



# SPEAK FRENCH LIKE A NATIVE

**Verbs and Tenses**

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# FRENCH VERBS AND TENSES

## Construction and Conjugations

### Introduction

Verbs are words that describe an **action** in a sentence. In the sentence *I eat cake*, the verb is *eat*.

Verb endings change with every person and can be **regular** (they follow a set pattern) or **irregular** (they do whatever they want). Sadly, if they fall into the second category, you will have to learn them by heart as they are not predictable in any way.

### **JARGON ALERT! Read this to understand all about verbs.**

**Ex: PARLER means TO TALK.** This form of the verb is called the **Infinitive**, which simply means it's the verb with the TO in front. The TO bit in English is equivalent to the ER, IR or RE bit on the end of the French verb.

The bit that is left once you have removed the ending is called the STEM. So PARL is the stem for PARLER.

In English you say *He talks*, not *He to talk*. So it's the same in French. You have to remove the ending of the verb (the TO) and stick another ending to suit the person the verb refers to. Changing the ending of the verb this way is called **conjugating** the verb.

Verbs are always laid out in the same logical order after each pronoun, from the singular to the collective.

A **pronoun** is a word that describes a person (I, you, they) and that goes before the verb.

The French pronouns are:

French Pronouns	Meaning in English
<b>Je</b> (changes to <i>J'</i> when the verb starts with a vowel, such as <i>J'aime = I like</i> )	I
<b>Tu</b> (familiar)	You
<b>Il</b>	He
<b>Elle</b>	She
<b>On</b>	Someone or We (spoken We)
<b>Nous</b>	We (written We)
<b>Vous</b> (formal or collective)	You
<b>Ils</b> (only used for men or for a mixed group)	They
<b>Elles</b> (only used for women)	They

## 1. Present Tense – Le Présent

It is used to describe what you generally do or what you are doing right now. Note that in French we do not differentiate between the two, unlike in English.

- **For Regular verbs**, take the stem of the verb and change the ending according to the person. There are 3 main groups of regular verbs.

**Group 1. End in ER, as in PARLER.** The stem is PARL- (chop off the ER bit), and the endings are always the same for all ER verbs (shown below in orange).

Luckily for you, ER verbs are the most numerous and they are the most straightforward to conjugate.

PARLER	TO TALK or TO SPEAK
Je parle	I talk
Tu parles	You talk
Il/Elle/On parle	He/She/We or Someone talks
Nous parlons	We talk
Vous parlez	You talk
Ils/Elles parlent (silent -ent)	They talk

## Group 2. End in IR, as in FINIR, SORTIR and OUVRIR.

Those three main categories of IR verbs take different endings (shown below in orange).

**The FINIR type.** The stem of FINIR is FIN.

FINIR	TO FINISH
Je finis	I finish
Tu finis	You finish
Il/Elle/On finit	He/She/We or Someone finishes
Nous finissons	We finish
Vous finissez	You finish
Ils/Elles finissent (silent -ent)	They finish

**The SORTIR type.** The stem of SORTIR is SORT, but it loses its T with Je and Tu (don't ask why. It's French, therefore it's always a bit random).

SORTIR	TO GO OUT
Je sors	I go out
Tu sors	You go out
Il/Elle/On sort	He/She/We or Someone goes out
Nous sortons	We go out
Vous sortez	You go out
Ils/Elles sortent (silent -ent)	They go out

**The OUVRIR type.** This applies to verbs ending in -VRIR and -FRIR. The stem of OUVRIR is OUVR and it behaves exactly like an -ER verb.

OUVRIR	TO OPEN
J'ouvre	I open
Tu ouvres	You open
Il/Elle/On ouvre	He/She/We or Someone opens
Nous ouvrons	We open
Vous ouvrez	You open
Ils/Elles ouvrent (silent -ent)	They open

PS: Technically, Sortir and Ouvrir belong to the 3rg group, which is a bit of a “anything goes” category, but I tried to simplify as much as I could in this booklet because its aim is to make conjugations as user-friendly as possible.

**Group 3. End in RE, as in VENDRE.** The stem is VEND and the endings are shown in orange below:

VENDRE	TO SELL
Je vend <b>s</b>	I sell
Tu vend <b>s</b>	You sell
Il/Elle/On vend	He/She/We or Someone sells
Nous vend <b>ons</b>	We sell
Vous vend <b>ez</b>	You sell
Ils/Elles vend <b>ent</b> (silent –ent)	They sell

- **Irregular verbs** - the most common, everyday verbs are all irregular. They mutate faster than the flu virus and will drive you crazy unless you learn them by heart. They are: être, avoir, aller, faire, prendre, savoir, devoir, venir, vouloir, voir, envoyer, recevoir, falloir (as in *Il faut*), mourir, tenir.

Here are the main seven:

ETRE	TO BE
Je suis	I am
Tu es	You are
Il/Elle/On est	He/She/We or Someone is
Nous sommes	We are
Vous êtes	You are
Ils/Elles sont	They are

AVOIR	TO HAVE
J'ai	I have
Tu as	You have
Il/Elle/On a	He/She/We or Someone has
Nous avons	We have
Vous avez	You have
Ils/Elles ont	They have

<b>FAIRE</b>	<b>TO DO or TO MAKE</b>
Je fais	I do/make
Tu fais	You do/make
Il/Elle/On fait	He/She/We or Someone does/makes
Nous faisons	We do/make
Vous faites	You do/make
Ils/Elles font	They do/make

<b>ALLER</b>	<b>TO GO</b>
Je vais	I go
Tu vas	You go
Il/Elle/On va	He/She/We or Someone goes
Nous allons	We go
Vous allez	You go
Ils/Elles vont	They go

<b>POUVOIR</b>	<b>TO BE ABLE TO, CAN</b>
Je peux	I can
Tu peux	You can
Il/Elle/On peut	He/She/We or Someone can
Nous pouvons	We can
Vous pouvez	You can
Ils/Elles peuvent (silent –ent)	They can

<b>PRENDRE</b>	<b>TO TAKE</b>
Je prends	I take
Tu prends	You take
Il/Elle/On prend	He/She/We or Someone takes
Nous prenons	We take
Vous prenez	You take
Ils/Elles prennent (silent –ent)	They take

<b>VENIR</b>	<b>TO COME (over)</b>
Je viens	I come (over)
Tu viens	You come (over)

Il/Elle/On vient	He/She/We or Someone comes (over)
Nous venons	We come (over)
Vous venez	You come (over)
Ils/Elles viennent (silent –ent)	They come (over)

- **Reflexive verbs** - These are alien to the English language but we LOVE them. They randomly pepper our language but as everything that looks illogical in French, there is a reason we use them.

**They are used to specify who the action refers to, or to mean “each other”.**

**Ex: Je me brosse les dents = I brush my teeth (literally: I brush myself the teeth).**

**On se dispute = We are arguing (with each other).**

It is a way of specifying that you are doing something to yourself as opposed to doing it to someone else. Compare it with:

**Ex: Je brosse les dents de ma fille = I brush my daughter’s teeth.**

**On dispute notre fille = We are scolding our daughter.**

See? When you are French, it’s better to over- than under-specify.

Reflexive verbs are made up of two bits: a **reflexive pronoun** (myself, yourself, themselves, in orange) and the **verb** itself.

SE LEVER	TO GET (oneself) UP
Je <b>me</b> lève	I get <b>myself</b> up
Tu <b>te</b> lèves	You get <b>yourself</b> up
Il/Elle/On <b>se</b> lève	He/She/We or Someone gets <b>oneself, himself, herself, ourselves</b> up
Nous <b>nous</b> levons	We get <b>ourselves</b> up
Vous <b>vous</b> levez	You get <b>yourself, yourselves</b> up
Ils/Elles <b>se</b> lèvent (silent –ent)	They get <b>themselves</b> up

## Handy sentences/expressions

Present tense	Meaning
Il y a	There is / There are
C’est	It is

Ca va	It's OK
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## 2. Future Tense – Le Futur

It is used to talk about what you **WILL** do in the future.

- Note that just like in English, we often use the immediate future with **GOING TO** instead. It saves us thinking about what the future ending for the verbs are, and it is easy to construct if you remember **ALLER**.

**Ex: Je vais partir demain = I am going to leave tomorrow.**

- Now the actual future tense is when you use **WILL**, as in

**Ex: Je partirai demain = I will leave tomorrow.**

### Regular verbs

The future is actually an interesting tense, as the stem of the verb is actually the whole infinitive (the verb + the **TO** bit). It works the same with **ER**, **IR** and **RE** verbs.

**Ex: Parler = To talk**

**Je parlerai = I will talk**

Here, the stem of **PARLER** is **PARLER**, then you stick your future endings to that, which is why you end up with **Je parlerai = I will talk**.

**The WILL is the equivalent to the French ending, therefore you can't separate it from the verb. So please don't ask me the same old question "But how do you say I will??" If you do, I WILL FIND YOU AND I WILL KILL YOU (only joking, of course, but only just).**

<b>PARLER</b>	<b>TO TALK or TO SPEAK</b>
Je parlerai	I will talk

Tu parler <b>as</b>	You <b>will</b> talk
Il/Elle/On parler <b>a</b>	He/She/We or Someone <b>will</b> talk
Nous parler <b>ons</b>	We <b>will</b> talk
Vous parler <b>ez</b>	You <b>will</b> talk
Ils/Elles parler <b>ont</b>	They <b>will</b> talk

FINIR	TO FINISH
Je finir <b>ai</b>	I <b>will</b> finish
Tu finiras	You <b>will</b> finish
Il/Elle/On finira	He/She/We or Someone <b>will</b> finish
Nous finir <b>ons</b>	We <b>will</b> finish
Vous finirez	You <b>will</b> finish
Ils/Elles finir <b>ont</b>	They <b>will</b> finish

VENDRE (sheds the E)	TO SELL
Je vendrai	I <b>will</b> sell
Tu vendras	You <b>will</b> sell
Il/Elle/On vendra	He/She/We or Someone <b>will</b> sell
Nous vendr <b>ons</b>	We <b>will</b> sell
Vous vendr <b>ez</b>	You <b>will</b> sell
Ils/Elles vendr <b>ont</b>	They <b>will</b> sell

## Irregular verbs

As before, the everyday verbs are the most troublesome. Let's use the same seven as for the present tense.

**In this case, the endings are regular, but the stems aren't.** Weird, or what?

ETRE – Stem is SER	TO BE
Je serai	I will be
Tu seras	You will be
Il/Elle/On sera	He/She/We or Someone will be

Nous serons	We will be
Vous serez	You will be
Ils/Elles seront	They will be

<b>AVOIR – Stem is AUR</b>	<b>TO HAVE</b>
J'aurai	I will have
Tu auras	You will have
Il/Elle/On aura	He/She/We or Someone will have
Nous aurons	We will have
Vous aurez	You will have
Ils/Elles auront	They will have

<b>FAIRE – Stem is FER</b>	<b>TO DO or TO MAKE</b>
Je ferai	I will do
Tu feras	You will do
Il/Elle/On fera	He/She/We or Someone will do
Nous ferons	We will do
Vous ferez	You will do
Ils/Elles feront	They will do

<b>ALLER – Stem is IR</b>	<b>TO GO</b>
J'irai	I will go
Tu iras	You will go
Il/Elle/On ira	He/She/We or Someone will go
Nous irons	We will go
Vous irez	You will go
Ils/Elles iront	They will go

<b>POUVOIR – Stem is POURR</b>	<b>TO BE ABLE TO, CAN</b>
Je pourrai	I will be able to
Tu pourras	You will be able to
Il/Elle/On pourra	He/She/We or Someone will be able to
Nous pourrons	We will be able to
Vous pourrez	You will be able to

Ils/Elles pourront	They will be able to
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<b>PRENDRE – Stem is PRENDR (regular)</b>	<b>TO TAKE</b>
Je prendrai	I will take
Tu prendras	You will take
Il/Elle/On prendra	He/She/We or Someone will take
Nous prendrons	We will take
Vous prendrez	You will take
Ils/Elles prendront	They will take

<b>VENIR – Stem is VIENDR</b>	<b>TO COME (over)</b>
Je viendrai	I will come (over)
Tu viendras	You will come
Il/Elle/On viendra	He/She/We or Someone will come
Nous viendrons	We will come
Vous viendrez	You will come
Ils/Elles viendront	They will come

## Handy sentences/expressions

<b>Future tense</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Il y aura	There will be
Ce sera	It will be
Ça ira	It will be OK

### 3. Conditional Tense – Le Conditionnel

It is used like in English, to talk about something you **WOULD** do.

It works in exactly the same way as the future (even irregular verbs have the same stem), but the endings are slightly different.

#### Regular verbs

PARLER	TO TALK or TO SPEAK
Je parlerais	I would talk
Tu parlerais	You would talk
Il/Elle/On parlerait	He/She/We or Someone would talk
Nous parlerions	We would talk
Vous parleriez	You would talk
Ils/Elles parleraient (silent –ent)	They would talk

FINIR	TO FINISH
Je finirais	I would finish
Tu finirais	You would finish
Il/Elle/On finirait	He/She/We or Someone would finish
Nous finirions	We would finish
Vous finiriez	You would finish
Ils/Elles finiraient (silent –ent)	They would finish

VENDRE (sheds the E)	TO SELL
Je vendrais	I would sell
Tu vendrais	You would sell
Il/Elle/On vendrait	He/She/We or Someone would sell

Nous vendrions	We would sell
Vous vendriez	You would sell
Ils/Elles vendraient (silent –ent)	They would sell

Again, NEVER ask me how to translate I WOULD. I just can't, unless you tell me what verb you want to use after it.

## Irregular verbs

ETRE – Stem is SER	TO BE
Je serais	I would be
Tu serais	You would be
Il/Elle/On serait	He/She/We or Someone would be
Nous serions	We would be
Vous seriez	You would be
Ils/Elles seraient (silent –ent)	They would be

AVOIR – Stem is AUR	TO HAVE
J'aurais	I would have
Tu aurais	You would have
Il/Elle/On aurait	He/She/We or Someone would have
Nous aurions	We would have
Vous auriez	You would have
Ils/Elles auraient (silent –ent)	They would have

FAIRE – Stem is FER	TO DO or TO MAKE
Je ferais	I would do
Tu ferais	You would do
Il/Elle/On ferait	He/She/We or Someone would do
Nous ferions	We would do
Vous feriez	You would do
Ils/Elles feraient (silent –ent)	They would do

<b>ALLER – Stem is IR</b>	<b>TO GO</b>
J'irais	I would go
Tu irais	You would go
Il/Elle/On irait	He/She/We or Someone would go
Nous irions	We would go
Vous iriez	You would go
Ils/Elles iraient (silent –ent)	They would go

<b>POUVOIR – Stem is POURR</b>	<b>TO BE ABLE TO, CAN</b>
Je pourrais	I would be able to
Tu pourrais	You would be able to
Il/Elle/On pourrait	He/She/We or Someone would be able to
Nous pourrions	We would be able to
Vous pourriez	You would be able to
Ils/Elles pourraient (silent –ent)	They would be able to

<b>PRENDRE – Stem is PRENDR (regular)</b>	<b>TO TAKE</b>
Je prendrais	I would take
Tu prendrais	You would take
Il/Elle/On prendrait	He/She/We or Someone would take
Nous prendrions	We would take
Vous prendriez	You would take
Ils/Elles prendraient (silent –ent)	They would take

<b>VENIR – Stem is VIENDR</b>	<b>TO COME (OVER)</b>
Je viendrais	I would come
Tu viendrais	You would come
Il/Elle/On viendrait	He/She/We or Someone would come
Nous viendrions	We would come
Vous viendriez	You would come
Ils/Elles viendraient	They would come

## Handy sentences/expressions

Conditional tense	Meaning
Il y aurait	There would be
Ce serait	It would be
Ca irait	It would be OK

## 4. Perfect Tense – Le Passé Composé

It's the main past tense we use when talking about our day, our weekend, our holiday, etc.

IT IS ALWAYS MADE UP OF TWO PARTS: the verb ETRE or AVOIR and the **Past Participle**, which is the ED bit at the end of English verbs like I talk**ed**.

- Either **AVOIR + Past participle**, as in the following example:

**J'ai mangé = I ate / I have eaten.**

- Or **ETRE + Past Participle**, as in the following examples:

**Je suis sortie = I went out / I have gone out.**

**Je me suis levé tard = I got (myself) up late.**

Most verbs in the past tense will use AVOIR + Past Participle, except 15 motion verbs (list to follow) and all the reflexive verbs.

Here are the 15 motion verbs that use ETRE in the past:

Infinitive	English	Past Participle	English
<b>Aller</b>	To go	Allé(e)	Went/have gone
<b>Rester</b>	To stay	Resté(e)	Stayed/have stayed
<b>Venir</b>	To come	Venu(e)	Came/have come
<b>Devenir</b>	To become	Devenu(e)	Became/have become
<b>Arriver</b>	To arrive	Arrivé(e)	Arrived/have arrived

<b>Partir</b>	To leave	Parti(e)	Left/have left
<b>Sortir</b>	To go out	Sorti(e)	Went out/have gone out
<b>Entrer</b>	To enter/get in	Entré(e)	Entered/Have entered
<b>Rentrer</b>	To go/come back	Rentré(e)	Went back/have gone back
<b>Monter</b>	To go up	Monté(e)	Went up/have gone up
<b>Descendre</b>	To go down	Descendu(e)	Went down/have gone down
<b>Retourner</b>	To return	Retourné(e)	Returned/have returned
<b>Tomber</b>	To fall	Tombé(e)	Fell/fallen
<b>Naître</b>	To be born	Né(e)	Was born/have been born
<b>Mourir</b>	To die	Mort(e)	Died/have died

**For Regular verbs**, ie verbs ending in ER, IR and RE, it follows a set pattern:

Past participle of ER verbs is **é** Donner (to give) becomes donn**é** (given)

Past participle of IR verbs is **i** Finir (to finish) becomes fini (finished)

Past participle of RE verbs is **u** Vendre (to sell) becomes vend**u** (sold)

### ➤ **AVOIR + Past participle – for “normal” verbs**

<b>PARLER</b>	<b>TO TALK or TO SPEAK</b>
J'ai parl <b>é</b>	I talk <b>ed</b> / have talk <b>ed</b>
Tu as parl <b>é</b>	You talk <b>ed</b> / have talk <b>ed</b>
Il/Elle/On a parl <b>é</b>	He/She/We or Someone talk <b>ed</b> / has talk <b>ed</b>
Nous avons parl <b>é</b>	We talk <b>ed</b> / have talk <b>ed</b>
Vous avez parl <b>é</b>	You talk <b>ed</b> / have talk <b>ed</b>
Ils/Elles ont parl <b>é</b>	They talk <b>ed</b> / have talk <b>ed</b>

<b>FINIR</b>	<b>TO FINISH</b>
J'ai fini <b>i</b>	I finish <b>ed</b> /have finish <b>ed</b>
Tu as fini <b>i</b>	You finish <b>ed</b> / have finish <b>ed</b>
Il/Elle/On a fini <b>i</b>	He/She/We or Someone finish <b>ed</b> / has finish <b>ed</b>
Nous avons fini <b>i</b>	We finish <b>ed</b> / have finish <b>ed</b>
Vous avez fini <b>i</b>	You finish <b>ed</b> / have finish <b>ed</b>
Ils/Elles ont fini <b>i</b>	They finish <b>ed</b> / have finish <b>ed</b>

VENDRE	TO SELL
J'ai vend <u>u</u>	I sold/have sold
Tu as vend <u>u</u>	You sold / have sold
Il/Elle/On a vend <u>u</u>	He/She/We or Someone sold / has sold
Nous avons vend <u>u</u>	We sold / have sold
Vous avez vend <u>u</u>	You sold / have sold
Ils/Elles ont vend <u>u</u>	They sold / have sold

➤ **ETRE + Past Participle – for motion or reflexive verbs.**

Notice that on this occasion, the ending has to agree with whether the person who is doing the action is a man or a woman, and whether there is one or several of them.

BUT if you are only learning French to speak it, there is no difference in sound anyway, as all the extra letters are silent, so don't worry about it.

➤ **With a motion verb**

MONTER	TO GO UP or Upstairs
Je suis mont <u>é(e)</u>	I went up / have gone up
Tu es mont <u>é(e)</u>	You went up / have gone up
Il est mont <u>é</u>	He went up / has gone up
Elle est mont <u>ée</u>	She went up / has gone up
On est mont <u>é(e)s</u>	We went up / have gone up
Nous sommes mont <u>é(e)s</u>	We went up / have gone up
Vous êtes mont <u>é(e)s</u>	You went up / have gone up
Ils sont mont <u>és</u>	They went up / have gone up
Elles sont mont <u>ées</u>	They went up / have gone up

➤ **With a reflexive verb**

SE LEVER	TO GET (Oneself) UP
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Je me suis levé(e)	I got (myself) up
Tu t'es levé(e)	You got (yourself) up
Il s'est levé	He got (himself) up
Elle s'est levée	She got (herself) up
On s'est levé(e)s	We/Someone got (ourselves) up
Nous nous sommes levé(e)s	We got (ourselves) up
Vous vous êtes levé(e)s	You got (yourself/yourselves) up
Ils se sont levés	They got (themselves) up
Elles se sont levées	They got (themselves) up

## Irregular verbs

ETRE	TO BE
J'ai été	I have been
Tu as été	You have been
Il/Elle/On a été	He/She/We or Someone has been
Nous avons été	We have been
Vous avez été	You have been
Ils/Elles ont été	They have been

AVOIR	TO HAVE
J'ai eu	I have had
Tu as eu	You have had
Il/Elle/On a eu	He/She/We or Someone has had
Nous avons eu	We have had
Vous avez eu	You have had
Ils/Elles ont eu	They have had

FAIRE	TO DO or TO MAKE
J'ai fait	I have done/did
Tu as fait	You have done/did
Il/Elle/On a fait	He/She/We or Someone has done/did
Nous avons fait	We have done/did
Vous avez fait	You have done/did
Ils/Elles ont fait	They have done/did

ALLER	TO GO
Je suis allé(e)	I have gone/went
Tu es allé(e)	You have gone/went
Il/Elle/On est allé(e)(s)	He/She/We or Someone has gone/went
Nous sommes allé(e)s	We have gone/went
Vous êtes allé(e)s	You have gone/went
Ils/Elles sont allé(e)s	They have gone/went

POUVOIR	TO BE ABLE TO, CAN
J'ai pu	I was able to
Tu as pu	You were able to
Il/Elle/On a pu	He/She/We or Someone was able to
Nous avons pu	We were able to
Vous avez pu	You were able to
Ils/Elles ont pu	They were able to

PRENDRE	TO TAKE (how to)
J'ai pris	I have taken
Tu as pris	You have taken
Il/Elle/On a pris	He/She/We or Someone has taken
Nous avons pris	We have taken
Vous avez pris	You have taken
Ils/Elles ont pris	They have taken

VENIR	TO COME (over)
Je suis venu(e)	I have come (over)/they came (over)
Tu es venu(e)	You have come
Il/Elle/On est venu(e)(s)	He/She/We or Someone has come
Nous sommes venu(e)s	We have come
Vous êtes venu(e)s	You have come
Ils/Elles sont venu(e)s	They have come

## Handy sentences/expressions

Perfect tense	Meaning
Il y a eu	There was/were OR There has/have been
Ca a été	It was / It has been
Ca a été (it was OK) NOTE we don't use <i>aller</i> here, but <i>être</i>	It was OK / It has been OK

## 5. Imperfect Tense – L'Imparfait

This tense is used to describe what you **USED TO DO** or **WERE DOING**.

Unlike the Perfect tense, it is made up of just the verb with an ending.

In order to find the right stem for the imperfect, take the *nous* form of the verb in the present tense (ie *Nous parlons* = *We talk*), chop off the *-ons* and add these endings:

PARLER	TO TALK or TO SPEAK
Je parlais	I <b>used to</b> talk/ <b>was</b> talking
Tu parlais	You <b>used to</b> talk
Il/Elle/On parlait	He/She/We or Someone <b>used to</b> talk
Nous parlions	We <b>used to</b> talk
Vous parliez	You <b>used to</b> talk
Ils/Elles parlaient (silent -ent)	They <b>used to</b> talk

FINIR	TO FINISH
Je finissais	I <b>used to</b> finish/ <b>was</b> finishing
Tu finissais	You <b>used to</b> finish
Il/Elle/On finissait	He/She/We or Someone <b>used to</b> finish
Nous finissions	We <b>used to</b> finish
Vous finissiez	You <b>used to</b> finish
Ils/Elles finissaient (silent -ent)	They <b>used to</b> finish

<b>SORTIR</b>	<b>TO GO OUT</b>
Je sortais	I <b>used to</b> go out/ <b>was</b> going out
Tu sortais	You <b>used to</b> go out
Il/Elle/On sortait	He/She/We or Someone <b>used to</b> go out
Nous sortions	We <b>used to</b> go out
Vous sortiez	You <b>used to</b> go out
Ils/Elles sortaient (silent -ent)	They <b>used to</b> go out

<b>VENDRE</b>	<b>TO SELL</b>
Je vendais	I <b>used to</b> sell/ <b>was</b> selling
Tu vendais	You <b>used to</b> sell
Il/Elle/On vendait	He/She/We or Someone <b>used to</b> sell
Nous vendions	We <b>used to</b> sell
Vous vendiez	You <b>used to</b> sell
Ils/Elles vendaient (silent -ent)	They <b>used to</b> sell

**The only true exception to this rule is the verb ETRE**, whose imperfect is shown below - the rest are regular in the imperfect but I have included them as well for your information:

<b>ETRE</b>	<b>TO BE</b>
J'étais	I was/used to be
Tu étais	You were/used to be
Il/Elle/On était	He/She/We or Someone was/used to be
Nous étions	We were/used to be
Vous étiez	You were/used to be
Ils/Elles étaient	They were/used to be

<b>AVOIR</b>	<b>TO HAVE</b>
J'avais	I used to have/ <b>was</b> having
Tu avais	You used to have
Il/Elle/On avait	He/She/We or Someone used to have
Nous avions	We used to have
Vous aviez	You used to have
Ils/Elles avaient	They used to have

<b>FAIRE</b>	<b>TO DO or TO MAKE</b>
Je faisais (pronounce FESAIT)	I used to do/was doing
Tu faisais	You used to do
Il/Elle/On faisait	He/She/We or Someone used to do
Nous faisions	We used to do
Vous faisiez	You used to do
Ils/Elles faisaient	They used to do

<b>ALLER</b>	<b>TO GO</b>
J'allais	I used to go/was going
Tu allais	You used to go
Il/Elle/On allait	He/She/We or Someone used to go
Nous allions	We used to go
Vous alliez	You used to go
Ils/Elles allaient	They used to go

<b>POUVOIR</b>	<b>TO BE ABLE TO, CAN</b>
Je pouvais	I could/used to be able to
Tu pouvais	You could
Il/Elle/On pouvait	He/She/We or Someone could
Nous pouvions	We could
Vous pouviez	You could
Ils/Elles pouvaient (silent –ent)	They could

<b>PRENDRE</b>	<b>TO TAKE</b>
Je prenais	I used to take/was taking
Tu prenais	You used to take
Il/Elle/On prenait	He/She/We or Someone used to take
Nous prenions	We used to take
Vous preniez	You used to take
Ils/Elles prenaient	They used to take

<b>VENIR</b>	<b>TO COME (OVER)</b>
Je venais	I used to come (over)/was coming
Tu venais	You used to come
Il/Elle/On venait	He/She/We or Someone used to come
Nous venions	We used to come
Vous veniez	You used to come
Ils/Elles venaient (silent –ent)	They used to come

## Handy sentences/expressions

Imperfect tense	Meaning
Il y avait	There was / There were
C'était	It was
Ca allait	It was OK

## 6. Subjunctive – Le Subjonctif

It is **not really a tense but a mood** – a form of the verb that is used after expressions using QUE, such as:

- **Il faut que (it is necessary to)**  
**Il faut que je te parle = I have to speak to you.**  
**Il faut que je parte = I have to go (literally means *It is necessary that I went*).**
- **Vouloir que (to want)**  
**Je veux que tu ailles te coucher tout de suite = I want you to go to bed right now.**
- **Penser que (to think that), or Croire que (to believe that) in the negative form**  
**Je ne pense pas/Je ne crois pas qu'ils soient mariés = I don't think/I don't believe they are married.**
- **Pour que (so that)**  
**Je travaille dur pour que tu puisses aller à l'université = I work hard so that you can go to uni.**
- **Jusqu'à ce que (until)**  
**Reste ici jusqu'à ce que je revienne = Stay here until I get back.**

And also: avant que (before), attendre que (to wait until), préférer que (would rather than), regretter que (to regret), à moins que (unless), croire que (to believe), il semble que (it seems), avoir peur que (to be afraid), ne pas douter que (to not doubt), craindre que (to fear), bien que (although), pourvu que (provided), le premier que (the first), le dernier que (the last), le seul que (the only).

If spoken French is all you need, then only remember those in bold and leave the rest.

**Regular verbs** (those with ER, IR or RE endings). Take the stem from the *Ils* form of the present tense and add the following endings: e, es, e, ions, iez, ent.

For **PARLER**, the *Ils* form of the present is *Ils parlent*. The stem is therefore PARL.

PARLER	TO TALK or TO SPEAK
Je parle	I talk
Tu parles	You talk
Il/Elle/On parle	He/She/We or Someone talks
Nous parlions	We talk
Vous parliez	You talk
Ils/Elles parlent	They talk

For **FINIR**, the *Ils* form of the present is *Ils finissent*. The stem is therefore FINISS.

FINIR	TO FINISH
Je finisse	I finish
Tu finisses	You finish
Il/Elle/On finisse	He/She/We or Someone finishes
Nous finissions	We finish
Vous finissiez	You finish
Ils/Elles finissent	They finish

For **VENDRE**, the *Ils* form of the present is *Ils vendent*. The stem is therefore VEND.

VENDRE	TO SELL
Je vende	I sell
Tu vendes	You sell
Il/Elle/On vende	He/She/We or Someone sells
Nous vendions	We sell
Vous vendiez	You sell
Ils/Elles vendent	They sell

**Irregular verbs** have no set pattern. The main ones to remember are: *être, avoir, aller, faire, pouvoir, prendre, savoir, venir, voir* and *vouloir*.

Here are the big seven:

<b>ETRE</b>	<b>TO BE</b>
Je sois	I am
Tu sois	You are
Il/Elle/On soit	He/She/We or Someone is
Nous soyons	We are
Vous soyez	You are
Ils/Elles soient (silent –ent)	They are

<b>AVOIR</b>	<b>TO HAVE</b>
J'aie	I have
Tu aies	You have
Il/Elle/On ait	He/She/We or Someone has
Nous ayons	We have
Vous ayez	You have
Ils/Elles aient (silent –ent)	They have

<b>FAIRE</b>	<b>TO DO or TO MAKE</b>
Je fasse	I do
Tu fasses	You do
Il/Elle/On fasse	He/She/We or Someone does
Nous fassions	We do
Vous fassiez	You do
Ils/Elles fassent (silent –ent)	They do

<b>ALLER</b>	<b>TO GO</b>
J'aile	I go
Tu ailles	You go
Il/Elle/On aille	He/She/We or Someone goes
Nous allions	We go
Vous allez	You go
Ils/Elles aillent (silent –ent)	They go

<b>POUVOIR</b>	<b>TO BE ABLE TO, CAN</b>
Je puisse	I can
Tu puisses	You can
Il/Elle/On puisse	He/She/We or Someone can
Nous puissions	We can
Vous puissiez	You can
Ils/Elles puissent (silent –ent)	They can

<b>PRENDRE</b>	<b>TO TAKE</b>
Je prene	I take
Tu prenes	You take
Il/Elle/On prene	He/She/We or Someone takes
Nous prenions	We take
Vous preniez	You take
Ils/Elles prennent (silent –ent)	They take

<b>VENIR</b>	<b>TO COME (OVER)</b>
Je vienne	I come (over)
Tu viennes	You come (over)
Il/Elle/On vienne	He/She/We or Someone comes (over)
Nous venions	We come (over)
Vous veniez	You come (over)
Ils/Elles viennent	They come (over)

# USING THE MAIN FRENCH TENSES

## Explanations and Examples

### Present Tense

- **Be aware that unlike English, French doesn't have a continuous present.** Get this into your head, as it is the most common mistake, even for advanced speakers. If you are due to take an exam, you can rest assured this will feature in it somewhere.

**Ex: Je fume = I smoke/I am smoking.**

- **If you need to emphasize continuity,** you can use the construction *Etre en train de* (to be in the process of).

**Ex: Il est en train de travailler = He is working /He is busy working.**

- **Sometimes French uses the present tense where English uses the perfect tense.**

➤ With certain prepositions of time like *Depuis* (since/for), when an action begins in the past and is continued in the present.

**Ex: J'habite Paris depuis 1986 = I have been living in Paris since 1986.**

➤ With the construction *Venir de* (to have just).

**Ex: Elle vient (juste) de partir = She has just left.**

### Future Tense

It is generally used as in English, but note the following:

- **Immediate future** is often expressed with the construction *Aller + Infinitif* (going to).

**Ex: Il va manquer le train = He is going to miss the train.**

- **In time clauses expressing future action**, French uses the future where English uses the present.

**Ex: Quand il viendra vous serez en vacances = When he comes you will be on holiday.**

## Conditional Tense

It is used exactly like in English, for something you would do. Usually follows a clause starting with *Si (If)*.

**Ex: Si je gagnais au loto j'achèterais une grande maison = If I won the lottery I would buy a big house.**

## Perfect Tense

**It is used to recount a completed action or event in the past.** It is the main past tense we use when talking about our day, our weekend, our holiday, etc.

**Ex with AVOIR: J'ai mangé des frites = I ate (some) chips.**

**Ex with ETRE: On est allés au bord de la mer = We went to the seaside OR We have been to the seaside.**

## Imperfect Tense

The imperfect describes:

- An action or state in the past **without definite limits in time** (*was + ing*).

**Ex: Elle regardait par la fenêtre = She was looking out of the window.**

- **Background actions** when telling a story (*was + ing*).  
**Ex: Il pleuvait quand il est arrivé = It was raining when he arrived.**
- **Habitual actions in the past**, often translated by *Would* or *Used to* in English.  
**Ex: Quand j'étais jeune, je me levais très tôt = When I was young I used to get up very early.**

Sometimes French uses the imperfect tense where English uses the pluperfect.

- With certain prepositions of time like *Depuis* (since/for), when an action begun in the past was continued in the more recent past.  
**Ex: Nous habitons à Londres depuis deux ans quand nous avons dû partir = We had been living in London for 2 years when we had to leave.**
- If the action has been completed or the sentence is negative, the pluperfect is used as in English:  
**Ex: Je ne l'avais pas vu depuis un an = I hadn't seen him for a year / Ca faisait un an que je ne l'avais pas vu = I hadn't seen him for a year.**
- With the construction *Venir de*.  
**Ex : Je venais de les rencontrer = I had just met them.**

## Subjunctive

**It's not actually a tense (it's a mood)** but for the purpose of this lesson we will treat it just like another tense. It does exist in English but it looks just like the past tense.

**Ex: It is time we went.**

**The most important uses of the subjunctive are:**

- After expressions using *que*, such as *Il faut que*, *ne pas penser que*, *ne pas croire que*, *avant que*, *bien que*, *pour que*, *pourvu que*, *à moins que*, *attendre que*, *il semble que*.  
**Ex: Il faut que tu ailles chez le docteur = you need to go to the doctor's (literally means It is necessary that you went to the doctor's).**

- In structures using *vouloir que*.

**Ex: Je veux que tu viennes = I want you to come over (literally means I want that you came over).**

- After a superlative (*le plus...que*), as well as *le premier...que*, *le dernier...que*, *le seul...que*. \*

**Ex: Ce sont les enfants les plus horribles que j'aie jamais vus = They are the most horrible children (that) I have ever seen.**

\*Although bear in mind for this last point a lot of French people use the normal Perfect tense, maybe out of laziness, but mostly because they have forgotten all these rules. So don't stress if, on this occasion, you forget, too.

**Are you ready to start learning the REAL French you were taught in school, without hours of tedious grammar?**

**If so, take a look at my BRAND NEW Parlez Français course [HERE](#), which I designed specifically for people who want to learn how to speak French fast.**