

Complete Guide to French Verbs

Guide Complet des Verbes Français

IdiomAry

What are French verbs?

French verbs (verbes) are the foundation of the French language. They express actions, states, and conditions and are highly inflected, changing form based on person, number, tense, mood, and voice. Mastering French verb conjugation is essential for fluency and allows you to express complex ideas with nuance and precision.

Contents

1	Verb Classifications	3
1.1	By Conjugation Groups	3
1.2	By Function	3
2	Present Tense (Présent)	3
2.1	Regular Conjugations	3
2.1.1	First Group (-ER): Parler	4
2.1.2	Second Group (-IR): Finir	4
2.1.3	Third Group (-RE): Vendre	4
2.2	Irregular Present Tense Verbs	4
2.2.1	Être (to be)	4
2.2.2	Avoir (to have)	5
2.2.3	Other Important Irregular Verbs	5
3	Past Tenses	5
3.1	Passé Composé (Past Compound)	5
3.1.1	With Avoir	5
3.1.2	With Être	5

3.1.3	Dr. Mrs. Vandertramp Verbs (Être verbs)	6
3.2	Imparfait (Imperfect)	6
3.2.1	Formation	6
3.2.2	Usage Examples	6
4	Future Tenses	6
4.1	Futur Simple (Simple Future)	7
4.1.1	Regular Formation	7
4.1.2	Common Irregular Future Stems	7
5	Conditional Mood	7
5.1	Conditionnel Présent (Present Conditional)	7
5.2	Usage Examples	7
6	Subjunctive Mood	8
6.1	Subjonctif Présent (Present Subjunctive)	8
6.2	Key Irregular Subjunctives	8
6.3	When to Use Subjunctive	8
7	Imperative Mood	8
7.1	Formation	8
7.2	Irregular Imperatives	9
8	Pronominal Verbs	9
8.1	Common Pronominal Verbs	9
8.2	Reflexive Pronouns	9
9	Modal Verbs	9
9.1	Devoir (must/have to)	10
9.2	Pouvoir (can/to be able to)	10
9.3	Vouloir (to want)	10
9.4	Savoir vs. Connaître (to know)	10
10	Common Mistakes and Tips	10
11	Quick Reference Table	11
12	Practice Exercises	11
13	Answer Key	12
14	Study Strategies	12

1 Verb Classifications

Classification des Verbes - Understanding verb categories

1.1 By Conjugation Groups

French verbs are divided into three main conjugation groups based on their infinitive endings:

- **First Group (-ER)** - *parler, aimer, étudier*
These are the most numerous and regular verbs in French.
Parler (to speak), *aimer* (to love), *étudier* (to study)
- **Second Group (-IR with -iss-)** - *finir, choisir, réussir*
These verbs insert -iss- in plural forms of present tense.
Finir (to finish), *choisir* (to choose), *réussir* (to succeed)
- **Third Group (Irregular)** - *être, avoir, aller, faire*
All other verbs including -IR, -RE, and completely irregular verbs.
Être (to be), *avoir* (to have), *aller* (to go), *faire* (to do/make)

1.2 By Function

- **Auxiliary Verbs** - *être, avoir*
Essential for forming compound tenses.
Être (to be), *avoir* (to have)
- **Modal Verbs** - *devoir, pouvoir, vouloir*
Express necessity, ability, or desire.
Devoir (must), *pouvoir* (can), *vouloir* (to want)
- **Pronominal Verbs** - *se lever, se laver, s'amuser*
Actions performed on oneself or reciprocally.
Se lever (to get up), *se laver* (to wash oneself)
- **Impersonal Verbs** - *pleuvoir, falloir, y avoir*
Used only in third person singular.
Pleuvoir (to rain), *falloir* (to be necessary)

2 Present Tense (Présent)

Le Temps Présent - Actions happening now or regularly

2.1 Regular Conjugations

2.1.1 First Group (-ER): Parler

Person	French	English
je	parle	I speak
tu	parles	you speak
il/elle	parle	he/she speaks
nous	parlons	we speak
vous	parlez	you (formal/plural) speak
ils/elles	parlent	they speak

2.1.2 Second Group (-IR): Finir

Person	French	English
je	finis	I finish
tu	finis	you finish
il/elle	finit	he/she finishes
nous	finissons	we finish
vous	finissez	you (formal/plural) finish
ils/elles	finissent	they finish

2.1.3 Third Group (-RE): Vendre

Person	French	English
je	vends	I sell
tu	vends	you sell
il/elle	vend	he/she sells
nous	vendons	we sell
vous	vendez	you (formal/plural) sell
ils/elles	vendent	they sell

2.2 Irregular Present Tense Verbs

2.2.1 Être (to be)

je	suis	I am
tu	es	you are
il/elle	est	he/she is
nous	sommes	we are
vous	êtes	you (formal/plural) are
ils/elles	sont	they are

2.2.2 Avoir (to have)

je	ai	I have
tu	as	you have
il/elle	a	he/she has
nous	avons	we have
vous	avez	you (formal/plural) have
ils/elles	ont	they have

2.2.3 Other Important Irregular Verbs

- **Aller (to go)** - *vais, vas, va, allons, allez, vont*
- **Faire (to do/make)** - *fais, fais, fait, faisons, faites, font*
- **Venir (to come)** - *viens, viens, vient, venons, venez, viennent*
- **Dire (to say)** - *dis, dis, dit, disons, dites, disent*
- **Savoir (to know)** - *sais, sais, sait, savons, savez, savent*
- **Voir (to see)** - *vois, vois, voit, voyons, voyez, voient*

3 Past Tenses

Les Temps du Passé - Expressing past actions

3.1 Passé Composé (Past Compound)

The most common past tense, formed with auxiliary verb + past participle.

3.1.1 With Avoir

- **J'ai parlé** - *I have spoken/I spoke*
Used with most transitive and many intransitive verbs.
- **Tu as mangé la pomme?** - *Did you eat the apple?*
- **Nous avons étudié le français** - *We studied French*
- **Ils ont travaillé toute la journée** - *They worked all day*

3.1.2 With Être

- **Je suis allé(e)** - *I went*
Used with verbs of movement and pronominal verbs.
- **Elle est arrivée en retard** - *She arrived late*
- **Nous sommes partis tôt** - *We left early*
- **Ils se sont amusés** - *They had fun*

3.1.3 Dr. Mrs. Vandertramp Verbs (Être verbs)

- **Devenir** - *to become* - **Rentrer** - *to go back home*
- **Mourir** - *to die* - **Sortir** - *to go out*
- **Venir** - *to come* - **Arriver** - *to arrive*
- **Naître** - *to be born* - **Descendre** - *to go down*
- **Entrer** - *to enter* - **Retourner** - *to return*
- **Tomber** - *to fall* - **Rester** - *to stay*
- **Aller** - *to go* - **Monter** - *to go up*
- **Partir** - *to leave*

3.2 Imparfait (Imperfect)

Used for ongoing past actions, descriptions, and habitual actions.

3.2.1 Formation

Take the nous form of present tense, remove -ons, add imparfait endings:

	Parler	Finir	Vendre
je	parlais	finissais	vendais
tu	parlais	finissais	vendais
il/elle	parlait	finissait	vendait
nous	parlions	finissions	vendions
vous	parliez	finissiez	vendiez
ils/elles	parlaient	finissaient	vendaient

3.2.2 Usage Examples

- **Quand j'étais enfant, je jouais toujours** - *When I was a child, I always played*
- **Il pleuvait pendant que nous marchions** - *It was raining while we were walking*
- **La maison était grande et belle** - *The house was big and beautiful*

4 Future Tenses

Les Temps du Futur - Expressing future actions

4.1 Futur Simple (Simple Future)

4.1.1 Regular Formation

For most verbs, add future endings to the infinitive:

Person	Parler	Finir
je	parlerai	finirai
tu	parleras	finiras
il/elle	parlera	finira
nous	parlerons	finirons
vous	parlerez	finirez
ils/elles	parleront	finiront

4.1.2 Common Irregular Future Stems

- **Être** - *ser-* → serai, seras, sera, serons, serez, seront
- **Avoir** - *aur-* → aurai, auras, aura, aurons, aurez, auront
- **Aller** - *ir-* → irai, iras, ira, irons, irez, iront
- **Faire** - *fer-* → ferai, feras, fera, ferons, ferez, feront
- **Venir** - *viendr-* → viendrai, viendras, viendra, etc.
- **Voir** - *verr-* → verrai, verras, verra, etc.

5 Conditional Mood

Le Mode Conditionnel - Expressing hypothetical actions

5.1 Conditionnel Présent (Present Conditional)

Used for polite requests, hypothetical situations, and expressing desires.

Person	Parler	Finir
je	parlerais	finirais
tu	parlerais	finirais
il/elle	parlerait	finirait
nous	parlerions	finirions
vous	parleriez	finiriez
ils/elles	parleraient	finiraient

5.2 Usage Examples

- **Je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît** - *I would like a coffee, please*
- **Iriez-vous au cinéma avec moi?** - *Would you go to the cinema with me?*
- **Si j'avais le temps, je voyagerais plus** - *If I had time, I would travel more*

6 Subjunctive Mood

Le Mode Subjonctif - Expressing doubt, emotion, and subjectivity

6.1 Subjonctif Présent (Present Subjunctive)

	Parler	Finir	Vendre
je	parle	finisse	vende
tu	parles	finisses	vendes
il/elle	parle	finisse	vende
nous	parlions	finissions	vendions
vous	parliez	finissiez	vendiez
ils/elles	parlent	finissent	vendent

6.2 Key Irregular Subjunctives

- **Être** - *sois, sois, soit, soyons, soyez, soient*
- **Avoir** - *aie, aies, ait, ayons, ayez, aient*
- **Aller** - *aille, ailles, aille, allions, alliez, aillent*
- **Faire** - *fasse, fasses, fasse, fassions, fassiez, fassent*

6.3 When to Use Subjunctive

- **After expressions of emotion** - *Je suis content que tu viennes*
- **After expressions of doubt** - *Je doute que ce soit vrai*
- **After expressions of will/desire** - *Je veux que tu étudies*
- **After certain conjunctions** - *Bien qu'il soit difficile, j'essaie*
- **After superlatives** - *C'est le meilleur livre que je connaisse*

7 Imperative Mood

Le Mode Impératif - Giving commands and instructions

7.1 Formation

Use present tense forms without subject pronouns:

Person	Parler	Finir	Vendre
tu	parle!	finis!	vends!
nous	parlons!	finissons!	vendons!
vous	parlez!	finissez!	vendez!

7.2 Irregular Imperatives

- **Être** - *sois, soyons, soyez*
- **Avoir** - *aie, ayons, ayez*
- **Savoir** - *sache, sachons, sachez*

8 Pronominal Verbs

Les Verbes Pronominaux - Actions performed on oneself or reciprocally

8.1 Common Pronominal Verbs

- **Se lever** - *to get up*
Je me lève à sept heures chaque matin.
I get up at seven o'clock every morning.
- **Se laver** - *to wash oneself*
Tu te laves les dents après les repas?
Do you brush your teeth after meals?
- **S'habiller** - *to get dressed*
Elle s'habille toujours élégamment.
She always dresses elegantly.
- **S'amuser** - *to have fun*
Nous nous amusons beaucoup aux fêtes.
We have a lot of fun at parties.

8.2 Reflexive Pronouns

Person	Pronoun
je	me
tu	te
il/elle	se
nous	nous
vous	vous
ils/elles	se

9 Modal Verbs

Les Verbes Modaux - Expressing ability, necessity, and desire

9.1 Devoir (must/have to)

- **Present** - *dois, dois, doit, devons, devez, doivent*
- **Usage** - *Je dois étudier pour l'examen - I must study for the exam*

9.2 Pouvoir (can/to be able to)

- **Present** - *peux, peux, peut, pouvons, pouvez, peuvent*
- **Usage** - *Pouvez-vous m'aider? - Can you help me?*

9.3 Vouloir (to want)

- **Present** - *veux, veux, veut, voulons, voulez, veulent*
- **Usage** - *Je veux apprendre le français - I want to learn French*

9.4 Savoir vs. Connaître (to know)

- **Savoir (facts/how to)** - *Je sais cuisiner - I know how to cook*
- **Connaître (people/places)** - *Je connais Paris - I know Paris*

10 Common Mistakes and Tips

Common Mistakes to Avoid:

1. **Wrong auxiliary verb:** Confusing être/avoir in compound tenses
2. **Agreement errors:** Forgetting past participle agreement with être
3. **Subjunctive avoidance:** Using indicative when subjunctive is required
4. **False friends:** Assuming similarity with English verb patterns
5. **Pronoun placement:** Incorrect positioning of reflexive pronouns
6. **Savoir vs. Connaître:** Mixing up these two "to know" verbs

Pro Tips for Mastering French Verbs:

1. **Learn patterns:** Focus on regular conjugation patterns first
2. **Practice daily:** Use different tenses in everyday conversations
3. **Memorize key irregulars:** Master the most common irregular verbs
4. **Use mnemonics:** Create memory aids like Dr. Mrs. Vandertramp

5. **Read and listen:** Expose yourself to authentic French content
6. **Practice with native speakers:** Develop natural rhythm and pronunciation

11 Quick Reference Table

Tense/Mood	Usage	Example
Présent	Current/habitual actions	Je parle français
Passé Composé	Completed past actions	J'ai parlé avec lui
Imparfait	Ongoing past actions	Je parlais souvent
Futur Simple	Future actions	Je parlerai demain
Conditionnel	Hypothetical/polite	Je parlerais si possible
Subjonctif	Doubt/emotion/will	J'espère qu'il parle
Impératif	Commands	Parle plus fort!

12 Practice Exercises

Exercise 1: Conjugate in Present Tense

Conjugate these verbs for the given persons:

- Manger (to eat): je _____, tu _____, il/elle _____
- Choisir (to choose): nous _____, vous _____, ils/elles _____
- Prendre (to take): je _____, tu _____, il/elle _____

Exercise 2: Choose the correct auxiliary

Complete with avoir or être:

- Marie _____ mangé la pizza.
- Nous _____ allés au cinéma.
- Ils _____ étudié toute la nuit.

Exercise 3: Transform to Past

Change these present tense sentences to passé composé:

- J'étudie le français. → _____ le français.
- Tu vas au marché. → _____ au marché.
- Nous dormons bien. → _____ bien.

13 Answer Key

Exercise Answers: Exercise 1:

1. Manger: je mange, tu manges, il/elle mange
2. Choisir: nous choisissons, vous choisissez, ils/elles choisissent
3. Prendre: je prends, tu prends, il/elle prend

Exercise 2:

1. Marie **a** mangé la pizza. (avoir)
2. Nous **sommes** allés au cinéma. (être - movement verb)
3. Ils **ont** étudié toute la nuit. (avoir)

Exercise 3:

1. J'étudie le français. → **J'ai étudié** le français.
2. Tu vas au marché. → **Tu es allé(e)** au marché.
3. Nous dormons bien. → **Nous avons bien dormi.**

14 Study Strategies

To master French verbs effectively:

1. **Start with regular patterns** and build your foundation systematically
2. **Practice conjugation drills** daily for 10-15 minutes
3. **Use verbs in context** rather than memorizing isolated forms
4. **Focus on the most common verbs** first (top 100 French verbs)
5. **Practice with native speakers** to develop natural rhythm and pronunciation
6. **Keep a verb journal** noting new verbs and their conjugations
7. **Use online conjugation tools** to verify your knowledge
8. **Read French texts** paying attention to verb usage patterns

Remember: French verbs follow logical patterns once you understand the system. The key is consistent practice and patience with irregulars. Focus on the most commonly used verbs first, and don't be discouraged by exceptions!

Bonne chance avec l'étude des verbes français!
Good luck with studying French verbs!