrive, and pass through the door in the house of **être**. What about the staircase? You can go up, go down, and if you aren't careful, you can fall. Now picture the bed. Way

before hospitals, people were born in the house, became sick, stayed in bed, and died in the house. All of these verbs require **être**.

Here's an example of an **être** verb fully conjugated in the **passé composé**:

aller (to go)	
je suis allé/allée	nous sommes allés/allées
tu es allé/allée	vous êtes allé/allée/allés/allées
il est allé/elle est allée	ils sont allés/elles sont allées
Les enfants sont allés à l'école. (The children went to school.)	

[Table 7-5](#) shows the verbs that use **être** when forming the **passé composé**, along with their past participles.

TABLE 7-5 Verbs Taking Être in the Passé Composé

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
aller (to go)	allé
arriver (to arrive)	arrivé
descendre* (to go downstairs, to descend)	descendu
devenir (to become)	devenu
entrer (to enter)	entré
monter* (to go upstairs, to climb)	monté
mourir (to die)	mort
naître (to be born)	né
partir (to leave)	parti
passer* (to pass)	passé
rentrer* (to go home)	rentré
rester (to stay)	resté
retourner* (to return)	retourné
revenir (to come back)	revenu
sortir* (to go out)	sorti

Infinitive	Past Participle
tomber (to fall)	tombé
venir (to come)	venu

Note: The six verbs with asterisks may take either **avoir** or **être**. They take **avoir** when they're *transitive* (followed by a direct object) and they take **être** when they're *intransitive* (don't have a direct object):

Il est sorti et il a sorti son parapluie. (*He went out and he took out his umbrella.*)

You form the passé composé of **être** verbs similarly to **avoir** verbs, but this time you conjugate **être** in the present tense and then add the past participle of the main verb:

Il est arrivé à 9 heures. (*He arrived at 9 o'clock.*)

In addition, all pronominal verbs (see [Chapter 3](#)) take **être** as their helping verb. Be sure to include the reflexive pronoun in front of the helping verb.

Here's an example of a pronominal fully conjugated in the passé composé:

se coucher (to go to bed)	
je me suis couché/couchée	nous nous sommes couchés/couchées
tu t'es couché/couchée	vous vous êtes couché/couchée/couchés/couchées
il s'est couché/elle s'est couchée	ils se sont couchés/elles se sont couchées
Elle s'est couchée tard. (<i>She went to bed late.</i>)	

Keeping your grammatical agreements

There's one additional tricky point with regard to **être** verbs: the past participle has to agree with its subject. That is,

- » If the subject is masculine singular, the past participle stays unmodified.
- » If the subject is feminine singular, add **-e** to the past participle.
- » If the subject is masculine plural, add **-s**.
- » If the subject is feminine plural, add **-es**.

For example,

Il est parti à 8h. (*He left at 8 a.m.*)

Elle est partie à 9h30. (*She left at 9:30 a.m.*)

Ils sont partis à midi. (*They left at noon.*)

Elles sont parties à 15h. (*They left at 3 p.m.*)



REMEMBER When the reflexive pronoun is an indirect object (because the sentence also has a direct object), the past participle doesn't agree with the subject:

Elle s'est lavée. (*She washed herself.*)

Elle s'est lavé les mains. (*She washed her hands.*)

Using the Passé Composé

The passé composé has three meanings in English. For example, **J'ai parlé** means *I spoke*, *I have spoken*, and *I did speak*.

You use the passé composé to refer to these things:

- » Something that was entirely completed in the past:

Je suis allé à la banque hier. (*I went to the bank yesterday.*)

Est-il arrivé avant la fête ? (*Did he arrive before the party?*)

- » Something that happened a certain number of times in the past:

J'ai visité la tour Eiffel trois fois. (*I've visited the Eiffel Tower three times.*)

Combien de fois lui as-tu téléphoné ? (*How many times did you call him?*)

» A series of actions that occurred one after another:

Je me suis levé, j'ai déjeuné et je suis parti avant 7h00. (*I got up, had breakfast, and left before 7 a.m.*)

Quand nous avons entendu les cris, nous avons téléphoné à la police. (*When we heard the screams, we called the police.*)



REMEMBER When you express something negative (see [Chapter 6](#)) in the passé composé, **ne** goes in front of the helping verb, and the second part of the negative structure goes after it. The only exception is **personne**, which goes after the past participle:

Je n'ai pas pleuré. (*I didn't cry.*)

Je n'ai vu personne. (*I didn't see anyone.*)

When you ask a question with inversion (see [Chapter 6](#)), you invert the subject pronoun and the auxiliary verb and put the past participle after that:

As-tu mangé ? (*Have you eaten?*)

Où est-il allé ? (*Where did he go?*)

Reminiscing with the Imperfect

You use the imperfect tense to describe a continuous or habitual action in the past, or an action that you did a nonspecific number of times. This

section explains how to conjugate regular and irregular verbs in the imperfect and how and when to use them.

Forming the imperfect

To conjugate verbs in the imperfect, just find the present-tense **nous** form of the verb, drop **-ons**, and add the imperfect endings. (Check out [Chapter 3](#) for more about the present tense.) The endings are as follows:

je -ais	nous -ions
tu -ais	vous -iez
il/elle/on -ait	ils/elles -aient

This conjugation rule applies to virtually all verbs, whether regular, irregular, stem-changing, or pronominal.

So here are the imperfect tense conjugations for regular verbs:

parler (to speak)	
Present-tense nous form: parlons	
je parlais	nous parlions
tu parlais	vous parliez
il/elle/on parlait	ils/elles parlaient
Il parlait à ses parents. (He was speaking to his parents.)	

finir (to finish)	
Present-tense nous form: finissons	
je finissais	nous finissions
tu finissais	vous finissiez
il/elle/on finissait	ils/elles finissaient
Je finissais mon déjeuner. (I was finishing my lunch.)	

vendre (to sell)	
Present-tense nous form: vendons	

je vendais	nous vendions
tu vendais	vous vendiez
il/elle/on vendait	ils/elles vendaient
Nous vendions notre maison. (We were selling our house.)	



TIP What if the stem of the verb in the **nous** form ends in **-i**, like **étudier** (*to study*)? Just keep the **i** and add the endings: **j'étudiais**, **tu étudiais**, **il/elle/on étudiait**, **nous étudions**, **vous étudiez**, **ils/elles étudiaient**.

For verbs that end in **-cer**, you need to add a cedilla to the **c** for all the singular and the third-person plural imperfect conjugations:

je commençais, **tu commençais**, **il/elle commençait**, **ils/elles commençaient**, but **nous commençons**, **vous commencez**

For verbs that end in **-ger**, you need to add an **e** after the **g** for all the singular and the third-person plural imperfect conjugations:

je mangeais, **tu mangeais**, **il/elle/on mangeait**, **ils/elles mangeaient**, but **nous mangions**, **vous mangiez**

To create the imperfect tense of irregular verbs, take their **nous** present-tense form, drop the **-ons**, and add the appropriate endings. Check out [Table 7-6](#), which lists several irregular verbs with their present-tense **nous** form and imperfect stem.

TABLE 7-6 Imperfect Stems of Irregular Verbs

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Nous form</i>	<i>Stem</i>
aller (<i>to go</i>)	Nous allons	all-
avoir (<i>to have</i>)	Nous avons	av-
boire (<i>to drink</i>)	Nous buvons	buv-

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Nous form</i>	<i>Stem</i>
croire (<i>to believe</i>)	Nous croyons	croy-
devoir (<i>to owe, to have to, must</i>)	Nous devons	dev-
dire (<i>to say</i>)	Nous disons	dis-
écrire (<i>to write</i>)	Nous écrivons	écriv-
faire (<i>to do, to make</i>)	Nous faisons	fais-
lire (<i>to read</i>)	Nous lisons	lis-
mettre (<i>to put, to place</i>)	Nous mettons	mett-
ouvrir (<i>to open</i>)	Nous ouvrons	ouvr-
partir (<i>to leave</i>)	Nous partons	part-
pouvoir (<i>to be able to</i>)	Nous pouvons	pouv-
prendre (<i>to take</i>)	Nous prenons	pren-
recevoir (<i>to receive</i>)	Nous recevons	recev-
venir (<i>to come</i>)	Nous venons	ven-
voir (<i>to see</i>)	Nous voyons	voy-
vouloir (<i>to want</i>)	Nous voulons	voul-

French has just one irregular verb with an irregular imperfect stem: **être** (*to be*). For it, you use the stem **ét-** and add the imperfect endings to that.

être (<i>to be</i>)	
j'étais	nous étions
tu étais	vous étiez
il/elle/on était	ils/elles étaient
Vous étiez en retard. (<i>You were late.</i>)	

Using the imperfect

You can use the imperfect to express various things that happened or existed in the past, such as

- » Something that happened an unknown number of times, especially habitual actions:

Je visitais le Louvre tous les jours. (*I visited/used to visit the Louvre every day.*)

L'année dernière, il préparait le dîner régulièrement. (*Last year, he prepared dinner regularly.*)

- » States of being and descriptions:

Quand j'étais petit, j'aimais danser. (*When I was little, I liked to dance.*)

La voiture faisait du bruit. (*The car was making noise.*)

- » Actions or states of being with no specific beginning or end:

Je regardais la télé pendant le petit déjeuner. (*I watched/was watching TV during breakfast.*)

Nous avions besoin de tomates. (*We needed tomatoes.*)

- » Two things that were happening at the same time:

Il travaillait et j'étudiais. (*He was working and I was studying.*)

Je lisais pendant que mon frère jouait au tennis. (*I was reading while my brother was playing tennis.*)

- » Background information and actions/states of being that got interrupted (by an action in the passé composé):

Travaillais-tu quand je t'ai téléphoné ? (*Were you working when I called you?*)

J'avais faim, donc j'ai acheté un sandwich. (*I was hungry, so I bought a sandwich.*)

- » Wishes, suggestions, and conditions after **si** (*if*):

Si seulement elle venait avec nous. (*If only she were coming with us.*)

Et si on allait au ciné ce soir ? (*How about going to the movies tonight?*)

Si j'étais riche, je ferais le tour du monde. (*If I were rich, I would travel the world.*)



TIP

In the third example, **je ferais** is the conditional of **faire** (*to do, to make*). See [Chapter 9](#) to read about the conditional.

» Time, date, and age:

On était lundi. (*It was Monday.*)

Tu étais trop jeune. (*You were too young.*)

Il était une fois ... (*Once upon a time ...*)



REMEMBER

The English translation of the imperfect is: was doing something, used to do something, or would do something in the past, where *would* means “used to” (this isn’t the same as the *would* of the conditional mood — see [Chapter 9](#)):

Quand j’habitais à Paris, je prenais souvent le métro. (*When I lived in Paris, I would often [I often used to] take the subway.*)

Choosing between the Passé Composé and the Imperfect

The imperfect and the passé composé express the past differently, so only by working together can they fully express what happened in the past. In order to use the right one at the right time, you need to know what each tense describes. [Table 7-7](#) spells out their differences.

TABLE 7-7 Functions of the Imperfect and the Passé Composé

Uses of the Imparfait	Uses of the Passé Composé
What was going on with no indication of when it started or ended	Things that happened with a definite beginning and/or end
Habitual or repeated actions	Single events
Simultaneous actions	Sequential actions
Actions that got interrupted	Actions that interrupted
Background information	Changes in physical or mental states
General descriptions	

Certain terms can help you decide whether to use the imperfect or passé composé. The following terms are usually used with the imparfait:

- » **toujours** (*always*)
- » **d'habitude, normalement** (*usually*)
- » **en général** (*in general*)
- » **généralement** (*generally*)
- » **souvent** (*often*)
- » **parfois, quelquefois** (*sometimes*)
- » **de temps en temps** (*from time to time*)
- » **chaque semaine, mois, année ...** (*every week, month, year ...*)
- » **tous les jours, toutes les semaines** (*every day, every week*)
- » **le week-end** (*on the weekends*)
- » **le lundi, le mardi ...** (*on Mondays, on Tuesdays ...*)
- » **le matin, le soir** (*in the mornings, in the evenings*)
- » **Quand j'étais jeune j'allais toujours à la plage.** (*When I was young I always went to the beach.*)

These terms tell you that you probably should use the passé composé:

- » **une fois, deux fois, trois fois ...** (*once, twice, three times ...*)

» **plusieurs fois** (*several times*)

» **soudainement** (*suddenly*)

» **tout à coup** (*all of a sudden*)

» **un jour** (*one day*)

» **un week-end** (*one weekend*)

» **lundi, mardi ...** (*on Monday, on Tuesday ...*)

Lundi soir je suis allé au cinéma. (*Monday night I went to the movies.*)

Chapter 8

Looking toward the Future

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Forming the future of regular and irregular verbs
 - » Using the future
 - » Talking about the future in different ways
-

With the future tense, you can describe events that will occur at a specific time or an unspecified time in the future. In this chapter, you can discover how to form the future tense and how to use it with various expressions, as well as some other ways to talk about the future.

Conquering the Future Tense

Expressing the future in French is a snap. In the future, all verbs take the same endings, no matter what the future stem is.

Creating the future tense for regular **-er**, **-ir**, and **-re** verbs is a piece of cake. All you have to do is take the infinitive of the verb, which serves as the stem, and add the appropriate endings. The future stem of all verbs, be they regular or irregular, always ends in **-r**. So for **-er** and **-ir** verbs, just add the future endings. For **-re** verbs, drop the **e**, and then add the endings.

Future Tense Verb Endings

je -ai	nous -ons
tu -as	vous -ez
il/elle/on -a	ils/elles -ont



REMEMBER Do these future endings look familiar? If you know the present conjugation of **avoir** (*to have*), you may notice similarities.

The following are the three categories of regular verbs — **-er, -ir, and -re** — in the future tense.

parler (to speak)	
je parlerai	nous parlerons
tu parleras	vous parlerez
il/elle/on parlera	ils/elles parleront
Je parlerai à l'agent de voyage demain. (I will speak to the travel agent tomorrow.)	

finir (to finish)	
je finirai	nous finirons
tu finiras	vous finirez
il/elle/on finira	ils/elles finiront
Ils finiront leurs études l'année prochaine. (They will finish their studies next year.)	

vendre (to sell)	
je vendrai	nous vendrons
tu vendras	vous vendrez
il/elle/on vendra	ils/elles vendront
Nous vendrons nos livres à la fin du semestre. (We will sell our books at the end of the semester.)	



TIP

Spelling-change verbs like **commencer** (*to begin*) and **manger** (*to eat*) have no spelling change in the future tense, so they're

conjugated like regular **-er** verbs: just take the infinitive and add the appropriate ending: **-ai, -as, -a, -ons, -ez, or -ont**:

Nous commencerons dans cinq minutes. (*We'll begin in five minutes.*)

Forming the future of stem-changing verbs

When you conjugate most stem-changing verbs in the future tense, the same spelling changes are required as in the present tense: change **e** to **è**, double the consonant after the **e**, or change **y** to **i**. (See [Chapter 3](#) for a list of these types of verbs.) These changes are required for all the future tense conjugations, as shown in [Tables 8-1, 8-2, and 8-3](#):

TABLE 8-1 Accent Grave (è) Spelling-Change in Verbs in the Future Tense

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Future Tense Stem</i>
acheter (<i>to buy</i>)	achèter-
mener (<i>to lead</i>)	mèner-
(se) lever (<i>to raise/to stand up</i>)	(se) lèver-

J'achèterai mon billet la semaine prochaine. (*I will buy my ticket next week.*)

Nous mènerons à terme le projet. (*We will complete the project.*)

TABLE 8-2 Double Consonant Spelling-Change in Verbs in the Future Tense

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Future Tense Stem</i>
jeter (<i>to throw</i>)	jetter-
(s')appeler (<i>to call/to call oneself/to be named</i>)	(s')appeller-

Est-ce que vous jetterez la balle ? (*Will you throw the ball?*)

Elle appellera son chien. (*She will call her dog.*)

Verbs whose infinitive form ends in **-yer** change to **-ier** before the endings; we show you examples of these verbs in [Table 8-3](#). (An exception is the verb **envoyer** [*to send*], whose future stem is **enverr-**):

TABLE 8-3 Y to i Spelling-Change Verbs in the Future Tense

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Future Tense Stem</i>
employer (<i>to use</i>)	emploier-
essayer (<i>to try</i>)	essaier-
nettoyer (<i>to clean</i>)	nettoier-
essuyer (<i>to wipe</i>)	essuier-

Nous nettoierons notre chambre. (*We will clean our room.*)

Verbs that end in **-ayer** have an optional **y-to-i** stem change in the future. There is absolutely no difference between these two conjugations — they're equally acceptable, though you should be consistent. Just use the infinitive **payer-** or the stem-changed infinitive **paier-** and add the ending **-ai**, **-as**, **-a**, **-ons**, **-ez**, or **-ont**:

Je payerai/paierai demain. (*I'll pay tomorrow.*)

For **é*-er** verbs, the stem change is optional in the future tense, so you can change the accents or not in infinitives like **espérer** (*to hope*), **préférer** (*to prefer*), and **répéter** (*to repeat*):

Tu répéteras/répèteras après le professeur. (*You will repeat after the professor.*)

Seeing the future with irregular verbs

Some verbs have an irregular future stem, but they take the same endings as regular verbs. [Table 8-4](#) lists the verbs with an irregular future

tense stem.

TABLE 8-4 Irregular Future Tense Verbs

<i>Irregular Verb</i>	<i>Future Tense Stem</i>
aller (<i>to go</i>)	ir-
avoir (<i>to have</i>)	aur-
courir (<i>to run</i>)	courr-
devenir (<i>to become</i>)	deviendr-
devoir (<i>to owe, to have to</i>)	devr-
envoyer (<i>to send</i>)	enverr-
être (<i>to be</i>)	ser-
faire (<i>to do, to make</i>)	fer-
 falloir (<i>to be necessary to</i>)	faudr-
mourir (<i>to die</i>)	mourr-
pleuvoir (<i>to rain</i>)	pleuvr-
pouvoir (<i>to be able to</i>)	pourr-
recevoir (<i>to receive</i>)	recevr-
revenir (<i>to come back</i>)	reviendr-
savoir (<i>to know</i>)	saur-
tenir (<i>to hold</i>)	tiendr-
valoir (<i>to be worth</i>)	vaudr-
venir (<i>to come</i>)	viendr-
voir (<i>to see</i>)	verr-
vouloir (<i>to want</i>)	voudr-

J'irai à la plage. (*I will go to the beach.*)

Elle saura la réponse bientôt. (*She will know the answer soon.*)

Using the Future

After you know how to create the future tense, you need to be familiar with some expressions that accompany it. Here, we list some time expressions that provide more specific information as to when in the future the event will take place. You can place them at the beginning or at the end of the sentence:

- » **demain** (*tomorrow*)
- » **demain matin** (*tomorrow morning*)
- » **demain après-midi** (*tomorrow afternoon*)
- » **demain soir** (*tomorrow evening*)
- » **la semaine prochaine** (*next week*)
- » **le mois prochain** (*next month*)
- » **l'année prochaine** (*next year*)
- » **lundi, mardi ... prochain** (*next Monday, Tuesday...*)
- » **plus tard** (*later*)

Demain ils passeront l'examen./Ils passeront l'examen demain.
(*They will take the test tomorrow.*)

In French, you also use the future tense after certain conjunctions when they indicate something that is going to happen in the future. Those conjunctions include the following:

- » **après que** (*after*)
- » **aussitôt que** (*as soon as*)
- » **dès que** (*as soon as*)
- » **lorsque** (*when*)
- » **quand** (*when*)
- » **Je te téléphonerai quand j'arriverai à l'hôtel.** (*I will call you when I arrive at the hotel.*)

Il le fera dès qu'elle sera là. (*He'll do it as soon as she's there.*)



REMEMBER You use the present tense after these expressions in English, but in French, the future is required because the action after the expression hasn't yet occurred.

You can also use the future tense to talk about something that will happen in the future if a certain condition is met. Remember, if you use the future tense in the main clause, the condition after **si** (*if*) (see [Chapter 9](#)) has to be in the present tense.

J'irai en France si tu viens avec moi. (*I will go to France if you come with me.*)

Si tu viens chez moi, on regardera le film ensemble. (*If you come to my house, we'll watch the movie together.*)

Speaking about the Future with the Present

The future tense can have a slightly formal feel to it. If you want to lighten your conversation and make it a bit less formal, you can talk about the future in a couple of other ways, especially if you're discussing something that'll happen soon (like what you'll do to your little brother if he messes with your stuff one more time). This section helps you add a little casualness to your words when referring to the future.

Using the present tense to express the future

In both French and English, you can use the present tense to talk about something that's in the future. When you're going to do something in just a few minutes or in the next few days, the present tense helps bring that event a little closer. It's slightly less formal than the future:

Je vais à la plage demain. (*I'm going to the beach tomorrow.*)

Nous partons dans cinq minutes. (*We're leaving in five minutes.*)

Speaking of the near future

You can talk about the near future with the present tense of **aller** (*to go*) + the infinitive. This *near future* construction is equivalent to *to be going to do* something in English. Like the present tense, the near future is just slightly informal and tends to be a good choice when what's going to happen is going to happen soon.

aller (<i>to go</i>)	
je vais	nous allons
tu vas	vous allez
il/elle/on va	ils/elles vont
Il va travailler pendant toute la journée. (<i>He's going to work all day.</i>)	
Alexandre et Laurent vont être déçus. (<i>Alexandre and Laurent are going to be disappointed.</i>)	



REMEMBER With pronominal verbs (see [Chapter 3](#)), the reflexive pronoun goes in front of the infinitive:

Nous allons nous promener sur la plage. (*We're going to take a walk on the beach.*)

Vas-tu t'habiller ? (*Are you going to get dressed?*)

Object and adverbial pronouns also precede the infinitive.

Je vais le faire demain. (*I'm going to do it tomorrow.*)

Ils vont en vouloir. (*They're going to want some.*)

Chapter 9

Recognizing Verb Moods

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Issuing commands
 - » Getting subjective with the present subjunctive
 - » Using the conditional
-

A *mood* is a verb form that indicates how the speaker feels about the action of the verb, whether it's real (the indicative mood), conditional (the conditional mood), subjective (the subjunctive mood), or a command (the imperative mood):

- » The *indicative* mood, the most commonly used, generally states a fact and is expressed with an indicative tense, such as the present, imperfect, or future. (See [Chapters 3](#), [7](#), and [8](#) for more on these tenses.)
- » The *imperative* mood gives a command.
- » The *subjunctive* is a mood that shows wishing, wanting, emotion, need, or doubt, among other subjective notions.
- » The *conditional* mood indicates what would happen under certain circumstances.

In this chapter, we focus on the imperative, subjunctive, and conditional moods.

Giving Orders with the Imperative

The technical term for giving commands or orders is the imperative. You usually give orders in English as well as in French by using just the verb, eliminating the “you” or “we” subject of the command (**tu**, **vous**, or

nous), which is implied. In the following sections, we show you how to conjugate verbs in the imperative.

Ordering with affirmative commands

Imperative conjugations for the vast majority of verbs come directly from the **tu**, **vous**, and **nous** forms of the present tense (see [Chapter 3](#)). Note that subject pronouns are never used in the command.

Here's how commands are formed for regular **-er**, **-ir**, and **-re** verbs:

<i>Informal (tu)</i>	<i>Formal/Plural (vous)</i>	<i>Let's (nous)</i>
Parle ! <i>(Speak!)</i>	Parlez ! <i>(Speak!)</i>	Parlons ! <i>(Let's speak!)</i>
Finis ! <i>(Finish!)</i>	Finissez ! <i>(Finish!)</i>	Finissons ! <i>(Let's finish!)</i>
Attends ! <i>(Wait!)</i>	Attendez ! <i>(Wait!)</i>	Attendons ! <i>(Let's wait!)</i>

All three imperative conjugations for **-ir** and **-re** verbs are identical to the present tense, minus the subject pronouns.

For **-er** verbs, the **nous** and **vous** conjugations are also identical to the present tense. But the **tu** imperative is a little trickier: For all **-er** verbs (regular, stem-changing, and irregular), you drop the **-s** at the end:

Tu parles. Parle-moi ! *(You're speaking. Speak to me!)*

Tu vas au lit. Va au lit ! *(You're going to bed. Go to bed!)*

In addition, **-ir** verbs, which are conjugated like regular **-er** verbs — like **ouvrir** (*to open*) and **offrir** (*to offer*) — also lose the **-s** at the end of their **tu** imperative conjugations:

Tu l'ouvres. Ouvre-le ! *(You're opening it. Open it!)*

The **s** comes back when the verb is followed by the pronouns **y** or **en** (see [Chapter 2](#)) for reasons of pronunciation:

Parles-en ! *(Speak about it!)*

Vas-y ! *(Go there!)*

Only four irregular verbs have irregular imperative forms:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Tu</i>	<i>Vous</i>	<i>Nous</i>
avoir (to have)	Aie (Have)	Ayez (Have)	Ayons (Let's have)
être (to be)	Sois (Be)	Soyez (Be)	Soyons (Let's be)
savoir (to know)	Sache (Know)	Sachez (Know)	Sachons (Let's know)

N'aie pas peur ! (*Don't be afraid!*)

Sois sage ! (*Be good!*)

Sachez bien les règles ! (*Know the rules well!*)



REMEMBER The fourth verb is **vouloir** (*to want*), for which you mostly use the irregular **veuillez** form when giving commands, and you follow it with the infinitive. This word is a polite way to give commands and is often translated as *please*.

Veuillez entrer. (*Please come in.*)

Forbidding with negative commands

In a negative command, **ne** precedes the verb as well as any objects. The second negative element follows the verb (and the preposition, if any):

Ne mens pas ! (*Don't lie!*)

Ne le fais pas ! (*Don't do it!*)

Ne lui écris jamais ! (*Never write to him!*)

Ne parle à personne ! (*Don't speak to anyone!*)

Reflecting on reflexive commands

When working with pronominal verbs (see [Chapter 3](#)), you eliminate the subject pronoun, but you have to keep the reflexive pronoun. In the

affirmative imperative, the reflexive pronoun follows the verb and is joined to it with a hyphen. The reflexive pronoun **te** becomes **toi** in the affirmative:

Habille-toi ! (*Get dressed!*)

Dépêchez-vous ! (*Hurry up!*)

Maquillons-nous ! (*Let's put on makeup!*)

In the negative imperative, the reflexive pronoun directly precedes the verb:

Ne vous dépêchez pas ! (*Don't hurry!*)

Ne nous maquillons pas ! (*Let's not put on makeup!*)



REMEMBER If the verb begins with a vowel or a mute **h**, drop the **e** from **te** and add an apostrophe:

Ne t'habille pas ! (*Don't get dressed!*)

Deciphering the Present Subjunctive

The subjunctive mood indicates subjectivity — the speaker may want something to happen or think it's important for something to happen, but the subjunctive indicates that it may or may not actually happen.

Whereas the indicative mood (for example, the present tense) expresses an objective reality, the subjunctive mood expresses the speaker's or writer's subjective points of view, emotions, fears, and doubts. The following sections tell you all about the subjunctive: how to form it and when to use it.



TIP

Because French doesn't have a future subjunctive, the present subjunctive expresses the future as well as the present and can be translated in English in the tense that makes the most sense.

Forming the subjunctive of regular verbs

To form the subjunctive, start with the third-person plural (**ils/elles**) form of the indicative, drop the **-ent** to find the stem, and add the following endings: **-e**, **-es**, **-e**, **-ions**, **-iez**, or **-ent**, as shown in [Table 9-1](#).

TABLE 9-1 The Subjunctive Endings of Regular Verbs

	<i>parler</i>	<i>finir</i>	<i>vendre</i>
ils form of present tense	parlent (<i>they speak</i>)	finissent (<i>they finish</i>)	vendent (<i>they sell</i>)
je	parle	finisse	vende
tu	parles	finisses	vendes
il, elle, on	parle	finisse	vende
nous	parlions	finissions	vendions
vous	parliez	finissiez	vendiez
ils, elles	parlent	finissent	vendent

Here are some examples of these verbs in the subjunctive:

Il est essentiel que nous parlions au directeur. (*It is essential that we speak to the director.*)

Il est possible que je finisse à 17 heures. (*It's possible that I'll finish at 5 p.m.*)

Nous sommes surpris que tu vendes ta maison. (*We're surprised that you're selling your house.*)



TIP

As strange as it looks and sounds, you add the regular subjunctive **-ions** and **-iez** endings even to verbs whose subjunctive stem already ends in **-i**. These verbs include **étudier** (*to study*), **rire** (*to laugh*), and **sourire** (*to smile*). For example: the stem from **ils étudient** is **étudi-**. The subjunctive forms are: **j'étudie**, **tu étudies**, **il/elle/on étudie**, **nous étudions**, **vous étudiez**, **ils/elles étudient**. Here's an example:

Il est important que nous étudions. (*It's important that we study.*)

Coping with stem-changing verbs

Certain verbs have two different stems, just as they did in the present tense: one for the **je**, **tu**, **il/elle/on**, and **ils/elles** forms and another for the **nous** and **vous** forms. The way to remember these verbs is to refer to their present indicative conjugations.

[Table 9-2](#) shows stem-changing verbs with two stems (verbs that end in **-eler**, **-eter**, **-yer**, **-e*er**, and **-é*er** — see [Chapter 3](#)).

TABLE 9-2 Verbs with Two Subjunctive Stems

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>je, tu, il, ils stem</i>	<i>nous, vous stem</i>
appeler	(to call)	appell-	appel-
acheter	(to buy)	achèt-	achet-
ennuyer	(to bother)	ennui-	ennuy-
envoyer	(to send)	envoi-	envoy-
jeter	(to throw)	jett-	jet-
mener	(to lead)	mèn-	men-
payer	(to pay)	pai-	pay-
préférer	(to prefer)	préfèr-	préfér-

Il faut que vous m'appeliez. (*You have to call me.*)

Je veux que tu envoies la lettre. (*I want you to send the letter.*)

Conjugating irregular verbs

Some irregular verbs also have two stems: one for the singular and third-person plural conjugations, and another for **nous** and **vous**, as shown here (followed by some examples).

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>je, tu, il, ils stem</i>	<i>nous, vous stem</i>
aller	(to go)	aill-	all-
boire	(to drink)	boiv-	bu-
croire	(to believe)	croi-	croy-
devoir	(to have to, to owe)	doiv-	dev-
mourir	(to die)	meur-	mour-
prendre	(to take)	prenn-	pren-
recevoir	(to receive)	reçoiv-	recev-
tenir	(to hold)	tienn-	ten-
venir	(to come)	vienn-	ven-
voir	(to see)	voi-	voy-
vouloir	(to want)	veuill-	voul-

Nous sommes heureux que vous veniez. (*We're happy that you're coming.*)

Il est possible qu'ils reçoivent la coupe. (*It's possible that they'll receive the cup.*)

Tu veux que j'y aille avec toi ? (*Do you want me to go with you?*)



TIP

You conjugate other verbs that end in **-tenir** and **-venir** the same way. These include **appartenir** (*to belong*), **contenir** (*to contain*),

maintenir (*to maintain*), **obtenir** (*to obtain*), **retenir** (*to retain*), **revenir** (*to come back*), and **soutenir** (*to support*).

Faire (*to do, to make*), **pouvoir** (*to be able to, can*), and **savoir** (*to know [how]*) have a single irregular stem in the subjunctive and use the regular subjunctive endings:

	<i>faire</i>	<i>pouvoir</i>	<i>savoir</i>
je	fasse	puisse	sache
tu	fasses	puisses	saches
il, elle, on	fasse	puisse	sache
nous	fassions	puissions	sachions
vous	fassiez	puissiez	sachiez
ils, elles	fassent	puissent	sachent

Il est bon que tu le fasses. (*It's good [that] you're doing it.*)

Elle ne croit pas que je puisse nager. (*She doesn't believe that I can swim.*)

Il est important que vous sachiez lire. (*It's important for you to know how to read.*)

Avoir (*to have*) and **être** (*to be*) have completely irregular subjunctive conjugations:

	<i>avoir</i>	<i>être</i>
je/j'	aie	sois
tu	aies	sois
il, elle, on	ait	soit
nous	ayons	soyons
vous	ayez	soyez
ils, elles	aient	soient

Je suis heureux que tu aies une nouvelle voiture. (*I'm happy [that] you have a new car.*)

Nous avons peur qu'elle soit malade. (*We're afraid that she's sick.*)

Note that the **tu**, **nous**, and **vous** subjunctive forms of **avoir**, **être**, and **savoir** are similar to the imperative forms that I mention in the [“Ordering with affirmative commands”](#) section earlier in this chapter.

Putting the subjunctive to work

The most important thing to understand about the subjunctive mood is that it expresses subjectivity. When something like a desire, doubt, emotion, judgment, or necessity is expressed in one clause of a sentence, you have to use the subjunctive in the other clause to show that the action of the verb isn't necessarily a fact, but rather is based on the subjective notion in the first phrase. The verb in the subjunctive tells you about what someone wants, needs, or feels, but not whether that is actually going to happen. It may be good, bad, important, necessary, or doubtful. But will it happen? The subjunctive often indicates the uncertainty of a situation.

The French subjunctive is required after many expressions and verbs, and it's optional after others. This section explains when you need the subjunctive and how to use it correctly.

You use the subjunctive in the *subordinate clause* (the dependent clause that doesn't make sense by itself) when all three key criteria are present in a sentence:

- » Two clauses are linked by **que** (*that*).
- » The two clauses have different subjects. (If the subject of both clauses is the same, then you use the infinitive.)
- » There is a verb, verbal expression, or impersonal expression in the main clause that expresses one of the subjective triggers.

If any of these elements is missing, then you probably need to use the infinitive or the indicative instead of the subjunctive.

Showing your wishes, preferences, or orders

You use the subjunctive in the subordinate clause (the dependent clause) when the verb or verbal expression in the main clause expresses wish, will, preference, or command:

- » **accepter que** *(to accept that)*
- » **admettre que** *(to admit that)*
- » **adorer que** *(to love that, to adore that)*
- » **aimer mieux que** *(to prefer that)*
- » **commander que** *(to order that, to command that)*
- » **demander que** *(to ask that)*
- » **désirer que** *(to desire that, to wish that)*
- » **empêcher que** *(to prevent [that])*
- » **exiger que** *(to demand that, to require that)*
- » **interdire que** *(to forbid [that])*
- » **ordonner que** *(to order that)*
- » **permettre que** *(to allow [that])*
- » **préférer que** *(to prefer that)*
- » **proposer que** *(to propose that)*
- » **recommander que** *(to recommend that)*
- » **refuser que** *(to refuse [that])*
- » **regretter que** *(to regret that)*
- » **souhaiter que** *(to wish that)*
- » **suggérer que** *(to suggest that)*
- » **vouloir que** *(to want [that])*

Here are some examples:

J'exige que vous partiez. *(I demand that you leave.)*

Je veux que tu sois gentil. (*I want you to be nice; Literally: I want that you be nice.*)

Expressing feelings, emotions, and judgment

Another important category of verbs and verbal expressions has to do with emotions and judgment. Take a look at this list:

- » **aimer que** (*to like that, to love that*)
- » **apprécier que** (*to appreciate that*)
- » **avoir honte que** (*to be ashamed that*)
- » **avoir peur que** (*to be afraid that*)
- » **détester que** (*to hate that*)
- » **être choqué que** (*to be shocked that*)
- » **être content que** (*to be happy/content that*)
- » **être déçu que** (*to be disappointed that*)
- » **être désolé que** (*to be sorry that*)
- » **être embarrassé que** (*to be embarrassed that*)
- » **être enchanté que** (*to be delighted that*)
- » **être étonné que** (*to be surprised that*)
- » **être fâché que** (*to be angry that*)
- » **être fier que** (*to be proud that*)
- » **être furieux que** (*to be furious that*)
- » **être gêné que** (*to be bothered/embarrassed that*)
- » **être heureux que** (*to be happy that*)
- » **être horrifié que** (*to be horrified that*)
- » **être inquiet que** (*to be worried that*)
- » **être malheureux que** (*to be unhappy that*)
- » **être mécontent que** (*to be unhappy that*)
- » **être navré que** (*to be very sorry that*)

- » **être ravi que** (*to be delighted that*)
- » **être stupéfait que** (*to be astonished that*)
- » **être surpris que** (*to be surprised that*)
- » **être triste que** (*to be sad that*)
- » **regretter que** (*to regret that*)

Consider these examples:

J'ai peur qu'il soit blessé. (*I'm afraid that he's wounded.*)

Nous sommes contents que tu veuilles voyager. (*We're happy that you want to travel.*)

Elle est surprise que vous veniez nous voir. (*She's surprised that you're coming to see us.*)

Using impersonal expressions

The subjunctive is a mood of subjectivity. As such, any term that expresses an opinion will be followed by the subjunctive. Expressions of necessity like **il faut que** (*it's necessary that*) and expressions of possibility like **il est possible que** (*it's possible that*) are also followed by the subjunctive. Here are the most common ones:

- » **il est absurde que** (*it's absurd that*)
- » **il est amusant que** (*it's amusing that*)
- » **il est bizarre que** (*it's strange/bizarre that*)
- » **il est bon que** (*it's good that*)
- » **il est curieux que** (*it's curious that*)
- » **il est essentiel que** (*it's essential that*)
- » **il est étonnant que** (*it's surprising that*)
- » **il est étrange que** (*it's strange that*)
- » **il est important que** (*it's important that*)
- » **il est impossible que** (*it's impossible that*)

- » **il est indispensable que** *(it's indispensable that)*
- » **il est injuste que** *(it's unjust that)*
- » **il est inutile que** *(it's useless that)*
- » **il est juste que** *(it's just/fair that)*
- » **il est naturel que** *(it's natural that)*
- » **il est nécessaire que** *(it's necessary that)*
- » **il est normal que** *(it's normal that)*
- » **il est possible que** *(it's possible that)*
- » **il est rare que** *(it's rare that)*
- » **il est regrettable que** *(it's regrettable that)*
- » **il est ridicule que** *(it's ridiculous that)*
- » **il est surprenant que** *(it's surprising that)*
- » **il est utile que** *(it's useful that)*
- » **il est dommage que** *(it's too bad that)*
- » **il faut que** *(it's necessary that)*
- » **il se peut que** *(it may be that)*
- » **il semble que** *(it seems that)*
- » **il vaut mieux que** *(it's better that)*

Check out some examples, noting the subjunctive verb in the clause after the **que**:

Il est important que tout le monde fasse de l'exercice. *(It's important that everyone exercises.)*

Il n'est pas possible qu'il ait autant de temps libre. *(It's not possible that he has so much free time.)*

Il se peut qu'il pleuve demain. *(It may [be that it will] rain tomorrow.)*

**TIP**

In all the expressions in the preceding list, you can replace **il est** (*it's*) with **c'est** (*it's*). The meaning remains the same, but becomes slightly less formal.

Expressing doubt or uncertainty

You also use the subjunctive when the verb or expression in the main clause expresses doubt or uncertainty. However, when the element of doubt or uncertainty no longer exists, then you use the indicative (see these verbs in [Table 9-3](#)).

TABLE 9-3 Phrases That Express Doubt or Uncertainty

<i>Affirmative (Indicative)</i>	<i>Interrogative (Subjunctive)</i>	<i>Negative (Subjunctive)</i>
croire que (<i>to believe that</i>)	croire que ?	ne pas croire que
être certain que (<i>to be certain that</i>)	être certain que ?	ne pas être certain que
être sûr que (<i>to be sure that</i>)	être sûr que ?	ne pas être sûr que
il est évident que (<i>it's evident that</i>)	est-il évident que ?	il n'est pas évident que
il est clair que (<i>it's clear that</i>)	est-il clair que ?	il n'est pas clair que
il est probable que (<i>it's probable that</i>)	est-il probable que ?	il n'est pas probable que
il est vrai que (<i>it's true that</i>)	est-il vrai que ?	il n'est pas vrai que
penser que (<i>to think that</i>)	penser que ?	ne pas penser que
trouver que (<i>to find that</i>)	trouver que ?	ne pas trouver que

You use the verbs in [Table 9-3](#) a bit differently than the ones listed in the previous two sections. When you use these verbs or expressions interrogatively or negatively in the main clause, you follow them with the subjunctive in the subordinate clause:

Croyez-vous qu'elle dise la vérité ? (*Do you believe that she's telling the truth?*)

Vous ne croyez pas qu'elle dise la vérité. (*You don't believe that she's telling the truth.*)

However, when you use them affirmatively, you follow them with the indicative:

Vous croyez qu'elle dit la vérité. (*You believe that she's telling the truth.*)

The verb **douter que** (*to doubt that*) and the expression **il est douteux que** (*it's doubtful that*) follow a different pattern than the verbs and phrases in [Table 9-3](#). You use the subjunctive in the subordinate clause when this verb and expression are used in the affirmative or in the interrogative because they imply doubt:

Tu doutes qu'il soit malade. (*You doubt that he's ill.*)

But in the negative, the element of doubt no longer exists, so you use the indicative:

Tu ne doutes pas qu'il est malade. (*You don't doubt that he's ill.*)

Using indefinite and negative pronouns

With the indefinite pronouns **quelqu'un** (*someone*) and **quelque chose** (*something*) and the negative pronouns **ne ... personne** (*no one*) and **ne ... rien** (*nothing*) followed by **qui**, you use the subjunctive when you're not sure whether something exists or whether you can find it. You don't use the subjunctive when you're sure that it does exist and/or you can find it.

Look at these three sentences:

Je ne connais personne qui sache pourquoi. (*I don't know anyone who knows why.*) I don't believe that there's anyone in the world who

knows why, so I use the subjunctive.

Je ne connais personne qui sait conduire. (*I don't know anyone who knows how to drive.*) Many people know how to drive — I know they exist, but I just don't happen to know any of them. Therefore, I use the indicative.

Je cherche quelqu'un qui sache parler japonais. (*I'm looking for someone who knows how to speak Japanese.*) I don't know if I'll find that person, so I use the subjunctive.

Exploring the Conditional

The conditional is a mood that expresses what would happen given a certain condition or supposition. You also use it to make polite requests or suggestions. Read these sections and master the ability to tell the world what you *would* do.

Forming the conditional of regular verbs

You form the conditional of most verbs by starting with the infinitive, just as you did for the future (see [Chapter 8](#)), and adding conditional endings. The conditional mood and the future tense, therefore, have the same stem, but the conditional uses the same endings as the imperfect (see [Chapter 7](#)).

Conditional Endings	
je -ais	nous -ions
tu -ais	vous -iez
il/elle/on -ait	ils/elles -aient

Check out the following examples of regular verbs in the conditional.

parler (to speak)	
je parlerais	nous parlerions
tu parlerais	vous parleriez
il/elle/on parlerait	ils/elles parleraient

Il parlerait au directeur s'il le voyait. (*He would speak to the director if he saw him.*)

finir (*to finish*)

je finirais

nous finirions

tu finirais

vous finiriez

il/elle/on finirait

ils/elles finiraient

Nous finirions avant huit heures ce jour-là. (*We would finish before eight o'clock on that day.*)

The conditional stem always ends in **-r**; therefore, remember to drop the **e** from **-re** verbs:

vendre (*to sell*)

je vendrais

nous vendrions

tu vendrais

vous vendriez

il/elle/on vendrait

ils/elles vendraient

Je vendrais ma voiture si j'avais besoin d'argent. (*I would sell my car if I needed money.*)

Making the conditional of stem-changing verbs

The same types of changes occur in stem-changing verbs as occur in the future tense (see [Chapter 8](#)):

- » **e** changes to **è** in the syllable before the infinitive ending: **acheter** (*to buy*) becomes **achèter-**; **mener** (*to lead*) becomes **mèner-**.

Si je le pouvais, j'achèterais une voiture de sport. (*If I could, I would buy a sports car.*)

- » Double the consonant in the syllable before the infinitive ending: **jeter** (*to throw*) becomes **jetter-**; **appeler** (*to call*) becomes **appeller-**.

Si elle avait une fille, elle l'appellerait Nicole. (*If she had a daughter, she would call her Nicole.*)

- » **y** changes to **i** **employer** (*to use*) becomes **employer-**.

Emploieraient-ils cette machine ? (*Would they use this machine?*)

» **-ayer** verbs may or may not change **y** to **i** **payer** (*to pay*) becomes **payer-** or **paier-**.

Nous payerions/paierions en liquide car ce serait plus pratique. (*We would pay cash because it would be more practical.*)



TIP

Spelling-change verbs like **commencer** (*to begin*) and **manger** (*to eat*) have no spelling change in the conditional:

Dans ce cas, nous commencerions à midi. (*In that case, we would begin at noon.*)

S'il n'y avait aucune autre option, ils ne mangeraient rien. (*If there were no other option, they wouldn't eat anything.*)



REMEMBER The conditional stem of **envoyer** (*to send*) is **enverr-**.

Verbs like **espérer** (*to hope*), **préférer** (*to prefer*), and **répéter** (*to repeat*) don't have a stem change in the conditional:

Je répéterais la phrase si vous ne compreniez pas. (*I would repeat the sentence if you didn't understand.*)

Conjugating the conditional of irregular verbs

Some verbs have an irregular conditional stem; again, it's the same as its future stem (see [Chapter 8](#)). They are

» **aller** (*to go*) **ir-**

» **avoir** (*to have*) **aur-**

- » **courir** (*to run*) **courr-**
- » **devenir** (*to become*) **deviendr-**
- » **devoir** (*to owe, to have to*) **devr-**
- » **envoyer** (*to send*) **enverr-**
- » **être** (*to be*) **ser-**
- » **faire** (*to do, to make*) **fer-**
- » **falloir** (*to be necessary to*) **faudr-**
- » **mourir** (*to die*) **mourr-**
- » **pleuvoir** (*to rain*) **pleuvr-**
- » **pouvoir** (*to be able to*) **pourr-**
- » **recevoir** (*to receive*) **recevr-**
- » **revenir** (*to come back*) **reviendr-**
- » **savoir** (*to know*) **saur-**
- » **tenir** (*to hold*) **tiendr-**
- » **valoir** (*to be worth*) **vaudr-**
- » **venir** (*to come*) **viendr-**
- » **voir** (*to see*) **verr-**
- » **vouloir** (*to want*) **voudr-**

Nous tiendrions le drapeau comme ça à votre place. (*We would hold the flag that way if we were you.*)

Vous auriez beaucoup d'argent si vous aviez économisé. (*You would have a lot of money if you'd saved.*)

Using the conditional

You use the conditional:

- » To be polite, express a wish, or offer a suggestion:

Je voudrais partir. (*I would like to leave.*)

Pourriez-vous me prêter votre stylo ? (*Could you lend me your pen?*)

Tu devrais faire attention. (*You should pay attention.*)

» To express desire:

Elle aimerait venir, mais elle est malade. (*She would like to come, but she's sick.*)

» To indicate something that you would do or would like to happen:

J'irais en France juste pour voir la tour Eiffel. (*I would go to France just to see the Eiffel Tower.*)

Understanding conditional sentences

A conditional sentence is comprised of two clauses: a conditional clause introduced by **si** (*if*), and a result clause. Despite the similar name, not all conditional sentences contain the conditional mood.

» The first type of conditional sentence is known as the likely conditional: It expresses a real condition, one that is possible or likely. Use the present tense in the **si** clause and the present, future, or imperative in the result clause:

Si tu veux, tu peux m'aider. (*If you want, you can help me.*)

J'irai au cinéma s'il pleut. (*I'll go to the movies if it rains.*)

Si vous êtes malade, restez au lit. (*If you're sick, stay in bed.*)

» The second conditional has an “unreal” or “contrary to fact” condition that is unlikely. Use the imperfect in the **si** clause and the conditional in the result clause.

Tu pourrais m'aider si tu voulais. (*You could help me if you wanted to.*)

S'il pleuvait, j'irais au cinéma. (*If it were raining, I would go to the movies.*)

Chapter 10

Ten Important Verb Particularities

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Deciphering nuances
 - » Understanding French and English distinctions
 - » Recognizing differing meanings
-

There are many ways a non-native speaker can mix up French verbs or use them incorrectly. This chapter shows you how to use these verbs correctly and explains the nuances they entail.

Arriving, Happening, or Coming Right Back

The French verb **arriver** literally means *to arrive* when followed by some information, such as time or provenance:

Ils vont arriver à 14h. (*They're going to arrive at 2 p.m.*)

Elle arrive de Toulouse. (*She's arriving [coming] from Toulouse.*)

However, it's often used on its own without that sort of detail to mean that you're on your way or even, when you've already arrived, that you'll come back:

Oui, allô ? Oui, je suis prêt, j'arrive. (*Yes, hello? Yes, I'm ready, I'm on my way.*)

Zut, j'ai oublié mon portefeuille dans la voiture, j'arrive. (*Darn, I forgot my wallet in the car, I'll be right back.*)

In addition, **arriver** commonly means *to happen*:

Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé ? (*What happened?*)

Knowing People or Places or Knowing Something

French has two different verbs that mean *to know*.

The verb **connaître** is generally used to express the idea that you're acquainted or familiar with someone or something:

Je connais le PDG de l'entreprise. (*I know the CEO of the company.*)

Connaissez-vous l'histoire de la France ? (*Do you know the history of France?*)

Nous connaissons le Quartier latin. (*We know the Latin Quarter.*)

On the other hand, the verb **savoir** means to know facts or information and to know how to do something:

Il ne sait pas où il est. (*He doesn't know where he is.*)

Je sais quand il va partir. (*I know when he's going to leave.*)

Nous savons parler aux enfants. (*We know how to speak to children.*)

When you want to say *I know* or *I don't know*, you use the verb **savoir**:

Oui, je sais. (*Yes, I know.*)

Je ne sais pas. (*I don't know.*)

Leaving or Leaving Behind

The verbs **partir**, **s'en aller**, **quitter**, and **laisser** all mean *to leave*, but you use them differently.

To express leaving in general, use **partir** or **s'en aller**:

Je pars./Je m'en vais. (*I'm leaving.*)

The verb **quitter** always has a direct object: use this verb when you're leaving a place or a person. When **quitter** is used with people, it usually means *to abandon*:

Il a quitté la bibliothèque. (*He left the library.*)

Il a quitté sa femme. (*He left his wife.*)

The verb **laisser** means that you're leaving something behind, not taking it with you:

Tu as laissé la clé dans la serrure. (*You left the key in the lock.*)

Liking or Loving

The French verb **aimer** means both *to like* and *to love*.

When talking about a thing or in front of a verb, the meaning depends on your tone of voice:

J'aime le café. (*I like coffee.*)

J'aime nager ! (*I love swimming!*)

With people, it's a little trickier, as the default meaning is *to love*:

J'aime Thomas. (*I love Thomas.*)

Je t'aime. (*I love you.*)

To make it clear that you're in the friendzone, you need to modify **aimer** with **bien**:

J'aime bien Cristelle. (*I like Cristelle.*)

Je t'aime bien. (*I like you.*)

Modal Verbs (Can, Could, Must, Should, Will, Would)

English has a special group of verbs called *modal verbs*, which don't follow even the minimal English verb conjugation pattern of adding -s to the third-person singular (*I walk, he walks*). Instead, these verbs always stay the same (*I can, he can*).

In French, modal verbs don't exist, and how to translate them varies depending on the verb.

Can and *must* are equivalent to **pouvoir** and **devoir**, respectively, which are verbs with full sets of conjugations:

Je peux vous aider. (*I can help you.*)

Tu dois finir aujourd'hui. (*You must finish today.*)

Will equals the French future tense (see [Chapter 8](#)):

Il sera en retard. (*He will be late.*)

Nous mangerons ensemble. (*We'll eat together.*)

Would turns into the French conditional mood (see [Chapter 9](#)):

J'aimerais étudier en Grèce. (*I would like to study in Greece.*)

Je me demande si Paulette nous aiderait. (*I wonder if Paulette would help us.*)

Could and *should* are equivalent to **pouvoir** and **devoir**, respectively, in the conditional:

Je pourrais vous aider. (*I could help you.*)

Tu devrais finir aujourd'hui. (*You should finish today.*)

Playing a Game or Playing an Instrument

To play a game, sport, or instrument, use the verb **jouer**, but choose your preposition carefully.

Use **jouer à** when playing sports or games:

Les enfants jouent au foot le samedi. (*The children play soccer on Saturdays.*)

Nous jouons aux échecs. (*We're playing chess.*)

When playing a musical instrument, use **jouer de**:

Mes filles jouent du violon. (*My daughters play violin.*)

Je voudrais jouer de la guitare. (*I would like to play the guitar.*)

Returning Home, Returning Something, or Just Returning

The verbs **retourner**, **revenir**, **rentrer**, and **rendre** all mean *to return*.

You use **retourner** for going back to a place other than home:

Mon chien retourne toujours dans son panier. (*My dog always returns to his basket.*)

Revenir (*to come back*) expresses that the subject is coming back to the same place it left:

Je reviendrai dans un quart d'heure. (*I'll be back in 15 minutes.*)

You use the verb **rentrer** to mean *to return home*:

Elle rentre toujours à sept heures. (*She always comes home at 7 o'clock.*)

You use **rendre** when you return something you borrowed:

Il a rendu les livres à la bibliothèque. (*He returned the books to the library.*)

Spending Time or Spending Money

In French, the verb to use when you spend time doing something is **passer**:

Je passe mon temps à jardiner. (*I spend my time gardening.*)

Il a passé deux heures à la banque. (*He spent two hours at the bank.*)

To express spending money, use the verb **dépenser**:

Elle a dépensé tout son salaire. (*She spent her entire salary.*)

J'essaie de ne pas trop dépenser en ce moment. (*I'm trying not to spend too much at the moment.*)

Thinking or Thinking About

In French, you can follow the verb **penser** (*to think*) with the prepositions **à** or **de**.

To say that you're thinking about someone or something, use **penser à**:

Nous pensons à nos amis. (*We're thinking about our friends.*)

You use **penser de** to ask for an opinion:

Qu'est-ce que tu penses de ton patron ? (*What do you think of your boss?*)

Visiting a Place or Visiting a Person

French has two different verbs that mean *to visit*.

The verb **visiter** is used when visiting places, such as cities, countries, and museums:

Nous avons visité le Louvre l'année dernière. (*We visited the Louvre last year.*)

To visit a person, use **rendre visite à**, which means *to pay a visit to (someone)*:

Est-ce que tu as rendu visite à tes amis hier ? (*Did you visit your friends yesterday?*)

Appendix

Verb Charts

Use these verb charts as a quick-reference guide to conjugations for regular, spelling-change, stem-changing, and irregular verbs.

Regular Verbs

-er Verbs

parler (to speak)

Present participle: **parlant**

Past participle: **parlé**

Imperative: parle, parl**ons**, parlez

Present: parle, parles, parle, parl**ons**, parlez, parlent

Imperfect: parl**ais**, parl**ais**, parlait, parl**ions**, parl**iez**, parl**aient**

Future: parler**ai**, parler**as**, parler**a**, parler**ons**, parler**ez**, parler**ont**

Conditional: parler**ais**, parler**ais**, parler**ait**, parler**ions**, parler**iez**, parler**aient**

Subjunctive: parle, parles, parle, parl**ions**, parl**iez**, parlent

-ir Verbs

finir (to finish)

Present participle: **finissant**

Past participle: **fini**

Imperative: finis, finis**sons**, finis**sez**

Present: finis, finis, finit, finis**sons**, finis**sez**, finis**sent**

Imperfect: finiss**ais**, finiss**ais**, finiss**ait**, finiss**ions**, finiss**iez**,
finiss**aient**

Future: finir**ai**, finir**as**, finir**a**, finir**ons**, finir**ez**, finir**ont**

Conditional: finir**ais**, finir**ais**, finir**ait**, finir**ions**, finir**iez**, finir**aient**

Subjunctive: finiss**e**, finiss**es**, finiss**e**, finiss**ions**, finiss**iez**, finiss**ent**

-re Verbs

vendre (to sell)

Present participle: vend**ant**

Past participle: vend**u**

Imperative: vend**s**, vend**ons**, vend**ez**

Present: vend**s**, vend**s**, vend, vend**ons**, vend**ez**, vend**ent**

Imperfect: vend**ais**, vend**ais**, vend**ait**, vend**ions**, vend**iez**, vend**aient**

Future: vendr**ai**, vendr**as**, vendr**a**, vendr**ons**, vendr**ez**, vendr**ont**

Conditional: vendr**ais**, vendr**ais**, vendr**ait**, vendr**ions**, vendr**iez**,
vendr**aient**

Subjunctive: vend**e**, vend**es**, vend**e**, vend**ions**, vend**iez**, vend**ent**

Spelling-Change Verbs

-cer Verbs

commencer (to begin)

Present participle: commen**ç**ant

Past participle: commen**ç**é

Imperative: commen**ce**, commen**çons**, commen**cez**

Present: commen**ce**, commen**ces**, commen**ce**, commen**çons**,
commen**cez**, commen**cent**

Imperfect: commençais, commençais, commençait, commencions, commencez, commençaient

Future: commencerai, commenceras, commencera, commencerons, commencerez, commenceront

Conditional: commencerais, commencerais, commencerait, commencerions, commenceriez, commenceraient

Subjunctive: commence, commences, commence, commencions, commencez, commencent

Verbs conjugated like **commencer** — which change the **c** to **ç** in some conjugations (before the letters **a** and **o**) — include **agacer** (*to annoy*), **annoncer** (*to announce*), **avancer** (*to advance*), **effacer** (*to erase*), **lancer** (*to throw*), **menacer** (*to threaten*), **placer** (*to place*), and **remplacer** (*to replace*).

-ger Verbs

manger (to eat)

Present participle: mangeant

Past participle: mangé

Imperative: mange, mangeons, mangez

Present: mange, manges, mange, mangeons, mangez, mangent

Imperfect: mangeais, mangeais, mangeait, mangions, mangiez, mangeaient

Future: mangerai, mangeras, mangera, mangerons, mangerez, mangeront

Conditional: mangerais, mangerais, mangerait, mangerions, mangeriez, mangeraient

Subjunctive: mange, manges, mange, mangions, mangiez, mangent

Similar verbs that sometimes (before the letters **a** and **o**) need an **e** after the **g** include **bouger** (*to move*), **corriger** (*to correct*), **déménager** (*to*

*move [house]), **déranger** (to disturb), **diriger** (to direct), **exiger** (to demand), **juger** (to judge), **mélanger** (to mix), **nager** (to swim), **partager** (to share), **plonger** (to dive), and **voyager** (to travel).*

Stem-Changing Verbs

-eler Verbs

appeler (to call)

Present participle: **appelant**

Past participle: **appelé**

Imperative: **appelle**, **appelons**, **appelez**

Present: **appelle**, **appelles**, **appelle**, **appelons**, **appelez**, **appellent**

Imperfect: **appelais**, **appelais**, **appelait**, **appelions**, **appeliez**, **appelaient**

Future: **appellerai**, **appelleras**, **appellera**, **appellerons**, **appellerez**, **appelleront**

Conditional: **appellerais**, **appellerais**, **appellerait**, **appellerions**, **appelleriez**, **appelleraient**

Subjunctive: **appelle**, **appelles**, **appelle**, **appelions**, **appeliez**, **appellent**

Similar verbs that sometimes double the **l** include **épeler** (to spell), **rappeler** (to call back, recall), and **renouveler** (to renew).

-eter Verbs

jeter (to throw)

Present participle: **jetant**

Past participle: **jeté**

Imperative: **jette**, **jetons**, **jetez**

Present: **jette**, **jettes**, **jette**, **jetons**, **jetez**, **jettent**

Imperfect: jetais, jetais, jetait, jetions, jetiez, jetaient

Future: j~~etter~~ai, j~~etter~~as, j~~etter~~a, j~~etter~~ons, j~~etter~~ez, j~~etter~~ont

Conditional: j~~etter~~ais, j~~etter~~ais, j~~etter~~ait, j~~etter~~ions, j~~etter~~iez, j~~etter~~aient

Subjunctive: j~~ette~~, j~~ettes~~, j~~ette~~, jetions, jetiez, j~~ettent~~

Projeter (*to project*) and **rejeter** (*to reject*) are conjugated the same way, doubling the **t** in some conjugations.

-e*er Verbs

acheter (to buy)

Present participle: achetant

Past participle: acheté

Imperative: achète, achetons, achetez

Present: achète, achètes, achète, achetons, achetez, achètent

Imperfect: achetais, achetais, achetait, achetions, achetiez, achetaient

Future: achèterai, achèteras, achètera, achèterons, achèterez, achèteront

Conditional: achèterais, achèterais, achèterait, achèterions, achèteriez, achèteraient

Subjunctive: achète, achètes, achète, achetions, achetiez, achètent

Similar verbs that add a grave accent to produce è in some conjugations include **amener** (*to take*), **enlever** (*to remove*), **geler** (*to freeze*), **se lever** (*to get up*), **mener** (*to lead*), **peser** (*to weigh*), and **promener** (*to walk*).

-é*er Verbs

gérer (to manage)

Present participle: gérant

Past participle: géré

Imperative: gère, gérons, gérez

Present: gère, gères, gère, gérons, gérez, gèrent

Imperfect: gérais, gérais, gérait, gérons, gériez, géraient

Future: gérerai, géreras, gèrera, gérerons, gèrerez, géreront/gèrerai, gèreras, gèrera, gèrerons, gèrerez, gèreront

Conditional: gèrerais, gèrerais, gèrerait, gèrerions, gèreriez, gèreraient/gèrerais, gèrerais, gèrerait, gèrerions, gèreriez, gèreraient

Subjunctive: gère, gères, gère, gérons, gériez, gèrent

Other verbs that change é to è in some conjugations are **célébrer** (*to celebrate*), **compléter** (*to complete*), **espérer** (*to hope*), **préférer** (*to prefer*), **protéger** (*to protect*), and **répéter** (*to repeat*).

-yer Verbs

nettoyer (to clean)

Present participle: nettoyant

Past participle: nettoyé

Imperative: nettoie, nettoyons, nettoyez

Present: nettoie, nettoies, nettoie, nettoyons, nettoyez, nettoient

Imperfect: nettoyais, nettoyais, nettoyait, nettoyions, nettoyez, nettoyaient

Future: nettoierai, nettoieras, nettoiera, nettoierons, nettoierez, nettoieront

Conditional: nettoierais, nettoierais, nettoierait, nettoierions, nettoieriez, nettoieraient

Subjunctive: nettoie, nettoies, nettoie, nettoyions, nettoyez, nettoient

Employer (*to use*) and **ennuyer** (*to bore*) likewise have a y to i stem change. **Note:** **Envoyer** (*to send*) and **renvoyer** (*to send back*) are conjugated like **nettoyer** in all tenses and moods except the future and the conditional, where the stem is **enverr-** or **renverr-**.

Verbs ending in **-ayer** may or may not change **i** to **y**.

Irregular Verbs

aller (to go)

Present participle: allant

Past participle: allé

Imperative: va, allons, allez

Present: vais, vas, va, allons, allez, vont

Imperfect: allais, allais, allait, allions, alliez, allaient

Future: irai, iras, ira, irons, irez, iront

Conditional: irais, irais, irait, irions, iriez, iraient

Subjunctive: aille, ailles, aille, allions, alliez, aillent

avoir (to have)

Present participle: ayant

Past participle: eu

Imperative: aie, ayons, ayez

Present: ai, as, a, avons, avez, ont

Imperfect: avais, avais, avait, avions, aviez, avaient

Future: aurai, auras, aura, aurons, aurez, auront

Conditional: aurais, aurais, aurait, aurions, auriez, auraient

Subjunctive: aie, aies, ait, ayons, ayez, aient

boire (to drink)

Present participle: buvant

Past participle: bu

Imperative: bois, buvons, buvez

Present: bois, bois, boit, buvons, buvez, boivent

Imperfect: buvais, buvais, buvait, buvions, buviez, buvaient

Future: boirai, boiras, boira, boirons, boirez, boiront

Conditional: boirais, boirais, boirait, boirions, boiriez, boiraient

Subjunctive: boive, boives, boive, buvions, buviez, boivent

connaître (to know, to be acquainted with)

Present participle: connaissant

Past participle: connu

Imperative: connais, connaissons, connaissez

Present: connais, connais, connaît, connaissons, connaissez, connaissent

Imperfect: connaissais, connaissais, connaissait, connaissions, connaissiez, connaissaient

Future: connaîtrai, connaîtras, connaîtra, connaîtrons, connaîtrez, connaîtront

Conditional: connaîtrais, connaîtrais, connaîtrait, connaîtrions, connaîtriez, connaîtraient

Subjunctive: connaisse, connaises, connaisse, connaissions, connaissiez, connaissent

Other verbs conjugated like **connaître** include **apparaître** (*to appear*), **disparaître** (*to disappear*), **paraître** (*to seem*), and **reconnaître** (*to recognize*).

croire (to believe)

Present participle: croyant

Past participle: cru

Imperative: crois, croyons, croyez

Present: crois, crois, croit, croyons, croyez, croient

Imperfect: croyais, croyais, croyait, croyions, croyiez, croyaient

Future: croirai, croiras, croira, croirons, croirez, croiront

Conditional: croirais, croirais, croirait, croirions, croiriez, croiraient

Subjunctive: croie, croies, croie, croyions, croyiez, croient

devoir (must, to have to, to owe)

Present participle: devant

Past participle: dû

Imperative: dois, devons, devez

Present: dois, dois, doit, devons, devez, doivent

Imperfect: devais, devais, devait, devions, deviez, devaient

Future: devrai, devras, devra, devrons, devrez, devront

Conditional: devrais, devrais, devrait, devrions, devriez, devraient

Subjunctive: doive, doives, doive, devions, deviez, doivent

dire (to say, tell)

Present participle: disant

Past participle: dit

Imperative: dis, disons, dites

Present: dis, dis, dit, disons, dites, disent

Imperfect: disais, disais, disait, disions, disiez, disaient

Future: dirai, diras, dira, dirons, direz, diront

Conditional: dirais, dirais, dirait, dirions, diriez, diraient

Subjunctive: dise, dise, dise, disions, disiez, disent

écrire (to write)

Present participle: écrivant

Past participle: écrit

Imperative: écris, écrivons, écrivez

Present: écris, écris, écrit, écrivons, écrivez, écrivent

Imperfect: écrivais, écrivais, écrivait, écrivions, écriviez, écrivaient

Future: écrirai, écriras, écrira, écrirons, écrirez, écriront

Conditional: écrirais, écrirais, écrirait, écririons, écririez, écriraient

Subjunctive: écrive, écrives, écrive, écrivions, écriviez, écrivent

être (to be)

Present participle: étant

Past participle: été

Imperative: sois, soyons, soyez

Present: suis, es, est, sommes, êtes, sont

Imperfect: étais, étais, était, étions, étiez, étaient

Future: serai, seras, sera, serons, serez, seront

Conditional: serais, serais, serait, serions, seriez, seraient

Subjunctive: sois, sois, soit, soyons, soyez, soient

faire (to do, make)

Present participle: faisant

Past participle: fait

Imperative: fais, faisons, faites

Present: fais, fais, fait, faisons, faites, font

Imperfect: faisais, faisais, faisait, faisions, faisiez, faisaient

Future: ferai, feras, fera, ferons, ferez, feront

Conditional: ferais, ferais, ferait, ferions, feriez, feraient

Subjunctive: fasse, fasses, fasse, fassions, fassiez, fassent

Défaire (*to undo, dismantle*), **refaire** (*to do/make again*), and **satisfaire** (*to satisfy*) follow the same pattern.

lire (to read)

Present participle: lisant

Past participle: lu

Imperative: lis, lisons, lisez

Present: lis, lis, lit, lisons, lisez, lisent

Imperfect: lisais, lisais, lisait, lisions, lisiez, lisaient

Future: lirai, liras, lira, lirons, lirez, liront

Conditional: lirais, lirais, lirait, lirions,iriez, liraient

Subjunctive: lise, lises, lise, lisions, lisiez, lisent

Élire (*to elect*) and **relire** (*to reread*) follow the same pattern.

mettre (to put, to place)

Present participle: mettant

Past participle: mis

Imperative: mets, mettons, mettez

Present: mets, mets, met, mettons, mettez, mettent

Imperfect: mettais, mettais, mettait, mettions, mettiez, mettaient

Future: mettrai, mettras, mettra, mettrons, mettrez, mettront

Conditional: mettrais, mettrais, mettrait, mettrions, mettriez, mettraient

Subjunctive: mette, mettes, mette, mettions, mettiez, mettent

Verbs like **mettre** include **admettre** (*to admit*), **commettre** (*to commit*), **permettre** (*to permit*), **promettre** (*to promise*), and **soumettre** (*to*

submit).

partir (to leave)

Present participle: partant

Past participle: parti

Imperative: pars, partons, partez

Present: pars, pars, part, partons, partez, partent

Imperfect: partais, partais, partait, partions, partiez, partaient

Future: partirai, partiras, partira, partirons, partirez, partiront

Conditional: partirais, partirais, partirait, partirions, partiriez, partiraient

Subjunctive: parte, partes, parte, partions, partiez, partent

pouvoir (can, to be able to)

Present participle: pouvant

Past participle: pu

Present: peux, peux, peut, pouvons, pouvez, peuvent

Imperfect: pouvais, pouvais, pouvait, pouvions, pouviez, pouvaient

Future: pourrai, pourras, pourra, pourrons, pourrez, pourront

Conditional: pourrais, pourrais, pourrait, pourrions, pourriez, pourraient

Subjunctive: puisse, puisses, puisse, puissions, puissiez, puissent

prendre (to take)

Present participle: prenant

Past participle: pris

Imperative: prends, prenons, prenez

Present: prends, prends, prend, prenons, prenez, prennent

Imperfect: prenais, prenais, prenait, prenions, preniez, prenaient

Future: prendrai, prendras, prendra, prendrons, prendrez, prendront

Conditional: prendrais, prendrais, prendrait, prendrions, prendriez, prendraient

Subjunctive: prenne, prennes, prenne, prenions, preniez, prennent

Other verbs like **prendre** include **apprendre** (*to learn*), **comprendre** (*to understand*), **reprendre** (*to take back*), and **surprendre** (*to surprise*).

***savoir** (to know [facts, how to])*

Present participle: sachant

Past participle: su

Imperative: sache, sachons, sachez

Present: sais, sais, sait, savons, savez, savent

Imperfect: savais, savais, savait, savions, saviez, savaient

Future: saurai, sauras, saura, saurons, saurez, sauront

Conditional: saurais, saurais, saurait, saurions, sauriez, sauraient

Subjunctive: sache, saches, sache, sachions, sachiez, sachent

***sortir** (to go out)*

Present participle: sortant

Past participle: sorti

Imperative: sors, sortons, sortez

Present: sors, sors, sort, sortons, sortez, sortent

Imperfect: sortais, sortais, sortait, sortions, sortiez, sortaient

Future: sortirai, sortiras, sortira, sortirons, sortirez, sortiront

Conditional: sortirais, sortirais, sortirait, sortirions, sortiriez, sortiraient

Subjunctive: sorte, sortes, sorte, sortions, sortiez, sortent

tenir (to hold)

Present participle: tenant

Past participle: tenu

Imperative: tiens, tenons, tenez

Present: tiens, tiens, tient, tenons, tenez, tiennent

Imperfect: tenais, tenais, tenait, tenions, teniez, tenaient

Future: tiendrai, tiendras, tiendra, tiendrons, tiendrez, tiendront

Conditional: tiendrais, tiendrais, tiendrait, tiendrions, tiendriez, tiendraient

Subjunctive: tienne, tiennes, tienne, tenions, teniez, tiennent

Similar compound verbs — **appartenir** (*to belong*), **contenir** (*to contain*), **obtenir** (*to obtain*), and **retenir** (*to retain*) — are conjugated the same way.

venir (to come)

Present participle: venant

Past participle: venu

Imperative: viens, venons, venez

Present: viens, viens, vient, venons, venez, viennent

Imperfect: venais, venais, venait, venions, veniez, venaient

Future: viendrai, viendras, viendra, viendrons, viendrez, viendront

Conditional: viendrais, viendrais, viendrait, viendrions, viendriez, viendraient

Subjunctive: vienne, viennes, vienne, venions, veniez, viennent

Verbs conjugated like **venir** include **devenir** (*to become*), **parvenir** (*to reach, achieve*), **revenir** (*to come back*), and **se souvenir** (*to remember*).

voir (to see)

Present participle: voyant

Past participle: vu

Imperative: vois, voyons, voyez

Present: vois, vois, voit, voyons, voyez, voient

Imperfect: voyais, voyais, voyait, voyions, voyiez, voyaient

Future: verrai, verras, verra, verrons, verrez, verront

Conditional: verrais, verrais, verrait, verrions, verriez, verraient

Subjunctive: voie, voies, voie, voyions, voyiez, voient

vouloir (to want)

Present participle: voulant

Past participle: voulu

Imperative: veuille, veuillons, veuillez

Present: veux, veux, veut, voulons, voulez, veulent

Imperfect: voulais, voulais, voulait, voulions, vouliez, voulaient

Future: voudrai, voudras, voudra, voudrons, voudrez, voudront

Conditional: voudrais, voudrais, voudrait, voudrions, voudriez, voudraient

Subjunctive: veuille, veuilles, veuille, voulions, vouliez, veuillent

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Publisher's Acknowledgments

Acquisition Editor: Lindsay Berg and Shannon Kujac

Project Manager and Copy Editor: Chad R. Sievers

Managing Editor: Kristie Pyles

Technical Editor: Aurélie Drouard

Production Editor: Bharaneedharan Murthy

Cover Design and Image: Wiley

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