START THE FRENCH CONJUGATION ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Stop Struggling. Master the terminology.

The French conjugation system is complicated...even for French people !

To make matters worse, in academic French courses, you'll hear a whole lot of jargon that you may not understand:

infinitives, present participles, gerunds, past participles, auxiliary, moods, tenses, subject pronouns, compound tenses, and simple tenses

<u>Knowing these basic terms</u> should be, therefore, *the* first & most important step to mastering French conjugations less painfully !

This guide was designed for this purpose. Ready ? Let's get started !

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savoir · étoile · rêvasser · esprit · être

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past participle

indirect object
pronoun

gerund

past compound tense

L'enfant a été gentil avec Chloé. En partant, il lui a donné des livres intéressants.

auxiliary

noun & subject

indicative mood

subject
pronoun

present participle

Feeling lost ? Let's shed some light on this jargon !

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How are nouns and pronouns related ?

A noun is a word used to design a person, an animal, a place, a thing, or an idea.
French nouns are either masculine or feminine and singular or plural.
A pronoun is a word used to replace one or more nouns.

Why do we need pronouns?

① Pronouns avoid repeating the same noun(s) within a sentence or paragraph.

② Pronouns can replace people, animals, places, things, and even phrases.

Without using pronouns:

Harry est gentil avec Annie. Harry a donné de l'argent à Annie.

Harry is kind to Annie. Harry gave Annie some money.

>>> The result is not natural and sounds repetitive

With pronouns:

Harry est gentil avec Annie. Il lui a donné de l'argent. (Il=Harry ; lui=Annie)

Harry is kind to Annie. He gave her some money.

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The Different kinds of French pronouns

There are 6 main categories of pronouns in French.

(1) Personal pronouns

Subject Pronouns: je, tu, il, elle, on, nous, vous, ils, elles ⫷
Direct Object Pronouns: me, te, le, les, nous, vous, leur
Indirect Object Pronouns: me, te, lui, en, y, nous, vous, leur
Adverbial pronouns: en, y (replace quantity or place)
Stressed pronouns: moi, toi, lui, elle, nous, vous, eux, elles

Don't worry ! We'll focus only on Subject Pronouns today

(2) Demonstrative pronouns

ce, c', ça, cela, ceci, celui, celle, celui-ci, celle-là, ceux, celles, ceux-ci, ceux-là, celles-ci, celles-là...

(3) Possessive pronouns

le mien, la mienne, le tien, le sien, la sienne, le/la nôtre, le/la vôtre, le/la leur, les miens, les miennes, les tiens, les tiennes, les siens, les siennes

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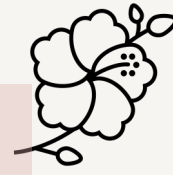## (4) Interrogative pronouns

qui ? que ? à qui ?....

(5) Relative pronouns

qui, que, quoi, sont, dont, où, lequel, laquelle, lesquels, lesquelles, duquel, auquel, à laquelle, auxquels, de laquelle, desquels, desquelles, auxquelles

(6) Reflexive pronouns

me, te, se, nous, vous

French subject pronouns

Like in English, French <u>subject pronouns</u> can be singular or plural

Singular subject pronouns

je = I
tu = informal/singular 'you'
il = he, masculine 'it'*
elle = she, feminine 'it'*
on = impersonal/informal 'we'

Plural subject pronouns

nous = we
vous = formal/plural 'you'
ils = masculine 'they'
elles = feminine 'they'

*<u>Note</u>: you have to use 'il' and 'elle' to speak about an animal or a thing, depending on its gender.

⟫ it = elle or il

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On vs. Nous

① • In conversation, people tend to use much more 'on' than 'nous'.

② • Verbs conjugated with 'on' are conjugated as with 'il' and 'elle' (singular).

③ • On can be translated with 'we', 'one', 'people'

Tu vs. Vous

- tu is used with family, friends, lovers, colleagues, children, and classmates

    Positive aspects: indicates intimacy, equality, love, friendship
    Negative aspects: can be perceived as rude and offensive if doesn't suit the relationship.

- vous is used for doctor-patient, professor-student, boss-employee, waiter-client, and kids-adults relationships.

    Positive aspects: Indicates respect, professionalism, politeness, formality, deference
    Negative aspects: can be seen as cold, distant, snobbery, and dislike.

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Infinitive verbs vs. Conjugated verbs (tenses)

Infinitive verb

- basic, unconjugated form of a verb

- doesn't say when the action took place

- no one is performing the action

- its form *never* changes.

- cannot be the main verb in a sentence

Ex: You are going to drive soon.

Tu vas conduire bientôt.

- **to drive/conduire** by itself cannot say 'who' or 'when'. It is not the main verb which is 'vas/are going' with the subject 'you/tu'.

Conjugated verbs

- says when the action took place (past, present, or future)

- its form changes according to its tense, person, number

- can be the main verb of the sentence.

Ex: I wished /J'ai souhaité

She eats well / Elle mange bien

- wished/ai souhaité tell us 'who' (I/je) & 'when' (in the past). It is the main verb of the sentence.

- Eat becomes 'eat<u>s</u>' with 'she' for the present tense. We know 'when' (in the present).

French infinitive verbs vs. English infinitive verbs

English Infinitives

① • two words (Full infinitive)

  = *to* + verb

(to run, to dance, to think)

② • one word (Bare infinitive)

  = verb without *to*

(I can do my homework)
(You should stay at home)

③ • Bare infinitives are used with
  auxiliary verbs:

*will, would, must, can, could,
shall, should, do, did*

French infinitives

① • one word: root + ending

(aimer, prendre, rougir, falloir)

② • grouped by their endings.

  • 1st group: –ER verbs (parler) - except
    Aller- to go

  • 2nd group: –IR verbs
    But not all -IR verbs are part of the 2nd
    group. Some belong to the 3rd !

  • 3rd group: -RE, -OIR, -IR endings
    (prendre, voir, partir) + Aller

③ • In the 1st & 2nd group, verbs follow the
  same patterns not in the 3rd !

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💡 Groups are used to categorize verbs to make it easier to remember **their endings**.

6,000 verbs	300 verbs	400 verbs

**1st GROUP
-ER endings**

**2nd GROUP
-IR endings**

**3rd GROUP
-IR –OIR –RE + ALLER**

- Regular + Semi regular
(ending in -CER + E*ER)
- Except verb aller
- Present participle in –ANT
aimer ->aimant (liking, loving)

model verbs*
aimer
s'amuser
manger
placer

*   *These 4 verbs cover the slight variations. It means that for every tense, you should know their conjugations*

- All Regular
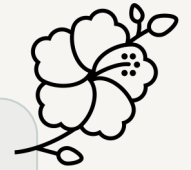- Same pattern as finir

- Present participle in –ISSANT

finir -> finissant (finishing)
rougir -> rougissant (blushing)

model verb*
finir

- Irregular – no general pattern
- a 'catch-all' group for all 'wobbly' verbs

3 main subgroups:

- *-IR verbs with present participle in –ANT
mourir ->mourant (dying)*
- *-OIR verbs
recevoir->recevant (receving)*
- -RE verbs
rendre->rendant (returning)

3 very important verbs to master:
- être
- avoir
- aller

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LESSON 03 – Auxiliary Verbs

1   Besides the 3 groups of verbs, there are also two auxiliary verbs in French *être* and *avoir*, also known as helping verbs.

2   *être* and *avoir* being **irregular,** their conjugations have to be learned by heart.

3   The auxiliary verbs être & *avoir* are used when constructing *compound tenses* such as the passé composé or the plus-que-parfait (pluperfect).

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Simple tense vs. Compound Tense
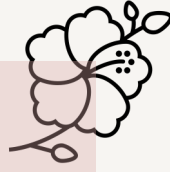
④ Compound tenses have 2 verbs: »» j'ai parlé (here *passé composé*)
Simple tenses have only 1 verb »» je parle (here *présent*)

For each simple tense in the <u>indicative mood</u>* there is a compound tense:

Présent > passé-composé
Futur > futur antérieur
Conditionnel > conditionnel passé
Imparfait > Plus-que-parfait
Subjonctif > subjonctif passé

*check out the slide *Lesson 05 – French Moods & Tenses* to understand what is a <u>mood</u>.

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Examples with a compound tense: the passé composé

Passé composé with avoir

elles ont parlé ← past participles with 'avoir' don't agree with the subject

'ont' is the auxiliary 'avoir'   'parlé' is the past participle

Passé composé with être

elles sont parties ← past participles with 'être' agree in number & gender with the subject.
Here *'elles'* is feminine & plural so the past participle takes an 'e' + a 's'.

'sont' is the auxiliary 'être'

'parties' is the past participle

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⑥ Depending on the compound tense, the auxiliary may be:

- in the present (here indicative present):

il a parlé *(he spoke*) / il est allé *(he went*) - passé composé

- in the past (here imperfect):

il avait parlé *(he had spoken)* / il était allé *(he had gone*) – pluperfect

- in the future (here simple future):

il aura parlé *(he will have spoken)* / il sera allé *(he will have gone)*
– future anterior

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① In English, the past participle typically ends in "-ed," as in *walked*

② In French, the typical past participle endings are:

for -ER verbs ⟶ -é endings

(1st group) ⟶ aimer ⟶ aim + -é ⟶ aimé

for –IR verbs : ⟶ -i endings

2nd group

+

some verbs of the 3rd ⟶ finir ⟶ fin + -i ⟶ fini

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Past participles for the 3rd group

③ However, in the 3rd group, the past participles are very irregular:

Some past participles end in:

-u such as in *eu* (avoir), *tenu* (tenir), *plu* (plaire), *lu* (lire)

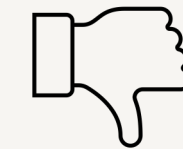-û such as in *mû* (mouvoir), *crû* (croître), *dû* (devoir)

7 different endings!

-is such as in *acquis* (acquérir), *mis* (mettre)

-t such as in *peint* (peindre), *cuit* (cuire), *conduit* (conduire)

-ert such as in ouvert (ouvrir), couvert (couvrir)

-ort such as mort (mourir)

-os such as clos (clore)

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So past participles of the 3rd group are difficult to predict.

Therefore, you need to learn them by heart as you need them for compound tenses such as the passé composé.

4 Moreover, past participles are also used as adjectives and even nouns so they are very useful.

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① English present participles end in –ing such as in liking, walking.

② French present participles end:

in –ant (1st and 3rd group) such as in aimant, partant

or in –issant (2nd group) such as in finissant, rougissant

③ Present participles can function as nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Present participle or Gerund ?

④ present participle + preposition 'en' = a gerund
(en parlant, en mangeant, etc. / while speaking, while eating)

present participle + no preposition 'en' = a past participle
(marchant trop vite, il est tombé / walking too fast, he fell)

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Present participles are NOT used for progressive tenses in French !

(5) There are <u>no progressive tenses</u> in French ! (to be + -ing verb)

I'm closing the door   <u>is NOT</u> translated by   *Je suis fermant la porte*

Instead, French uses either:

- '*être en train de*' + <u>infinitive</u>

  I am closing the door. Je suis en train de <u>fermer</u> la porte.

       or

- a <u>simple verb</u> form

  I am closing the door. Je <u>ferme</u> la porte. (present tense>simple tense)
  I was closing the door. Je <u>fermais</u> la porte. (imperfect>simple tense)

When to use Gerunds in French ?

1 To express a way, a manner, or simultaneous actions (2 actions occuring at the same time)

2 Function as verbs and they are invariable (they never change form).

3 Used to express an action that occurs <u>parallel</u> to the main action – 1 subject + 2 verbs

> Je ne peux pas travailler <u>en</u> mangeant. I cannot work <u>while</u> eating.
>   (main action#1)   (action#2)
>
> <u>En</u> partant, j'ai perdu mes clés. <u>When</u> I left, I lost my keys.

4 Used to explain how or <u>why</u> something happens - 2 subjects + 2 verbs

> C'est <u>en</u> pratiquant que vous réussirez. It's <u>by</u> practicing that you'll succeed. (how)
> Voulant marquer un but, Max s'est concentré sur le ballon.
> Wanting to score a goal, Max focused on the ball. (why)

Gerunds

When to use Present Participles in French ?

① Present participles function as adjectives, nouns, and verbs.

② As adjectives (agreement needed)

une fille amusante. a funny girl (fille: fem. + sing.)

des livres très amusants. some very amusing books (livres: masc. + plur.)

un enfant bruyant – a noisy child (enfant: masc. + sing.)

des rues bruyantes – some noisy streets (rues: fem. + plur.)

As adjectives, they express a state or quality

③ As nouns (agreement needed)

un assistant – une assistante (an assistant)

un commerçant – des commerçants (a shopkeeper/shopkeepers)

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③ As <u>verbs</u> to show simultaneous action (no agreement)

Entrant dans la classe, <u>j'ai vu</u> mon copain.
When I entered the classroom, <u>I saw</u> my friend

④ As <u>verbs</u> to replace a relative clause

(qui + verb) - (no agreement)

Aux Etats-Unis, les personnes qui parlent français sont rares.
Aux Etats-Unis, les personnes <u>parlant</u> (=qui parlent) français sont rares.
In the United States, people who speak/speaking French are rare.

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How to form French present participles?

The traditional method suggests that in order to know how to form present participles you need to:

① Take the verb in the *present tense* with 'nous'

manger ⟫→ nous mangeons

② Drop the –ons ending

nous mangeons ⟫→ mange

③ Then, add the –ant ending
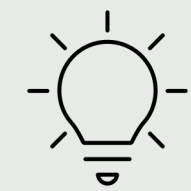
mange + -ant ⟫→ mangeant

④ 3 exceptions to this method:

être, avoir, savoir

MY GRAIN OF SALT:
this simple method works only if you know already the present tense of all the verbs you need to know.

Therefore, for new verbs, learn their
- present participles
- past participles
- infinitives & meanings
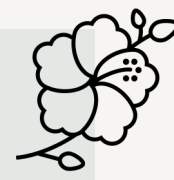
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Mood

① Indicates the mindset of the subject

② French has 4 moods:

- Indicative: to relate facts & objective statements (the most common mood).

> Il se réveille tôt le matin. He gets up early the morning.

- Subjunctive: expresses opinions, feelings, doubt, unlikelhood (commonly used).

> Il est dommage qu'il soit mort. It is too bad he is dead.

- imperative: gives a command, opinion, or a wish.

> Marie, réveille-toi ! Marie, get up !

- Conditional: describes a condition, possibility, or contrary-to-fact statement.

> Si j'étais riche, j'achèterais une maison.
> If I were rich, I would buy a house

Tense

① Indicates the time of the action:
- in the past
- in the present
- in the future

② Therefore, there are:
- past tenses
- present tenses
- future tenses

③ two categories of tenses:
- simple tenses (built with 1 verb)
- compound tenses (built with 2 verbs)

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French Moods

Indicative
to relate facts & objective statements

Présent: j'aime
Imparfait: j'aimais
Passé simple: j'aimai
Futur simple: j'aimerai

Passé composé: j'ai aimé
Plus-que-parfait: j'avais aimé
Passé antérieur: j'eus aimé
Futur Antérieur: J'aurai aimé

Subjunctive
to express opinions, feelings, doubt, unlikelihood

Présent: que j'aime
Imparfait: que j'aimasse

Passé: que j'aie aimé
Plus-que-parfait: que j'eusse aimé

Conditional
to describe a condition, possibility, or contrary-to-fact statements

Présent: que j'aimerais
Passé 1st form: j'aurais aimé
Passé 2nd form: j'eusse aimé

Imperative
to give a command, an advice or express a wish

Présent: aime
Passé : aie aimé

4 Important Facts about French Moods & Tenses

1. The indicative mood is the most used, but the other moods are commonly used as well, even the subjunctive!

2. Main tenses for speaking: present tense, passé composé, imperfect, simple future, conditional present, present subjunctive, imperative present

3. Main tenses for reading: all the above + simple past and pluperfect.

4. if you want to read French books, of any genre (even children's books!), you should learn the simple past tense, as you'll see it everywhere.

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