

French Grammar

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of French grammar*

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| Introduction

This French Grammar is more thorough and more practical than other paperback grammars. It is also more up to date. In the next 300 pages you will find:

- All the basic grammar of French presented clearly, comprehensively, and succinctly.
- Explanations that use everyday language, and a glossary of absolutely all the grammatical terms we have used.
- Up-to-date explanations of modern French usage not found in other grammars of this size.
- Short, simple, easy-to-follow French examples for points of basic grammar, and longer examples from modern French sources where they are needed to explain usage.
- A clear layout.

This grammar is *really* comprehensive. It will explain problems met by beginners, it will be a reliable learning aid for GCSE and A level, and it will remain a first resource for quick reference and revision for French specialists who have reached university and polytechnic level. As well as covering all the grammar used in modern French, it has sections on translation problems and pronunciation traps, verb tables with the conjugation of more than a hundred irregular verbs, an alphabetical list of French prepositions and their use, sections on word order and punctuation, a glossary of grammatical terms and an easy-to-use index.

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TENSE FORMATION

The tenses of French verbs are either *simple*, in which case the verb is a single word, or *compound*, in which case it is normally formed from a part of the verb **avoir**, *to have*, followed by the past participle:

simple tense: **Je porte**, *I wear*

compound tense: **J'ai porté**, *I have worn*

Regular verbs, what they are

Most French verbs are regular—that is they follow an entirely predictable pattern. The pattern they follow is determined by the way their infinitive ends. They divide into three groups (known as conjugations), each with its own infinitive ending:

porter, *to wear*, first conjugation

finir, *to finish*, second conjugation

vendre, *to sell*, third conjugation

Most French verbs belong to the first conjugation, whose infinitives all end in **-er**. All invented new verbs are automatically first conjugation verbs. Verbs in the second conjugation all have an infinitive ending **-ir**, and those in the very small third conjugation all have an infinitive ending **-re**.

Irregular verbs, what they are

Some French verbs are irregular, following no pattern. In the simple tenses there is no way of predicting their

stems (the part of the verb to which endings are added) or, quite frequently, the endings that are added to them. In the compound tenses, however, it is only the past participle which is irregular. So, for example, with **vouloir** (irregular), *to want*:

<i>present (simple tense)</i>	<i>perfect (compound tense)</i>
je veux	j'ai voulu
tu veux	tu as voulu
il veut	il a voulu
nous voulons	nous avons voulu
vous voulez	vous avez voulu
ils veulent	ils ont voulu

► There is a table of all the common irregular verbs with their conjugation on page 242.

Simple-tense formation, regular verbs

To form each simple tense a fixed set of endings is added to the verb's stem. The stem is the infinitive minus its **-er**, **-ir** or **-re** ending. Each conjugation has a different set of verb endings.

porter → **port-** → **je porte**, *I wear*
finir → **fin-** → **je finis**, *I finish*
vendre → **vend-** → **je vends**, *I sell*

The ending of the verb corresponds to the subject of the verb:

je finis, *I finish*
il finit, *he finishes*

► The complete tense-formation of regular verbs is given on pp. 4–12, with the verb endings printed in bold.

Compound-tense formation, all verbs

To form a compound tense you need to know a verb's past participle. The past participle of a regular verb is

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formed by removing the **-er**, **-ir**, or **-re** of the infinitive. To this stem is added **-é** (first conjugation), **-i** (second conjugation), or **-u** (third conjugation):

<i>infinitive</i>		<i>past participle</i>
porter	→	porté
finir	→	fini
vendre	→	vendu

The tenses of **avoir** used to form the compound tenses are:

perfect tense:

present of **avoir**: **j'ai porté**

pluperfect tense:

imperfect of **avoir**: **j'avais porté**

future perfect tense:

future of **avoir**: **j'aurai porté**

conditional perfect tense:

conditional of **avoir**: **j'aurais porté**

past anterior tense:

past historic of **avoir**: **j'eus porté**

perfect subjunctive:

present subjunctive of **avoir**: **j'aie porté**

pluperfect subjunctive:

imperfect subjunctive of **avoir**: **j'eusse porté**

► Some very common French verbs form their compound tenses with **être** instead of **avoir**. See p. 12.

► In all the compound tenses the past participle may sometimes agree with its subject or its direct object, in gender and in number. See p. 14.

CONJUGATION OF -er VERBS

(First-conjugation verbs)

In all tenses **elle** (*she*), **on** (*one*) and singular nouns are followed by the **il** form of the verb; **elles** (*they*, feminine)

and plural nouns are followed by the **ils** form of the verb.

infinitive	porter, <i>to wear</i>
present participle	portant, <i>wearing</i>
past participle	porté, <i>worn</i>
imperative	porte, <i>wear...!</i>
	portons, <i>let's wear...</i>
	portez, <i>wear...!</i>

Simple tenses

present tense, <i>I wear, I am wearing</i>	je porte tu portes il porte	nous portons vous portez ils portent
imperfect tense, <i>I wore, I was wearing, I used to wear</i>	je portais tu portais il portait	nous portions vous portiez ils portaient
past historic tense, <i>I wore</i>	je portai tu portas il porta	nous portâmes vous portâtes ils portèrent
future tense, <i>I shall wear, I shall be wearing</i>	je porterai tu porteras il portera	nous porterons vous porterez ils porteront
conditional tense, <i>I should wear</i>	je porterais tu porterais il porterait	nous porterions vous porteriez ils porteraient
present subjunctive, <i>I wear, I may wear</i>	je porte tu portes il porte	nous portions vous portiez ils portent
imperfect subjunctive*, <i>I wore, I might wear</i>	je portasse tu portasses il portât	nous portassions vous portassiez ils portassent

* archaic or literary

Compound tenses

perfect tense, <i>I wore, I have worn, I have been wearing</i>	j' ai porté tu as porté il a porté	nous avons porté vous avez porté ils ont porté
pluperfect tense, <i>I had worn, I had been wearing</i>	j' avais porté tu avais porté il avait porté	nous avions porté vous aviez porté ils avaient porté
future perfect tense, <i>I shall have worn, I shall have been wearing</i>	j' aurai porté tu auras porté il aura porté	nous aurons porté vous aurez porté ils auront porté
conditional perfect tense, <i>I should have worn</i>	j' aurais porté tu aurais porté il aurait porté	nous aurions porté vous auriez porté ils auraient porté
past anterior tense*, <i>I had worn</i>	j' eus porté tu eus porté il eut porté	nous eûmes porté vous eûtes porté ils eurent porté
perfect subjunctive, <i>I wore, I may have worn</i>	j' aie porté tu aies porté il ait porté	nous ayons porté vous ayez porté ils aient porté
pluperfect subjunctive*, <i>I had worn</i>	j' eusse porté tu eusses porté il eût porté	nous eussions porté vous eussiez porté ils eussent porté

Imperative of -er verbs

The **tu** form of the imperative of **-er** verbs (also verbs like **ouvrir**, see p. 29) has no **-s** except when followed by **y** or **en**:

donne-le-moi, *give it to me!*

donnes-en à ta sœur aussi, *give your sister some as well!*

vas-y, *go on!*

* archaic or literary

Spelling changes in some -er verbs

► Tenses with changes are given in detail in the verb tables on p. 239.

■ Verbs ending **-e[CONSONANT]er** change the **e** of the stem to **è** when a silent **e** follows:

mener → **je mène**

They also make this change in the future and conditional, where the **e** that follows is soft rather than silent:

je mènerai; je mènerais

■ verbs ending **-eter** and **-eler**, however, usually produce the open sound in the **e** by doubling the consonant:

jeter → **je jette**

rappeler → **je rappelle**

■ some verbs ending **-eter** and **-eler** follow the pattern of **mener**, changing the **e** to **è**:

acheter → **j'achète**

geler → **je gèle**

Most verbs that do this are, however, quite uncommon. The only ones you are at all likely to encounter are:

acheter, *buy*

ciseler, *engrave*

congeler, *(deep) freeze*

crocheter, *hook (up)*

déceler, *disclose*

dégeler, *thaw*

démanteler, *dismantle*

geler, *freeze*

haleter, *pant*

modeler, *model*

peler, *peel*

racheter, *buy back,
buy again*

■ Verbs ending **-é[CONSONANT]er** change the **é** to **è** before a silent **e** in the same way, *except in the future and conditional tenses*:

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espérer → **j'espère**, but
j'espéreral; **j'espérerais**

■ Verbs ending **-cer** and **-ger** change the **c** to **ç** and the **g** to **ge** before **a** and **o**. This keeps the **c** and the **g** soft:

commencer → **nous commençons**

manger → **nous mangeons**

■ Verbs ending **-oyer** and **-uyer** change the **y** to **i** before a silent **e**:

envoyer → **j'envoie**

appuyer → **j'appuie**

With verbs ending **-ayer** this change is optional:

payer → **je paie** or **je paye**

CONJUGATION OF -ir VERBS

(Second-conjugation verbs)

In all tenses **elle** (*she*), **on** (*one*), and singular nouns are followed by the **il** form of the verb; **elles** (*they, feminine*) and plural nouns are followed by the **ils** form of the verb.

infinitive	finir , to finish
present participle	finissant , finishing
past participle	fini , finished
imperative	finis , finish ...! finissons , let's finish ... finissez , finish ...!

Simple tenses

present tense, <i>I finish, I am finishing</i>	je finis tu finis il finit	nous finissons vous finissez ils finissent
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