

TENSES FOR
FRENCH A LEVEL



RESTEZ
CALME
ET
CONJUGUEZ

French Grammar: Tenses

1) In any language, when we refer to something happening, we always use a tense to indicate whether it is going to, is, or has already, happened.

e.g. I'm *going to eat* an apple. I *am eating* an apple. I *ate* an apple.

2) French verbs are formed by: a stem + an ending (-ER, -RE, -IR)

3) To use the verbs in different tenses, we need to know some rules. These rules are simple and are applied to nearly all verbs.

4) Unfortunately, some verbs do not follow these rules and it is therefore important to know these IRREGULAR VERBS such as “aller” (to go), “faire” (to do), “avoir” (to have) or “être” (to be).

Le Présent

When to use it: To talk about what is happening at the moment
To talk about what happens usually/normally

Time phrases: Tous les jours (everyday), chaque jour (everyday), le matin (in the mornings), parfois (sometimes), etc.

Regular Verbs

1) **ER verbs:** take off the **-ER** and add the endings

2) **IR verbs:** take off the **-IR** and add the endings

3) **RE verbs:** take off the **-RE** and add the endings

Examples:

Parler

Je parle
Tu parles
Il/Elle parle
Nous parlons
Vous parlez
Il/Elles parlent

Finir

Je finis
Tu finis
Il/Elle finit
Nous finissons
Vous finissez
Il/Elles finissent

Vendre

Je vends
Tu vends
Il/Elle vend
Nous vendons
Vous vendez
Il/Elles vendent

Irregular Verbs

As in every French tense there are always irregular verbs. These verbs do not follow the rules. You just have to learn them off by heart!

Examples:

Être

Je suis
Tu es
Il/Elle est
Nous sommes
Vous êtes
Il/Elles sont

Avoir

J'ai
Tu as
Il/Elle a
Nous avons
Vous avez
Il/Elles ont

Aller

Je vais
Tu vas
Il/Elle va
Nous allons
Vous allez
Il/Elles vont

Faire

Je fais
Tu fais
Il/Elle fait
Nous faisons
Vous faites
Il/Elles font

USEFUL VERB LIST - PRESENT TENSE OF SOME IRREGULAR VERBS

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>je=I tu=you (I-friend) il= he elle=she nous=we vous=you (2-polite) ils=they (masc/mix) elles=they (fem)</p> | <p>faire (to do) je fais tu fais il/elle fait nous faisons vous faites ils/elles font</p> | <p>savoir (to know sth) je sais tu sais il/elle sait nous savons vous savez ils/elles savent</p> | <p>valoir (to be worth sth) je vauX tu vauX il/elle vaut nous valons vous valez ils/elles valent</p> |
| <p>pouvoir (to be able to) je peux tu peux il/elle peut nous pouvons vous pouvez ils/elles peuvent</p> | <p>vouloir (to want) je veux tu veux il/elle veut nous voulons vous voulez ils/elles veulent</p> | <p>devoir (to have to) je dois tu dois il/elle doit nous devons vous devez ils/elles doivent</p> | <p>mettre (to put (on)) je mets tu mets il met nous mettons vous mettez ils/elles mettent</p> |
| <p>prendre (to take) je prends tu prends il/elle prend nous prenons vous prenez ils/elles prennent</p> | <p>croire (to believe) je crois tu crois il/elle croit nous croyons vous croyez ils/elles croient</p> | <p>écrire (to write) j'écris tu écris il/elle écrit nous écrivons vous écrivez ils/elles écrivent</p> | <p>dire (to say) je dis tu dis il/elle dit nous disons vous dites ils/elles disent</p> |
| <p>lire (to read) je lis tu lis il/elle lit nous lisons vous lisez ils/elles lisent</p> | <p>connaître (to know sbd) je connais tu connais il/elle connaît nous connaissons vous connaissez ils/elles connaissent</p> | <p>tenir (to hold) je tiens tu tiens il/elle tient nous tenons vous tenez ils/elles tiennent</p> | <p>vivre (to live) je vis tu vis il/elle vit nous vivons vous vivez ils/elles vivent</p> |
| <p>sortir (to go out) je sors tu sors il/elle sort nous sortons vous sortez ils/elles sortent</p> | <p>descendre (to go down) je descends tu descends il/elle descend nous descendons vous descendez ils/elles descendent</p> | <p>partir (to leave) je pars tu pars il/elle part nous partons vous partez ils/elles partent</p> | <p>apercevoir (to see in the distance) j'aperçois tu aperçois il/elle aperçoit nous apercevons vous apercevez ils/elles aperçoivent</p> |
| <p>mourir (to die) je meurs tu meurs il meurt nous mourons vous mourez ils/elles meurent</p> | <p>entendre (to hear) j'entends tu entends il/elle entend nous entendons vous entendez ils/elles entendent</p> | <p>se lever (to get up) je <u>me</u> lève tu <u>te</u> lèves il/elle <u>se</u> lève nous <u>nous</u> levons vous <u>vous</u> levez ils/elles <u>se</u> lèvent</p> | |

Le Passé Composé

When to use it: To talk about something that has happened in the past and is now finished.

Time phrases: La semaine dernière (last week), hier (yesterday), etc.

Le passé composé is made up of 2 parts:

1) The auxiliary verb (the present tense of AVOIR or ÊTRE)

+

2) The past participle (donné, parlé, sorti, fait, etc)

Regular AVOIR Verbs

The present tense of avoir + the past participle

| <u>Donner</u> | <u>Finir</u> | <u>Vendre</u> |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| J'ai donné | J'ai fini | J'ai vendu |
| Tu as donné | Tu as fini | Tu as vendu |
| Il/Elle a donné | Il/Elle a fini | Il/Elle a vendu |
| Nous avons donné | Nous avons fini | Nous avons vendu |
| Vous avez donné | Vous avez fini | Vous avez vendu |
| Ils/Elles ont donné | Ils/Elles ont fini | Ils/Elles ont vendu |

Irregular AVOIR verbs

There is a group of irregular verbs that take AVOIR in le passé composé. These verbs are formed with:

1) present tense of avoir + 2) the irregular past participle

Irregular past participles:

| | | |
|------------|--------------|--------|
| avoir: | to have: | eu |
| être: | to be: | été |
| boire: | to drink: | bu |
| connaître: | to know: | connu |
| courir: | to run: | couru |
| croire: | to believe: | cru |
| devoir: | to have to: | dû |
| dire: | to say/tell: | dit |
| écrire: | to write: | écrit |
| faire: | to make/do: | fait |
| lire: | to read: | lu |
| mettre: | to put: | mis |
| ouvrir: | to open: | ouvert |
| pouvoir: | to be able: | pu |
| prendre: | to take: | pris |
| recevoir: | to receive: | reçu |
| savoir: | to know: | su |
| voir: | to see: | vu |
| vouloir: | to want: | voulu |

Examples:

Prendre

J'ai pris
Tu as pris
Il/Elle a pris
Nous avons pris
Vous avez pris
Ils/Elles ont pris

Avoir

J'ai eu
Tu as eu
Il/Elle a eu
Nous avons eu
Vous avez eu
Ils/Elles ont eu

Être

J'ai été
Tu as été
Il/Elle a été
Nous avons été
Vous avez été
Ils/Elles ont été

ÊTRE Verbs

A small group of verbs, and all *reflexive* verbs, take the present tense of “être” as their auxiliary verb.

1) present tense of être + 2) past participle

| | | |
|------------|------------|----------|
| Mourir: | to die: | mort |
| Retourner: | to return: | retourné |
| Sortir: | to go out: | sorti |

| | | |
|----------|-------------|--------|
| Venir: | to come: | venu |
| Arriver: | to arrive: | arrivé |
| Naître: | to be born: | né |

| | | |
|------------|-------------|----------|
| Descendre: | to go down: | descendu |
| Entrer: | to enter: | entré |

| | | |
|---------|------------|-------|
| Tomber: | to fall: | tombé |
| Rester: | to stay: | resté |
| Aller: | to go out: | allé |
| Monter: | to go up: | monté |
| Partir: | to leave: | parti |

N.B: The past participle must 'agree with' who did the action.

So if the person was female you must add an extra -e to the end of the past participle:
e.g. elle est partie - *she left*.

If two or more females did the action you must add -es: e.g. elles sont parties - *they left*.

If the person who did the action was one male, then the past participle **does not change**:
e.g. il est parti - *he left*.

If two or more males did the action add -s: e.g. ils sont partis - *they left*.

L'Imparfait

When to use it: To talk about something that used to happen in the past. To describe the way something was in the past (the weather was fine last Tuesday).

Phrases: Quand j'étais jeune (when I was young), l'année dernière (last year).

How to form l'imparfait:

1) Take the "nous" part of the present tense: e.g. nous **donnons**

2) Drop the **-ons**: e.g **donn**

3) Add the endings: -ais, -ais, -ait, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient, -aient

Examples:

Parler

Je parlais
Tu parlais
Il/Elle parlait
Nous parlions
Vous parliez
Ils/Elles parlaient

Finir

Je finissais
Tu finissais
Il/Elle finissait
Nous finissions
Vous finissiez
Ils/Elles finissaient

Lire

Je lisais
Tu lisais
Il/Elle lisait
Nous lisions
Vous lisiez
Ils/Elles lisaient

*There is only one irregular verb in l'imparfait: être

Être

J'étais
Tu étais
Il/Elle était
Nous étions
Vous étiez
Ils/Elles étaient

Le plus-que-parfait

- When to use it:**
1. The pluperfect is used to indicate an action in the past that occurred before another action in the past. The latter can be either mentioned in the same sentence or implied.
 2. The pluperfect is also used in 'si' clauses to express a hypothetical situation in the past contrary to what actually happened.

How to form the le plus-que-parfait:

The French past perfect is a compound conjugation, which means it has two parts:

1. imperfect of the auxiliary verb (either avoir or être).
2. past participle of the main verb (see Le Passé Composé for help on forming these).

Don't forget that if the verb uses être as its auxiliary, the past participle must agree.

Examples – Type 1

Il n'avait pas mangé (avant de faire ses devoirs).
He hadn't eaten (before doing his homework).

J'ai fait du shopping ce matin ; j'avais déjà fait la lessive.
I went shopping this morning; I had already done the laundry.

J'étais déjà sorti (quand tu as téléphoné).
I had already left (when you called).

Examples – Type 2

Si tu m'avais demandé, j'aurais répondu.
If you had asked me, I would have answered.

Nous y serions allés si nous avions su.
We would have gone if we had known

Le Futur Proche

When to use it: To talk about what we are going to do.

Time phrases: Ce soir (this evening), ce week-end (this weekend), le week-end prochain (next weekend), l'année prochaine (next year), etc.

Le future proche is made up of 3 parts:

1) The pronoun

2) Aller in the present tense

+

3) The infinitive (verb in its unchanged form ending in -er, -ir, -re)

| <u>Pronoun</u> | <u>Aller</u> | <u>Infinitive</u> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Je <i>I</i> | vais <i>am going</i> | écouter – to listen regarder – to watch |
| Tu <i>You</i> | vas <i>are going</i> | faire – to do jouer – to play |
| Il/Elle <i>He/She</i> | va <i>is going</i> | aller – to go voir – to see |
| Nous <i>We</i> | allons <i>are going</i> | chanter – to sing danser – to dance |
| Vous <i>You (pl)</i> | allez <i>are going</i> | étudier – to study visiter – to visit |
| Ils/Elles <i>They</i> | vont <i>are going</i> | parler – to speak retrouver – to meet |

Le Futur Simple

When to use it: To describe what will happen at a certain time in the future.

Time phrases: Demain (tomorrow), la semaine prochain (next week).

Regular Verbs

Regular **-er**, **-ir** and **-re*** verbs all follow the same rules in the future:

1) Take the infinitive (title) of the verb: e.g. donner, finir

2) Add the endings : -ai, -as, -a , -a, -ons, -ez, -ont, -ont

*** There is a slight difference for -re verbs. Before adding the endings you must take off the "e".** For example: vendre = to sell / I will sell = Je vendrai

Parler

Je parlerai
Tu parleras
Il/Elle parlera
Nous parlerons
Vous parlerez
Ils/Elles parleront

Partir

Je partirai
Tu partiras
Il/Elle partira
Nous partirons
Vous partirez
Ils/Elles partiront

Prendre

Je prendrai
Tu prendras
Il/Elle prendra
Nous prendrons
Vous prendrez
Ils prendront

Futur Simple: Irregular Verbs

For irregular verbs in the futur simple, you only need to learn the stem as the endings are the same. For example: être: ser / I will be: je serai

Irregulars:

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| aller: | to go: | ir: | j'irai |
| avoir: | to have: | aur: | j'aurai |
| envoyer: | to send: | enverr: | j'enverrai |
| devoir: | to have to: | devr: | je devrai |
| être: | to be: | ser: | je serai |
| faire: | to make/do: | fer: | je ferai |
| pleuvoir: | to rain: | pleuvr : | il pleuvra |
| pouvoir: | to be able: | pourr: | je pourrai |
| recevoir: | to receive: | recevr | je recevrai |
| savoir: | to know: | saur: | je saurai |

Le Conditionnel

When to use it: To talk about things that would happen in the future if another condition is met.
(I would buy a sports car if I won the lottery).

Regular verbs

Regular **-er**, **-ir** and **-re*** verbs all follow the same rules in the conditional:

1) Take the infinitive of the verb, e.g. donner, finir

2) Add the endings: -ais, -ais, -ait, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient, -aient
(These are the same endings as l'imparfait!)

*** There is a slight difference for -re verbs. Before adding the endings you must take off the "e".** For example: boire = boir / I would drink = je boirais

Donner

Je donnerais
Tu donnerais
Il/Elle donnerait
Nous donnerions
Vous donneriez
Ils/Elles donneraient

Finir

Je finirais
Tu finirais
Il/Elle finirait
Nous finirions
Vous finiriez
Ils/Elles finiraient

Prendre

Je prendrais
Tu prendrais
Il/Elle prendrait
Nous prendrions
Vous prendriez
Ils/Elles prendraient

Le Conditionnel: Irregular verbs

If you know the irregular stems for the futur simple, you know them for le conditionnel (they are exactly the same!)

Use the irregular stems from the future tense and add the endings:

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------|----------|--------------|
| aller: | to go: | ir: | j'irais |
| avoir: | to have: | aur: | j'aurais |
| envoyer: | to send: | enverr: | j'enverrais |
| devoir: | to have to: | devr: | je devrais |
| être: | to be: | ser: | je serais |
| faire: | to make/do: | fer: | je ferais |
| pleuvoir: | to rain: | pleuvr : | il pleuvrait |
| pouvoir: | to be able: | pourr: | je pourrais |
| recevoir: | to receive: | recevr | je recevrais |

Le Conditionnel Passé

When to use it: To express action that *would have* happened if past circumstances had been different. It is often used in *si* clauses.
(If I had seen it, I *would have* bought it.)

How to form the le conditionnel passé:

The French conditional perfect is a compound conjugation, which means it has two parts:

1. the conditional of the auxiliary verb (either avoir or être).
2. past participle of the main verb (see *Le Passé Composé* for help on forming these).

Don't forget that if the verb uses être as its auxiliary, the past participle must agree.

Examples

Si je l'avais vu, je l'aurais acheté.

If I had seen it, I would have bought it.

Il serait venu si nous l'avions invité.

He would have come if we had invited him.

The conditional perfect can also be used in a sentence where the unmet condition is only implied:

À ta place, je l'aurais dit.

In your place, I would have said it.

Elles auraient dû acheter un plan.

They should have bought a map.

Use the conditional perfect to express an unrealized desire in the past:

J'aurais aimé te voir, mais j'ai dû travailler.

I would have liked to see you, but I had to work.

Nous aurions voulu manger, mais c'était trop tard.

We would have liked to eat, but it was too late.

Le subjonctif

The subjunctive is not a tense as such, but a 'mood' and is often used when there is a doubt, or when you want to express a wish, a judgement, an emotion or an attitude. It is also used after certain set expressions (often followed by: que) and after superlatives. It exists in several tenses, however at A Level, you will really only ever have to use it in the present subjunctive. You may however, come across the imperfect subjunctive in more complicated, written texts.

Forming the Present Subjunctive

For the most part, you take the **ils/elles** form of your verb in the **present** tense, knock off the **ENT** ending and add the following endings :

| | | | |
|---------|----|-----------|------|
| je | e | nous | ions |
| tu | es | vous | iez |
| il/elle | e | ils/elles | ent |

So for **ER verbs**, the subjunctive looks **similar** to (or the same as) the present tense you already know. **IR & RE verbs** do look and sound quite **different** however.

Ils mang-ent > mange > je mang +e = **je mange**

Ils mang-ent > mange > nous mang +ions + **nous mangions**

Ils finiss-ent > finiss > je finiss +e = **je finisse**

Ils vend-ent > vend > je vend +e = **je vende**

Some common verbs you will need to learn by heart:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| être | je sois , tu sois, il soit, soyons, soyez, soient |
| avoir | j' aie , tu aies, elle ait, nous ayons, ayez, aient |
| faire | je fasse ... |
| aller | j' aille ... |
| devoir | je doive ... |
| pouvoir | je puisse ... |
| savoir | je sache ... |
| vouloir | je veuille ... |
| prendre | je prenne ... |
| venir | je viene ... |

When to use the subjunctive

1. After certain conjunctions :

| | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| avant/après que | before/after | sans que | without |
| jusqu'à ce que | until | pourvu que | provided that |
| cela ne veut pas dire que | doesn't mean that | bien/quoique | although |
| à condition que | as long as | afin/pour que | so that |
| que (at start of sentence !) | whether/let... | à moins que | unless |
| qui que | whoever | quoi que | whatever |
| quel/le que | whatever | où que | where ever |
| si (= adjective) que | however (+adjective) | | |

2. After some impersonal verbs/expressions (often starting with il)

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Il faut que | you (one has) have to |
| Il est nécessaire que | it's necessary that... |
| Il arrive que | it happens that |
| Il est im/possible que | it's im/possible that |
| Il se peut que | it's possible that |
| Il semble que | it appears that |
| Il est douteux que | it's doubtful that |
| Il vaut mieux que | it's better to |
| Il est temps que | it's time to |
| Il n'est pas sûr que | it's not sure that |
| C'est dommage que | it's a pity that |
| Il est préférable que | it's better to |
| Il semble que | it appears that (BUT not: il me semble que...) |

3. After these verbs (of emotion, fear, asking, forbidding, necessity, possibility, wishing or doubt)

aimer que, désirer que, préférer que, souhaiter que (wish that), vouloir que, demander que (ask that), empêcher que (prevent that), permettre que (allow that), interdire que (forbid that), avoir peur que & craindre que (fear that), être content/surpris/étonné que, regretter que, douter que, vouloir que (want that)

4. A few verbs in the negative

Je **ne** pense **pas** que, je **ne** crois **pas** que, je **ne** dis **pas** que

5. After superlatives & premier/dernier/seul

C'est le meilleur que, le plus grand que, le pire que, le premier que...

Examples

1. **Bienque** je **sois** riche, j'épargne mon argent **although/even though**
Quoi **que** tu **dises**, je ne mangerai jamais des escargots **whatever**
Qu'il **vienne** ou qu'il ne **vienne** pas, ça m'est égal **whether**
Si célèbre **qu'il soit**, je ne l'aime pas ! **however** famous he may be...

2. **Il faut que** tu **viennes** demain you must
Il est impossible qu'il ait gagné au lotto it's impossible that
Il est temps que nous **étudions** notre français it's about time that
C'est dommage qu'il pleuve it's a pity that
Il semble que le gouvernement **fasse** des fautes it seems that

3. Mes parents **souhaitent que** je **devienne** médecin wish that
Elle **veut que** tu **ailles** en ville pour elle wants me to
Il **préfère que** tu **prennes** l'avion prefers that
Je **suis étonné que** ma sœur **fasse** de la natation surprised that
Je **crains que** notre équipe **ait** perdu le match fear that

4. Je **ne pense pas** qu'il y **aille** **BUT** je **pense** qu'il y **va** (not subjunctive)
Je **ne dis pas** qu'elle **soit** paresseuse **BUT** je **dis** qu'elle **est** paresseuse
Il **ne croit pas** que je **viene** demain **BUT** il **croit** que je **viens** demain

5. C'est la **meilleure** note en français **que** j'**ai**e jamais reçu
Elle est la **seule** personne **que** je **connais** ici