

French Tenses

Overview

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If you want to know how well you know each of these tenses, [try the quiz!](#)

The Present Tense

The present tense can be used for two reasons: an action happens routinely (I eat) or an action is happening at the moment(I am eating).

Regular verbs

Here are the conjugations for present tense -er verbs:

Personal Pronoun	Ending	Example (manger - to eat)
Je	-e	Je mange
Tu	-es	Tu manges
Il / Elle / On	-e	Il / Elle / On mange
Nous	-ons	Nous mange <u>ons</u>
Vous	-ez	Vous mangez
Ils / Elles	-ent	Ils / Elles mangent

Here are the conjugations for present tense -ir verbs:

Personal Pronoun	Ending	Example (finir - to finish)
Je	-is	Je finis
Tu	-is	Tu finis
Il / Elle / On	-it	Il / Elle / On finit
Nous	-issons	Nous finissons
Vous	-issez	Vous finissez
Ils / Elles	-issent	Ils / Elles finissent

Here are the conjugations for present tense -re verbs:

Personal Pronoun	Ending	Example (vendre - to sell)
Je	-s	Je vends
Tu	-s	Tu vends
Il / Elle / On	<i>nothing</i>	Il / Elle / On vend
Nous	-ons	Nous vend ons
Vous	-ez	Vous vend ez
Ils / Elles	-ent	Ils / Elles vend ent

Irregular verbs

<p><u>Acheter - to buy</u> j'achète tu achètes il achète nous achetons vous achetez ils achètent</p>	<p><u>Aller - to go</u> je vais tu vas il va nous allons vous allez ils vont</p>	<p><u>Avoir - to have</u> j'ai tu as il a nous avons vous avez ils ont</p>
<p><u>Boire - to drink</u> je bois tu bois il boit nous buvons vous buvez ils boivent</p>	<p><u>Conduire - to drive</u> je conduis tu conduis il conduit nous conduisons vous conduisez ils conduisent</p>	<p><u>Connaître - to know</u> je connais tu connais il connaît nous connaissons vous connaissez ils connaissent</p>
<p><u>Courir - to run</u> je cours tu cours il court nous courons vous courez ils courent</p>	<p><u>Croire - to believe</u> je crois tu crois il croit nous croyons vous croyez ils croient</p>	<p><u>Devoir - to have to</u> je dois tu dois il doit nous devons vous devez ils doivent</p>
<p><u>Dire - to say</u> je dis tu dis il dit nous disons vous dites ils disent</p>	<p><u>Dormir - to sleep</u> je dors tu dors il dort nous dormons vous dormez ils dorment</p>	<p><u>Écrire - to write</u> j'écris tu écris il écrit nous écrivons vous écrivez ils écrivent</p>
<p><u>Être - to be</u> je suis tu es il est nous sommes vous êtes ils sont</p>	<p><u>Faire - to do</u> je fais tu fais il fait nous faisons vous faites ils font</p>	<p><u>Falloir - to be necessary</u> il faut</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Lire - to read</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je lis tu lis il lit nous lisons vous lisez ils lisent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Mettre - to put</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je mets tu mets il met nous mettons vous mettez ils mettent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Partir - to leave/go</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je pars tu pars il part nous partons vous partez ils partent</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Pleuvoir - to rain</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">il pleut</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Pouvoir - to be able to</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je peux tu peux il peut nous pouvons vous pouvez ils peuvent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Prendre - to take</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je prends tu prends il prend nous prenons vous prenez ils prennent</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Recevoir - to receive</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je reçois tu reçois il reçoit nous recevons vous recevez ils reçoivent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Servir - to serve</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je sers tu sers il sert nous servons vous servez ils servent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Sortir - to go out</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je sors tu sors il sort nous sortons vous sortez ils sortent</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Suivre - to follow</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je suis tu suis il suit nous suivons vous suivez ils suivent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Venir - to come</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je viens tu viens il vient nous venons vous venez ils viennent</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Voir - to see</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je vois tu vois il voit nous voyons vous voyez ils voient</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Vouloir - to want</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">je veux tu veux il veut nous voulons vous voulez ils veulent</p>	

[Quizlet](#)

Reflexive Verbs

When you do an action to yourself, e.g. washing yourself, it is reflexive and needs a reflexive pronoun (Je me, tu te, il/elle/on se, nous nous, vous vous, ils/elles se).

When negative, put *ne* and *pas* around the conjugated verb *and* the reflexive pronoun:

Je me lave → Je **ne** me lave **pas**

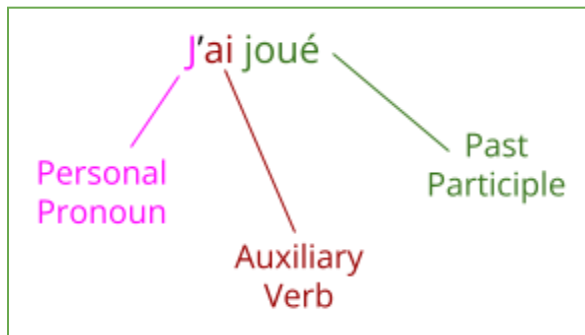
The Perfect Tense

If something already happened in the past, we use perfect tense to show it (e.g. I played).

The perfect tense is split into two families, the 'big' family where avoir is used, and the 'small' family where être is used.

The Big Family

When putting something into the perfect tense for big family, you begin with the personal pronoun as normal (je, tu, il/elle/on etc.) and then add the conjugated form of avoir (the auxiliary verb), then the past participle:



For -er verbs, remove the -er and add -é: jouer → joué

For -ir verbs, remove the -ir and add -i: finir → fini

For -re verbs, remove the -re and add -u: perdre → perdu

Unless they're irregular...

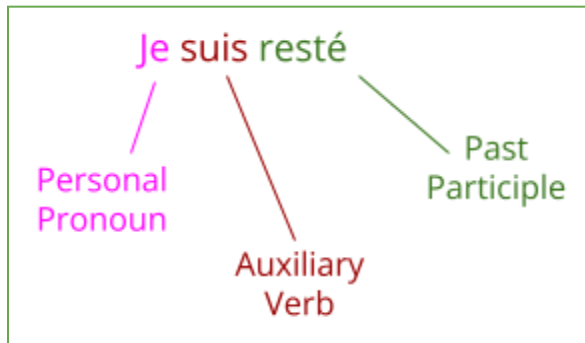
Irregular Verbs

Infinitive	Past Participle	Meaning
être	été	to be
avoir	eu	to have
boire	bu	to drink
connaître	connu	to know
voir	vu	to see
vouloir	voulu	to want
courir	couru	to run
savoir	su	to know
devoir	dû	to have to
prendre	pris	to take
comprendre	compris	to understand
apprendre	appris	to learn
écrire	écrit	to write
dire	dit	to say
faire	fait	to do
pouvoir	pu	to be able to
pleuvoir	plu	to rain
mettre	mis	to put
lire	lu	to read
ouvrir	ouvert	to open

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The Small Family

This is very similar to the big family, however, être is used instead of avoir for the auxiliary. The past participle stays the same:



To find out if the verb we are putting into past tense is either big or small family, we need to use **MRS VANDERTRAMP**. All words in this acronym are small family.

Infinitive	Past Participle	Meaning
Monter	monté	to go up
Rester	resté	to stay
Sortir	sorti	to go out
Venir	venu	to come
Arriver	arrivé	to arrive
Naître	né	to be born
Descendre	descendu	to go down
Entrer	entré	to enter/go in
Retourner	retourné	to come back/return
Tomber	tombé	to fall
Rentrer	rentré	to come back/return
Aller	allé	to go
Mourir	mort	to die
Partir	parti	to leave/go

One important difference of a small family is that it is **sensitive** and therefore, the past participle can change due to number and gender:

Il est allé - He went

Elle est allée - She went

Ils sont allés - They (m.) went

Elles sont allées - They (f.) went

Reflexive Verbs

All reflexive verbs are small family and all the other rules stay the same:

Je me suis lavé

When making the reflexive negative, *ne* and *pas* go around both the reflexive pronoun and the auxiliary verb:

Je **ne** me suis **pas** lavé

or

Nous **ne** nous sommes **pas** levé

The Imperfect Tense

There are many uses of the imperfect tense:

- Describing the weather at a time in the past (e.g. "The weather was very good" - "*Il faisait très beau*")
- Talking about something that was happening in the past and could still be happening now (e.g. "I was playing" - "*Je jouais*")
- Talking about how things used to be over a period of time in the past (e.g. "When I was young" - "*Quand j'étais jeune/petit*")
- Descriptions/Opinions in the past (e.g. "It was great!" - "*C'était génial!*")
- Saying what was happening, when something else happened (one action would be in perfect, whilst the other in imperfect tense) (e.g. "I was reading the newspaper when my Dad entered the living room" - "*Je lisais le journal quand mon père est entré dans le salon*")

To form the Imperfect we take the *nous* form of the present tense, and take off the *-ons* and instead add the correct imperfect ending.

Personal Pronoun	Ending	Example (jouer - to play)
Je	-ais	Je jouais
Tu	-ais	Tu jouais
Il / Elle / On	-ait	Il/Elle/On jouait
Nous	-ions	Nous jouions
Vous	-iez	Vous jouiez
Ils / Elles	-aient	Ils/Elles jouaient

*The endings for je, tu, il/elle/on and ils/elles are all pronounced the same.

Irregular Verbs

There are very few exceptions to this rule.

The main one is être, whose stem is ét- (J'étais, tu étais, il/elle/on était etc.).

In addition, verbs like manger and ranger, which have an extra "e" in the nous form of the present tense, retain this in the imperfect to make the "g" sound soft (Mon frère mang**e**ait).

Similarly verbs like commencer, which have a "ç" in the nous form, retain this to make the "c" sound soft (Je commen**ç**ais).

Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive verbs in the imperfect tense are the same as reflexive verbs in the present, except that the conjugated verb becomes imperfect.

Je me lave (I wash myself) → Je me lavais (I was washing myself / I used to wash myself)

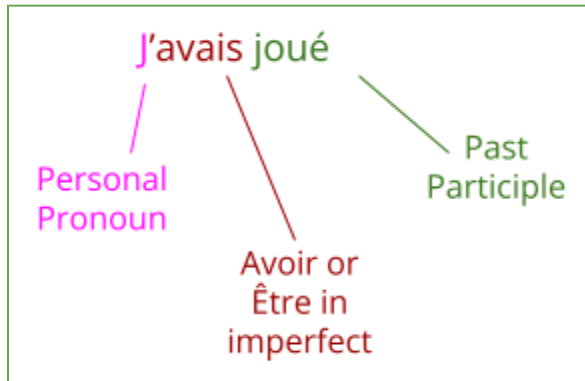
To make the reflexive negative, just add *ne* and *pas* around both the reflexive pronoun and verb:

Je **ne** me lavais **pas** (I wasn't washing myself)

The Pluperfect Tense

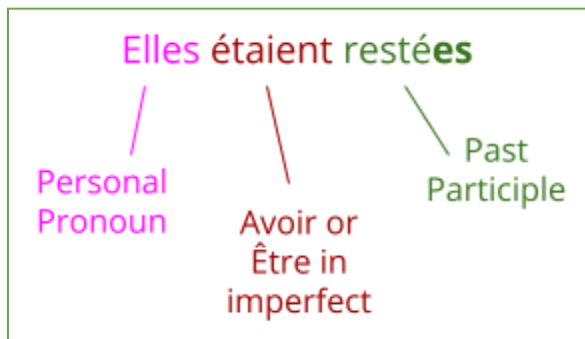
The [perfect tense](#) talks about an action that happened in the past. However, if you wanted to talk about something that *had* happened before the perfect, you use the pluperfect.

To form the pluperfect, you combine the [imperfect tense](#) (of either avoir or être) with the [past participle](#).



(I had played)

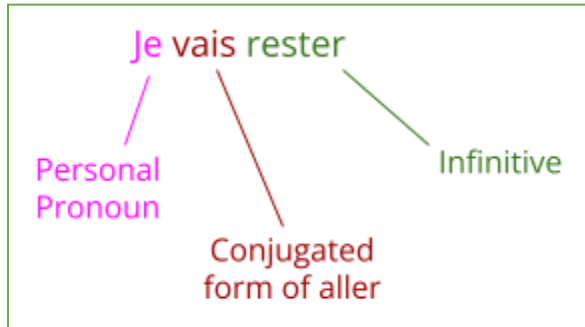
Like the perfect tense, you use avoir when it is big family and être when small family(the past participle still agrees when it is small family).



The near Future Tense (Le futur proche)

This tense is used when you are going to do something (e.g. I am going to play).

All you have to do is get the conjugated form of *aller* and then put the infinitive afterwards:



(I am going to stay)

If you change the personal pronoun, the conjugated form of *aller* changes to match (je vais, tu vas, il/elle/on va, nous allons, vous allez, ils/elles vont).

Reflexive Verbs

The reflexive pronoun and infinitive don't separate, so they go at the end and the conjugated form of *aller* goes before them both:

Je me lave → Je vais me laver

To make this negative, you put *ne* and *pas* around the conjugated form of *aller*:

Je **ne** vais **pas** me laver

The Simple Future Tense (Le futur simple)

Instead of saying that you are going to do something, you can say that you *will* do something. For this, you would need the simple future tense.

Regular Verbs

To change an infinitive to the simple future tense, you don't take off anything (unless the infinitive is -re then you remove the -e) and add the following endings:

Personal Pronoun	Ending	Example (jouer - to play)
Je	-ai	Je jouer ai
Tu	-as	Tu jouer as
Il / Elle / On	-a	Il/Elle/On jouera a
Nous	-ons	Nous jouer ons
Vous	-ez	Vous jouer ez
Ils / Elles	-ont	Ils/Elles jouer ont

*The endings are very similar to the conjugation of avoir.

Irregular Verbs

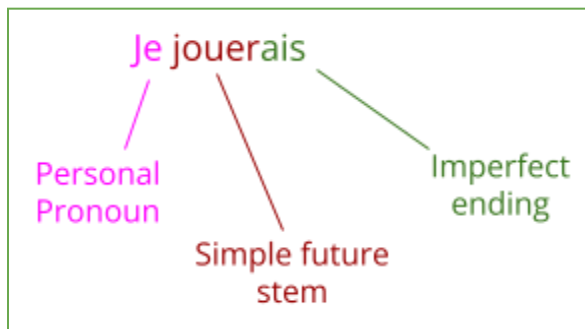
Infinitive	Future stem	Example
acheter (to buy)	achèter-	j'achèterai
avoir (to have)	aur-	j'aurai
être (to be)	ser-	Je serai
faire (to do)	fer-	Je ferai
aller (to go)	ir-	j'irai
savoir (to know)	saur-	Je saurai
devoir (to have to)	devr-	Je devrai
recevoir (to receive)	recevr-	Je recevrai
courir (to run)	courr-	Je courrai
pouvoir (to be able to)	pourr-	Je pourrai
vouloir (to want to)	voudr-	Je voudrai
voir (to see)	verr-	Je verrai
envoyer (to send)	enverr-	j'enverrai
venir (to come)	viendr-	Je viendrai
se lever (to get oneself up)	lèver-	Je me lèverai

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The Conditional Tense (Le conditionnel)

The conditional tense is used when you 'would' do something. Most of the time, the conditional comes after an imperfect 'if' statement e.g. If I were a teacher, I would...

To form the conditional, you simply get the [Simple Future](#) stem and then add the [imperfect](#) ending:



(I would play)

Reflexive Verbs

The reflexive pronoun goes in the same place as the present tense.

Je me lave → Je me laverai

To make this negative, you also do the same thing as present tense.

Je **ne** me laverai **pas**

[Quizlet](#)

Tip: The conditional usually uses the word 'if', which in french is 'si' e.g. *If I were rich - Si j'étais riche.* (This sentence is in the imperfect, but what would follow after will be conditional)