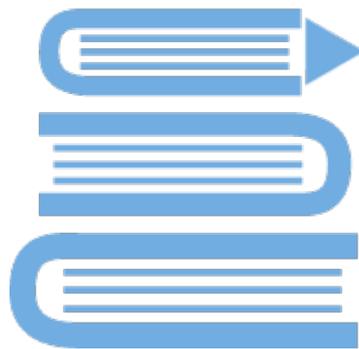


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Verb Tenses, Moods & Aspects

Verb Tenses, Moods & Aspects

Introduction

Tense

Tense is the grammatical term that refers to the time when the action of the verb occurs: past, present, future. The time frame of an action is usually established by referring to the present moment; for example, the **passé composé** and the **future** are respectively past and future in relation to the present.

- However, some tenses establish their time frame by referring to other actions in the past or in the future.
- For example, the **plus-que-parfait** tense indicates a past action that occurred prior to the completion of another past action. The **futur antérieur** tense indicates a future action that will have occurred before another future action.
- Actions that occur before another action are described as being **anterior**.

Tenses are also described by their number of parts.

- For example, a tense with only one verb form is called a **simple tense** (ie, le passé simple). In contrast, a tense comprising two forms, the auxiliary verb and the participle, is referred to as a **compound tense** (ie, le passé composé).

Aspect

Aspect, unlike tense, is not concerned with placing events on a time line. Rather, aspect is concerned with making distinctions about the kinds of actions that are described by verbs: progressive actions, punctual actions, habitual actions, etc.

The most important aspectual distinction in French concerns the difference between the two most common past tenses: the **imparfait** and the **passé composé**.

- While both tenses refer to actions in the past, they are used for very different types of actions.
- The imparfait indicates an action that is ongoing or habitual. Actions in the imparfait may be simultaneous or overlapping.
- The passé composé on the other hand, indicates an action that is in a strict sequence in relation to another action. In other words, an event in the passé composé must be completed before another may be used in narration.

These aspectual differences are best understood in a **narrative** context where the **imparfait** is typically used to set the scene of a story by giving **background** information.

- The **passé composé** is used for the **foreground**, that is, the plot line events. Note that plot line events are sequential, that is, an event must be completed before another event begins.

Mood

Mood is a grammatical category distinguishing verb tenses. There are four moods in French: **indicative**, **subjunctive**, **conditional**, and **imperative**. All of these moods, except the imperative, may be conjugated in different tenses. Each of these moods has a different function.

Voice

Voice is a grammatical category describing the relationship between a verb and its subject. Voice is either **active** or **passive**. Active voice refers to the situation where the subject of the sentence performs the action of the verb.

Present Tense

The present tense indicates an action that is either actually occurring at the time of speaking, or a general truth, a so-called 'eternal verity.'

The French present may be translated in three different ways in English depending on the intended

meaning.

*See the 'Verb rules' file for more notes on the present tense.

Recent Past (Passé Immédiat)

When **venir** is conjugated in the present and followed by **de**** + infinitive**, it means 'to have just done something.' This is called the recent past (le passé immédiat).

- I have just....

When **venir** is conjugated in the imparfait followed by **de**** + infinitive**, it means 'had just done something.'

Le Passé Composé

The **passé composé** is the most commonly used tense to refer to actions completed in the past. The passé composé may be translated into English in different ways depending on the context.

This is made up of two parts - le verbe auxiliaire and le participe passé.

- The verbe auxiliaire usually is the present tense of avoir (to have). Sometimes it is être (to be).

Avoir (to have)

J'ai	I have
Tu as	You have
Il/elle a	He/she has
Nous avons	We have
Vous avez	You have
Ils/ elles ont	They have

Être (to be)

Je suis	I am
Tu es	You are
Il/elle est	He is/ she is
Nous sommes	We are
Vous êtes	You are
Ils/elles sont	They are

- The participe passé is the second part of the passé composé. To form le participe passé of a regular -er verb, you cross out the 'er' and add é (jouer - joué). To form the participe passé of a regular -ir verb, you cross out the 'ir' and add 'i' (finir - fini). To form the participe passé of a regular -re verb, you cross out 're' and add 'u' (vendre - vendu).

Examples:

- J'ai joué (I have played)
- J'ai fini (I have finished)
- J'ai vendu (I have sold)

La négation du passé composé:

- The 'ne' is put before le verbe auxiliaire and the 'pas' is put after le verbe auxiliaire eg. J'ai rangé ma chambre - je n'ai pas rangé ma chambre

*Ne needs to be shortened to n' always before a vowel

Irregular past participles

The irregular past participles still use avoir as their verbe auxiliaire

- There are no irregular past participles for -er verbs. The participe passé always ends in é
- There are a number of -ir verbs which have irregular past participles:

Avoir (to have)	eu
Devoir (to have to)	dû
Offrir (to give)	offert
Ouvrir (to open)	ouvert
Pouvoir (to be able)	pu
Voir (to see)	vu
Vouloir (to want)	voulu

- There a number of -re verbs which have participes passés irréguliers:

Boire (to drink)	bu
Dire (to say)	dit
Être (to be)	été
Faire (to do/make)	fait
Mettre (to put)	mis
Prendre (to take)	pris

Examples:

- J'ai offert un cadeau à Maman.
- J'ai fait du vélo.

Le passé composé avec 'être'

The verbs that use être as their verb auxiliaire are the following:

- Aller = to go
- Arriver = to arrive
- Descendre = to go down
- Entrer = to enter
- Monter = to go up
- Mourir = to die
- Naître = to be born
- Partir = to leave
- Rester = to stay
- Retourner = to return

- Sortir = to go out
- Tomber = to fall
- Venir = to come - **All reflexive verbs**

To form the past participles of those verbs:

- -er verbs: cross off '-er' and add é
- -ir verbs: cross off '-ir' and add i (except mourir - mort & venir - venu)
- -re verbs: cross off '-re' and add u (except naître - né)

Verbs which use être as their verbe auxiliare must agree with their subject:

1. Masculine singular - nothing changes
2. Feminine singular subject - add an 'e' to the past participle (elle est sortie)
3. Masculine plural subject - add 's' to the past participle (ils sont arrivés)
4. Feminine plural subject - add 'es' to the past participle (elles sont nées)

La forme négative:

- Put 'ne' before verbe auxiliare and 'pas' after it eg. je ne suis pas monté dans ma chambre.

Le passé composé des verbes pronominaux

Les verbes pronominaux need two pronouns (je me repose). **All verbes pronominaux use être as their auxiliary verb.**

- This means that their past participles need to agree with the subject of the sentence (elle s'est lavée)
- The past participles of les verbes pronominaux are formed as normal (-er verbs - é, -ir verbs - i, -re verbs - u)
- Example (se coucher) - je me suis couché, je me suis couchée etc.

La forme négative des verbes pronominaux

Here is an example of where the 'ne' and 'pas' are placed:

- Je ne me suis pas amusé.

L'imparfait

This tense is used to describe:

- What was happening when... (I was going to a party when I saw the accident)
- What used to happen in the past (we used to spend Christmas with my cousins)
- What someone or something was like (the present was great)
- Feelings in the past (he was happy with the present)
- An opinion in the past (it was fabulous)

To form l'imparfait (it is the same for -er, -ir and -re verbs):

- Go to the nous form of the present tense of the verb
- Take away the nous and the -ons
- Now add the imparfait endings to what's left

The endings are:

Je	-ais
Tu	-ais
Il	-ait
Elle	-ait

Nous	-ions
Vous	-iez
Ils	-aient
Elles	-aient

Examples (fêter = to celebrate):

- Je fêtais
- Il fêtait
- Vous fêtiez

There is one exception to these rules. When using être, the imparfait stem is 'ét-' and the imparfait endings are the same:

J'	étais	I was/used to be
Tu	étais	You were/used to be
Il	était	He was/used to be
Elle	était	She was/used to be
Nous	étions	We were/used to be
Vous	étiez	You were/used to be
Ils	étaient	They were/used to be
Elles	étaient	They were/used to be

*The imperfect tense (**l'imparfait**) has two primary uses: - to describe on-going actions and states of being in the past - to state habitual actions in the past.

Narration: Passé Composé vs. Imparfait

The passé composé is used in French in answer the question 'What happened?' On the other hand, you will usually put a verb in the imparfait if it answers the question 'What was going on when something else happened?'

- Generally, the passé composé is used to relate events while the imparfait is used to describe what was going on in the past, states of being in the past, or past habits.

All this takes on special importance in narration of past actions, when both tenses often occur in the same story.

- Narrating a story entails both describing a setting (habitual actions, atmosphere, places and people) and recounting a plot or a series of events, actions, changes of feelings or thoughts.
- In general, all stories have a well delineated plot line of events, the foreground, and a background of supporting details and description. Some literary texts might subvert this rule but this is out of a conscious effort to surprise or unsettle their reader.

Plus-que-parfait

The pluperfect (**le plus-que-parfait**) is formed with the auxiliary in the imparfait followed by the past participle of the verb. The choice of auxiliary, **être** or **avoir** , is the same as for the passé composé (the Alamo of être applies).

- *Plus-que-parfait* = auxiliary in the imparfait + past participle of verb
 - J'avais mangé = I had eaten
 - J'étais allé(e) = I had gone

In past narration, the plus-que-parfait is used to express an **action which precedes another past action** or moment.

- In other words, the action in the plus-que-parfait is prior to another past action or moment.
- In English the plus-que-parfait is indicated by **had + past participle**.
- In affirmative sentences in French, it is often, but not always, accompanied by the adverb **déjà** (already).

Passé Simple

The **passé simple** is a past tense reserved primarily for written discourse. It may, however, be used in very formal spoken language, such as presidential addresses, sermons, or news broadcasting. It has traditionally been used only for events completed in the distant, historical past; however, twentieth century writers sometimes use it for stylistic effect.

The passé simple will generally be translated into English by a preterit, that is, the simple past: 'I talked'.

But like the passé composé, the passé simple is used in French only to mention changes and events, while the imparfait remains the tense used for describing the setting, the atmosphere, an ongoing state of mind, or the general situation.

Endings for -er verbs:

- -ai
- -as
- -a
- -âmes
- -âtes
- -èrent

Endings for -ir and -re verbs:

- -is
- -is
- -it
- -îmes
- -îtes
- -irent

irregular verbs: avoir, être, faire

These verbs are irregular in the **passé simple**.

Avoir:

- J'eus
- Tue us
- Il/elle/on eut
- Nous eûmes
- Vous eûtes
- Ils/ells eurent

Être:

- Je fus
- Tu fus
- Il/elle/on fut

- Nous fumes
- Vous fûtes
- Ils/ells furent

Faire:

- Je fis
- Tu fis
- Il/elle/on fit
- Nous fîmes
- Vous fîtes
- Ils/ells firent

Le Futur Proche (future tense)

To make le futur proche, you use the présent of the irregular verb aller (to go) + the infinitive of the verb you need to use.

Aller:

Je vais (I go/ I am going)	Nous allons
Tu vas	Vous allez
Il va	Ils vont
Elle va	Elles vont

Example:

- Je vais manger une quiche = I am going to eat a quiche.
- Nous allons manger une quiche = we are going to eat a quiche

Le Futur Simple

This tense is used to say what you will do tomorrow or later on, or for any action/ event that will happen.

To form this tense:

- For -er and -ir verbs you add the future endings to the infinitive (jouerai, finirai)
- For -re verbs you keep the 'r' of the infinitive but drop the 'e' and then add the future endings (vendrai)
- The endings are:

Je	-ai
Tu	-as
Il	-a
Elle	-a
Nous	-ons
Vous	-ez
Ils	-ont
Elles	-ont

- Examples: je téléphonerai, je remplirai, j'attendrai

The 'simple' future is so-named because it is a one-word tense. In other words, its formation is simple because there is no auxiliary. The stem of the simple future always ends with the letter **r**, which is the characteristic sound of the future and conditional tenses.

*See Irregular Verb document for Futur Simple irregular verbs.

Futur proche vs. Futur simple

The two tenses are virtually interchangeable in most contexts, especially in spoken French. So what is the difference?

- In general, the two tenses differ in their level of formality; the future proche is used in more informal contexts and the simple future in more formal contexts.
- Thus, the futur proche is primarily used in speech and less frequently in writing.
- According to traditional grammars, the two tenses also differ in their relative distance to the present moment.
- The future proche, also called the futur immédiat, typically refers to a time very close to the present moment, i.e, the near or immediate future.
- The futur simple, on the other hand, is often used for events in the more distant future.
- Because the futur simple is associated with distant future events, it often takes on a detached, objective quality making it the preferred tense for future events that represent general truths.

L'imperatif (the imperative)

When you want to give someone an order, an instruction or advice, you use the imperative form of the verb.

The imperative with 'tu' and 'vous':

- Find the second person singular (tu form) or the second person plural (vous form) of the verb in the present tense.
- Drop the words tu and vous and what you have left is the imperative.
- With all -er verbs, you also take away the final 's' from the 2nd person singular. This rule applies to irregular verbs too (except avoir and être).

Verb group	Present	Imperative
-er verbs (including aller)	Tu parles	Parle!
	Vous regardez	Regardez!

Verb group	Present	Imperative
-ir verbs (including irreg.)	Tu finis	Finis!
	Vous lisez	Lisez!

Verb group	Present	Imperative
-re verbs (including irreg.)	Tu attends	Attends!
	Vous faites	Faites!

The imperative with 'nous':

- This is used when you want to translate 'let's do something' eg. Let's play football!
- To make this form you take the nous form of the present tense of the verb and simply drop the 'nous'.

Verb group	Present	Imperative
-er verbs	Nous parlons	Parlons!
-ir verbs	Nous finissons	Finissons!
-re verbs	Nous attendons	Attendons!
Irreg. verbs	Nous lisons	Lisons!

Irregular verbs in l'imperatif:

- Avoir: Aie! / Ayons! / Ayez!
- Être: Sois! / Soyons! / Soyez!

Regular Subjunctive

The subjunctive is one of four moods in French (indicative, imperative, subjunctive and conditional).

- A mood is a grammatical term which helps categorize verb tenses. The subjunctive mood is used more frequently in French than in English. It has two tenses: present and past.
- It expresses several concepts, such as a wish, hope, or doubt, as well as an obligation or a necessity. One such expression which is always followed by the subjunctive is **il faut que** (it is necessary that ...).

-er, -re, and -ir verbs

The subjunctive endings are the same for all verbs:

- **-e , -es , -e , -ions , -iez , -ent.**

For most verbs, the subjunctive mood is formed by dropping the **-ent** ending from the third person plural of the present indicative and adding the subjunctive endings.

- Note the similarities between the present indicative and the present subjunctive of **-er** verbs. This is due to the fact that the same stem is used for the subjunctive and the present indicative; the endings are also identical except for the **nous** and **vous** forms.

Because the subjunctive occurs in subordinate clauses, the subordinating conjunction **que** is usually included as part of the paradigm for the subjunctive forms.

- Il faut qu'on finisse avant midi = we must end before midday

Irregular Subjunctive

Verbs with two stems (eg. Venir)

There are several categories of irregular subjunctive formations. The first of these categories concerns verbs with two stems in the subjunctive.

- These verbs have a similar two-stem irregularity in the present indicative (for example, 'ils **vienn** ent' BUT 'nous **ven** ns').
- The **boot stem** (for the forms je, tu, il / elle, ils / elles) is the third person plural of the present indicative, the very same as the stem for regular formation of the subjunctive.
- The first person plural of the present indicative provides the **second stem** for the 'nous' and 'vous' forms of the subjunctive. The regular subjunctive endings are added to these two stems.

Here is a list of the most frequent verbs with two stems in the subjunctive:

- Aller: que j'aïlle, que nous allions
- Devoir: que je doive, que nous devions
- Venir: que je vienne, que nous venions
- Recevoir: que je reçoive, que nous recevions
- Vouloir: que je veuille, que nous voulions

Irregular verbs: avoir and être

Avoir and **être** are highly irregular in the subjunctive and must be memorized. Note that the 'nous' and 'vous' forms are spelled with the letter **y** (instead of the **i** characteristic of the regular subjunctive endings).

Avoir:

- Que j'aie
- Que tu aies
- Qu'il/elle/on ait
- Que nous ayons
- Que vous ayez
- Qu'ils/ells aient

Être:

- Que je sois
- Que tu sois
- Qu'il/elle/on soit
- Que nous soyons
- Que vous soyez

- Qu'ils/ells soient

irregular verbs: faire, savoir, pouvoir

The verbs **faire** , **savoir** and **pouvoir** have completely irregular stems. The endings, however, are regular.

Faire:

- Que je fasse
- Que tu fasses
- Qu'il/elle/on fasse
- Que nous fassions
- Que vous fassiez
- Qu'ils/ells fassent

Savoir:

- Que je sache

Pouvoir:

- Que je puisse

Subjunctive Usage

The subjunctive is required **after** impersonal expressions of necessity and obligation. An impersonal expression is any expression introduced by the impersonal pronoun **il** , usually translated into English by 'it'. One of the most frequent is **il** faut que**** (it is necessary to).

- When the main clause uses **il faut que** , the verb of the dependent clause which follows must be in the subjunctive. Note that there are always two different subjects in the two clauses.
- Eg: il faut que tu choisisses le vin

Below are other common impersonal expressions of obligation and necessity. Note that they are all followed by the conjunction **que** which introduces a subordinate clause with a verb in the subjunctive:

- Il est important que...
- Il est nécessaire que...
- Il est essentiel que...
- Il est inévitable que...

Will and desire

The subjunctive is used in dependent clauses after expressions of will and desire whenever there are two different subjects in the two clauses linked by the subordinating conjunction **que**. Here is a list of common verbs expressing will and desire:

- Aimer que...
- Préférer que..
- Désirer que...
- Souhaiter que...
- Vouloir que...

emotion

The subjunctive is used after expressions of emotion and opinion. Remember that the subjunctive is found in the subordinate clause of sentences that contain a change of subject from the main clause to the subordinate clause.

Here is a list of common expressions of emotion with which the subjunctive is found in the subordinate clause:

- **être content(e) que**, to be happy that
- **être heureux(/se) que**, to be happy that
- **être ravi(e) que**, to be delighted that

- **être étonné(e) que**, to be surprised that
- **être mécontent(e) que**, to be unhappy that
- **être malheureux(/se) que**, to be unhappy that
- **être triste que**, to be sad that
- **être surpris(e) que**, to be surprised that

Past Subjunctive

Formation

The past subjunctive resembles the *passé composé* in that it is formed with the present subjunctive of the appropriate auxiliary verb (**avoir** or **être**) and the past participle of the main verb.

- Rire: que j'aie ri, que nous ayons ri
- Sortir: que je sois sorti(e), que nous soyons sorti(e)s

Le conditionnel

This tense is used to say:

- What would happen (I would go with you, if I had the money)
- What you would like to do (I would like to go to the cinema with you)
- Saying what you could/would be able to do (We could visit my grandparents)
- Asking politely for something (could you send me a brochure?)

The endings are:

	Je	-ais
Tu		-ais
Il		-ait
Elle		-ait
Nous		-ions
Vous		-iez
Ils		-aient
Elles		-aient

Examples:

- Je parlerais (I would speak)
- Je finirais (I would finish)
- J'apprendrais (I would learn)
- J'irais avec toi, si j'avais l'argent (I would go with you, if I had the money)

*See Irregular Verbs file to see the irregular verbs in the conditional tense.

Past Conditional

The past conditional represents, as its name implies, the past of the present conditional mood. In French, the past conditional is called **le passé du conditionnel** or **le conditionnel antérieur**. Both the present and past conditional express hypothetical situations or conditions.

Formation:

The past conditional is a compound tense, i.e. it has two parts, an auxiliary and the past participle.

- The past conditional is formed with the conditional of the auxiliary (either **avoir** or **être**) and the past participle of the main verb.
- *Past conditional = auxiliary in the conditional + past participle*

Eg: I would have said (dire= to say)

- J'aurais dit

In the past conditional (as with the passé composé), you have to choose between **avoir** and **être** as the auxiliary.

- While most verbs use **avoir** as an auxiliary, pronominal verbs and verbs of movement generally use **être**.
- Just as for the passé composé with **être**, in the past conditional with **être**, the past participle agrees in gender and in number with the subject.

Eg: I would have left (partir = to leave)

- Je serais parti(e)

Uses:

The past conditional is found in **si** clauses with the pluperfect. This is because **si** clauses with the pluperfect also describe events that did not occur, or rather conditions which were not fulfilled so that the event in the past conditional could occur.

'Si' Clauses

Si clauses (**if** clauses in English) indicate possibilities, which may or may not become reality. They refer to the present, past, and future. These conditional sentences have two parts: the condition, or **si** clause, and the main or result clause which indicates what will happen if the condition of the **si** clause is met.

Si + Present:

- Result = present/future/imperative
- Eg: si tu veux, tu peux répondre aux questions

Si + imparfait:

- Result = conditional
- Eg: Si vous étiez un fruit, lequel choisiriez-vous? (If you were a fruit, which one would you choose?)

Si + Plus-que-parfait:

- Result = past conditional
- Eg: Si j'étais né à College Station, j'aurais préféré Texas A&M à UT (If I had been born in College Station, I would have preferred Texas A&M over UT)

The main French irregular verbs are on the other file, and you should learn these, along with all the above rules, all to help you with your written expression.

All the irregulars include:

- aller (to go)
- avoir (to have)
- boire (to drink)
- comprendre (to understand)
- connaître (to know- people/places)
- devoir (to have to)
- dire (to say/tell)
- écrire (to write)
- envoyer (to send)
- être (to be)
- faire (to make/do)
- lire (to read)
- mettre (to put)
- partir (to leave)
- pleuvoir (to rain)
- pouvoir (to be able to)
- prendre (to take)
- recevoir (to get/receive)
- savoir (to know - information/knowledge)
- sortir (to go out)
- tenir (to hold on)
- venir (to come)
- voir (to see)
- vouloir (to want)