Long trusted as the most comprehensive, up-to-date and user-friendly grammar available, "French Grammar and Usage" is a complete guide to French as it is written and spoken today. It includes clear descriptions of all the main grammatical phenomena of French, and their use, illustrated by numerous examples taken from contemporary French, and distinguishes the most common forms of usage, both formal and informal.

Key features include:

- comprehensive content, covering all the major structures of contemporary French
- user-friendly organisation offering easy-to-find sections with cross-referencing and indexes of English words, French words and grammatical terms
- clear and illuminating examples help students at all stages of their degree
- useful indications of what cannot be said as well as what can.

Revised and updated throughout, this new edition offers updated examples to reflect current usage, new headers to include chapter number and section parts as well as enhanced cross-referencing for easier reference and expanded and more nuanced explanations of notoriously difficult points of grammar.

The combination of reference grammar and manual of current usage is an invaluable resource for students and teachers of French at the intermediate to advanced levels.

This Grammar is accompanied by Practising French Grammar: A Workbook (available to purchase separately ISBN 978-1-138-85119-1) which features related exercises and activities and a companion website offering additional resources at www.routledge.com/cw/hawkins.

Roger Hawkins is Professor of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex, UK.

Richard Towell is Emeritus Professor of French Applied Linguistics at the University of Salford, UK.
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Guide for the user

This reference grammar of French has been written specifically to cater for the needs of English speakers. Such grammars are seldom read like novels. Usually, readers either want information on a specific grammatical point. (‘In what order do the pronouns me and le occur in imperatives?’; ‘How do I translate “should” into French?’), or they want information about the behaviour of a class of grammatical phenomena such as ‘pronouns’, or ‘modal verbs’, or ‘negation’, and so on.

For this reason, and in common with most other grammars, French Grammar and Usage is divided into a number of chapters which deal with broad classes of grammatical phenomena; there are 17 chapters in all. But within each chapter there are two further subdivisions: the first into particular phenomena, and the second into specific grammatical points concerning those phenomena. This gives rise to three kinds of heading in the text. For example:

- Chapter 2 Determiners
- Chapter 2.6 Omission of the article
- Chapter 2.6.6 Omission of the article with nouns in apposition

Chapter 8 Verb constructions
- Chapter 8.2 Intransitive constructions
- Chapter 8.2.2 Intransitive verbs and auxiliary être

The chapters and their major subdivisions are listed in the Contents at the beginning of the book. If you want information about a broad class of grammatical phenomena, you will probably find it most quickly by looking there. At the end of the book we have provided a more detailed Index where key French and English words and expressions are listed, along with grammatical points. The items listed there will direct you to a specific section of the grammar dealing with the property you want to know about.

If you are not familiar with grammatical terms, try the Glossary of key grammatical terms, which comes just after this Guide for the user. We briefly define common terms such as subject, object, transitive verb, intransitive verb, phrase, clause, and so on, illustrating them from French.

The variety of French described in French Grammar and Usage

We have focused on one variety of French: standard European French. This is the variety used by university-educated speakers throughout metropolitan France. Within this variety we have distinguished two media of communication: written French and spoken French.

In the normal case, we describe grammatical phenomena which are appropriate both to the spoken and the written forms of standard European French.

But in some cases particular constructions may be appropriate either to one or the other, but not both. For example, the simple past tense form of verbs – je partis ‘I left’, elle mangea ‘she ate’ – is normally restricted to written French. Questions formed by putting a question word at the front of a sentence without subject-verb inversion – Où il est, le patron? ‘Where’s the boss?’ – are normally restricted to spoken French. Where there are such restrictions we say so. Where we say nothing, assume that a construction is possible in both written and spoken French.
Register

All languages have constructions and vocabulary which are appropriate to some contexts but not others. For example, in English when people are writing in an academic or literary style (as they do in grammars!), they tend not to use contracted forms. They would write sentence (1) rather than sentence (2):

(1) Who would have thought that they would not have succeeded?
(2) Who’d’ve thought they wouldn’t’ve succeeded?

In spoken English, however, you are much more likely to hear (2) than (1). These context-related differences in the form of a single variety of language are often called ‘registers’. A variety of language has a number of different registers appropriate to different contexts.

In *French Grammar and Usage* we have distinguished just two broad registers: formal French, which is the kind of French used in contexts where native speakers are careful in what they say and write, where they employ grammatical and stylistic devices which they may have learned at school (like the simple past, the imperfect subjunctive, or the inverted forms of questions). We also refer to informal French, which is used when speakers are engaged in relaxed, spontaneous communication and are less attentive to the form of what they are saying.

Where particular grammatical phenomena are typical only of formal French, or of informal French, but not both, we say so. Where we say nothing, assume that a construction is possible both in formal French and informal French.

It is important to be aware that informal French is not the same thing as ‘slang’ or ‘dialect forms’. Informal French is just as much standard French as formal French is – it is the relaxed register used by speakers of standard educated European French. ‘Slang’ and ‘dialect forms’ are different, non-standard, varieties. On odd occasions we may signal some usages as being non-standard by using the term colloquial.

Prescriptive and descriptive approaches to French grammar

One of the problems facing any writer of a grammar of French is deciding what weight to give to the view of those French grammarians, legislators, educators, newspaper columnists and others who wish to prescribe how French should be written and spoken, within the framework of a description of how French writers and speakers actually use French. We have tried to steer a middle path in this respect. Where a grammatical phenomenon is clearly widespread and normal in the French of educated speakers and writers, but in conflict with prescriptive norms, we have described the usage. An example is the widespread omission of *ne* in *ne . . . pas ‘not’, frowned upon by some, but in widespread use in informal spoken French (see Chapter 16.4).

Where there is variability or hesitation in the use of a grammatical phenomenon by speakers or writers, or where there is a change in progress in the language which has not yet been fully accepted, and there is an established prescriptive norm, we have presented the prescriptive norm. For example, agreement of the past participle with preceding direct objects, as in *La lettre que j’ai écrite* ‘The letter I wrote’, is subject to considerable variability in some contexts. Some speakers make the agreement, some do not. In this case we have followed the prescriptive norms (see Chapter 9.3).
**Conventions**

In many places in this grammar, we have presented examples not only of what native speakers do say and write, but also of what they do NOT say and write. Such ungrammatical sentences are preceded by an asterisk *. For example:

Les cinq personnes (NOT *gens) qui ont mangé avec nous  
*The five people who ate with us* (see Chapter 1.1.3)

Round brackets placed around a French or English word or part of a word in an example mean that it is optional, and its presence or absence has little or no effect on the meaning. For example:

par instant(s)  *at odd moments*  
(You can use either *par instant* or *par instants*)

par milliers  *in (their) thousands*  
(*par milliers* can be translated either by ‘in thousands’ or ‘in their thousands’)


Glossary of key grammatical terms

Adjective – A class of words which describe somebody or something and thereby modify nouns. Adjectives appear adjacent to nouns or separated from them by verbs like être, devenir, rester: e.g. **un petit problème** ‘a small problem’; **une boîte carrée** ‘a square box’; **cette robe est chère** ‘This dress is expensive’. Adjectives are commonly inflected to agree with nouns.

Adverb – A class of words which give extra meaning to or modify verbs, adjectives, another adverb, phrases and whole sentences: e.g. **Je cours vite** ‘I can run quickly’; **Tout est si clair** ‘Everything is so clear’; **Le train roulait tellement vite qu’elle n’a pas pu en descendre.** ‘The train was going so fast she couldn’t get off’; **Juste avant le départ du train** ‘Just before the train leaves’ **soudain, j’ai entendu un bruit** ‘Suddenly I heard a noise’.

Adverbial – A word, phrase or clause that functions as an adverb, e.g. **parler bas** ‘to talk quietly’ (**bas** – an adjective); **Je lui rends visite de temps en temps** ‘I visit her from time to time’. (**de temps en temps** – a prepositional phrase); **Elle travaille le matin** ‘She works in the mornings’ (**le matin** – a noun phrase); **Le concert m’a beaucoup plu parce que j’aime ce type de musique** (**parce que j’aime ce type de musique** – a subordinate clause).

Affirmative sentence – A sentence which is not a negative: e.g. **Elle parle** ‘She is speaking; **Parle-t-elle?** ‘Is she speaking?** Parle!** ‘Speak’ (as opposed to the negative sentences **Elle ne parle pas, Ne parle-t-elle pas?** or **Ne parle pas!**)

Agreement – The way the form of a word changes to align with other words to which it is related. Thus, the verb must change its form to be compatible with a given subject: e.g. **nous mangeons** ‘We’re eating’; **vous mangez** ‘You’re eating’. A determiner and an adjective must change their form to be compatible with a given noun: e.g. **un bon repas** ‘A good meal’; **une bonne bière** ‘A good beer’. A past participle must change its form to be compatible with a preceding direct object: e.g. **Le coffre? Je l’ai ouvert** ‘The car boot? I’ve opened it’; **La porte? Je l’ai ouverte** ‘The door? I’ve opened it’; and so on.

Article, definite – definite articles (**le, la, les**) indicate that the entity/concept referred to by the noun is uniquely identifiable by both speaker and hearer. If you say **Passe-moi la fourchette** ‘Pass me the fork’, both speaker and hearer know that there is a unique, identifiable ‘fork’ in the context in which the conversation is taking place.

Article, indefinite – indefinite articles (**un, une, des**) are used with count nouns (**bouteille** ‘bottle’, **billet** ‘ticket’) and indicate that the entity/concept referred to by the noun is not sufficiently ‘known about’ or ‘specified’ to justify the definite article. If you say **Passe-moi une fourchette** ‘Pass me a fork’, this implies that there is no uniquely identifiable ‘fork’ in the context of the conversation (perhaps because there are several of them).

Article, partitive – partitive articles (**du, de la, des**) serve the same function as indefinite articles but are used with mass and abstract nouns: **j’ai acheté du lait** ‘I bought (some) milk, **Il faut avoir de la patience** ‘You must have (some) patience’. The plural partitive article **des** is used with nouns that are mass or abstract by virtue of their meaning, but happen to be grammatically plural: **des tripes** (f.pl.) ‘tripe’; **des cheveux** (m.pl.) ‘hair’; **des renseignements** (m.pl.) ‘information’.

Auxiliary Verb – the verbs **avoir** or **être** which accompany a past participle in compound tenses or the passive e.g. **Elle a mangé** ‘She has eaten’; **Le vélo a été réparé** ‘The bike has been repaired’.

Clause – A string of words which contains just one verb phrase and a subject (whether overt or implied): e.g. **Elle part** ‘She’s leaving’ – one clause: **Depuis janvier les prix ont augmenté** ‘Since January, prices have gone up’ – one clause; **Il est heureux parce qu’il est riche** ‘He is
happy because he is rich’ – two clauses; *Elle est prête/à partir* ‘She is ready to leave’ – two clauses (in *à partir* the subject is implied: She is ready, and she will leave); *Les circonstances aidant/le parti gagnera les élections* ‘If the conditions are right, the party will win this election’ – two clauses; *Il dit/qu’on croit/qu’elle va partir* ‘He says that they think that she will leave’ – three clauses. Also see coordinate clause, main clause, relative clause, subordinate clause.

**Comparative** – A way of modifying adjectives and adverbs to draw a comparison between one entity and another: *Il veut acheter une plus grande/une moins grande/une aussi grande voiture* ‘He wants to buy a bigger car/a car which is not so big/a car which is just as big’; *Cette voiture roule plus vite/moins vite/aussi vite que l’autre* ‘This car goes faster/slower/as quickly as the other one’.

**Complement** – Any phrase which follows a noun, verb, adjective, adverb to form an expression with a cohesive meaning: e.g. *un appartement à louer* ‘a flat to let’; *Il se réunissent le dimanche au stade* ‘They meet on Sundays at the stadium’; *Alice est devenue professeur* ‘Alice has become a teacher’; *Pierre est difficile à vivre* ‘Pierre is difficult to live with’.

**Coordinate clause** – A clause linked to another by *et, ou, mais* e.g. *Il viendra demain et il nous apportera des gâteaux.* ‘He’ll come tomorrow and he’ll bring us some cakes’. These clauses are both main clauses.

**Declarative sentence** – A sentence which makes a statement (as opposed to a question or an imperative)

**Demonstrative** – Demonstratives ‘point to’ items in a way which is more specific than the definite articles. Demonstrative determiner = *ce, cette, ces* e.g. *ce bus, cette chatte, ces oignons* ‘this bus, this female cat, these onions’. Demonstrative pronoun = *celui, celle, ceux, celles* ‘this one’ (m. and f.) and ‘those ones’ (m. and f.)

**Determiner** – Words which modify nouns in specific ways to indicate definiteness and possession. Articles (*un, une/le, la, les/des*, etc.), demonstrative determiners (*ce, cette, etc.*) or possessive determiners (*mon, ma/ton, ta* etc.) which modify a noun. All determiners have singular and plural forms, and in the singular have different forms depending on whether the noun is masculine or feminine.

**Determiner, demonstrative** – demonstrative determiners are the forms *ce/cet, cette, ces* ‘this/these, that/those’. They indicate that the noun is seen as ‘known about’ or ‘specified’ largely in contrast to another noun: *Passe-moi cette fourchette* ‘Pass me that fork (and not some other fork that might also be visible).

**Determiner, possessive** – possessive determiners are forms like *mon, son, votre* ‘my, his/her, your’ that indicate that the noun is seen as belonging to someone.

**Direct Object** – See Object

**Directly transitive verb** – see Verb

**Ditransitive Verb** – See Verb

**Finite Verb** – See Verb

**Formal French** – In this grammar ‘formal French’ refers to a style used by speakers of standard and educated French when they are paying particular attention to the form of what they are saying or writing. It is a style usually appropriate when someone is speaking in an official capacity (lectures, sermons, speeches, etc.), or writing in learned, academic or literary style. Features of formal French which are absent from informal French include: the use of the simple past tense (*Il sortit ‘He went out’), the use of the past anterior tense (*Aussitôt qu’il fut sorti ‘As soon as he had gone out’), retention of *ne in ne...pas.*

**Gender** – A division of nouns into two classes: masculine and feminine: The distinction shows up mainly in determiners (*le versus la, ce versus cette, mon versus ma* etc.) in pronouns (*il versus elle*) and in the agreement of adjectives with nouns (*beau versus belle*). Gender distinctions are grammatical and need not correspond to sex distinctions in the real world (although they mostly do): e.g. *médecin ‘doctor’* is masculine, but can refer to men or women: *personne ‘person’* is feminine but can refer to men or women.

**Gerund** – see Participle
xiv  Glossary of key grammatical terms

Imperative – a form of the verb used to give orders, express encouragement or give advice: e.g. Asseyez-vous ‘Sit down’; Allez! ‘Come on’; Fais attention! ‘Watch out’.

Impersonal – Refers to a pronoun (usually a subject pronoun) which does not refer to any person, place, thing, idea etc. il, ce, cela, ça can be impersonal pronouns in French: e.g. Il est temps de partir ‘It's time to leave’; Ça me fait peur d'y aller la nuit ‘It scares me to go there at night’.

Indicative – The set of forms of the verb which are not subjunctive, imperative, infinitive or participial.

Indirect Object – see Object

Indirectly transitive verb – see Verb

Infinitive – A ‘base’ form of the verb which ends in -er, -ir, -re, -oir, and corresponds to English ‘to’: aimer ‘to like’, finir ‘to finish’, vendre ‘to sell’, recevoir ‘to receive’.

Intransitive verb – see Verb

Main clause – A main clause is complete on its own and can form a complete sentence e.g. Il pleuvait hier vers trois heures ‘It was raining yesterday around three o’clock’.

Modify, to – To add to the meaning of a noun, verb, adjective, etc. by adding another word or phrase to it: e.g. manteau, un manteau, un manteau gris; oiseau, un oiseau, un oiseau qui chante; parle, il parle, il parle lentement; grand, si grand, pas si grand.

Negator – One of the elements aucun, jamais, ni, nul, pas, personne, plus, rien which can make expressions negative (see Chapter 16).

Noun – A class of words which refer to people, places, things, ideas, and so on; a noun is usually preceded by a determiner e.g. un ami, la France, une bière, le bonheur. Sub-classes of nouns are: abstract: le bonheur; concrete: un livre; collective: la foule; count: un ami; mass: du beurre; proper: la France, Marie Paule.

Noun Phrase – The phrase consisting of a noun alone, or a noun and the elements which modify it. Each of the following is a noun phrase: Pierre, Le soleil, un cher ami ‘a dear friend’, une bière bien fraîche ‘a really cold beer’, chacun de mes amis les plus chers ‘each of my dearest friends’.

Number – A grammatical distinction between nouns or pronouns which are singular and those which are plural. Number distinctions need not correspond to real singular and plural distinctions in the world, and can differ between English and French (although mostly the grammatical and real-world distinctions coincide): e.g. ‘hair’ (singular) versus cheveux (plural); trousers (plural) versus pantalon (singular).

Number, cardinal – A number in the series un (1), deux (2), trois (3), etc.

Number, ordinal – A number in the series premier (1er), deuxième, (2e), troisième (3e) etc.

Object – A direct object is the noun phrase or pronoun whose referent is affected directly by the action described by the verb: e.g. Il a pris le train ‘He took the train’ Il l’a pris ‘He took it’; je crois ce qu’il a dit ‘I believe what he said’. An indirect object is the noun phrase or pronoun whose referent benefits in some way from the action described by the verb. In French, the indirect object noun phrases are always introduced by à: e.g. il a envoyé un cadeau à sa mère ‘He sent a present to his mother’. An object of a preposition is any noun phrase which follows a preposition: e.g. dans le hall ‘In the hall’; à côté du restaurant ‘beside the restaurant’. See also Preceding direct object.

Ordinal Number – see Number

Parenthetical Expression – An aside made by a speaker to indicate a reservation about what is being said. It is the equivalent of putting something in brackets (‘parentheses’): e.g. Pierre, semble-t-il, a gagné le prix ‘Pierre, it seems, won the prize. Parentheticals are kinds of adverbal.

Past Participle – see Participle

Participle – Past participles are forms of the verb which occur with avoir or être e.g. J’ai mangé ‘I’ve eaten’; Elle est partie ‘She has left’. Present participles end in -ant and correspond to English verbs ending in -ing: e.g. disparaissant ‘disappearing’, attendant ‘waiting’. Gerunds are present participles preceded by en: en disparaissant ‘while disappearing’; by disappearing’, en attendant ‘while waiting; by waiting’.
Passive – A form of a normally transitive verb where the direct object becomes the subject and the verb is turned into an être + past participle construction: e.g. Il a réparé le vélo ‘He repaired the bike’ / Le vélo a été réparé ‘The bike has been repaired’.

Person – The three categories into which noun phrases or pronouns can be divided depending on whether they refer to the person(s) speaking (je, me, moi, nous – first person), the person(s) being spoken to (tu, te, toi, vous – second person) or the person(s) or thing(s) being talked about (il, elle, lui, ils etc. – third person). Pronouns take different forms in the first, second and third person, and finite verbs change their form to agree with the person of the subject (e.g. je parle, nous parlons, vous parlez, etc.)

Personal Pronoun – A first person, second person or third person pronoun which stands for a noun phrase mentioned or implied elsewhere in a text or discourse. Personal pronouns contrast with Impersonal Pronouns which do not refer to other noun phrases. Personal pronouns are pronouns like je, me, moi, nous; tu, te, toi, vous; il, elle, lui, les etc. They take their name from the fact that they can be classified as first, second or third person and do not necessarily refer to people; e.g. elle is a personal pronoun, but it refers to the inanimate émission in: ELLE est intéressante, cette émission ‘That programme’s interesting’.

Phrase – Any string of words which gives rise to an expression with a cohesive meaning e.g. mon oncle Jacques ‘my uncle Jacques’ (noun phrase); Pierre MARCHE LENTEMENT ‘Pierre walks slowly’ (verb phrase), etc.

Preceding direct object – When a verb is conjugated with avoir the past participle agrees with the preceding direct object. This is usually a preceding unstressed pronoun: Je les ai vus; the head of a relative clause: LA LETTRE que j’ai écrite or, in questions, the interrogative form at the beginning of the question: Quelle lettre a-t-il écrite?

Preposition – Words like à, de, dans, en, sur etc. which are followed by noun phrases and indicate the direction, location, orientation etc., of an entity.

Prepositional Phrase – A phrase consisting of a preposition and its complement. The following are all prepositional phrases: à midi ‘at noon’; à chaque virage ‘at every bend’; au chevet de ma mère ‘at my mother’s bedside’.

Present Participle

Pronoun – A form which is used in place of a noun phrase when that phrase is already known from the context: e.g. je, tu, nous, le, la, leur etc. Pronouns have different forms depending on whether they are subjects, direct objects, indirect objects or objects of a preposition.

Proper Noun – names such as Marie-Paule, le Canada, are proper nouns.

Quantifier – A determiner-like expression which measures or quantifies a noun or noun phrase: e.g. beaucoup d’argent ‘a lot of money’; LA PLUPART des spectateurs ‘most of the spectators’; tous les jours ‘every day’.

Question (direct versus indirect) – A direct question is addressed directly to the hearer or reader: e.g. Viens-tu? ‘Are you coming?’ An indirect question reports the asking of the question: e.g. Il a demandé si tu venais ‘He asked if you were coming’.

Reciprocal – A type of sentence where either the direct object, the indirect object or the object of a preposition refers to the same thing, idea etc. as a plural subject, and the sentence is interpreted so that the subjects are doing things to each other: e.g. Les boxeurs se sont blessés ‘The boxers injured each other’; Les participants se sont posé des questions ‘The participants asked each other questions’; Les manifestants ont lutté LES UNS CONTRE LES AUTRES ‘The demonstrators fought with each other’.

Reflexive – A type of sentence where either the direct object, the indirect object or the object of a preposition refers to the same person, thing or idea as the subject: e.g. Je me lave ‘I am washing (myself)’; Elle se cache la vérité ‘She is hiding the truth from herself’; Elle parle CONTRE ELLE-MÊME ‘She is speaking against herself’.

Relative clause – A clause which modifies a noun phrase or a pronoun: e.g. Il y avait deux hommes qui sortaient du bar ‘There were two men who were coming out of the bar’; C’est lui qui me l’a donné ‘He is the one who gave it to me’.
Subject – The noun phrase or pronoun in a clause about which the verb and its complement say something. (For clauses as subjects see Subordinate Clause.) Subjects usually appear in front of the verb: e.g. *Le diner est servi* ‘Dinner is served’; *Sa femme parle lentement* ‘His wife speaks slowly’; *Delphine a été battue* ‘Delphine was beaten’ . It can appear after the verb in some constructions. See Subject-Verb Inversion

Subject-Verb inversion – Subjects normally precede finite verbs in French. But in questions, and after certain adverbs, the subject and the finite verb may change places: e.g. *Aime-t-il le Roquefort?* ‘Does he like Roquefort cheese?’; *à peine s’est-il assis qu’on lui a demandé de se déplacer.* ‘Hardly had he sat down when someone asked him to move’.

Subjunctive – see Chapter 11 for discussion

Subordinate clause – A clause which is part of a larger sentence, and whose meaning is secondary to that of the main clause. It is useful to distinguish between two kinds of subordinate clauses: Those which serve as adverbials: *Parce qu’il est riche, Pierre est heureux* ‘Because he is rich, Pierre is happy’ – *parce qu’il est riche* is subordinate to *Pierre est heureux* and serves as an adverbial. Those which serve as subjects and objects; *Ce qu’elle a fait ce jour-là me restera toujours dans l’esprit* ‘What she did that day will stay in my mind for ever’ – *Ce qu’elle a fait ce jour-là* is subordinate to *Je ne vois pas* and functions as the subject of the sentence. *Je ne vois pas ce que je peux faire* ‘I don’t see what I can do’ *Ce que je peux faire* is subordinate to *Je ne vois pas* and functions as the object of the sentence. For relative clauses see above.

Superlative – A way of modifying adjectives and adverbs to single out an entity as the best or the worst of its kind: e.g. *C’est la route la plus dangereuse/la moins dangereuse de la région* ‘It’s the most dangerous road/least dangerous road in the region’; *Cette voiture-là roule la plus vite/la moins vite* ‘That car goes fastest/the least fast’.

Tense – A form of the verb which indicates the time at which an event took place relative to other events being talked about: e.g. *Je prends [present tense] la route par où nous sommes venus [compound past tense] ‘I’m taking the road along which we came’. Tenses have names like present, future, simple past, compound past, etc. – See Chapter 7 for the forms of verbs in different tenses and Chapter 10 for their uses.

Transitive Verb – See Verb

Verb – A class of words which refers to actions, states, events, accomplishments, and so on, and has different forms to indicate tense and agreement e.g. *Elle parle ‘She is speaking’; L’eau scintillait ‘The water was sparkling’.*

Verb, intransitive – A verb which has no direct object: e.g. *La neige tombait ‘Snow was falling’.*

Verb, finite – A verb which is marked for tense and agreement, as opposed to non-finite forms such as the infinitive, imperative, participles: e.g. *Je parle ‘I’m speaking; J’ai parlé ‘I spoke’; Je sais parler français ‘I can speak French’.*

Verb, transitive – A verb which has a direct object: e.g. *Elle mange une pomme ‘She is eating an apple’.*

Verb, indirectly transitive – A verb which has a prepositional complement: e.g. *Il parle de ses parents ‘He is talking of his parents’*

Verb, ditransitive – A verb which has two complements consisting of a direct object and a prepositional object: e.g. *J’ai envoyé la lettre à mon frère ‘I sent the letter to my brother’.*

Verb, pronominal – Pronominal verbs are accompanied by an unstressed pronoun which agrees with the subject and is one of *me, te, se, nous, vous.* The unstressed pronoun may be a direct object e.g. *je me lave or an indirect object: e.g. je me lave le visage.*

Verb Phrase – The phrase consisting of a verb alone, or a verb and the elements which modify it (but excluding the subject). Each of the following is a verb phrase: *marchait ‘was walking’; marchait lentement ‘was walking slowly’; a envoyé un cadeau d’anniversaire à sa tante ‘sent a birthday present to his/her aunt’.*
The influence of others is apparent in all forms of writing, but it is particularly pervasive in the writing of a grammar of French. So much has been said and written about French grammar over the centuries. The influence of the work of those who have gone before, the views of our colleagues and contemporaries who teach French or are interested in the structure of French, have shaped the presentation of nearly every item we discuss.

It would therefore be impossible for us to cite all the sources of ideas and examples on which we have drawn in writing French Grammar and Usage. Nevertheless, we would like to single out some sources, and some friends and colleagues, for making a direct and significant contribution. A list of the main works referred to is given in the bibliography. The following friends and colleagues have taken time to comment on drafts of various chapters: Marie-Anne Hintze, Tony Lodge, Chris Lyons, Jean-Pierre Mailhac, Annie Rouxeville, Raphael Salkie and Carol Sanders. John Butt, co-author of A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish (London, Arnold, 1988) provided us with valuable feedback on an early draft, as did several anonymous readers. Elaine Murphy, supported by the secretarial staff in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Salford, skilfully typed and copied countless drafts of the book. We would like to thank all of these for their interest and their help, and also Lesley Riddle at Arnold for waiting patiently for the final version while we juggled writing with the demands of running large university departments during difficult times.

We have discovered in undertaking this work that there are as many views about how a point of grammar should be presented and exemplified as there are people who are consulted. Those who have given us the benefit of their advice may not agree with the way we have finally decided to present the grammar of French. But we are certain that the end product is far better than it would have been without their advice.

Roger Hawkins and Richard Towell
Colchester and Salford,
January 1996
Acknowledgements for the second edition

This second edition of French Grammar and Usage has benefitted considerably from the comments of friends, colleagues and students who used the first edition and found areas where it could be improved. We would particularly like to thank the following for their significant help: Aidan Coveney, Jim Dolamore, Annick Leyssen, Matthew McNamara and Jonathan Mallinson. We would also like to thank George Stephenson for his comments on the text prior to the reprinting of the second edition. We alone are responsible for any errors or weaknesses of presentation which remain.

Roger Hawkins and Richard Towell
Colchester and Salford
September 2000
Acknowledgements for the third edition

For the third edition of French Grammar and Usage we have made some of the explanations more reader-friendly, added some new examples and modified certain points in the light of comments received from our readers. We would particularly like to thank Penny Eley, Odile Cyrille-Thomas and Agnès Gower for their comments, and Seth Whidden’s website (http://www86.homepage.villanova.edu/seth.whidden.html) for directing us to Jean Girodet’s (1996) discussion of adjective agreement with gens. To maintain consistency in the tone of entries, we have not always taken up suggestions made by our readers, and we hope they will forgive us where we appear to have ignored their advice. For weaknesses in presentation that still remain, and for errors that were not noticed before the book went to print, we alone are to blame.

Roger Hawkins and Richard Towell
Colchester and Salford
January 2010
Acknowledgements for the fourth edition

Perhaps it is in the nature of a reference grammar that there continue to be errors that were not spotted in the preparation of earlier editions, and better ways of describing things than before. At any rate, we have made a number of changes in this fourth edition that we believe render it more accurate and reader-friendly. A number of the changes are in response to the comments of reviewers or users of the grammar. We would particularly like to thank Guillaume Fleury for his observations about *gens* and *personnes* that have led us to revise the entry for these words. As in previous editions, to maintain consistency in the tone of the entries we have not always taken up suggestions made by our readers. We beg their forgiveness and hope that they will nevertheless find the new edition a useful source of information about the contemporary French language.

Roger Hawkins and Richard Towell
Colchester and Salford
August 2014
1 Nouns

1.1 Types of noun

A noun is a word that typically refers to an entity or concept of some kind, e.g. livre ‘book’, ami ‘friend’, bière ‘beer’, bonheur ‘happiness’, and is the main constituent of the subject of a clause, the object of a verb or the object of a preposition. French nouns may co-occur with articles (le livre ‘the book’, un ami ‘a friend’) and modifying adjectives (un roman français ‘a French novel’, mon cher ami ‘my dear friend’). There are different subclasses of noun, typically determined by meaning, that have different distributional properties which are described in this chapter: abstract (bonheur ‘happiness’, beauté ‘beauty’), concrete (bière ‘beer’, roman ‘novel’), mass (eau ‘water’, beurre ‘butter’), count (bouteille ‘bottle’, billet ‘ticket’), collective (comité ‘committee’, gouvernement ‘government’) and proper (names) (Jean-Pierre, France). French nouns belong to one of two gender classes – masculine or feminine (le bâtiment ‘the building’, but la maison ‘the house’) – and they may vary in form when they are singular or plural (cheval ‘horse’, but chevaux ‘horses’). Nouns can be simple (une cour ‘a yard’, un marteau ‘a hammer’) or compound (une basse-cour ‘a farmyard’, un marteau-piqueur ‘a pneumatic drill’). Compound nouns have their own rules for gender and number assignment (see 1.2.11 and 1.3.9).

1.1.1 Abstract versus concrete nouns

Concrete nouns refer to entities with physical attributes which can be seen, heard, touched, etc. Abstract nouns refer to entities without such physical attributes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical concrete nouns</th>
<th>Typical abstract nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bière (f)</td>
<td>béer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonbon (m)</td>
<td>sweet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cadeau (m)</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carte (f)</td>
<td>card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disque (m)</td>
<td>disk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>église (f)</td>
<td>church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>livre (m)</td>
<td>book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mannequin (m)</td>
<td>(fashion) model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abstract nouns in French are usually accompanied by a definite article whereas English has no article:

La patience est une qualité qui se fait rare
Patience is a quality which is becoming rare

Je cherche le bonheur
I'm looking for happiness

But when abstract nouns refer to a particular example of ‘patience’, ‘happiness’, ‘knowledge’, and so on (for instance, when they are modified by an adjective), they occur with an indefinite article:

Il a fait preuve cette fois d’une patience appréciable
The patience he showed on this occasion was considerable
2 Nouns §1.1

Il s’est alors produit un silence absolu
Absolute silence ensued

Un bonheur en vaut un autre
One kind of happiness is the same as any other

(See Chapter 2 for definite and indefinite articles.)

1.1.2 Mass versus count nouns

Count nouns identify individual entities, and usually have both singular and plural forms. Mass nouns treat the entity or entities they refer to as a single unit, and typically have only a singular form (although some mass nouns only have a plural form):

Typical count nouns                      Typical mass nouns

une bouteille      a bottle               de l’air      air
des bouteilles     bottles                du beurre     butter
un chien           a dog                  de l’eau      water
des chiens         dogs                   du gâteau     cake
une personne       a person               des cheveux   hair
des personnes      people                 du sable      sand

Mass nouns in French are usually accompanied by the partitive article (see Chapter 2.4) – du, de l’, de la or des – in those cases where English has ‘some’ or no article at all:

Je voudrais du lait, s’il vous plaît
I would like some milk, please

Il y a du vin dans le placard
There’s wine in the cupboard

Mass nouns used countably

Some mass nouns can be used countably to refer to specific examples of the substance in question:

les vins de France the wines of France
les fromages de Normandie the cheeses of Normandy
un pain               a loaf of bread
un petit pain         a bun

Some count nouns can also be used as mass nouns:

Prenez du poulet Have some chicken
Il met du citron dans tout He puts lemon in everything

1.1.3 Collective nouns

Collective nouns refer to collections of people or things.

Typical collective nouns

assistance (f)         audience
comité (m)             committee
equipe (f)             team
foire (f)              crowd
gouvernement (m)       government
linge (m) de maison    household linen
§1.1 Types of noun

main-d’œuvre (f)  workforce
people (m)  people
vaisselle (f)  dishes, crockery

When a collective noun is the subject of a clause, the verb is usually singular. This contrasts with English, where the verb can be either singular or plural:

Le gouvernement a (NOT *ont) décidé d’interdire la publicité pour les cigarettes
The government has/have decided to ban cigarette advertising

L’équipe s’entraîne (NOT *s’entraînent) le jeudi soir
The team trains/train on Thursday evenings

(For more on subject-verb agreement see Chapter 9.1.)

Personnes and gens

personnes and gens, both of which mean ‘people’, differ in their uses because personnes is a count noun and gens, which is only found in the plural form, behaves like a collective noun. Only personnes can be preceded directly by a number (e.g. cinq), or the quantifiers plusieurs ‘several’ and quelques ‘a few’:

Les cinq personnes (NOT *gens) qui ont mangé avec nous
The five people who ate with us

Plusieurs personnes (NOT *gens) sont restées tout l’après-midi
Several people stayed for the whole afternoon

By the same token, gens tends to be used in contexts where ‘people’ refers to people in general:

Les gens n’aient pas rester à table trop longtemps
People don’t like to spend too long over a meal

However, gens can be preceded by beaucoup de ‘many’, peu de ‘few’, un nombre de ‘a number of’, tous les ‘all the’ and la plupart des ‘most’, and when an adjective precedes gens, the adjective can be preceded by a number:

Nous avons vu les six jeunes gens devant la banque hier
We saw the six young people in front of the bank yesterday

1.1.4 Proper nouns

Proper nouns are names like Marie-Paule, Paris, Toulouse, Le Havre, la Seine, la France, le Canada.

With persons there is usually no article:

Marie-Paule viendra demain
Marie-Paule will come tomorrow

In some cases an article is inserted in informal speech:

Dis donc, elle était pas fière, la Marie-Paule!
So Marie-Paule must have felt a bit of a fool!

T’aurais vu la tête qu’il faisait, le Jérôme!
You should have seen Jérôme’s face!

This conveys a familiar, affectionate attitude towards the individual concerned.
Nouns §1.1

When reference is made to a family, as in ‘the Jones family’, a plural article is used, but the name itself is not pluralized:

J’ai invité les Martin à venir manger dimanche
I have invited the Martins for Sunday lunch

When a person’s title is used, it is normally accompanied by the definite article:

Je vous présente le Professeur Bodin
May I introduce Professor Bodin

chez le Docteur Gleizes
c/o Dr Gleizes (on an envelope or package)

When proper nouns are modified by preceding adjectives, they require a definite article:

le petit Jules little Jules
le gros Henri fat Henri

Unlike in English, regions and countries are normally used with a definite article:

J’ai visité la Normandie I visited Normandy
la France d’aujourd’hui today’s France
Nous survolons la Belgique We’re flying over Belgium

(See Chapter 2.2.2 for the use of articles with regions and countries.)

1.1.5 Use of an/année, jour/journée, matin/matinée, soir/soirée

English has only one word for each of ‘morning’, ‘evening’, ‘day’ and ‘year’. French has two, but each is used under different circumstances. It is often said that the -ée forms are used when the activity which takes place during the morning, evening, etc. is highlighted. Compare:

Je travaille chaque matin/soir/jour
I work every morning/evening/day
(where the frequency rather than the activity is highlighted)

J’ai travaillé toute la matinée/la soirée/la journée
I worked all morning/evening/day
(where the length of work is highlighted)

But there are other cases where the forms have distinct uses which appear to be the result simply of convention:

au début de la matinée/la soirée/la journée
at the start of the morning/the evening/the day

en fin de matinée/soirée/journée
at the end of the morning/the evening/the day

par une belle matinée on a beautiful morning
tôt le matin early in the morning
Un beau matin il est parti One fine morning he up and left
tous les jours/matins/ans every day/morning/year
l’an 2000 the year 2000
le jour de l’an New Year’s Day
§1.2 Gender

Nouns in French are either masculine or feminine. Unfortunately there are no simple rules which non-native speakers can use to predict with complete accuracy the gender of a given noun. However, there are some patterns, either in the form or meaning of nouns, which can normally be used to predict the correct gender with greater than chance accuracy. The reader should remember, however, that these patterns are not comprehensive, and that there are exceptions.

1.2.1 Gender signalled by the final letters of the written forms of nouns

Masculine

Many nouns whose singular written form ends in a consonant are masculine:

- un tic a twitch (un lac a lake, le public the public, etc.)
- un bord the edge (le fond the bottom, le pied the foot, etc.)
- un camping a camp site (un parking a car park, un shampooing a shampoo, etc.)
- un détail a detail (le travail work, le soleil the sun, etc.)
- le fer iron (l’hiver winter, un couloir a corridor, etc.)
- le chocolat chocolate (le climat the climate, un jouet a toy, un poulet a chicken, le ciment cement, un jugement a judgement, etc.)

Exceptions are typically found with nouns which end in -n, -r, -s, -t, and -x:

- une maison a house
- une cuiller a spoon
- la mer the sea
- une tour a tower
- une fois one time
- une dent a tooth
- une nuit a night
- une jument a mare
- une croix a cross

Nouns ending in -on are usually masculine (un poisson ‘a fish’, un sillon ‘a furrow’, etc., although une chanson ‘a song’ is an exception). But nouns ending in -aison, -(s)ion, -lion or -xion are usually feminine:

- une comparaison a comparison
- une liaison a liaison
6  Nouns §1.2

une maison  a house
une raison  a reason
une saison  a season
une décision  a decision
la tension  tension, blood pressure
une vision  a vision
une émission  a broadcast
une connexion  a connection

Exception: un bastion a bastion

Nouns ending in -eur are usually masculine (un ordinateur a computer, le bonheur happiness, etc.), but the following frequently-used nouns are feminine:

la chaleur  the heat
une couleur  a colour
une erreur  a mistake
une fleur  a flower
la largeur  the width
la longueur  the length
la peur  fear
la profondeur  the depth

Many nouns whose singular written form ends in a vowel (but excluding -e without an acute accent) are masculine, although there are a significant number of exceptions:

-ai, -oi
un délai  a time limit
un essai  an attempt (a ‘try’ in rugby)
un emploi  a job
un roi  a king

Exceptions: la foi faith, une loi a law, une paroi a wall

-é
le café  the café or coffee
un fossé  a ditch
le marché  the market
le thé  tea

Exception: une clé a key

-eau
un couteau  a knife
un marteau  a hammer
le niveau  the level
le réseau  the network
un tableau  a picture

Exceptions: l’eau water, la peau skin

-i
l’abri  shelter
un cri  a shout
un pari  a bet
un pli  a fold
un raccourci  a short-cut
§1.2 Gender

-ou

un bijou       a jewel
un caillou     a pebble
un clou        a nail
un genou       a knee
le hibou       the owl

Feminine

Many nouns whose singular written form ends in -e without an acute accent are feminine:

l’audace       daring, la façade the front, the outside, une salade a salad
une baie       a bay, la haie the hedge
une douzaine    a dozen, une fontaine a fountain
une ambulance   an ambulance, une flèche an arrow
une thèse       a thesis, une grève a strike
une araignée    a spider, une bougie a candle, etc.

But there are a large number of exceptions to this rule:

-isme

Nouns ending in -isme are masculine: le romantisme ‘romanticism’, le tourisme ‘tourism’, un idiotisme ‘an idiom (linguistic)’, etc.

-ède, -ège, -ème

Nouns with these endings are usually masculine:

un intermède    an interlude
un cortège       a procession
un piège         a trap
un stratège      a strategist
un poème         a poem
le système       the system
le thème         the theme or translation into a foreign language

la crème cream is an exception (but see 1.2.4).

-age

Nouns ending in -age are usually masculine, but there are some notable exceptions:

le courage       courage
un garage        a garage
un message       a message
un stage         a work placement
un voyage        a journey

Exceptions: une cage a cage, une image a picture, une page a page, une plage a beach, la rage rabies.

Other common exceptions:

un grade         a rank
un stade         a stadium
un groupe        a group
le monde         the world
le capitaine     the captain
le domaine  the area
le silence  silence
un musée  a museum
un lycée  a (sixth-form) college
un trophée  a trophy
un génie  a genius
un incendie  a fire
un cimetière  a cemetery
le derrière  the backside
un magazine  a magazine
le platine  platinum
un pare-brise  a windscreen
un intervalle  an interval
le rebelle  the rebel
le chèvrefeuille  honeysuckle
un chêne  an oak tree
un hêtre  a beech tree
un gorille  a gorilla
un portefeuille  a wallet
un carrosse  a carriage
un squelette  a skeleton
un renne  a reindeer
le mercure  mercury
un murmure  a murmur
un gramme  a gram
un kilogramme  a kilogram
un mètre  a metre
un kilomètre  a kilometre
un litre  a litre
un parapluie  an umbrella

NB: Most words with the prefix para- are masculine: un parachute ‘a parachute’, un paratonnerre ‘a lightning conductor’, le parapente ‘paragliding’, un paravent ‘wind-shield, screen’.

1.2.2 Nouns which refer both to males and to females without changing form

In the past, a number of nouns referring to professions, trades or titles associated predominantly with men had only a masculine form. However, with women present in all spheres of society in the modern world, a French government commission of the 1980s (la commission générale de terminologie et de néologie) made a set of proposals for the ‘féminisation . . . des noms de métier, grade, fonction ou titre’. Although some of the proposed feminine forms of nouns have been slow to enter general usage, they have strong political backing in France, and are reflected in the lists presented in this section and in 1.2.3. In practice, where feasible, it is probably best to ask the woman in question what the appropriate form of address is.

Some nouns can refer either to males or to females simply by changing the determiner from masculine to feminine:

un/une adulte  an adult
un/une adversaire  an adversary
un/une architecte  an architect
un/une artiste  an artist
un/une bibliothécaire  a librarian
§1.2 Gender

In forms of address to women office holders, either feminine or masculine articles are used: Madame la Ministre/Madame le Ministre, Madame la Maire/Madame le Maire, etc.

NB: pupille meaning ‘pupil of the eye’ is feminine only. In set expressions such as pupille de la Nation, pupille de l’Etat the noun refers to a child whose education is paid for by the state. With this meaning pupille may be masculine or feminine according to the sex of the child.

1.2.3 Nouns which change form when they refer to males or to females

Regular patterns
For words ending in -i, -é, -u, -l an -e is added in the written form and the pronunciation remains the same:

un ami      une amie    a friend
un employé  une employée an employee (worker)
un rival     une rivale   a rival
un consul    une consule  a consul
For words ending in \(-d, -t, -ois, -ais, -er, -ier\) an \(-e\) is added and the final consonant, previously not pronounced, is pronounced:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un marchand</td>
<td>une marchande</td>
<td>a trader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un adjoint</td>
<td>une adjointe</td>
<td>a deputy, assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un avocat</td>
<td>une avocate</td>
<td>a lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un candidat</td>
<td>une candidate</td>
<td>a candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un magistrat</td>
<td>une magistrate</td>
<td>a magistrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un préfet</td>
<td>une préfète</td>
<td>a prefect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un président</td>
<td>une présidente</td>
<td>a president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un bourgeois</td>
<td>une bourgeoise</td>
<td>a bourgeois(e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un boulanger</td>
<td>une boulangère</td>
<td>a baker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un berger</td>
<td>une bergère</td>
<td>a shepherd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un fermier</td>
<td>une fermière</td>
<td>a farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un caissier</td>
<td>une caissière</td>
<td>a checkout operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un menuisier</td>
<td>une menuisière</td>
<td>a carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un pompier</td>
<td>une pompière</td>
<td>a fireman, a firewoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un romancier</td>
<td>une romancière</td>
<td>a novelist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For words ending in \(-ien, -on, -an, -in, -ain\) in written form \(-(n)\) is added and the final vowel, previously pronounced as a nasal vowel, is pronounced as an oral vowel plus \(-n\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un chien</td>
<td>une chienne</td>
<td>a dog/a bitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un chirurgien</td>
<td>une chirurgienne</td>
<td>a surgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un électricien</td>
<td>une électricienne</td>
<td>an electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un informaticien</td>
<td>une informaticienne</td>
<td>a computer scientist, an information technologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un lion</td>
<td>une lionne</td>
<td>a lion/a lioness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un artisan</td>
<td>une artisane</td>
<td>a craftsman/craftswoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un gitan</td>
<td>une gitane</td>
<td>a gypsy (pejorative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un paysan</td>
<td>une paysanne</td>
<td>a farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un voisin</td>
<td>une voisine</td>
<td>a neighbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un Africain</td>
<td>une Africaine</td>
<td>an African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un écrivain</td>
<td>une écrivaine</td>
<td>a writer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Although *une médecine* ‘a (female) doctor’ is allowed under the recommendations for the feminization of names of professions, the normal usage is *une femme médecin*. In colloquial French, many people use *une doctoresse* as the feminine equivalent for *un docteur*.

Some nouns add \(-esse\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un âne</td>
<td>une ânesse</td>
<td>a donkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un chanoine</td>
<td>une chanoinesse</td>
<td>a canon/canoness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un comte</td>
<td>une comtesse</td>
<td>a count/countess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un diable</td>
<td>une diablesse</td>
<td>a devil/she-devil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un drôle</td>
<td>une drôlesse</td>
<td>a rascal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un hôte</td>
<td>une hôtesse</td>
<td>a host/hostess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un ivrogne</td>
<td>une ivrognesse</td>
<td>a drunkard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un maître</td>
<td>une maîtresse</td>
<td>a master/mistress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un ogre</td>
<td>une ogresse</td>
<td>an ogre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un pauvre</td>
<td>une pauvresse</td>
<td>a poor person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un prêtre</td>
<td>une prétresse</td>
<td>a priest/priestess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un prince</td>
<td>une princesse</td>
<td>a prince/princess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un Suisse</td>
<td>une Suissesse</td>
<td>a Swiss person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un tigre</td>
<td>une tigresse</td>
<td>a tiger/tigress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the nouns listed above are in common use, the -esse ending is no longer used productively to create feminine forms, and is felt as somewhat pejorative.

With nouns that end in -eur, some simply add -e, others change to -rice, and yet others change to -euse:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un auteur</td>
<td>une auteure</td>
<td>an author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un docteur</td>
<td>une docteure</td>
<td>a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un ingénieur</td>
<td>une ingénieure</td>
<td>an engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un pasteur</td>
<td>une pasteure</td>
<td>a (religious) minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un professeur</td>
<td>une professeure</td>
<td>a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un proviseur</td>
<td>une proviseure</td>
<td>a headteacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un sculpteur</td>
<td>une sculpture</td>
<td>a sculptor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un compositeur</td>
<td>une compositeure (also une sculptrice)</td>
<td>a composer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un agriculteur</td>
<td>une agricultrice</td>
<td>a farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un animateur</td>
<td>une animatrice</td>
<td>a youth leader, a (radio/TV) presenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un auditeur</td>
<td>une auditrice</td>
<td>a listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un éditeur</td>
<td>une éditrice</td>
<td>a publisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un instituteur</td>
<td>une institutrice</td>
<td>a (primary school) teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un rédacteur</td>
<td>une rédactrice</td>
<td>an editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un camionneur</td>
<td>une camionneuse</td>
<td>a truck driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un chanteur</td>
<td>une chanteuse</td>
<td>a singer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un chercheur</td>
<td>une chercheuse</td>
<td>a researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un entraîneur</td>
<td>une entraîneuse</td>
<td>a coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un footballeur</td>
<td>une footballleuse</td>
<td>a footballer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un menteur</td>
<td>une menteuse</td>
<td>a liar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un voleur</td>
<td>une voleuse</td>
<td>a thief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Irregular patterns
In addition to these regular patterns there are a number of masculine/feminine forms where the words are quite different:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un confrère</td>
<td>une consœur</td>
<td>a colleague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un époux</td>
<td>une épouse</td>
<td>a husband/wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un fils</td>
<td>une fille</td>
<td>a son/daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un garçon</td>
<td>une fille</td>
<td>a boy/girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un héros</td>
<td>une héroïne</td>
<td>a hero/heroine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un homme</td>
<td>une femme</td>
<td>a man/woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un homme-grenouille</td>
<td>une femme-grenouille</td>
<td>frogman/frogwoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un neveu</td>
<td>une nièce</td>
<td>a nephew/niece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2.4 Nouns which can be masculine or feminine

Nouns which change meaning when they change gender
Some nouns have different meanings when they are masculine and when they are feminine:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un aide</td>
<td>a helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un chèvre</td>
<td>a goat’s cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un crème</td>
<td>a white coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le crêpe</td>
<td>crêpe (cloth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un critique</td>
<td>a critic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un espace</td>
<td>a space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un laque</td>
<td>artwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un livre</td>
<td>a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un manche</td>
<td>a handle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un manœuvre</td>
<td>an unskilled worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un mémoire</td>
<td>a dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un merci</td>
<td>a thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un mode</td>
<td>a way of . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(un mode de vie)</td>
<td>(a way of life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un moule</td>
<td>a mould</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un pendule</td>
<td>a pendulum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le physique</td>
<td>appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un poêle</td>
<td>a stove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un poste</td>
<td>a job, TV or radio set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le solde</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un somme</td>
<td>a nap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un tour</td>
<td>a turn, trick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Tour de France</td>
<td>the Tour de France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un vase</td>
<td>a vase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un voile</td>
<td>a veil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Nouns which have variable gender depending on how they are being used

*Choix* is normally feminine when it means ‘thing’: *la/une* chose. But the expressions *quelque chose* ‘something’, *autre chose* ‘something else’, *peu de chose* ‘nothing much’, *pas grand-chose* ‘not a great deal’ are masculine:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quelque chose est arrivé</td>
<td>versus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something happened</td>
<td>This thing happened</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gens* ‘people’ or ‘folk’ requires immediately preceding adjectives or quantifiers to be feminine, but following adjectives/participles to be masculine. Where a preceding quantifier, adjective or participle is separated from *gens*, it is also masculine:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C’est une tradition chez les vieilles gens de la campagne</td>
<td>It’s a tradition among old country folk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quelque chose est arrivé</td>
<td>versus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something happened</td>
<td>This thing happened</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>It’s a tradition among old country folk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rassurés, les gens qui manifestaient se sont dispersés</td>
<td>Having been reassured, those demonstrating dispersed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This can produce sentences with contradictory indications of gender as in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Les vieilles gens sont attachés à leurs racines</td>
<td>Old people are close to their roots</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NB: *jeunes gens* (mpl) can refer either to ‘young men’, or ‘young people’ if the group is composed of both boys and girls; *jeunes filles* (fpl) is used where the group consists solely of ‘young women’.

*Amour* ‘love’ is normally masculine singular. It is sometimes, however, feminine plural: *les amours*. When feminine plural it can mean ‘amorous adventures’ or it can be a more poetic way of referring to love.

*Œuvre* meaning ‘a single artistic or literary work’ or ‘a collection of individual works’ is feminine:

  **Une grande œuvre** de Picasso est exposée dans ce musée
  *A large work by Picasso is on display in this museum*

  **Les œuvres complètes** de Balzac
  *Balzac’s complete works*

But when it refers to the totality of work envisaged as a single unit, it is masculine:

  **L’œuvre peint** de Matisse
  *Matisse’s paintings*

And when it is used to refer to building work it is also masculine, usually in the set phrase *le gros œuvre*:

  **Le gros œuvre** sera terminé dans une semaine
  *The main building work will be finished in a week*

*Paques* ‘Easter’, when conceived of as an event, is masculine:

  **Il a promis de me rembourser avant Paques prochain**
  *He promised to pay me back before next Easter*

But in Easter greetings *Paques* is feminine:

  **Joyeuses Paques**
  *Happy Easter*

  **Bonnes Paques**
  *Happy Easter*

*Noël* ‘Christmas’ is normally preceded by a feminine article, but agreeing participles are masculine:

  **Pour la Noël j’irai voir ma sœur en Lorraine**
  *I will go to see my sister in Lorraine for the Christmas period*

  **Noël est tombé le jeudi cette année-là**
  *Christmas fell on a Thursday that year*

### 1.2.5 Nouns which have the same spoken form but two different written forms, with different genders and different meanings

There are some words which, in spoken French, are pronounced in the same way but which have different meanings and different genders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un cal</td>
<td><em>a callus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un faîte</td>
<td><em>a summit</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le foie</td>
<td><em>the liver</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14  Nouns §1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>le maire</td>
<td>the mayor</td>
<td>la mer</td>
<td>the sea</td>
<td>une mère</td>
<td>a mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un pet</td>
<td>a fart</td>
<td>la paie</td>
<td>the pay</td>
<td>la paix</td>
<td>peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le poids</td>
<td>weight</td>
<td>la poix</td>
<td>pitch</td>
<td>un pois</td>
<td>a pea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un rai</td>
<td>a ray of light</td>
<td>une raie</td>
<td>a parting (in hair)</td>
<td>or a skate (fish)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le sel</td>
<td>salt</td>
<td>une selle</td>
<td>a saddle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le sol</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>une sole</td>
<td>a sole (fish)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un tic</td>
<td>a tic (nervous)</td>
<td>une tique</td>
<td>a tick (insect)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le vice</td>
<td>vice (crime)</td>
<td>une vis</td>
<td>a screw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2.6 Gender of countries, towns, islands, rivers, regions and states

Countries

Some countries are masculine, some are feminine. The best generalization is that they are masculine unless they end in -e, in which case they are feminine:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>le Canada</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>la Chine</td>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Danemark</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>la Finlande</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Japon</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>la Libye</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Koweit</td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>la Norvège</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Liban</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>la Mauritanie</td>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Maroc</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>la Roumanie</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Nigéria</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>la Suisse</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Portugal</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>la Syrie</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Les Etats-Unis (m pl).


‘To’ or ‘in’ a country is either en or au(x). en is used with countries of feminine gender, and countries of masculine gender beginning with a vowel. au is used with countries of masculine gender beginning with a consonant, and aux with those countries whose names are plural, whether masculine or feminine (see Chapter 13.2.3 and 13.26.1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>en Chine</td>
<td>au Canada</td>
<td>en Norvège</td>
<td>au Japon</td>
<td>en Suisse</td>
<td>aux États-Unis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en Iran (m)</td>
<td></td>
<td>en Israël</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Towns

Towns, in normal usage, are masculine. In formal written French they are sometimes feminine, particularly those which end in -e:

Cambridge est plein(e) de touristes en été
Cambridge is full of tourists in summer

Where the name of a town includes a definite article, adjectives and participles must agree with the gender of the article:

La Baule est située sur le littoral atlantique
La Baule is on the Atlantic coast
Le Touquet est désert l’hiver
Le Touquet is deserted in winter

Islands
Islands are usually feminine:

- la Sardaigne: Sardinia
- la Crète: Crete
- la Nouvelle-Zélande: New Zealand

But le Groënland ‘Greenland’ is an exception.

Rivers, regions and states
For rivers, French départements, French regions, for states and regions in other countries, the best generalization is that if they end in -e they are feminine:

**Rivers**

- le Rhin: the Rhine
- le Tarn: the Tarn
- le Cher: the Cher

**Départements**

- le Calvados: la Haute-Garonne
- le Gers: la Marne
- le Jura: la Vendée

**French regions**

- le Berry: la Normandie
- le Limousin: la Bretagne
- le Périgord: la Champagne

**States and regions in other countries**
For example, American states:

- le Massachusetts: la Louisiane
- le Nevada: la Californie
- le Texas: la Floride

Exception: British counties appear mostly to be treated as masculine, even those ending in ‘-shire’:

- le Kent
- le Perthshire
- le Yorkshire

1.2.7 Gender of makes of vehicle and machines

Usually, the gender of makes of vehicle or makes of machines, such as cars, lorries, planes, lawnmowers, dishwashers, and so on, is the same as the gender of the general name for the vehicle or machine.
Nouns §1.2

*voiture* ‘car’ is feminine, so makes of car are feminine:

- une Renault
- une Citroën C4
- une Nissan Micra

*camion* ‘lorry, truck’ is masculine, so makes of truck are masculine:

- un Berliet
- un Foden

*avion* ‘plane’ is masculine, so types of plane are masculine:

- un Boeing 747
- un Airbus 380

*cuisinière* ‘cooker’ is feminine, so makes of cooker are feminine:

- une Arthur Martin
- une Belling

and so on.

1.2.8 Names of ships and restaurants

The names of ships are usually masculine because *navire* is masculine e.g. *Le Normandie*. However, smaller vessels may be feminine e.g. *La Marie-Joseph* because *la corvette* and *la frégate* are feminine. The names of restaurants also tend to be masculine, because *restaurant* itself is masculine. A restaurant named after a region famed for its excellent produce, such as *la Normandie*, will be called *Le Normandie*.

1.2.9 Nouns which are only feminine, but can refer both to men and women

There are a small number of nouns which are only feminine in gender, but which may refer both to men and women:

- personne
- recrue
- sentinelle
- star/vedette
- victime

*personne* meaning ‘person’ is feminine: *la/une personne*. *personne* in *ne . . . personne* meaning ‘nobody’ (see Chapter 16.13) is masculine:

- Personne n’est *venu* versus Cette personne est venue
- Nobody came versus That person came

1.2.10 Nouns with genders which English speakers often get wrong

The following nouns are masculine:

- le caractère
- un choix
- le crime

- character/temperament
- a choice
- crime

- un légume
- le manque
- le mérite

- a vegetable
- lack, lacuna
- merit
l'espace  space  un parachute  a parachute
l'exode  exodus  un parapluie  an umbrella
un groupe  a group  le silence  silence

NB: *espace* is feminine when it means ‘a space in printing’ (see 1.2.4).

The following nouns are feminine:

- une croix  a cross
- une espèce  a type, kind
- la fin  the end

**1.2.11 Gender of compound nouns**

Compound nouns fall into six main types in French, and it is possible to determine broadly the gender of a compound on the basis of the type it belongs to (although with some exceptions).

NB: In the majority of cases compound nouns are written with a hyphen: *basse-cour* ‘farmyard’, *auto-école* ‘driving school’. However, compound nouns formed with *de* or *à* are not typically hyphenated: *chef d’œuvre* ‘masterpiece’, *brosse à dents* ‘toothbrush’.

**Adjective + noun compounds**

Adjective + noun compounds normally take their gender from the noun. The noun part of the compound is highlighted in the following examples:

- un arc-boutant  a buttress
- un bas-côté  a verge (e.g. of a motorway)
- une basse-cour  a farmyard
- une belle-fille  a daughter-in-law or a step-daughter
- un cerf-volant  a kite
- un coffre-fort  a safe
- un grand-parent  a grandparent
- un rond-point  a roundabout

**Exception:** un rouge-gorge  ‘a robin’.

**Noun + noun compounds**

In noun + noun compounds the gender is determined by the more important noun. *un camion-citerne* ‘a tanker (lorry)’ is a type of *camion* ‘lorry’, so *camion* is the more important noun, and the compound is masculine. *un homme-grenouille* ‘a frogman’ is a type of *homme* ‘man’ (not a type of frog!), so *homme* is the more important noun, and the compound is masculine. The important nouns are highlighted in the following examples:

- une auto-école  a driving school
- un bateau-mouche  a Parisian tourist boat
- un bateau-citerne  a tanker (ship)
- un camion-citerne  a tanker (lorry)
- un chou-fleur  a cauliflower
- un homme-grenouille  a frogman
- un hôtel-Dieu  a hospital
- une idée-force  a central idea
- un mot-clé  a keyword
- un oiseau-mouche  a humming-bird
- du papier-toilette  toilet paper
Nouns §1.2

- une pause-café: a coffee break
- une porte-fenêtre: a French window
- un timbre-poste: a stamp
- une voiture-restaurant: a restaurant car
- un wagon-lit: a sleeping car

Adverb + noun compounds

In adverb + noun compounds, the compound is usually the same gender as the noun, but there are exceptions:

- une arrière-pensée: a second thought
- l’arrière-plan (m): the background
- une contre-offensive: a counter-offensive
- un demi-tarif: a half-price ticket
- une demi-bouteille: a half bottle
- un hors-bord: a speedboat
- une mini-jupe: a miniskirt
- un haut-parleur: a loudspeaker
- un sans-travail: an unemployed person

Exceptions: l’après-guerre (m) ‘the post-war period’, un en-tête ‘a letterhead’, le sans-gêne ‘the lack of embarrassment’. 

Noun + prepositional phrase compounds

The gender of noun + prepositional phrase compounds is usually that of the first noun:

- un aide-de-camp: an aide-de-camp
- un arc-en-ciel: a rainbow
- un chef d’œuvre: a masterpiece
- un coup d’œil: a glance
- un coup de pied: a kick
- un croc-en-jambe: a trip
- une langue-de-chat: a langue-de-chat (a long, flat, finger biscuit)
- la main d’œuvre: the workforce
- un mont-de-piété: a pawnshop
- une pomme de terre: a potato
- un pot-de-vin: a bribe

Exceptions to this generalization are: un tête-à-queue ‘a spin’ (head to tail in a car), un tête-à-tête ‘a tête-à-tête conversation’.

Verb + noun compounds

Verb + noun compounds are usually masculine:

- un abat-jour: a lampshade
- un accroche-cœur: a (kiss) curl
- un appui-tête: a headrest
- des casse-noisettes: nutcrackers
- un cache-nez: a scarf
- un coupe-papier: a paper-knife
- un couvre-lit: a bedspread
- un cure-dents: a toothpick
- un essuie-mains: a hand towel
- un gratte-ciel: a skyscraper
Verbal phrase compounds
Compounds constructed from verbal phrases are masculine:

le manque-à-gagner  lost revenue
le on-dit  rumour, gossip
le ouï-dire  hearsay
un m’as-tu-vu  a show-off
le qu’en dira-t-on  the ‘what might people say’
un faire-part  an announcement card (weddings, births, funerals)
un laisser-passer  a pass (document)
le savoir-faire  know-how

1.3 Number

All nouns must be either singular or plural. Although many nouns are marked for plural in written French, few differ in singular and plural form in spoken French. Usually, number is marked in the determiner in spoken French (le/la versus les, ce/cette versus ces, mon/ma versus mes, and so on).

1.3.1 Regular plurals
Regular plurals add -s, which is not pronounced, to the singular noun in written French:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une loi</td>
<td>des lois</td>
<td>law(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un drap</td>
<td>des draps</td>
<td>sheet(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une voiture</td>
<td>des voitures</td>
<td>car(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une remarque</td>
<td>des remarques</td>
<td>remark(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un chat</td>
<td>des chats</td>
<td>cat(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un enfant</td>
<td>des enfants</td>
<td>child(ren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une maison</td>
<td>des maisons</td>
<td>house(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un chandail</td>
<td>des chandails</td>
<td>cardigan(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un éventail</td>
<td>des éventails</td>
<td>fan(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For words ending in -ail which have an irregular plural see 1.3.6.)

1.3.2 Plurals of nouns ending in -s, -x, -z
With these words there is no change between singular and plural:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un pois</td>
<td>des pois</td>
<td>spot(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une croix</td>
<td>des croix</td>
<td>cross(es)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un nez</td>
<td>des nez</td>
<td>nose(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nouns §1.3

un as des as ace(s)
un prix des prix price(s)
un corps des corps body(ies)
un bras des bras arm(s)

NB:

(a) un os ‘bone’: In the singular the final ‘s’ is pronounced. In the plural it is not pronounced: des os ‘bones’.
(b) un as ‘ace’: The ‘s’ is pronounced in both the singular and the plural.

1.3.3 Plurals of nouns ending in -eu, -au, -eau

These nouns form their plural by adding -x:

un cheveu des cheveux hair(s)
un tuyau des tuyaux pipe(s)
un manteau des manteaux coat(s)
l’eau des eaux water(s)

Exceptions:

un bleu des bleus bruise(s)
un pneu des pneus tyre(s)
un landau des landaus pram(s)

1.3.4 Plurals of nouns ending in -ou

Nouns ending in -ou form their plural with -s:

un fou des fous madman/men or jester(s)
un trou des trous hole(s)

But there are seven words which form their plural with -x:

un bijou des bijoux jewel(s)
un caillou des cailloux stone(s)
un chou des choux cabbage(s)
un genou des genoux knee(s)
un hibou des hiboux owl(s)
un joujou des joujoux toy(s)
un pou des poux louse (lice)

1.3.5 Plurals of nouns ending in -al

Most nouns ending in -al form their plural as -aux:

un bocal des bocaux jam jar(s)
un cheval des chevaux horse(s)
un idéal des idéaux ideal(s)
un journal des journaux newspaper(s)
un mal des maux evil(s)
un terminal des terminaux terminal(s)
un val des vaux (limited to poetic language) valley(s)
There are, however, a number of exceptions which form their plural with -s:

- **un bal** des bals: dance(s)
- **un cal** des cals: callus(es)
- **un carnaval** des carnavals: carnival(s)
- **un cérémonial** des cérémonials: ceremony(ies)
- **un chacal** des chacals: jackal(s)
- **un festival** des festivals: festival(s)
- **un récital** des récitals: recital(s)
- **un régali** des régals: feast(s)

### 1.3.6 Irregular plurals for nouns ending in -ail

Many nouns ending in -ail have a regular plural, e.g. des details, des chandails, des éventails, as indicated in 1.3.1, but a number of -ail nouns also make their plural with -aux:

- **un bail** des baux: lease(s)
- **un corail** des coraux: coral(s)
- **un émail** des émaux: enamel(s)
- **un soupirail** des soupiraux: window(s)
- **le travail** les travaux: work(s)
- **un vitrail** des vitraux: stained glass

### 1.3.7 Nouns which exist only in plural form

- **des affres** (f): agonies
- **aux alentours** (m): around
- **des annales** (f): annals
- **des archives** (f): archives
- **des armoiries** (f): (coat of) arms
- **des arrérages** (m): arrears
- **des arrhes** (f): a deposit
- **des bestiaux** (m): animals
- **des condoléances** (f): condolences
- **des ébats** (m): frolicking
- **des entrailles** (f): entrails
- **des environs** (m): surroundings
- **des fiançailles** (f): engagement
- **des fringues** (f) (colloquial): clothes
- **des frusques** (f) (colloquial): clothes
- **des funérailles** (f): funeral
- **des gens**
- **des honoraires** (m): fees
- **des intempéries** (f): bad weather
- **des meurs** (f): customs
- **des obsèques** (f): funeral
- **des vêpres** (f): vespers
- **des victuailles** (f): victuals
1.3.8 Nouns with irregular plurals

These are most notably:

- un os des os (pronounced as ‘eau’) bone(s)
- un œil des yeux eye(s)
- un ciel des cieux sky(ies)
- un œuf des œufs (pronounced as ‘œu’) egg(s)
- un bœuf des bœufs (pronounced as ‘bœu’) bullock(s)

Monsieur Messieurs Mr; sir(s); gentleman/gentlemen
Madame Mesdames Mrs; madam; lady/ladies
Mademoiselle Mesdemoiselles Miss; (young) lady/(young) ladies
Monseigneur Messeigneurs Your Highness(es); Your Lordship(s); Your Grace(s); Your Eminence(s)

1.3.9 The plural of compound nouns

Adjective + noun compounds

In adjective + noun compounds (see 1.2.11 for the meanings of these compounds), both elements become plural:

- un arc-boutant des arcs-boutants
- un bas-côté des bas-côtés
- une basse-cour des basses-cours
- une belle-fille des belles-filles
- un cerf-volant des cerfs-volants
- un coffre-fort des coffres-forts
- un grand-parent des grands-parents
- un rond-point des ronds-points

NB: un grand-père des grands-pères
un grand-oncle des grands-oncles
une grand-mère des grands-mères
une grand-tante des grands-tantes

un bonhomme des bonshommes
BUT un bonjour des bonjours

Noun + noun compounds

In noun + noun compounds (see 1.2.11) the norm is for both nouns to become plural:

- un bateau-citerne des bateaux-citernes
- un bateau-mouche des bateaux-mouches
- un camion-citerne des camions-citernes
- un chou-fleur des choux-fleurs
- un homme-grenouille des hommes-grenouilles
- une idée-force des idées-forces
- un mot-clé des mots-clés
- un oiseau-mouche des oiseaux-mouches
- une pause-café des pauses-cafés
- une porte-fenêtre des portes-fenêtres
- une voiture-restaurant des voitures-restaurants
- un wagon-lit des wagons-lits
Exceptions:

- une auto-école des auto-écoles
- un bain-marie des bains-marie
- un hôtel-Dieu des hôtels-Dieu
- un timbre-poste des timbres-poste

Adverb + noun compounds
In adverb + noun compounds (see 1.2.1), the noun alone becomes plural (although some remain invariable):

- une arrière-boutique des arrière-boutiques
- une arrière-pensée des arrière-pensées
- un arrière-plan des arrière-plans
- une contre-offensive des contre-offensives
- une contre-offre des contre-offres
- une demi-bouteille des demi-bouteilles
- un demi-tarif des demi-tarifs
- un haut-parleur des haut-parleurs
- un hors-bord des hors-bords
- une mini-jupe des mini-jupes
- un non-lieu des non-lieux
- un non-paiement des non-paiements

Exception: un sans-travail, des sans-travail

Noun + prepositional phrase compounds
In noun + prepositional phrase compounds (see 1.2.11) only the first noun becomes plural:

- un aide-de-camp des aides-de-camp
- un arc-en-ciel des arcs-en-ciel
- un chef d’œuvre des chefs d’œuvre
- un coup d’œil des coups d’œil
- un coup de pied des coups de pied
- un croc-en-jambe des crocs-en-jambe
- une langue-de-chat des langues-de-chat
- la main d’œuvre des mains d’œuvre
- un mont-de-piété des monts-de-piété
- une pomme de terre des pommes de terre
- un pot-de-vin des pots-de-vin

But not all change:

- un pot-au-feu des pot-au-feu
- un tête-à-queue des tête-à-queue
- un tête-à-tête des tête-à-tête

Verb + noun compounds
In verb + noun compounds (see 1.2.11), there are three possibilities:

(i) The form remains invariable whether its singular form contains a noun in the singular or plural. This is the usual pattern:

- des abat-jour
- des essuie-mains
24  Nouns §1.3

   des gratte-ciel
   des ouvre-boîtes
   des porte-monnaie

(ii) The second word becomes plural, normally -s or -x. This is the case with:

   des accroche-cœurs
   des tire-bouchons
   des couvre-lits

These would appear to have been assimilated to the one-word versions, such as:

   le(s) portemanteau(x)  coat peg(s)
   le(s) portefeuille(s)  wallet(s)

(iii) The first word becomes plural (which is an indication that it is no longer related to any verbal form). This is the case with:

   des appuis-tête
   des soutiens-gorge

It has to be said that in the area of compound nouns not all ‘authorities’ agree on the rules and attempts to introduce ‘logical’ rules appear to have added further confusion to an already confused situation!

Verbal phrase compounds
These do not generally have a different plural form:

   des manque-à-gagner
   des on-dit
   des ouï-dire
   des m’as-tu-vu
   des qu’en dira-t-on
   des laisser-passer
   des savoir-faire

1.3.10 Number differences between French and English nouns
Some nouns which are singular in English are plural in French, and others are plural in English and singular in French. The following are examples which sometimes cause difficulty for English speakers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English singular</th>
<th>French plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>applause</td>
<td>les applaudissements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>darkness</td>
<td>les ténèbres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sb’s funeral</td>
<td>les funérailles de qn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hair</td>
<td>les cheveux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>des informations, des renseignements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td>les connaissances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to make progress</td>
<td>faire des progrès</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to do research/my research</td>
<td>faire des recherches/mes recherches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although family names are not pluralized in French (see 1.1.4), plurals are normal with dynasties:

Les Durand nous ont accompagnés tout au long du voyage
The Durands came with us all the way on our trip

But:

Les Stuarts étaient des héritiers dans la succession au trône
The Stuarts were next in line of succession to the throne

Les Capétiens sont arrivés à la fin de leur lignée
The Capetians came to the end of their line of descent

NB: Some mass nouns in French can also be used as count nouns more freely than their English equivalents:

un fruit  a piece of fruit
un pain  a loaf of bread (NOT *a bread)
un raisin  a type of grape
2 Determiners

For the purposes of this grammar, the term ‘determiner’ refers to three classes of items that modify nouns:

- Articles: definite, indefinite and partitive
- Demonstrative determiners
- Possessive determiners

Each class functions in different (but sometimes overlapping) ways with the others to specify the status of the entity or concept referred to by the noun in the discourse.

Definite articles indicate that the entity/concept referred to by the noun is uniquely identifiable by both speaker and hearer. If you say *Passe-moi la fourchette* ‘Pass me the fork’, both speaker and hearer know that there is a unique, identifiable ‘fork’ in the context in which the conversation is taking place.

Indefinite articles are used with count nouns (*bouteille* ‘bottle’, *billet* ‘ticket’) and indicate that the entity/concept referred to by the noun is not sufficiently ‘known about’ or ‘specified’ to justify the definite article. If you say *Passe-moi une fourchette* ‘Pass me a fork’, this implies there is no uniquely identifiable ‘fork’ in the context of the conversation (perhaps because there are several of them).

Partitive articles (*du, de la, des*) serve the same function as indefinite articles, but are used with mass and abstract nouns: *j'ai acheté du lait* ‘I bought (some) milk’, *il faut avoir de la patience* ‘You must have (some) patience’. The plural partitive article *des* is used with nouns that are mass or abstract by virtue of their meaning, but happen to be grammatically plural: *des tripes* (fpl) ‘tripe’, *des cheveux* (mpl) ‘hair’, *des renseignements* (mpl) ‘information’.

Demonstratives are the forms *ce/cet, cette, ces* ‘this/these, that/those’. They indicate that the noun is seen as ‘known about’ or ‘specified’ largely in contrast to another noun: *Passe-moi cette fourchette* ‘Pass me that fork (and not some other fork that might also be visible)’.

Possessives are forms like *mon, son, votre* ‘my, his/her, your’ that indicate that the noun is seen as belonging to someone.

All determiners have singular and plural forms, and in the singular have different forms depending on whether the noun is masculine or feminine.

### 2.1 Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definite</th>
<th>Indefinite</th>
<th>Partitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>masc</td>
<td>le, l’, the</td>
<td>un a</td>
<td>du, de l’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem</td>
<td>la, l’, the</td>
<td>une a</td>
<td>de la, de l’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plur</td>
<td>les the</td>
<td>des</td>
<td>someño article</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### TABLE 2.A Summary table of articles
2.1.1 Form of the article with adjectives and nouns beginning with a vowel or an \( h \)

*le* and *la* are shortened to *l’,* and *du* and *de la* become *de l’* if they immediately precede an adjective or noun beginning with a vowel:

- l’univers (m) *the universe*
- l’électricité (f) *electricity*
- de l’acier (m) *steel*
- de l’eau (f) *water*
- l’ancien régime (m) *the Ancien Regime*

They also behave in the same way when they immediately precede an adjective or noun beginning with a so-called ‘silent \( h \)’ or *h muet*. This is a written \( h \) which has no counterpart in the spoken language:

- l’hiver (m) *winter*
- l’histoire (f) *history*
- de l’héroïsme (m) *heroism*
- de l’herbe (f) *grass*
- l’horrible silence (m) *the terrible silence*

There is also another set of adjectives and nouns beginning with a written *h* which do have a counterpart in the spoken language. This is misleadingly called an ‘aspirate *h*’ or *h aspiré*. It is misleading because there is no ‘\( h \)’ sound in spoken French. Rather, words which begin with an ‘aspirate *h*’ in written French also happen to block reduction of the article to *l’* or *de l’* in spoken French:

- le hibou (m) *the owl*
- la haine (f) *hate*
- du hachis (m) *minced beef*
- de la honte (f) *shame*
- la haute montagne (f) *high up in the mountains*

There is no easy way to distinguish adjectives and nouns which begin with a silent *h* from those which begin with an aspirate *h*. Some cases are idiosyncratic. For example, *héros* ‘hero’ does not allow contraction of the article: *le héros*; but *héroïne* ‘heroine or heroin’ and *héroïsme* ‘heroism’ do: *l’héroïne, l’héroïsme*. Many dictionaries indicate an aspirate *h* by putting [’] at the beginning of the phonetic transcription of the word. For example:

- hibou [’ibu] (m) *owl*
- histoire [istwar] (f) *story, history*

The final consonant of *les* and *des* is pronounced [z] when they immediately precede an adjective or a noun beginning with a vowel or a silent *h*:

- les [z] enfants *children* BUT les hérisons *hedgehogs*
- des [z] amis *friends* BUT des haricots *beans*
- des [z] héroïnes *heroines* BUT des héros *heroes*

The final *n* of *un* is pronounced when *un* immediately precedes an adjective or noun beginning with a vowel or silent *h*, but not otherwise:

- un [n] hôtel *a hotel* BUT un homard *a lobster*
- un [n] honnête homme *a decent man* BUT un haut fonctionnaire *a senior civil servant*
Determiners §2.2

NB: Verbs beginning with an *h* in the written language also divide into those which require contraction of *je, me, le, la, ne, etc.*, and those which do not:

- J’habite Londres  
  I live in London  
- Je hais Londres  
  I hate London  
- Je l’héberge  
  I am letting her (or him) stay with me  
- Je la heurte dans son orgueil  
  I hurt her pride

2.2 Typical uses of the definite article

(a) One use of the definite article indicates that the entity or concept referred to by the noun it accompanies is already known from the context:

- Achetez une Panthéra GT6. La Panthéra GT6 vous va!  
  Buy a Panthéra GT6. The Panthéra GT6 suits you!  
- Tu as laissé dans le jardin le livre que tu as acheté hier  
  You left the book which you bought yesterday in the garden

Since French and English are similar in this use of definite articles, a fairly reliable guide is:

- if English uses a definite article, use one in French.

(b) A second ‘generic’ use is to indicate that the noun refers to a general class of phenomena, a unique phenomenon or an abstract quality:

- Les filles ne laissent plus les garçons faire la loi  
  Girls no longer let boys lay down the law  
- Les médecins pensent que la rougeole réapparaît  
  Doctors think that measles is coming back  
- Le lait est meilleur quand il se boit froid  
  Milk is better when drunk cold  
- Elle a toujours lutté contre la bêtise  
  She has always fought stupidity  
- La peur de prendre l’avion le retient en Grande Bretagne  
  Fear of flying keeps him in Britain

The generic use of definite articles with count plural nouns (*les filles ‘girls’, les médecins ‘doctors’) or with singular mass or abstract nouns (*le lait ‘milk’, la peur ‘fear*) contrasts with English, which more often than not uses no article when a general class or an abstract quality are indicated:

- Girls no longer let boys lay down the law  
- Milk is better when drunk cold

The definite article is obligatory in French in these cases.

2.2.1 Fused forms of the definite article

Masculine singular and plural definite articles fuse with preceding *de or à*:

- du (= de + le) pain  
  au (= à + le) cinéma  
- de l’effort  
  à l’école  
- des (= de + les) épices  
  aux (= à + les) animaux
Where place names include a masculine singular or plural definite article (Le Caire ‘Cairo’, Le Havre, Les Caraïbes ‘The West Indies’) these also fuse with a preceding de or à:

Il vient du Caire
He comes from Cairo

La mer des Caraïbes
The Caribbean

Il travaillera au Havre l’année prochaine
He will work in Le Havre next year

Such contraction is only possible with articles, however. It is not possible when le, la, les are pronouns (see Chapter 3.2):

J’ai essayé de le comprendre
‘I tried to understand it’ (NOT *J’ai essayé du comprendre).

An archaic contraction of en les to ès is still found in the set phrase: licencié ès lettres ‘Bachelor of Arts’.

2.2.2 Use of the definite article with names of countries, regions, départements, towns

In French the definite article is normally used with the names of countries, regions and départements, whereas in English it is not:

La France est un très beau pays
France is a very beautiful country

Progressivement, la Champagne est devenue terre de rencontre et de conflits
Over time, Champagne (a French region) became a land of meetings and confrontations

Ramassage de coquillages interdit dans le Calvados
Shellfish fishing banned in Calvados (a French département)

When en ‘to/in’ or de ‘from’ are used with feminine countries or regions (or with masculine countries beginning with a vowel: en Irak), the definite article is omitted:

Nous irons en France l’année prochaine
We shall go to France next year

des pommes de Normandie
apples from Normandy

des vacances en Ille-et-Vilaine
holidays in Ille-et-Vilaine

But with masculine countries, regions and départements, the definite article is retained with à ‘to/in’, dans ‘in’ and de ‘from’:

Les hôtels au Mexique sont d’un très bon niveau
The hotels in Mexico are of a very high standard

J’ai acheté une maison dans le Finistère
I have bought a house in Finistère

des pommes du Calvados
apples from Calvados
Determiners §2.2

Towns whose names do not include a definite article (Lille, Bordeaux, Metz) require one when modified:

Visitez Lille! Visit Lille!

Bordeaux est une ville remarquable
Bordeaux is a remarkable city

Le Bordeaux d’aujourd’hui est une ville remarquable
Today’s Bordeaux is a remarkable city

The names of large islands are usually accompanied by definite articles: La Corse ‘Corsica’, La Sardaigne ‘Sardinia’, La Nouvelle-Zélande ‘New Zealand’. But some small European islands, and some large islands elsewhere in the world do not have an article: Chypre ‘Cyprus’, Malte ‘Malta’, Jersey, Taiwan, Cuba, Haiti, Java.

(For the gender of countries see Chapter 1.2.6, and for the use of en, à, dans see Chapter 13.26.1.)

2.2.3 Use of the definite article with names of languages

The names of languages in English start with a capital letter and have no article. The names of languages in French start with a small letter, normally have a definite article and are masculine in gender:

Ici les étudiants étudient le français, l’allemand et l’italien
Here students study French, German and Italian

Le grec possède un alphabet tout à fait différent du nôtre
Greek has an alphabet which is quite different from our own

In the expressions parler français, parler allemand, etc., the name of the language functions more like an adverbial than a noun, so no article is used. But note the following contrast:

Je parle français/Je parle souvent le français/Je parle bien le français
I speak French/I often speak French/I speak French well

When adverbs such as souvent, bien are present, français becomes a noun again, requiring the definite article.

2.2.4 Use of the definite article with seasons

Seasons in French are usually accompanied by a definite article, except when they are preceded by en:

L’hiver est une saison de repos pour nous
Winter is a restful season for us

L’été nous réserve parfois des surprises mais à l’automne le temps est toujours plus prévisible
Summer sometimes has some surprises in store for us, but autumn weather is always more predictable

Tout se réveille au printemps
Everything awakes in spring
§2.2 Typical uses of the definite article

BUT

en hiver  
in winter

en été    
in summer

en automne

N.B.: ‘in spring’ is ‘au printemps’

(See also Chapter 13.26.1.)

2.2.5 Use of the definite article with titles

Titles in French prefaced by Monsieur or Madame include the definite article:

Monsieur le Maire  
Mr Mayor

Madame le Maire  
Madam Mayor

Monsieur le Président-Directeur-Général  
Mr Chairman

Where women are the holders of the post in question, the feminine article is also used: Madame la Maire, Madame la Ministre, Madame la Président-Directeur-Général. (See Chapter 1.2.2.)

Such forms of address as: Monsieur le Directeur des Achats ‘Mr Purchasing Director’, Madame le Directeur du Personnel ‘Madam Personnel Director’ used to be frequent in French in writing (e.g. letters) or in very formal speeches, and can still be found today, but are almost unheard of in English.

The definite article is similarly present in French in greetings or expressions of encouragement like:

Salut les mecs!  
Hi, guys!

Allez les bleus!  
Come on, you blues!

Au lit, les enfants!  
Off to bed, kids!

With kings and queens, however, French leaves out an article with numbers where English puts one in:

François I (François premier)  
François the first

Henri III (Henri trois)  
Henry the third

Elizabeth I (Elizabeth première)  
Elizabeth the first

Elizabeth II (Elizabeth deux)  
Elizabeth the second

(See also Chapter 6.4.2.)

2.2.6 Use of the definite article with superlatives

In superlatives involving adjectives which follow the noun (see Chapter 4.12.2), it is compulsory to repeat the definite article, which then agrees with the noun:

Le moment le plus intense de ma vie  
The most exciting moment of my life

Les virages les plus dangereux de la région  
The most dangerous bends in the region
2.2.7 Use of the definite article with quantities

Where English uses ‘so much a pound’, French refers to tant la livre/le kilo, etc.:

Les pommes? C’est 4,50 € le kilo
Apples? They are 4.50 euros a kilo

Les bonbons sont à 5,30 € les 100 grammes
Sweets are 5.30 euros for 100 grammes

Ces chaises sont vendues à 50 € la pièce (or 50 € pièce)
These chairs are sold for 50 euros each

2.2.8 Use of the definite article with parts of the body

(a) In simple descriptions of body parts, French uses a definite article where English uses a possessive determiner (e.g. his, my, their):

Il a les yeux bleus
His eyes are blue
Elle a les cheveux coupés court
She has her hair cut short

(b) When people activate parts of their own bodies, French also uses a definite article with the body part:

Il a plissé les yeux
He screwed up his eyes
Elle a agité le bras
She waved
J’ai baissé la tête en y entrant
I lowered my head as I went in
Elle a hoché/secoué la tête
She nodded/shook her head

(c) When people do things which affect their own bodies, or those of others, the usual construction is a definite article in front of the body part, and a reflexive or indirect object pronoun:

Je me suis fracturé la jambe
I broke my leg
Elle s’est fait couper les cheveux
She had her hair cut
Je lui serre la main
I shake his hand
On lui a coupé la tête
They cut his head off
Elle lui essuie les yeux avec un mouchoir
She wipes his eyes with a handkerchief

These constructions are also possible with a possessive determiner, as in English, however:

Je prends sa main
I take her hand
Elle caresse mes cheveux
She strokes my hair
J’appuie mes deux mains sur sa poitrine
I press with both my hands on his chest

(d) When body parts are the subject of a sentence, they usually have a possessive determiner, as in English, rather than a definite article:

Mon cœur s’est arrêté une fraction de seconde
My heart stopped for an instant
Ma tête me fait mal
My head hurts
Ses paupières se sont abaissées
His eyelids lowered
Leurs regards se sont croisés
Their eyes met
(e) When descriptions of parts of the body or items of clothing are used adverbially, they are accompanied by the definite article:

- l’homme au nez retroussé  
  *the man with the turned-up nose*
- le comédien au chapeau de paille  
  *the actor in the straw hat*
- Il parlait, le sourire aux lèvres  
  *He spoke, with a smile*
- Elle est partie, les mains dans ses poches  
  *She left with her hands in her pockets*
- Il s’est agenouillé, le chapeau à la main  
  *He knelt down with his hat in his hands*
- Il a avoué son crime, les yeux abaissés  
  *He confessed his crime, looking down*

### 2.2.9 Singular or plural when a number of individuals have one item each

When reference is made to one body part, one item of clothing, or one more general personal attribute, but two or more people are involved, the entity is usually referred to in the singular:

- Nous nous sommes tous les deux cassés le bras  
  *We both broke our arms*
- Ils ont levé la main droite  
  *They raised their right hands*
- Les étudiants sont priés d’inscrire leur nom de famille à l’endroit prévu  
  *Students are requested to write their surnames in the space provided*
- Ils ont tous accroché leur manteau dans l’entrée  
  *They all hung their coats up in the entrance hall*
- Les jumeaux ont vécu leur vie d’une manière indépendante  
  *The twins lived their lives independently*

### 2.2.10 Use of the definite article to indicate a habitual action

Where English uses ‘on + . . . day(s)’ to indicate a habitual action e.g. ‘On Monday(s) I go to the market’, French uses the definite article: *Je vais faire mon marché le lundi:*

- Nous allons au cinéma le vendredi soir  
  *We go to the cinema on Friday evenings*
- Le cours d’histoire a lieu le mercredi  
  *The history lecture is on Wednesdays*
- Ils viennent ramasser les poubelles le lundi et le jeudi  
  *They come to empty the dustbins on Mondays and Thursdays*

### 2.2.11 Repetition of the definite article

In French the article usually has to be repeated with each noun, whereas in English one use at the beginning of a ‘list’ is enough:

- Je dois rapporter chez moi le fer à repasser, la planche à repasser et la corbeille à papiers  
  *I must take home with me the iron, ironing board and waste-paper basket*
2.3 Typical uses of the indefinite article

(a) One use of the indefinite article is to introduce a new, countable, concrete noun (*maison*, *tableau*, *livre*, *voiture*, etc.) into the discourse where the entity referred to is not ‘known about’ or ‘specified’ sufficiently to justify the use of the definite article:

> Je me suis trouvé une belle maison en Ecosse
> I have found myself a lovely house in Scotland

> Voulez-vous voir un Picasso?
> Do you want to see a Picasso?

(b) Another is to indicate that the noun describes a general class of countable, concrete entities (‘generic’ reference):

> Normalement une voiture a quatre roues et une moto en a deux
> Normally a car has four wheels and a motorbike two

> Il s’agit là d’une erreur caractéristique d’un étudiant de première année
> That’s an example of a typical error made by a first year student

In this ‘generic’ use, the indefinite article overlaps with and is usually interchangeable with a plural definite article (see 2.2(b)):

> Normalement les voitures ont quatre roues et les motos en ont deux
> Normally cars have four wheels and motorbikes two

> Il s’agit là d’une erreur caractéristique des étudiants de première année (de + definite article les)

(c) A third use is with abstract nouns (*courage*, *beauté*, *réalisme*, *importance*, etc.). Abstract nouns are normally accompanied by the definite article (see Chapter 1.1.1). But when they are modified by an adjective they take an indefinite article. Compare:

> Il admire le courage
> He admires courage

> Il a fait preuve d’un courage peu ordinaire
> He showed extraordinary courage

> La beauté du paysage nous éblouissait
> The beauty of the countryside dazzled us

> Le paysage était d’une beauté éblouissante
> The countryside was astonishingly beautiful

2.3.1 The plural indefinite article des

The plural indefinite article *des* refers to an unspecified quantity of entities described by a plural count noun. In English the article is most frequently omitted:

> Je lui ai offert des roses
> I gave her roses

> Les places avaient déjà été réservées par des Américains
> The seats had already been reserved by Americans

> Vous me posez des questions impossibles
> You ask me impossible questions

NB: An error often made by English speakers is to omit the article; plural indefinite *des* cannot be omitted in French: NOT *Je lui ai offert roses.*
2.3.2 Omission of plural indefinite *des* after the preposition *de*

When the plural indefinite article is preceded by the preposition *de*, it is omitted in French. Compare:

Elle a été accusée *d’un* meurtre particulièrement horrible  
*She was accused of a particularly nasty murder*

Elle a été accusée *de* meurtres particulièrement horribles  
(*être accusé de + des meurtres horribles*)  
*She was accused of particularly nasty murders*

Avec l’aide *d’une* amie, elle a fini son projet  
*With the help of a friend, she finished her project*

Avec l’aide *d’amies*, elle a fini son projet  
(*avec l’aide de + des amies*)  
*With the help of friends, she finished her project*

Omission of plural indefinite article *des* only occurs after the preposition *de*. With other prepositions it is not omitted:

Elle est sortie *avec des* amies  
*She went out with friends*

*des attaques violentes contre des* policiers  
*violent attacks on policemen*

Because plural indefinite *des* is omitted after the preposition *de*, this means that it is omitted when it is the complement of a number of verbs which are always followed by the preposition *de* (see Chapter 8.4):

Il a déjeuné *de* fruits  
*His lunch consisted of fruit*  
(*versus* Il a mangé *des* fruits)*

Elle parlait *de* choses oubliées depuis longtemps  
*She spoke of things long since forgotten*  
(*versus* Elle *décrit* des choses oubliées depuis longtemps)*

Plural indefinite *des* is also omitted after many quantifiers (see Chapter 6.9) or quantifier-like expressions which incorporate the preposition *de*:

Il y a un bon nombre *de* participants au tournoi  
*There are a good many participants at the tournament*

Un kilo *de* cerises, s’il vous plaît  
*A kilo of cherries, please*

Beaucoup *de* personnes ont déjà remarqué ton absence  
*Many people have already noticed your absence*

J’ai déjà entendu assez d’*excuses* de ta part; je n’en accepterai plus  
*I have heard enough excuses from you; I won’t accept any more*

Où as-tu mis la boîte *de* sardines?  
*Where did you put the tin of sardines?*
36  Determiners §2.3

Exceptions: *bien des* ‘many’, *encore des* ‘still more’:

Bien des personnes ont déjà remarqué ton absence
Many people have already noticed your absence

J’ai encore des questions à vous poser
I still have more questions to ask you

2.3.3 Comparing the use of plural indefinite article *des* with preposition *de* + definite article *les*

Compare the use of the plural indefinite article and the plural definite article in similar contexts:

Elle mangeait *des coquillages*
*She was eating shellfish*

Elle mangeait *les coquillages qu’elle avait achetés au marché*
*She was eating the shellfish she had bought in the market*

When the highlighted expressions follow the preposition *de*, *des* is deleted (2.3.2), but *de* + *les* becomes *des* (2.2.1):

Elle déjeunait *de coquillages*
*She dined on shellfish*

Elle déjeunait *des coquillages qu’elle avait achetés au marché*
*She dined on the shellfish which she had bought in the market*

Thus *des* can be either a plural indefinite article corresponding to English ‘some’ or no article, or a plural definite article fused with the preposition *de*.

Note the following contrasts with quantifiers:

Beaucoup *de* personnes (indefinite) trouvent cela difficile
*Many people find that difficult*

Beaucoup *des* personnes (definite) à qui nous avons parlé trouvent cela difficile
*Many of the people to whom we spoke find that difficult*

Un kilo *de* cerises, s’il vous plaît
*A kilo of cherries, please*

Un kilo *des* cerises espagnoles, s’il vous plaît
*A kilo of the Spanish cherries, please*

2.3.4 *d’autres* and *des autres*

A contrast which English speakers often find difficult is between *d’autres* and *des autres*. *d’autres* ‘other(s)’ is an indefinite expression which is not accompanied by the plural indefinite article *des*:

Dans son article, elle a présenté *d’autres* idées (NOT *des autres idées*)
*In her article, she presented other ideas*
§2.4 The partitive article: *du, de l’, de la, des*

D’*autres* (NOT *des autres*) auraient agi différemment
Others would have acted differently

J’en ai vu d’*autres* (NOT *des autres*)
I saw others

*des autres* is only used where *des* is the fused form of preposition *de* and the definite article *les* of *les autres* ‘the others’:

Elle parlait *des* autres projets qu’elle dirige
She spoke of the other projects she directs

Je ne me rappelle rien *des* autres jours de ce mois
I remember nothing of the other days of that month

NB: This is a case where a change appears to be in progress. In spoken French *des autres* is often generalized to all these contexts.

**2.3.5 The use of *de* when an adjective precedes the noun**

When an adjective precedes the noun, it is customary, at least in written French, to use *de* and not *des*:

Je lui ai offert *de* jolies roses
I gave her pretty roses

*De* gros miroirs comme ça, on n’en voit plus beaucoup
You don’t see many large mirrors like that any more

NB: This does not apply when the adjective and the noun are joined in a compound noun or something which is seen as a single unit: *des jeunes gens, des jeunes filles, des petits pois, des petites annonces, des grands magasins, des grands jours*.

**2.4 The partitive article: *du, de l’, de la, des***

The partitive article *du, de l’, de la, des* is used with mass nouns in French where English uses ‘some’ or no article at all:

Il charrait *du* bois pour son voisin
He carted wood about for his neighbour

Vous auriez dû acheter *du* lait en même temps
You ought to have bought some milk at the same time

Avec *de l’ail* ça aurait encore meilleur goût!
It would taste even better with garlic!

Il me manque *de l’argent*
I’m lacking funds

The partitive article is also used with abstract nouns such as *courage, beauté, patience, silence* when these qualities are attributed to people or things:

Il faut avoir *de la* patience avec les enfants
You must be patient with children
Elle a de l’intelligence à revendre
She is really intelligent

Vos enfants ont de la malice
Your children are mischievous

When a partitive article follows the preposition de it is deleted, just as plural indefinite des is deleted (see 2.3.2):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beaucoup de bois</td>
<td>a lot of wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une bouteille de lait</td>
<td>a bottle of milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une tête d’ail</td>
<td>a bulb of garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J’ai besoin d’argent</td>
<td>I need money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4.1 Use of faire + partitive: faire du/de la
Many constructions exist with faire + noun, introduced by the partitive:

Faire du sport    | To take part in sport  
Faire du basket   | To play basketball  
Faire du piano    | To play the piano  
Faire de la politique | To go in for politics  
Faire du bien (à quelqu’un) | To do good (to somebody)  
Faire du mal (à quelqu’un) | To do harm (to somebody)  

2.5 Use of indefinite and partitive articles after the negative forms ne . . . pas, ne . . . jamais, ne . . . plus, ne . . . guère
After ne . . . pas, ne . . . jamais, ne . . . plus, ne . . . guère, any indefinite article (un, une, des) or partitive article (du, de l’, de la, des) accompanying a direct object normally becomes de:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elle n’a pas écrit de lettre</td>
<td>She didn’t write a letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nous ne vendons pas de chaussettes</td>
<td>We don’t sell socks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle ne porte jamais de casque</td>
<td>She never wears a helmet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pourquoi ne peut-on jamais acheter de vêtements d’hiver au printemps?</td>
<td>Why can you never buy winter clothes in spring?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je n’ai plus de crayon</td>
<td>I don’t have a pencil any more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il n’a plus de médicaments</td>
<td>He doesn’t have any more medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il n’y a guère de visiteurs</td>
<td>There are hardly any visitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are three cases where this does not apply:

(a) when a contrast is made between a negative and a positive direct object:

Je ne veux pas des chaussettes mais des chaussures
I don’t want socks, but shoes
§2.6 Omission of the article

There are a number of cases where no article is used in French.

2.6.1 Omission of the article in compound nouns linked by à

In compound nouns linked by à, there is usually no article in front of the second noun:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une brosse à dents</td>
<td>a toothbrush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un couteau à pain</td>
<td>a bread knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une corbeille à papiers</td>
<td>a waste-paper basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une cuiller à café</td>
<td>a tea (coffee) spoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une planche à roulettes</td>
<td>a skateboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une planche à voile</td>
<td>a sailboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une tasse à café</td>
<td>a coffee cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une tasse à thé</td>
<td>a tea cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un verre à vin</td>
<td>a wine glass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un verre à pied</td>
<td>a stemmed glass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.6.2 Omission of the article in noun constructions linked by de

The article is frequently omitted before the second noun in noun + noun constructions linked by de, where the second noun functions like an adjective (and is often translated into English as an adjective):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une ambassade de France</td>
<td>a French embassy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une carte de visite</td>
<td>a visiting card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une carte de France</td>
<td>a map of France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un billet de bus</td>
<td>a bus ticket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un arrêt de bus</td>
<td>a bus stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un tableau d’affichage</td>
<td>a notice board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une question d’argent</td>
<td>a question of money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une affaire de cœur</td>
<td>a matter of the heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un problème de liquidité</td>
<td>a cash-flow problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une salle de classe</td>
<td>a classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une salle de bains</td>
<td>a bathroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une agence de voyages</td>
<td>a travel agent/agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un verre de vin</td>
<td>a glass of wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une tasse de thé</td>
<td>a cup of tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une tasse de café</td>
<td>a cup of coffee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But note that when the second noun is modified (by an adjective or a clause, for example) it becomes definite, and a definite article appears:
2.6 Determiners §2.6

une carte de la France métropolitaine
a map of mainland France

Il va être question de l’argent que je t’ai prêté
There’ll be a discussion about the money I lent you

un arrêt du bus no 25
a stop for the number 25 bus

2.6.3 Omission of the article in participle + noun constructions linked by de

The article is omitted after de in participle + noun constructions where the participle functions as an adjective:

- couvert de boue covered with mud
- rempli d’eau full of water
- dépouvu de sens lacking any meaning
- comblé de bonheur overwhelmed with happiness
- entouré d’imbéciles surrounded by idiots

2.6.4 Omission of the article after sans, avec, en, sur, sous, par, ni . . . ni

The article is frequently omitted when a noun alone follows sans, avec, en, sur, sous, par, or two nouns alone appear in the expression ni . . . ni:

- sans arrêt continuously
- sans difficulté without difficulty
- sans délai without delay
- sans sucre without sugar
- sans manche with no handle
- avec patience with patience
- avec difficulté with difficulty
- en colère angry
- en guerre at war
- en réparation being repaired
- en théorie in theory
- en marbre in marble
- sur commande by order
- sous verre under glass
- sous pression under pressure
- deux fois par semaine twice a week
- par pitié out of pity
- Il ne portait ni veste nor a tie
- ni cravate

(For ne . . . ni . . . ni see Chapter 16.14.)
But if the noun is modified (for example by an adjective) the article is not omitted:

- sans la moindre difficulté  
  without the least difficulty
- sans même le plus petit retard  
  without even the slightest delay
- avec une patience admirable  
  with admirable patience
- sous la pression du gouvernement  
  under pressure from the government

NB: *en* cannot normally co-occur with an article. When an article is required, the preposition changes to *dans*:

- en théorie BUT dans la théorie d’Einstein  
  in theory in Einstein’s theory
- en pratique BUT dans la pratique  
  in practice

### 2.6.5 Omission of the article in set phrases and verbal constructions

- avoir besoin (de)  
  to need
- avoir envie (de)  
  to desire
- avoir peur  
  to be afraid
- avoir raison  
  to be right
- chercher noise (à)  
  to try and pick a quarrel (with)
- demander pardon  
  to ask for forgiveness
- donner congé (à)  
  to sack
- faire attention  
  to pay attention
- garder rancune (à)  
  to bear a grudge (against)
- prendre fait et cause (pour)  
  to defend
- rendre justice (à)  
  to be fair (to)
- rendre service  
  to help
- tenir parole  
  to keep one’s word

### 2.6.6 Omission of the article with nouns in apposition

When proper nouns are juxtaposed with common nouns which identify them, the common nouns are said to be in apposition. In such cases the article is usually omitted:

- Versailles, palais de Louis XIV et son entourage  
  Versailles, the palace of Louis XIV and his court
- Juliette Lagrange, concierge, cherchait un nouveau poste  
  Juliette Lagrange, caretaker, was looking for a new job
- Chantal, fille de dentiste, a annoncé son mariage avec Jean-Michel, fils de médecin  
  Chantal, a dentist’s daughter, has announced her marriage to Jean-Michel, a doctor’s son
- Le Bergerac, vin de qualité, est vendu dans toute l’Europe  
  Bergerac, a quality wine, is sold throughout Europe

But when the common noun is modified, for example by an adjective, the article is not omitted:

- Chantal, la fille aînée du dentiste, . . .
- Versailles, le célèbre palais de Louis XIV . . .
2.6.7 Omission of the article with nouns following the verbs être, demeurer, devenir, élire, nommer, rester

When a noun alone follows the verbs être ‘be’, demeurer ‘stay’, devenir ‘become’, élire ‘elect’, nommer ‘appoint’, rester ‘stay’, the article is omitted:

- Sa mère est ingénieur(e)  
  Her mother is an engineer
- Il est devenu architecte très tôt  
  He became an architect early on
- Elle est restée maire de la commune  
  She remained mayor of the village
- On l’a élu président  
  He was elected president
- Pierre a été nommé Directeur des Achats  
  Pierre was appointed Purchasing Director

But when the noun is modified, for example by an adjective, the article is not omitted:

- Depuis, il est devenu un architecte innovateur  
  Since then, he has become an innovatory architect
- Pierre a été nommé le premier Directeur des Achats  
  Pierre was appointed as the first Purchasing Director

2.6.8 Omission of the article in lists

In lists of nouns the article is frequently omitted:

- Hommes, femmes et enfants sont tous invités à la fête  
  Men, women and children are all invited to the party
- J’ai acheté pommes de terre, tomates, courgettes, prunes et navets chez le même marchand de primeurs  
  I bought potatoes, tomatoes, courgettes, plums and turnips at the same greengrocer’s

NB: Either all the articles are omitted (as in these examples) or they are all included (see 2.2.11).

2.6.9 Omission of the article with days and months

The nouns referring to days and months do not have an article when they are used without modification:

- Venez mardi  
  Come on Tuesday
- Les derniers jours de décembre  
  The final days of December

However, when modified, for example by a date or a relative clause, a definite article is required:

- Venez le mardi 17  
  Come on Tuesday 17th
- Les derniers jours du décembre qui vient de s’écouler  
  The final days of last December
2.7 Demonstrative determiners

TABLE 2.B Summary table of demonstrative determiners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proximate</th>
<th>Non-proximate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>masc</td>
<td>ce, cet this, that</td>
<td>ce, cet . . . ci this . . . (here)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ce, cet . . . là that . . . (there)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem</td>
<td>cette this, that</td>
<td>cette . . . ci this . . . (here)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cette . . . là that . . . (there)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plur</td>
<td>ces these, those</td>
<td>ces . . . ci these . . . (here)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ces . . . là those . . . (there)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Masculine cet appears only when the demonstrative determiner immediately precedes a noun or adjective beginning with a vowel or a ‘silent h’ (h muet) (see 2.1.1):

- cet enfant = this child
- cet ancien marin = that ex-sailor
- cet héroïsme = that heroism

2.7.1 Typical use of demonstrative determiners

Demonstrative determiners imply a contrast between the entity referred to by the noun they accompany and other entities of a similar type:

- Cette voiture a fait le tour du monde
  This car has been around the world
  (The car referred to is implicitly contrasted with other cars which haven’t been around the world.)

- A cet instant, la porte s’est brusquement refermée derrière eux
  At that moment the door suddenly closed behind them
  (The moment referred to is implicitly contrasted with other moments when the door didn’t close.)

Note that ce, cet/cette translate both ‘this’ and ‘that’, ces translates both ‘these’ and ‘those’. The form -ci can be added to the noun accompanied by ce, etc., to stress proximity in space or time. Proximity in English is part of the meaning of ‘this’, but it can also be emphasized by stressing ‘this’ or sometimes by adding ‘here’ after the noun:

- Cette voiture-ci a fait le tour du monde
  THIS car/This car here has been around the world

- Ce mois-ci je ne peux pas vous payer
  THIS month I can’t pay you

The form -là can be added to the noun accompanied by ce, etc., to stress non-proximity in space or time. Non-proximity in English is part of the meaning of ‘that’, but it can also be emphasized by stressing ‘that’ or sometimes by adding ‘there’ after the noun:

- Cette année-là nous ne sommes pas allés à la mer
  THAT year we did not go to the sea

- Ce matin-là, je m’étais réveillé très tard
  THAT morning I had woken up very late
-ci and -là are necessary if a comparison is made between ‘this X’ and ‘that X’:

Est-ce que vous préférez cette voiture-ci ou cette voiture-là?
Do you prefer this car or that car?

2.8 Possessive determiners

TABLE 2.C Summary table of possessive determiners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First person</th>
<th>Second person</th>
<th>Third person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>masc</td>
<td>fem</td>
<td>plu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mon</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>nos</td>
<td>son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>ton</td>
<td>ta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nos</td>
<td>our</td>
<td>vost</td>
<td>vost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possessive determiners agree in gender and number with the nouns they precede:

Elle a levé son verre  She raised her (or his) glass
Il a rempli sa tasse  He filled his (or her) cup
Il a cassé ses lunettes He broke his (or her) glasses

The feminine singular forms ma, ta, sa become mon, ton, son when they immediately precede a noun or adjective beginning with a vowel or ‘silent h’ (h muet) (see 2.1.1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>mon</th>
<th>sa</th>
<th>ton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ma classe</td>
<td>my class</td>
<td>BUT</td>
<td>mon école</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sa permission</td>
<td>her permission</td>
<td>BUT</td>
<td>son approbation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ta hardiesse</td>
<td>your audacity</td>
<td>BUT</td>
<td>ton hésitation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The determiners votre, vos can both be used to refer to more than one possessor:

Messieurs et mesdames, votre table est prête
Ladies and gentlemen, your table is ready

and as a polite form:

Suivez-moi, monsieur, votre table est prête
Follow me, sir, your table is ready

(For the use of the definite article rather than possessive determiners with parts of the body see 2.2.8.)

(For the use of a singular determiner when a single item is possessed by more than one person see 2.2.9.)
Personal and impersonal pronouns

Personal pronouns are forms that are used in place of a noun phrase when that phrase is already known from the situation, linguistic or contextual. Personal pronouns have different (but overlapping) forms depending on whether they are subjects, direct objects, indirect objects or objects of a preposition. They agree in person and number with the noun phrase for which they stand.

Personal pronouns take their name from the fact that they can be classified as first person (je, me, moi, nous), second person (tu, te, toi, vous) or third person (il, elle, lui, les; ils, leur, eux, elles). They do not necessarily refer to people; e.g. elle is a personal pronoun, but it refers to the inanimate émission in: elle est intéressante, cette émission 'That programme’s interesting’.

Personal pronouns contrast with impersonal pronouns, which do not refer to other noun phrases. An impersonal pronoun (usually in subject position) does not stand for any person, place, thing, idea, etc. il, ce, cela, ça can be impersonal pronouns in French: e.g. Il pleut ‘It’s raining’; Il est tard ‘It’s late’; Ça me fait peur d’y aller la nuit ‘It scares me to go there at night’.

Neutral pronouns (ce, cela, ça) normally refer to events, actions, states or general classes of people or things, e.g. Vous viendrez dîner ce soir. C’est prévu ‘Come to dinner this evening. It’s all taken care of’ (C’ refers to the event ‘Come to dinner’).

Stressed pronouns (moi, toi, lui, elle, soi, nous, vous, eux, elles) are used for emphasis and also appear after prepositions.

Demonstrative pronouns (celui, celle, ceux, celles, which can have the suffix -ci or -là) are used where English uses ‘the one’, i.e. to specify noun phrases in a way which distinguishes one from another. They can refer to people or things.

Possessive pronouns (le(s) mien(s), le(s) tien(s), le(s) sien(s), le(s) nôtre(s), le(s) vôtre(s), le(s) leur(s)) are used where English uses ‘mine’, ‘hers’, ‘yours’, etc.

3.1 Subject pronouns

TABLE 3.A Summary table of subject pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person</td>
<td>je</td>
<td>nous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td>tu</td>
<td>vous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you (plural, polite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person</td>
<td>il</td>
<td>ils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>he, it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>she, it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific</td>
<td>one, we,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>people, they</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>ce, cela, ça</td>
<td>it, that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impersonal</td>
<td>il, ce, cela, ça</td>
<td>it, that, there</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1.1 Position of subject pronouns

In declarative sentences, subject pronouns normally appear immediately before the verb which carries the tense:

- **Nous** voulons voir le directeur
  *We want to see the manager*

- **Tu** comprends vite
  *You catch on quickly*

- **Elle** a servi le vin chambré
  *She served the wine at room temperature*

They can only be separated from this verb by the *ne* of negation, and by other pre-verbal pronouns:

- **Elle ne** prend pas de café
  *She’s not having any coffee*

- **Tu l’as mangé**
  *You ate it*

- **Vous ne le** ferez pas
  *You won’t do it*

Unlike in English, subject pronouns cannot normally be separated from the verb by adverbials or parenthetical expressions:

- **NOT** *Je souvent dine avec Laura*
  *I often dine with Laura*

- **NOT** *Il, paraît-il, ne prend pas de café*
  *He, it seems, isn’t having coffee*

versus the grammatical *Je dine souvent avec Laura, Il ne prend pas de café, paraît-il.*

In yes/no questions involving inversion (see Chapter 14.2.3), subject pronouns appear immediately after the verb which carries the tense:

- **Sait-il nager?**
  *Can he swim?*

- **Est-elle arrivée?**
  *Has she arrived?*

- **Ont-ils mangé?**
  *Have they eaten?*

(For the formation of yes/no questions, see Chapter 14.2.)

When subject pronouns follow the verb in this way nothing else can intervene:

- **Ne le croyez-vous pas?**
  *Don’t you believe it?*

- **Ne le lui avez-vous pas donné?**
  *Didn’t you give it to him?*

- **Dînent-ils souvent ensemble?**
  *Do they often dine together?*

3.1.2 The use of *vous* and *tu*

*vous* can have two functions: to address more than one person, and as a polite form of address to one person when there is a certain ‘social distance’ between the speaker and the addressee. *tu* is used only to address one person when there is no social distance between speaker and addressee.
In its plural use, *vous* refers simply to more than one addressee, whether social intimates or not:

*Vous* voulez aller au match dimanche?
*Do you want to go to the match this Sunday?*  
(e.g. several friends discussing where to go)

*Vous* allez me refaire ce devoir
*You lot are going to have to do this homework again*  
(e.g. a teacher talking to a class)

When one person is being addressed it is difficult to give hard and fast rules about when to use *tu* and when to use the polite *vous*. Generally, one can say that the non-native speaker would be well advised to use *vous* from the outset, and to allow the native speaker to take the initiative about any change to *tu*. Table 3.B illustrates some uses of *tu* and polite *vous*, but it is not possible to give an exhaustive list of such usage. Individual speakers may vary in their own preferences, and usage may vary regionally (for example, it is often said that *tu* is used more readily in the south of France than in the north).

**TABLE 3.B Examples of the use of *tu* and polite *vous***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Typical usage by two speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult strangers meeting for the first time in formal contexts: e.g. business meetings, interviews, dealing with state administration and services.</td>
<td>Both use <em>vous</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults meeting in informal contexts: e.g. neighbours, socializing, shopping.</td>
<td>Initially both use <em>vous</em>, but with continued contact it is likely that they will change to <em>tu</em>, especially with young adults (under 40).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional superior and inferior</td>
<td>Generally both use <em>vous</em>, but in some organizations the inferior may use <em>vous</em> and the superior <em>tu</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional equals</td>
<td>Both use <em>tu</em>, but older speakers (50-ish or over) may use <em>vous</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate family</td>
<td>Both use <em>tu</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant relatives: e.g. second cousins, great aunts/uncles, etc.</td>
<td>Both use <em>tu</em>, but there is a tendency to use <em>vous</em> when older family members are involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Typically <em>tu</em> but older speakers (50-ish or over) may use <em>vous</em>. This does not necessarily indicate less warmth in the friendship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults to young children</td>
<td>Adults use <em>tu</em> to young children up to early adolescence. When very young they will respond with <em>tu</em>, but as they grow older they are expected to learn when and where <em>vous</em> is required of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and pupils</td>
<td>Teachers typically use <em>tu</em> to children under 14 and <em>vous</em> to older pupils, but some teachers continue to use <em>tu</em> either to express power over their pupils, or solidarity with them. The younger the teacher, the greater the likelihood that <em>tu</em> will be used. Pupils typically use <em>vous</em> to teachers, occasionally <em>tu</em>. Under tens are rarely expected to say <em>vous</em> to their teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Both use <em>tu</em> from the first meeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1.3 ‘Marked’ use of *tu*

Certain social sub-groups have their own internal norms for the use of *tu* and polite *vous*. For example, in sports teams, in left-wing political parties, and in trade unions, *tu* is the generalized form of address.

There are also a number of contexts where the expected use of polite *vous* between speakers is not met, and the actual pronoun form used is *is tu*. For example, a stranger approaching you in the street and using the *tu* form, where normally *vous* is expected, may create the impression of an unwanted degree of intimacy; or it may indicate arrogance or contempt. Other examples of such ‘marked’ use are:

- In street altercations, e.g. between motorists. The effect produced is one of insult.
- Police interrogating suspects use the *tu* form, but suspects are expected to reciprocate with the *vous* form. The effect produced is one of domination.
- As a special case of the use of *tu*, Protestants have always addressed God with the *tu* form, but Catholics have only done so since 1967; before that God was addressed with the *vous* form.

3.1.4 Use of *il/ils* and *elle/elles*

The third person pronouns *il/ils* and *elle/elles* normally refer to people and things (both concrete and abstract) and the choice of which one to use is usually determined by the grammatical person, gender and number of the noun referred to:

- *Qu’est-ce qu’il fait, le facteur? Il est en retard*
  *What’s the postman up to? He’s late*

- *Il est intéressant, ce livre*
  *That book’s interesting*

- *Où est la directrice? Elle est en réunion*
  *Where’s the headmistress? She’s in a meeting*

- *Elle est intéressante, cette émission*
  *That programme’s interesting*

- *Il n’y a plus d’abricots. Ils sont finis*
  *There are no more apricots. They’re finished*

- *Elles sont dangereuses, ces falaises*
  *These cliffs are dangerous*

3.1.5 Grammatical and real gender

With a handful of nouns, the real gender (sex) of the person referred to may determine the choice of third person pronouns *il/ils* or *elle/elles*. For example, *victime, recrue, sentinelle* are grammatically feminine nouns, but not all ‘victims’, ‘recruits’ or ‘sentries’ are necessarily female; *mannequin, président, conseiller municipal* are grammatically masculine nouns, but not all ‘models’, ‘presidents’ or ‘town councillors’ are necessarily male. In such cases the real gender of the person referred to normally determines the choice of *il/ils* or *elle/elles*:

- *Nous avons fait une nouvelle recrue. Il va se joindre à nous ce soir*
  *We have gained a new recruit. He will join us this evening*
§3.1 Subject pronouns

C’est une femme qui a été nommée président de l’université. Elle n’a que 42 ans
A woman has been appointed as Vice-Chancellor of the university. She is only 42

3.1.6 Grammatical and real number

With grammatically singular nouns that refer to more than one person or thing, the choice of pronoun is normally singular il or elle:

Quant au gouvernement, il ne prendra jamais les mesures qui s’imposent
As for the government, they will never take the necessary steps

Le comité va-t-il élire un nouveau président?
Will the committee elect a new chairperson?

En ce qui concerne l’équipe française, on peut dire qu’elle est en grande forme en ce moment
As for the French team, they are currently on top form

For collective nouns see Chapter 1.1.3.

3.1.7 Pronouns referring to groups of mixed gender

When a group (of people or things) of mixed gender is referred to, ils is the pronoun used. Compare:

Le directeur, son frère et son neveu? Ils sont tous les trois démissionnaires
The director, his brother and his nephew? All three are resigning

Louise, sa fille et sa petite-fille étaient dans la voiture. Elles sont toutes les trois mortes dans l’accident
Louise, her daughter and her granddaughter were in the car. All three died in the accident

with:

Louise, sa fille et son petit-fils étaient dans la voiture. Ils sont tous les trois morts dans l’accident
Louise, her daughter and her grandson were in the car. All three died in the accident

3.1.8 ils with arbitrary reference

Plural ils may be used to refer to an indefinite or arbitrary group of people:

Ils ont encore augmenté le prix de l’essence
They have put the price of petrol up again

Ils disent qu’il va y avoir de l’orage
They say that there will be a storm

Comment votent-ils par ici?
How do they vote around here?
3.1.9 Coordination of subject pronouns

When clauses containing unstressed subject pronouns are coordinated by *et*, *ou* or *ne...ni*, the second pronoun may be deleted:

Elle se réveille et (elle) regarde l’horloge
She wakes up and looks at the clock

Je ne lis ni (je) n’écris à présent
I am neither reading nor writing at the moment

When the verb is accompanied by auxiliary *avoir* or *être*, if the subject pronoun is deleted, the auxiliary must be too:

Il a chanté et (il a) dansé
(Not *Il a chanté et a dansé*)
He sang and danced

3.1.10 Use of *on*

*On* can refer to a person or people whose identity is not really known:

**On dit que la première année de mariage est la plus difficile**
*People say that the first year of marriage is the most difficult*

**C’est une région où l’*on* continue de mourir davantage de maladies de cœur que du cancer**
*It is an area where more people continue to die from heart disease than from cancer*

**On n’en fabrique plus**
*They don’t make them any more*

**On m’a volé tout mon argent**
*Someone stole all my money*

3.1.11 *on* as an alternative to the English passive

A construction with *on* can often be used where a passive is used in English:

**On croyait la crise du logement définitivement réglée**
*The housing shortage was definitely thought to be over*

**On ne soupçonne guère le véritable rôle économique joué par les enfants**
*The real economic role that children play is thoroughly underestimated*

**On sait qu’il a eu des démêlés avec la police, mais on ne sait pas pourquoi**
*It is well known that he was once in trouble with the police, but it is not known why*

(For the passive see Chapter 8.6.)

3.1.12 *on* as an equivalent for English ‘you’

*On* can sometimes be used where English uses ‘you’ and French could use *vous* or *tu*:

**Est-il vrai qu’*on* distingue un Américain d’un Français à cent mètres?**
*Is it true you can tell an American from a Frenchman at a hundred metres?*
Avec le moteur devant, on est au moins protégé
With the engine at the front you are at least protected

Comment savoir si on est doué pour la musique si l’on n’a jamais essayé?
How do you know whether you have a talent for music if you’ve never tried it?

3.1.13 on as an equivalent for nous

on can often be used as a synonym for nous:

On avait d’abord tenté l’opération inverse
We had at first taken the opposite tack

On sait à quelles extrémités peuvent arriver certaines personnes
We know to what extremes some people can go

On s’y est habitué depuis longtemps
We have been used to it for a long time

The use of on instead of nous is very frequent in informal spoken French:

Pourquoi on rentre pas à la maison?
Why don’t we go home?

On avait chanté la Marseillaise, tu te souviens pas?
We sang the Marseillaise, don’t you remember?

On y va?
Shall we go?

NB: When on refers to more than one person, many writers make any adjective or past participle which should indicate agreement show plural agreement. Not all native speakers agree with this. Teachers, for instance, require the masculine singular agreement to be observed.

On est tous très fatigués
We are all very tired

Après on est tous sortis en boîte
Afterwards we all went to a club

A frequent use of on in spoken French combines it with a phrase introduced by avec to express the meaning ‘Somebody and I did something’ or ‘We, together with somebody else, did something’:

Avec Charlotte, on est allé en ville pour déjeuner
Charlotte and I went into town to have lunch OR We went with Charlotte to have lunch in town

Avec ton frère, on a acheté cinq DVDs
Your brother and I bought 5 DVDs OR We bought 5 DVDs with your brother

While the meaning of on in this use is unspecified for number, the verb is always third person singular. This usage is slightly more colloquial than the same structure used with nous (see 3.3.5 (b)).
3.1.14 Use of l'on

l'on is sometimes used in French for on when it follows a word ending in a vowel (like et, ou, qui, que, si, etc). This is a feature of written, rather than spoken, French:

Comment savoir si l'on ne demande pas?
How can you know if you don’t ask?

Il faut savoir choisir l'homme avec qui l'on s'engage pour la vie
You have to be careful choosing the man to whom you will commit your life

The use of l’ is not obligatory, however.

3.1.15 Use of ce, cela, ça as neutral pronouns

When ce, cela and ça are used as neutral pronouns they normally refer to events, actions, states or general classes of people or things:

Vous viendrez dîner ce soir. C'est prévu.
Come to dinner this evening. It’s all taken care of
(ce referring to ‘coming to dinner’)

L'élection d'un nouveau président aura lieu en mars. Ce sera l'occasion pour le pays de s'exprimer
The election of a new president takes place in March. The country will be able to have its say
(ce referring to ‘the election of a president’)

L'extérieur, ce n'est rien. Il faudrait voir l'intérieur
The outside is nothing. You should see the inside
(ce referring to the ‘state of the outside’)

NB: il cannot usually be used to refer to events, actions, states or general classes.

While ce is normally used with être (see also 3.1.23), cela and ça are used with other verbs:

Partez à l'étranger. Cela vous fera du bien
Travel abroad. It will do you good
(cela referring to ‘travelling abroad’)

Ils y sont allés un peu fort. Cela risque de faire du bruit
They went a bit far. It is likely to cause a stir
(cela referring to ‘having gone a bit far’)

J'essayais pas d'être premier. Ça m'intéressait pas.
I wasn’t trying to come first. It didn’t interest me.
(ça referring to coming first)

cela tends to be used in written French, or for emphasizing the subject in spoken French; ça is widely used as the unstressed subject in the spoken language.

Written French:

Plus de la moitié de la population adulte d’aujourd’hui a étudié le latin à l’école. Cela montre bien le décalage entre les formations scolaires et les activités professionnelles
More than half of today’s adults studied Latin at school. This clearly shows the gap that exists between school education and professional activity
3 millions de Français ne savent pas lire. Cela incite à poser des questions sur l’efficacité du système éducatif.

3 million French people cannot read. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the educational system.

Spoken French:

Elle est heureuse. Ça se voit
She’s happy. You can tell just from looking at her

Ça lui servira de leçon
That’ll teach him

3.1.16 Comparing neutral ce, cela, ça with personal il/elle, ils/elles

il/ils and elle/elles refer to people and things (both concrete and abstract). ce, cela, ça refer to events, actions, states or general classes of phenomena. Compare:

C’est bon, le vin
Wine is good
(refers to wine in general)

Il est bon, le vin
The wine is good
(refers to a specific example of wine)

C’est lourd, cette valise
This suitcase is heavy
(implies that it is heavy to carry)

Elle est lourde, cette valise
This suitcase is heavy
(refers to the object itself)

J’adore m’occuper des enfants. C’est si câlin à cet âge-là
I love looking after children. They’re so cuddly when they’re that age
(c’ referring to small children in general)

J’adore m’occuper de tes enfants. Ils sont si câlins
I love looking after your children. They’re so cuddly
(referring to specific small children)

In informal spoken French many speakers use ça where il/ils, elle/elles are used in more formal spoken and written French:

J’ai astiqué mes casseroles. Regardez comme ça brille!
I gave my pans a scrub. Look how shiny they are!

Les pintades, ça couche souvent dehors
Guinea-fowl often sleep outside

Tu sais, ces gens-là, ça boit
You know, those people, they like their drink

NB: Because this usage is regarded as a feature of informal spoken French, the foreign learner should avoid using it in the written language.
3.1.17 Use of *il, ce, cela* and *ça* as impersonal pronouns

The clearest use of impersonal subject pronouns is with verbs where *il, ce, cela* and *ça* simply mark the subject position without referring to someone or something elsewhere in the conversation or text:

- **Il pleut**  
  *It’s raining*
- **Il neige**  
  *It’s snowing*
- **Il fait du vent**  
  *It’s windy*
- **C’est difficile de le joindre au téléphone**  
  *It’s difficult to reach him by phone*
- **C’est dommage qu’elle ne soit pas venue**  
  *It’s a pity that she didn’t come*
- **Cela inquiète ma mère de les savoir dehors par ce temps**  
  *It worries my mother to know that they are out in this weather*
- **Ça m’étonne qu’elle n’ait rien dit**  
  *It amazes me that she said nothing*

In these cases *il, ce, cela, ça* express very little meaning (indeed, in some languages impersonal constructions are characterized by the absence of a subject, for example Spanish *Llueve* ‘(it) is raining’). This impersonal use of *il, ce, cela, ça* in French corresponds to the impersonal use of ‘it’, and sometimes ‘there’ in English.

3.1.18 Impersonal subject restricted to *il*

Some impersonal verbs and verbal expressions always take impersonal subject *il* (and NOT *ce, cela* or *ça*):

Expressions of clock time do:

- **Quelle heure est-il?**  
  *What time is it?*
- **Il est midi**  
  *It’s 12 o’clock*

As do the related time expressions:

- **Il est temps de, que . . .**  
  *It’s time to, that . . .*
- **Il est tard**  
  *It’s late*

Certain frequently occurring constructions also take impersonal *il*:

- **Il y a (quelqu’un, deux hommes à la porte)**  
  *There is/are (somebody, two men at the door)*
- **Il est question de (lui interdire l’accès aux enfants)**  
  *There’s talk of (stopping her seeing the children)*
- **Il s’agit de (refaire les fondations)**  
  *It’s a question of (rebuilding the foundations)*
- **Il faut (se lever tôt le matin)**  
  *You’ve got to (get up early in the morning)*
§3.1 Subject pronouns

Il reste (des phénomènes qu’il est difficile de catégoriser)
There remain (phenomena which it is difficult to classify)

Il convient (de faire le point)
It is advisable (to take stock)

Il vaut mieux (rester chez vous)
It’s better (for you to stay at home)

NB: Il s’agit de is a frequently-used impersonal construction which learners often misuse because one way of translating it into English is as ‘X is about Y’, e.g. Il s’agit dans ce roman d’une jeune fille ‘This novel is about a girl’. Il s’agit de can never have a personal subject, however:

NOT *Ce roman s’agit d’une jeune fille

By contrast, the verb agir ‘to act’ must have a personal subject:

Pierre agit de façon bizarre
Pierre is acting in a strange way

Il agit en ami
He is acting as a friend

(For impersonal verbs see also Chapter 8.8.)

3.1.19 Il or ça with impersonal verbs

Some impersonal verbs and verbal expressions have il as subject in written French, but il or ça may occur in spoken French; ça is used in informal styles.

Some weather verbs behave in this way:

Il pleut, ça pleut   It’s raining
Il neige, ça neige   It’s snowing
Il gèle, ça gèle     It’s freezing
Il bruine, ça bruine It’s drizzling

Constructions not listed under 3.1.18 also behave in this way:

Il/ça se peut que la carte soit démagnétisée
Perhaps the card has lost its magnetism

Il/ça n’empêche pas qu’elle ait raison
That doesn’t stop her from being right

Il/ça suffit de voir ce qui se passe
You only have to see what’s happening

3.1.20 Il/ça alternating with clauses or infinitives as subjects

Some impersonal verbs allow both il (or ça in informal spoken French) and a clause or infinitive as a subject:

Il convient à ma mère que les Durand habitent à côté or
Que les Durand habitent à côté convient à ma mère
It suits my mother to have the Durands living next door
Ça me fait peur d’y aller la nuit or
D’y aller la nuit me fait peur
I am afraid to go there at night

Others:

Il/ça déplait à Olivier de/que . . .
It displeases Oliver to/that . . .

Il/ça fait mal à Arnaud de/que . . .
It hurts Arnaud to/that . . .

Il/ça fait plaisir à Céline de/que . . .
It gives Céline pleasure to/that . . .

Il/ça va à Romain de/que . . .
It suits Romain to/that . . .

Il/ça arrive à Béatrice de/que . . .
It sometimes happens to Béatrice that . . .

Verbs of this type which have direct objects, as opposed to indirect objects introduced by à, always take the impersonal subject cela (or ça in informal spoken French) and NOT il:

Cela/ça amuse Pierre qu’elle fasse de la planche à voile or
Qu’elle fasse de la planche à voile amuse Pierre
It amuses Pierre that she goes wind-surfing

Cela/ça ennuie Georges de devoir recommencer or
De devoir recommencer ennuie Georges
George finds it annoying to have to start again

Cela/ça attriste Antoine de/que . . .
. . . saddens . . .

Cela/ça effraye Véronique de/que . . .
. . . frightens . . .

Cela/ça énerve Joël de/que . . .
. . . annoys . . .

Cela/ça épuise Fabien de/que . . .
. . . exhausts . . .

Cela/ça étonne Jérôme de/que . . .
. . . astonishes . . .

Cela/ça fatigue Charlotte de/que . . .
. . . tires . . .

Cela/ça gêne Violette de/que . . .
. . . embarrasses . . .

Cela/ça inquiète Maud de/que . . .
. . . worries . . .

Cela/ça intéresse Rachel de/que . . .
. . . interests . . .

Cela/ça irrite Sophie de/que . . .
. . . irritates . . .

3.1.21 il/ça alternating with noun phrase subjects

A handful of common verbs alternate between an impersonal construction with il (or ça in informal spoken French) and a personal construction with a noun phrase subject:

Il semble que Pierre soit passé lundi or
Pierre semble être passé lundi
It seems that Pierre came round on Monday

Il apparaît que vous êtes le dindon de la farce or
Vous apparaîssez comme étant le dindon de la farce
It seems that you have been made a fool of
Il s’est avéré que Sophie était consciencieuse or
Sophie s’est avérée consciencieuse
It turned out that Sophie was conscientious

3.1.22 Choosing between *il est* and *c’est*

*il est* versus *c’est* with reference to professions, nationality or social status
There are two ways of indicating a person’s profession, nationality or social status: *il/ils* and *elle/élles* are used with the verbs *être, devenir, rester* and a noun without an article:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Il est médecin</em></td>
<td>He is a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elle est devenue professeur(e)</em></td>
<td>She became a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elles sont avocates</em></td>
<td>They are lawyers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elle est toujours restée femme au foyer</em></td>
<td>She always was a housewife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ils restent hollandais, bien qu’ils aient quitté les Pays-Bas il y a 20 ans*
*They remain Dutch, although they left the Netherlands 20 years ago*

*ce* is used when the noun is preceded by a determiner (*un, une, le, la, etc.)*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est un Russe</em></td>
<td>He’s a Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est un avocat</em></td>
<td>He’s a lawyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the noun is modified, a determiner is required and therefore *ce* (not *il/elle*) must be used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est un médecin connu</em></td>
<td>He’s a famous doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est un boxeur professionnel</em></td>
<td>He’s a professional boxer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est une avocate qui connaît le droit anglais</em></td>
<td>She’s a lawyer who knows English law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est un professeur de Toulouse</em></td>
<td>He’s a teacher from Toulouse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*il est* versus *c’est* in more general contexts
When *être* is followed by anything other than an adjective, *ce* is the pronoun to use, NOT *il*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est un plaisir</em></td>
<td>It’s a pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(NOT <em>il est un plaisir</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est Marie</em></td>
<td>It’s Marie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(NOT *il, <em>elle est Marie</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’était en été</em></td>
<td>It was in summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(NOT <em>il était en été</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ce sera pour elle</em></td>
<td>It’ll be for her</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*il est* versus *c’est* when *être* is followed by an adjective alone
When *être* is followed by an adjective alone, both *il* and *ce* are possible but there is a difference in meaning. In these examples, *il* is personal but *ce* is impersonal or neutral:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Il est stupide</em></td>
<td>will normally mean He is stupid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est stupide</em></td>
<td>will normally mean That’s silly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Il est curieux</em></td>
<td>will normally mean He’s inquisitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est curieux</em></td>
<td>will normally mean That’s odd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Il est incroyable</em></td>
<td>will normally mean He’s amazing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C’est incroyable</em></td>
<td>will normally mean That’s unbelievable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## §3.1

**il est versus c’est when être is followed by adjective + clause or infinitive**

When être is followed by an adjective which is itself followed by a clause or infinitive, both *il* and *ce* are possible and both are then used in an impersonal sense:

- **Il/c’est difficile de formuler une politique**
  - *It’s difficult to formulate a policy*

- **Il/c’est intéressant d’observer les passants**
  - *It’s interesting to watch the passers-by*

- **Il/c’est impossible d’ouvrir ces huîtres**
  - *It’s impossible to open these oysters*

Some grammars will sometimes claim that *il est* is the only form to use in these constructions, but *c’est* is widely used in all spoken styles of French, and is often also found in these constructions in the written language.

Other common adjectives which behave in this way are:

- **agréable** - fun
- **bon** - good
- **commode** - convenient
- **dangereux** - dangerous
- **difficile** - difficult
- **étranger** - odd
- **évident** - obvious
- **facile** - easy
- **important** - important
- **impossible** - impossible
- **insupportable** - intolerable
- **intéressant** - interesting
- **inutile** - useless
- **mauvais** - bad
- **nécessaire** - necessary
- **pénible** - tiresome
- **périlleux** - perilous
- **possible** - possible
- **peu probable** - unlikely
- **utile** - useful
- **vrai** - true

**NB:** In the impersonal constructions illustrated above, the preposition which links the adjective to the following infinitive is always *de*.

*(For discussion of adjective + infinitive constructions see Chapter 12.7.)*

**il versus ce used with être + adjective + à**

In the examples immediately above, *il* and *ce* are impersonal. They are used like ‘it’ and ‘there’ in English without reference to anything else in the conversation or text: in these cases the adjective is linked to the infinitive by the preposition *de*. But *il* can also be used as a personal pronoun, and *ce* as a neutral pronoun in similar constructions when the preposition linking the adjective and the infinitive is *à*:

- **Leur politique est difficile à accepter**
  - *(Leur politique), elle est difficile à accepter*  
  - *(Leur politique), c’est difficile à accepter*

- **Ce document est intéressant à analyser**
  - *(Ce document), il est intéressant à analyser*  
  - *(Ce document), c’est intéressant à analyser*

Here *il, elle* and *ce* refer to something mentioned elsewhere in the conversation or text (in this case to *leur politique, ce document*).

*(For more on these constructions see Chapter 12.7.)*
3.1.23 **ce, and compound forms of être**

*ce* can be used with various compound forms of *être*, such as *ce doit être*, *ce peut être*, *ça été*:

- Ce pourrait être un facteur important
  *It could be an important factor*
- Ce doit être Marianne
  *It must be Marianne*
- Ça aurait été trop
  *It would have been too much*

When the phrase following *être* in this construction is plural, some grammars suggest that the verb should be in the third person plural form:

- Ce sont mes amis
  *It's my friends*
- Ce devraient être eux/elles
  *It should be them*

But many speakers use *c'est* etc. in these cases:

- C'est mes amis
- Ce doit être eux/elles

When first or second person plural pronouns *nous* or *vous* follow *être* in these constructions, the verb is always singular:

- C'est vous, c'est nous
  *It's you, it's us*

### 3.2 Object pronouns

**Correctly identifying the direct and indirect objects in English and French**

Many of the problems which learners have with pronouns are not caused by a failure to know what the pronouns are, but by a failure to recognize which pronoun French requires in a particular structure. This is especially true of indirect object pronouns. The structure of English and French verbs, even when they have similar meanings, is not necessarily the same: in a given sentence it is **essential** to know whether the object is direct or indirect in relation to the French verb and NOT the English verb.

Thus, in the English sentence 'They advised Stéphane to leave', 'Stéphane' is the **direct object** of 'advised', and with a pronoun the sentence becomes 'They advised **him** to leave'. But in the French equivalent – *Ils ont conseillé à Stéphane de partir* – Stéphane is the **indirect object** of *conseiller*. With a pronoun the French sentence becomes:

*Il* *leur* ont conseillé de partir

For a full list of verbs which behave differently with respect to objects in English and French see Chapter 8.
TABLE 3.C Summary table of object pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and indirect</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>nous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and indirect</td>
<td>te</td>
<td>vous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>le</td>
<td>les</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>la</td>
<td>les</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>le</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>lui</td>
<td>leur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>lui</td>
<td>leur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and indirect</td>
<td>reflect, reciprocal, benefactive</td>
<td>se (to oneself)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3.D y and en

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Stands in the place of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>a phrase introduced by à, en, dans, sur e.g. à Paris, en ville, dans sa chambre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en</td>
<td>a phrase which begins with de e.g. de son idée</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.1 Direct object and indirect object pronouns: differences between English and French

The following common French verbs take indirect object pronouns; learners often treat them as if they required direct object pronouns, perhaps because their English equivalents take direct objects:

Sa sœur lui a appris à parler espagnol
*His sister taught him to speak Spanish*
(apprendre à qn à faire qc)

Luc leur a conseillé de se taire
*Luc advised them to be quiet*
(conseiller à qn de faire qc)

Sa mère lui défendait de fumer à la maison
*Her mother used to forbid her to smoke at home*
(défendre à qn de faire qc)

Le film lui a (dé)plu
*He (dis)liked the film*
((dé)plaire à qn)

Elle lui manque
*He misses her*
(manquer à qn)
There are several verb constructions which tend to give rise to this problem, each slightly different.

**Verbs followed by: . . . à quelqu’un:**

- . . . lui a téléphoné  . . . phoned him
- . . . lui a survécu  . . . outlived her
- . . . lui a (dés)obéi  . . . (dis)obeyed her
- . . . lui a nui  . . . disadvantaged him
- . . . lui ressemble  . . . looks like him

**Verbs followed by: . . . quelque chose à quelqu’un:**

- . . . lui a passé le sel  . . . passed her the salt
- . . . lui a permis du repos  . . . allowed him some rest
- . . . lui a promis une lettre  . . . promised her a letter
- . . . lui a reproché son attitude  . . . criticized her attitude
- . . . lui a enseigné le chant  . . . taught him to sing
- . . . lui a donné un cadeau  . . . gave her a present
- . . . lui a envoyé un email  . . . sent her an email
- . . . lui a offert un whisky  . . . offered her a whisky

**Verbs followed by: . . . à quelqu’un de faire quelque chose:**

- . . . lui a ordonné de signer  . . . ordered him to sign
- . . . lui a dit de se taire  . . . told him to shut up
- . . . lui a demandé de partir  . . . asked him to leave
- . . . lui a permis de l’acheter  . . . allowed her to buy it

The following common French verbs take **direct objects**; learners often treat them as if they required indirect objects, perhaps because of a confusion over the status of à (or sometimes de) which these verbs require when they are followed by an infinitive:

- Je l’ai aidé à changer la roue  
  I helped him to change the wheel

- Le professeur l’avait encouragé à participer  
  The teacher had encouraged him to take part

- Je les ai persuadés de venir  
  I persuaded them to come

**Others:**

- . . . l’a contraint à rester  . . . forced him to stay
- . . . l’a dissuadée  . . . dissuaded her
- . . . l’a empêché de courir  . . . stopped him from running
- . . . l’a forçée à rester  . . . forced her to stay
- . . . l’a invitée à dîner  . . . invited him to dinner
- . . . l’a menacée  . . . threatened her
- . . . l’a obligé à parler  . . . forced him to talk
- . . . l’a remerciée  . . . thanked her
3.2.2 Position of direct and indirect object pronouns

Direct and indirect object pronouns are closely linked with the verb to which they are most closely related in declarative, negative and interrogative sentences.

When the verb is a main verb they appear immediately before it:

- L’État *me* paie  The state pays *me*
- Les gens ne *me* remarquent pas  People don’t notice *me*
- Elle *le* croit  She believes *it*
- A son âge, vous ne *la* referez pas  You won’t change *her*, at *her* age
- Il lui a soufflé quelques mots  He whispered a few words to *her*
- Tu *me* donnes une idée  You’ve given me an idea
- Ça *leur* apprendra à mentir  That will teach *them* to lie

When the verb is accompanied by the auxiliary verbs *avoir* or *être*, direct and indirect object pronouns appear immediately before the auxiliary:

- Il *m’a* vu  He saw *me*
- M’a-t-il vu?  Did he see *me*?
- Vous ne *les* avez pas goûtés?  Didn’t you taste *them*?
- Il lui avait proposé un voyage  He had suggested a trip to *her*
- Je *vous* suis très reconnaissant  I am very grateful to *you*

Il leur a raconté beaucoup d’histoires passionnantes  
*He told them a lot of fascinating stories*

Nous l’avons déjà traduite, cette lettre  
*We have already translated this letter*

NB: The past participle agrees with a preceding direct object in these cases, but not with the indirect object.

(For the agreement of the past participle see Chapter 9.2 and 9.3.)

Note also that pronouns ending in -e (*me, te, se, le*) and -a (*la*) are shortened to the consonant alone before verbs beginning with a vowel: elle m’aide, je t’ai déjà remercié, je te l’ai dit, etc.

3.2.3 Position of object pronouns with infinitives

When the verb governing a direct or indirect object pronoun is an infinitive (including a compound infinitive made up of an auxiliary verb and a past participle), direct and indirect objects usually come in front of the infinitive:

- On peut toujours *lui* téléphoner  
  *He can always be reached by phone*
- Il pourra *te* voir demain  
  *He will be able to see you tomorrow*
- Nous irons *leur* raconter l’histoire demain  
  *We will go and tell them what happened tomorrow*
- Il pourrait bien l’avoir dit  
  *He may well have said that*

NB: When à or de followed by le or les come before the infinitive, these forms do NOT combine to form au, du, aux, dès: Je suis obligé de *les* aider.
3.2.4 Position of object pronouns with faire, laisser, envoyer or verbs of perception + infinitive

Where the infinitive has faire, laisser, envoyer or perception verbs like voir, regarder, entendre, sentir in front of it, direct and indirect object pronouns appear before this other verb if they are understood as the subject of the infinitive:

Je la voyais venir
(who is coming? ‘she’ is, therefore la is the understood subject of venir)
I saw her coming

Sa mère lui a fait manger du potage
(who ate the soup? ‘she’ did, therefore lui is the understood subject of manger)
Her mother made her eat some soup

Elle m’a laissé pleurer
(who cried? ‘I’ did, therefore me is the understood subject of pleurer)
She let me cry

Note that the understood subject of the infinitive is realized as an indirect object if the infinitive has a direct object, but as a direct object if it does not. Compare:

Sa mère lui a fait manger du potage/Sa mère le lui a fait manger
(du potage is the direct object of manger)
Her mother made her eat some soup/Her mother made her eat it

Sa mère l’a fait manger
(manger has no direct object)
Her mother made her eat

If the direct or indirect object is understood as the object of the infinitive, it normally also comes before the other verb (although some native speakers may allow it to be placed directly in front of the infinitive):

Je l’ai envoyé chercher (le is the understood object of chercher)
I sent (someone) to look for him

Je l’ai entendu dire (le is the understood object of dire)
I have heard it said

Elle le fit remplacer (le is the understood object of remplacer)
She had it replaced

For the ordering of more than one pronoun with these constructions, see 3.2.32.

3.2.5 Position of object pronouns with imperatives

In affirmative imperatives direct and indirect object pronouns come immediately after the verb which governs them, and the pronouns me, te become the stressed forms moi, toi:

Prends-les!
Take them!

Suivez-nous!
Follow us!

Arrêtez-les!
Stop them!

Ecoutez-moi!
Listen to me!

Tais-toi!
Shut up!
BUT in negative imperatives direct and indirect object pronouns precede the verb:

- Ne les suivez pas!  
  Don’t follow them!
- Ne la mangez pas!  
  Don’t eat it!
- Ne me fais pas rire!  
  Don’t make me laugh!

(See also Chapter 11.5 on imperatives.)

### 3.2.6 Position of object pronouns with *voici* and *voilà*

Direct object pronouns may appear before *voici* and *voilà*:

- Nous voici  
  Here we are
- Les voilà  
  There they are

### 3.2.7 Ambiguity of reference of *lui* and *leur*

Because the indirect object pronouns *lui*, *leur* can refer both to masculine and to feminine nouns they are inherently ambiguous:

- Je lui ai indiqué le chemin  
  I showed him or her the way
- Pierre leur a parlé  
  Pierre spoke to them (either male or female or mixed)

This ambiguity can be resolved if one wishes, however, by copying the pronoun with a stressed pronoun and a preposition:

- Je lui ai indiqué le chemin à elle / Je lui ai indiqué le chemin à lui  
  Pierre leur a parlé à elles / Pierre leur a parlé à eux

### 3.2.8 Use of the neutral pronoun *le*

*le*, in addition to its function as a third person singular pronoun referring to masculine nouns, may also have a ‘neutral’ function when it refers to states, general ideas or whole propositions:

- Pour que nous vous remboursions vos frais de déplacement, il faut présenter des justificatifs, si vous le pouvez (le refers to ‘justifying the expenditure’)  
  For us to be able to pay your travelling expenses, you must prove you have spent the money, if you can
- Vous n’êtes plus président, je le sais (le refers to ‘no longer being the president’)  
  You are no longer the president, I know
- Je le répète: tu ne travailles pas assez (le refers to ‘you’re not doing enough work’)  
  I’ll say it again: you’re not doing enough work

In this usage neutral *le* is the object counterpart of the neutral subjects *ce*, *cela*, *ça* (see 3.1.15).
3.2.9 Use of neutral le where no equivalent exists in English

Sometimes neutral le is required in French where English normally has no object pronoun at all, typically where the verb être + adjective/identifying expression are involved:

N’ayez pas peur! J’étais en colère, mais je ne le suis plus
(le refers to ‘being angry’)
Don’t be frightened! I was angry, but I’m not any more

Est-ce qu’elle est prête? Elle le sera dans un instant
(le refers to ‘being ready’)
Is she ready? She will be in a moment

Moi, je n’étais pas étonné, mais Myriam l’a été
(le refers to ‘being surprised’)
I wasn’t surprised, but Myriam was

3.2.10 Wrong use of neutral le in phrases where ‘it’ occurs in English

The English constructions ‘find it difficult to’, ‘consider it easy to’, ‘reckon it possible that’, and similar cases, have French counterparts in which le must not appear. The verbs usually involved are croire, penser, trouver, juger, estimer, considérer:

Je trouve difficile de me faire des amis
I find it difficult to make friends

NOT *Je le trouve difficile de me faire des amis

Il considère important que tous ses amis soient prévenus
He considers it important that all his friends be notified

NOT *Il le considère important que tous ses amis soient prévenus

The le is absent in these cases because the construction is impersonal, and, while English requires ‘it’, French requires an absence of pronoun. Where the construction is personal (that is, where a person or thing is referred to), le, la, or les are required:

Je trouve ce livre difficile à comprendre
I find this book difficult to understand

Je le trouve difficile à comprendre
(le refers to ‘the book’)

J’ai trouvé le soliste impossible à écouter
I found I couldn’t bear to listen to the soloist

Je l’ai trouvé impossible à écouter
(le refers to ‘the soloist’)

(For more on this construction see Chapter 12.7.)
3.2.11 Optional use of neutral *le*

Neutral *le* is optional in the following environments:

(a) With the verbs *croire, penser, dire, vouloir, savoir* when these are used as stock conversational responses to questions or statements by other people:

*Ils sont heureux? Oui, je (le) pense*  
*Are they happy? Yes, I think so*

*Est-ce que vous viendrez ce soir? Non, je ne (le) crois pas*  
*Will you come this evening? No, I don’t think so*

*Elle revient directement de Londres. Oui, je (le) sais*  
*She has come straight back from London. Yes, I know*

(b) In the second clause of a comparison (where the particle *ne* is also optional). The use of *ne* and *le* is typical of formal written French:

*Il est autre que je (ne) (le) croyais*  
*He is different from what I expected*

*Un abonnement est moins cher que vous (ne) (le) pensez*  
*A subscription costs less than you think*

*A son âge, il faut admettre que Maurice est plus naïf qu’il (ne) devrait (l’)être*  
*When you realize how old he is, you have to admit that Maurice is more naïve than he should be*

3.2.12 Reflexive use of *me, te, se, nous, vous*

Where *me, te, se, nous, vous* refer to the subject of the verb to which they are attached, they are being used reflexively. This use can correspond to English ‘my-, your-, him-, her-, it-, oneself; our-, your-, themselves’:

*Michel adore se regarder dans les vitrines*  
*Michel loves looking at himself in shop windows*

*Je me connais*  
*I know myself*

*Vous vous critiquez trop*  
*You are too critical of yourselves*

(See also Chapter 8.7.1.)

3.2.13 Reciprocal *se* and cases of potential ambiguity

When the subject is third person plural, *se* may also be interpreted as a ‘reciprocal’ pronoun, corresponding to English ‘each other’. In some cases *se* is therefore ambiguous, having a ‘reflexive’ or ‘reciprocal’ interpretation, and the meaning may depend on the context:

*Les deux écrivains s’admirent depuis 20 ans*  
*The two writers have admired each other for 20 years*
but could possibly be:

_The two writers have (each) admired themselves for 20 years_

_Les deux amis se connaissent bien_
_The two friends know themselves or each other well_

(See also Chapter 8.7.5.)

### 3.2.14 Benefactive _me, te, se, nous, vous_

_me, te, se, nous, vous_ may also be used to indicate that the subject ‘benefits’ from some action. This use, known as the ‘benefactive’, can often be paraphrased in English by ‘for him-, her-, it-, oneself/themselves, etc.’:

Josée s’est acheté un nouvel ordinateur  
Josée bought herself a new computer

Jacques s’est commandé une bière  
Jacques ordered himself a beer

J’ai hâte de rentrer et de _me_ verser un petit Kir  
_I can’t wait to get home and pour myself a Kir (white wine with a dash of blackcurrant liqueur)_

Etienne et Madeleine _se_ sont offert un baptême de l’air  
_Etienne and Madeleine treated themselves to a first flight_

### 3.2.15 _se_ as an alternative to an English passive

_se_ may be used with a verb as an alternative to an English passive:

_Ces verres peuvent-ils _se_ laver en machine?_  
_Can these glasses be put in the dishwasher?_

_Le Gamay _se_ boit frais  
_Gamay (light red wine) is best drunk chilled_

_L’uni _se_ vend bien cet hiver  
_Plain colours are selling well this winter_

This usage is restricted to special circumstances. The sentence must describe a state of affairs and not an action and the verb must not suggest through its tense that the action takes place in a limited time span.

(See also Chapter 8.7.6.)

### 3.2.16 _me, te, se, nous, vous_ as part of certain verbs but with no specific meaning

_me, te, se, nous, vous_ also normally accompany some verbs without any detectable reflexive, reciprocal or benefactive meaning:

Robert s’est évanoui  
_Robert fainted_
Elle se souvient de son arrière-grand-père
She remembers her great-grandfather

La foule s’est éloignée
The crowd moved away

(For a list of common pronominal verbs in which se has no detectable reflexive, reciprocal or benefactive meaning, see Chapter 8.7.3.)

3.2.17 Emphasizing me, te, se, nous, vous by adding a pronoun + même

The reflexive and benefactive interpretations of me, te, se, nous, vous can be emphasized by the addition of one of the expressions moi-même, toi-même, lui-même, elle-même, soi-même, eux-mêmes, elles-mêmes, etc.:

Connais-toi, toi-même
Know thyself

Elle est grande maintenant: elle s’habille elle-même
She’s a big girl now, she dresses herself

Puisque personne d’autre ne le fait, Suzette s’admirer elle-même!
Since no-one else does so, Suzette admires herself!

De nos jours, malheureusement, il faut se soigner soi-même
Nowadays, unfortunately, you have to be your own doctor

3.2.18 Emphasizing the reciprocal use of se by adding l’un l’autre

The reciprocal interpretation of se can be made explicit by the addition of one of the phrases l’un(e) l’autre, l’un(e) à l’autre, les un(e)s les autres, les un(e)s aux autres, all with the meaning ‘each other’, ‘one another’.

l’un(e) l’autre or l’un(e) à l’autre are used when the subject refers to just two people or things:

Les deux boxeurs se regardaient fixement l’un l’autre
The two boxers were staring at each other

Mes deux sœurs se copient l’une l’autre
My two sisters copy one another

les un(e)s les autres and les un(e)s aux autres are used when the subject refers to more than two people or things:

Les équipiers se connaissent depuis longtemps les uns les autres
The team members have known each other for a long time

Les enfants se sont donné des petits cadeaux les uns aux autres
The children gave each other small presents
3.2.19 Constructions which do not allow indirect object pronouns

A small set of verbs and adjectives in French look as if they take indirect objects because they are followed by the preposition à, but in fact they do not allow preceding me, te, se, nous, vous, lui, leur, and require stressed pronouns to follow à:

- Il pense à Jean
  *He is thinking of John*

- Il fait allusion à Marie
  *He is referring to Marie*

- Elle aura affaire à Henri
  *She will have to deal with Henri*

- Ce sac est à Julien
  *This bag is Julien’s*

The explanation for this behaviour seems to be that à has two functions: as a marker of indirect objects, and as an ordinary preposition. In the above examples it is a preposition and can only be followed by stressed pronouns (see 3.3).

Other common verbs followed by à which behave similarly are:

- en appeler à
  *appeal to*

- faire appel à
  *appeal to*

- avoir recours à
  *have recourse to*

- recourir à
  *have recourse to*

- faire attention à
  *pay attention to*

- faire allusion à
  *allude to*

- s’habituer à
  *get used to*

- revenir à
  *come back to*

- rêver à
  *dream of*

- songer à
  *think of*

- tenir à
  *be fond of*

- venir à
  *come to*

The set of verbs which behave in this way is quite small. We have listed most of them here.

When the phrase introduced by à in these cases refers to things, rather than people, pre-verbal y may replace it. (See 3.2.21 and 3.2.23.)

Verbs like these can be made reflexive or reciprocal by adding the appropriate forms lui(-même), elle(-même), etc., or l’un l’autre, etc.:

- Il pense à lui(-même)
  *He is thinking of himself*

- Elles auront affaire les unes aux autres
  *They will have to deal with each other*
3.2.20 Indirect object pronouns used in possessive constructions with body parts

The indirect object pronouns are used in a possessive construction in French with ‘body parts’ where English would use possessive determiners (like ‘my’, ‘your’, ‘his’, ‘her’, etc.):

On lui a cassé le bras  
*They broke his arm*

Elle s’était coupé le doigt  
*She had cut her finger*

La sueur me coulait dans le dos  
*Sweat was running down my back*

However, the indirect object construction is not possible with verbs which do not describe actions:

Elle lui lave le visage  
*She is washing his face*

BUT NOT:  
*Elle lui aime le visage*  
*RATHER: Elle aime son visage*  
*She likes his face*

This construction is also normally impossible with non-body-parts. However, it can be found in some regional varieties of French:

Elle lui a cassé l’écran de portable  
*She broke his laptop screen*

(See also Chapter 2.2.8 and 8.7.2.)

3.2.21 Use of y

y usually plays the same role in sentences as phrases which follow the verb and are introduced by prepositions like à, en, dans, sur, sous, etc.:  

Je vais à Paris demain  
*I am going to Paris tomorrow*

J’y vais demain  
*I’m going there tomorrow*

Elle vit dans une grande maison  
*She lives in a large house*

Elle y vit  
*She lives there*

Il a écrit son nom sur le cahier  
*He wrote his name on the book*

Il y a écrit son nom  
*He wrote his name there*

Although y can generally replace any phrase of this type, both concrete and abstract (as in the examples below), it is usually restricted to non-animate entities:

Je pense souvent à la retraite  
*I often think about retirement*

J’y pense souvent  
*I think about retirement*

Elle est fidèle à ses principes  
*She is faithful to her principles*

Elle y est fidèle  
*She is faithful there*
Nous sommes entrés dans le débat
We joined in the debate
Nous y sommes entrés

3.2.22 Non-specific use of y
In a number of common constructions, y is used without a very specific meaning being attached to it:

Pensez-y!
Think about it!
Je n’y suis pour rien
It’s nothing to do with me
J’y suis, j’y reste
Here I am and here I stay
Il y a . . .
There is . . . there are . . .

3.2.23 Use of y in constructions where à does not introduce an indirect object
y is normally used to refer to non-human objects which occur with verbs like penser à where à does not introduce an indirect object (see 3.2.19):

Je pense à la guerre
I’m thinking of the war
J’y pense
I’m thinking of it
Je tiens à mes idées
I’m sticking to my ideas
J’y tiens
I’m sticking to them
Je ferai très attention à vos affaires
I’ll look after your belongings very carefully
J’y ferai très attention
I’ll look after them carefully

y can also be found on rare occasions referring to people with such verbs: J’y pense ‘I’m thinking of him’.

3.2.24 Use of en
en is the pronoun used to replace phrases introduced by de which follow the verb. Where these include a noun, en can refer to both human and non-human nouns:

Il a déjà parlé de son idée
He has already spoken about his idea
Il en a déjà parlé
He has already spoken about it
Il a empêché Jean-Pierre de travailler
He stopped Jean-Pierre working
Il l’en a empêché
He stopped him doing it
Mémère s’occupe des enfants
Grandma is looking after the children
Mémère s’en occupe
Grandma is looking after them
Christine est fière de son frère
Christine is proud of her brother
Christine en est fière
Christine is proud of him

In spoken French, where people are referred to, it is quite likely that a stressed pronoun following de will be used instead (see 3.3.3):

Mémère s’occupe d’eux
Christine est fière de lui
NB: An exception to the generalization that *en* can replace phrases introduced by *de* is those verbs, such as *permettre, défendre* and *interdire*, with a construction using . . . à quelqu’un de faire quelque chose. The infinitive clause is treated as a direct object:

Elle a permis à Jean-Marie d’emprunter sa voiture  
She allowed Jean-Marie to borrow her car

Elle le lui a permis (le means ‘to borrow the car’)  
She allowed him to do it

Il a défendu à Suzanne de sortir ce soir  
He forbade Suzanne to go out this evening

Il le lui a défendu (le means ‘to go out this evening’)  
He forbade her to do it

### 3.2.25 Use of *en* with numerals and quantifiers

It is important to use *en* when numerals (*deux, trois, une dizaine, une douzaine,* etc.) and quantifiers (*beaucoup, trop, la plupart,* etc.) are on their own after a verb. In English a pronoun is normally absent in these cases, but in French *en* is obligatory:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J’ai acheté dix roses</td>
<td>I bought ten roses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a commandé une douzaine d’huîtres</td>
<td>He ordered a dozen oysters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle produit beaucoup de documents</td>
<td>She produces a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle a cueilli plusieurs tomates</td>
<td>She picked several tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le comité avait demandé certains manuscrits</td>
<td>The committee had asked for selected manuscripts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that *quelques* ‘some, a few’ belongs to this group, but when *en* is present *quelques* becomes *quelques-un(e)s*:

On voyait quelques voiles au loin  
We could see some sails in the distance

On *en* voyait quelques-un(e)s au loin

(See also Chapter 6.9.2.)
### §3.2 Object pronouns

#### 3.2.26 y and en as an integral part of the verb structure

There is a small set of verbs in French which involve y or en as an integral part of their structure without any detectable specific meaning. Common examples are:

- **il y a...** | **there is/are...** | **Il y avait trois hommes**
- **s’en aller** | **go away** | **Yvette s’en va**
- **en imposer** | **impress** | **Elle en impose**
- **s’en prendre à** | **lay into** | **Il s’en est pris à Jacques**
- **en revenir** | **get over** | **Je n’en reviens pas**
- **s’en tenir à** | **stick to** | **Tenez-vous-en aux faits**
- **en vouloir à** | **hold a grudge** | **Je lui en veux**
- **en voilà un** | **there’s someone** | **En voilà un qui m’énerve**
- **c’en est fait** | **that’s the end of** | **C’en est fait de nos espoirs**
- **en découdre** | **to get into a fight** | **Il est toujours prêt à en découdre**
- **en être à** | **to be at, get to** | **Où en sommes-nous?**

#### 3.2.27 Position of y and en with negative infinitives

When y and en appear with negative infinitives, they normally appear directly adjacent to the infinitive, just as all other object pronouns do:

- **Il vaudrait mieux ne pas en parler**
  
  *It would be better not to speak of it*

- **Elle avait décidé de ne plus y penser**
  
  *She had decided not to think about it any more*

Cases where y and en ‘split’ the negative are regarded as archaic:

- **Il vaudrait mieux n’en pas parler**
- **Elle avait décidé de n’y plus penser**

#### 3.2.28 y and en in French where the English translation has no preposition

The foreign learner of French should remember that the use of y and en is determined by the presence of à or de in the French verb phrase, and should not be misled by an English equivalent which does not have a preposition, e.g.:

- **to use something** BUT se servir de qch
  
  *I often use it = Je m’en sers souvent*

- **to need something** BUT avoir besoin de qch
  
  *I need it = J’en ai besoin*

- **to give something up** BUT renoncer à qch
  
  *I will give it up = J’y renoncerai*

- **to enter/join** BUT entrer dans qch
  
  *I joined the firm when I was twenty*

- **to doubt something** BUT douter de qch
  
  *Je suis entré dans l’entreprise quand j’avais vingt ans*
  
  *J’y suis entré quand j’avais vingt ans*
§3.2

I doubt it = J’en doute

But see the note to 3.2.24.

3.2.29 Order of unstressed object pronouns when more than one is present

When two (and more rarely three) unstressed object pronouns appear before a verb, their order usually follows the pattern indicated in Table 3.E (known by generations of British schoolchildren as the ‘soccer team’ of pronouns with a ball (en), a goalkeeper (y), two full-backs (lui, leur), three midfield players (le, la, les) and five strikers (me, te, se, nous, vous):

TABLE 3.E The order of unstressed object pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>me</td>
<td>le</td>
<td>lui</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>en</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>te</td>
<td>la</td>
<td>leur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se</td>
<td>les</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:

Il me l’a dit
He told me about it

Elle le lui a dit
She told him about it

Elle nous les a donnés
She gave them to us

Nous le leur avons dit
We told them about it

Susanne m’en a parlé
Susanne spoke to me about it

Nous nous y sommes beaucoup attachés
We have become very fond of it

Nous y en avons beaucoup trouvé
We found a lot of it there

Elle les y a souvent vus
She has often seen them there

Nous leur en avons promis beaucoup
We have promised a lot of those to them

Ne me le donne pas
Don’t give it to me
§3.2 Object pronouns

Lui en auras-tu parlé avant demain?
Will you have spoken to him about it before tomorrow?

En voudriez-vous s’il y en avait?
Would you want some if there were any?

M’y accompagneriez-vous?
Will you come there with me?

Il y en a beaucoup
There are a lot of them

Nous y en avons trouvé plusieurs
We found several of them there

More rarely three pronouns may occur in combination where the first is a benefactive (i.e. indicates that the action described by the verb is ‘for the benefit’ of the person in question), although this benefactive use is regarded as colloquial:

Tu vas me le lui écrire, et plus vite que ça!
You will write it to her for me, and be quick about it!

In formal French the benefactive interpretation would be expressed through other means:

Tu vas me le lui écrire = Tu vas me faire le plaisir de le lui écrire

3.2.30 Restrictions on possible combinations

Although Table 3.E describes in general the possible sequences of unstressed object pronouns, there are some restrictions on possible combinations. No pronoun from the first column (me, te, se, nous, vous) can normally appear in combination with a pronoun from the third column (lui, leur):

Whilst:
Je vous présenterai Eve-Marie
I will introduce Eve-Marie to you

can, with two pronouns, become:
Je vous la présenterai
I will introduce her to you

the sentence
Je vous présenterai à Eve-Marie
I will introduce you to Eve-Marie

cannot become
*Je vous lui présenterai
I will introduce you to her

Instead, you would use:
Je vous présenterai à elle

Whilst:
Je vous recommande Jean-Paul
I recommend Jean-Paul to you

can, with two pronouns, become:
Je vous le recommande
I recommend him to you

the sentence
Je vous recommande à Jean-Paul
I recommend you to Jean-Paul
cannot become
*Je vous lui recommande
_I will recommend you to him_

Instead, you would use:
Je vous recommande à _lui_

Nor can any pronouns from within the same column appear together:

Richard s’est joint à notre petit groupe
_Richard joined our little group_

cannot become:
*Il se nous est joint
NOR *Il nous s’est joint

BUT ONLY:

Richard s’est joint à _nous_
_Richard joined us_

### 3.2.31 Order of multiple pronouns with imperatives

When two pronouns follow the verb in affirmative imperatives the ordering of pronouns is slightly different in that pronouns from the first column (_me, te, se, nous, vous_) follow pronouns from the second column (_le, la, les_). The other orders remain the same. Pronouns after imperatives are linked to the verb that governs them by hyphens:

Donne-_le-moi_ (NOT *Donne-_moi-le_)
_Give it to me_

Passez-_les-nous_ (NOT *Passez-_nous-les_)
_Pass them over to us_

Nettoyez-_la-moi_ (NOT *Nettoyez-_moi-la_)
_Clean it for me_

NB: _Donne-moi-le, Passez-nous-les_, etc., are often heard in informal spoken French. The foreign learner should avoid them, however.

BUT:

Donne-_le-lui_
_Give it to him_

Passez-_les-leur_
_Pass them over to them_

Parlez-_lui-en_
_Talk to him about it_

The pronouns _me, te_ become _moi, toi_ in affirmative imperatives when they are the last pronoun in the sequence, but become _m’, t’_ before _y or en_:

Donne-_le-moi_  _Give it to me_
Donne-_m’en_ _Give me some_
§3.2 Object pronouns

In these cases in informal spoken French it is not unusual to hear *moi, toi* retained with a linking -z-, but the learner should avoid this usage:

- Parlez-moi-z-en  
  Talk to me about it
- Accroche-toi-z-y  
  Hang on to it

In negative imperatives pronouns precede the verb, and the order of multiple pronouns is as indicated in the table:

- Ne me le donne pas  
  Don’t give it to me
- Ne me les nettoyez jamais!  
  Don’t you ever clean them for me! (i.e. I forbid you to . . .)

3.2.32 Position of more than one object pronoun with *faire* etc. + infinitive

When the verbs *faire, laisser, envoyer*, and perception verbs like *voir, entendre, regarder, sentir* are followed by an infinitive, there are different ways of placing two pronouns depending on which verb is being used.

If the verb is *faire*, both the pronouns come before *faire* (or *avoir* if *faire* is in a compound tense):

- Je les lui ferai manger  
  I shall make him eat them
- Je les lui ai fait manger  
  I made him eat them

If the verb is *laisser, envoyer* or one of the perception verbs, there are the two possibilities illustrated below:

- Tu les lui laissez lire?
  Will you let her read them?
- Tu la laissez les lire?
  Will you let her read them?

- Je le leur ai entendu dire  
  I heard them say so
- Je les ai entendus le dire  
  I heard them say so

- Elle me l’envoya chercher  
  She sent me to fetch it or
- Elle m’envoya le chercher  
  She sent me to fetch it

(For the structure of sentences involving *faire, laisser, envoyer* and perception verbs, see Chapter 12.3.8 and 12.3.9.)

3.2.33 Position of object pronouns with *devoir, pouvoir* + infinitives

After *devoir, pouvoir* (modal verbs) followed by an infinitive, object pronouns come before the infinitive:

- Je dois vous l’avouer tout de suite  
  I must admit it to you immediately
- Ils peuvent nous le signaler dès son arrivée  
  They can tell us about it as soon as he arrives
3.2.34 Object pronouns in coordinated clauses

When clauses containing unstressed object pronouns are coordinated by *et* or *ou*, it is normally necessary to repeat the pronoun in the second clause:

*Cela m’agace et m’ennuie*

*That irritates and bores me*

*Je les ai préconisés et les ai proposés*

*I advocated and proposed them*

*Elle l’a aidé et lui a donné de l’argent*

*She helped him and gave him money*

However, where the two pronouns are identical in form and attached to an auxiliary (*avoir* or *être*), the second pronoun and auxiliary may be deleted together:

*Je les ai préconisés et proposés*

The pronouns must be identical, however, and both the pronoun and the auxiliary must be deleted together. Hence the following are impossible:

*NOT *Je les ai préconisés et ai proposés*

*NOT *Cela m’agace et ennuie*

*NOT *Elle l’a aidé et donné de l’argent*

In this last example it is not so much that the pronouns have different functions (*le* being a direct object and *lui* an indirect object), as that they differ in their surface forms. In the following example the first *me* is a direct object and the second *me* an indirect object, but the second *me* can be deleted with the auxiliary because the two *me’s* are identical in surface form:

*Elle m’a aidé et m’a donné de l’argent*

*Elle m’a aidé et donné de l’argent*

3.3 Stressed pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person</td>
<td>moi</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nous</td>
<td>us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td>toi</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous</td>
<td>you (plural or polite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person</td>
<td>lui</td>
<td>him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>elle</td>
<td>her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>cela, ça</td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>soi</td>
<td>oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.1 Use of stressed pronouns for emphasis

To highlight or emphasize a pronoun a common strategy is to ‘double up’ by the addition of a stressed pronoun. This can be done with:

**Subject pronouns**

Toi, tu le crois peut-être mais lui, il ne le croit pas
*YOU might believe that, but HE doesn’t*

Moi, je veux travailler ce soir, mais lui pas
*I want to work this evening, but HE doesn’t*

The stressed subject pronoun copy may equally appear at the end of the clause with the same effect:

Tu le crois peut-être, toi, mais il ne le croit pas, lui
Je veux travailler ce soir, moi, mais pas lui

When third person subject pronouns are highlighted or emphasized, the stressed pronoun alone may, on occasions, be used:

Lui pourrait le faire
*HE could do it*

Eux sauraient quoi dire
*THEY would know what to say*

This is not possible with first and second person pronouns:

NOT *Moi pourrais le faire (but Moi, je pourrais le faire)*
NOT *Toi saurais quoi dire (but Toi, tu saurais quoi dire)*

Only stressed pronouns and not unstressed subject pronouns can be separated from the tense-marked verb by adverbs or parenthetical expressions:

Lui, souvent, critique son professeur
(NOT *Il souvent critique son professeur)*
*He often criticizes his teacher*

Eux, par exemple, connaissent l’italien
(NOT *Ils, par exemple, connaissent l’italien)*
*They, for example, know Italian*

(For stressed pronouns introduced by c’est/ce sont, sometimes followed by relative clauses, see Chapter 9.1.6.)

**Object pronouns**

A common strategy is to add a second, stressed pronoun at either the beginning or the end of the clause:

Lui, on le sait innocent
*HE is known to be innocent*

On l’a souvent vu au match, lui
*We often saw him at the match*
When the unstressed pronoun is an **indirect object**, the stressed pronoun being used to highlight it is preceded by à only when it is at the end of the clause:

Nous, elle nous a souvent écrit or
Elle nous a souvent écrit, à nous
*She has often written to US*

Moi, cela me ferait plaisir or
Cela me ferait plaisir, à moi
*That would give ME pleasure*

This ‘doubling’ of an unstressed pronoun by a stressed pronoun is also used to disambiguate ambiguous pronouns. In the following sentence *leur* is ambiguous between a masculine and a feminine interpretation:

Simon leur a dit de partir
*Simon told them to leave*

But it can be disambiguated by the addition of stressed pronouns:

Jean leur a dit à eux de partir
Jean leur a dit à elles de partir

### 3.3.2 Stressed pronouns standing alone

Stressed pronouns are normally used where the pronoun stands alone, or is in a phrase without a verb:

Qui est là? Moi (NOT *je*)
Qui tu as vu? Lui (NOT *il*)
C’est elle qui t’aidera, pas moi (NOT *pas je*)

### 3.3.3 Stressed pronouns used as the object of a preposition

Stressed pronouns are the forms to use after all prepositions other than à (but see 3.2.19): **

Je suis venu malgré lui I came in spite of him
J’ai agi comme elle I acted as she did
Ne le dites pas devant eux Don’t say it in front of them
Elle s’est assise à côté de moi She sat down next to me
Je n’ai rien contre elles I have nothing against them

Phrases introduced by de are normally pronominalized using en, but, when humans are referred to, dé followed by a stressed pronoun is more usual:

Ma mère avait parlé de lui My mother had spoken of him
3.3.4 Stressed pronouns with même, aussi, seul, autres, tous and numerals

Stressed pronouns are used in conjunction with the forms: même, aussi, seul, autres, tous and numerals (deux, trois, etc.):

Les enfants avaient préparé la salade eux-mêmes
The children had prepared the salad themselves

Lui aussi aura des problèmes
He too will have problems

Eux seuls pourraient la convaincre
They alone could persuade her

Nous autres Européens, on se comprend
We Europeans understand one another

Vous tous irez prendre une douche
You will all go and have a shower

NB: Some adjectives, such as fier ‘proud’, fidèle ‘faithful’, sûr ‘sure’ are followed by a stressed pronoun alone, and not by moi-même, lui-même, elles-mêmes, etc., when used reflexively:

Elle est très fière d’elle
She is very proud of herself

Je ne suis plus sûr de moi
I am not sure of myself any more

3.3.5 Coordination of stressed pronouns

Only stressed pronouns can be coordinated with each other or with other nouns by et, ou:

Marianne et moi (NOT *je) en avons discuté à fond
Marianne and I have discussed it in depth

Lui (NOT *il) et vous devrez vous mettre d’accord
You and he ought to come to an agreement

J’ai dit la même chose à vous et à lui (NOT *il)
I said the same thing to you and him

NB: The form the verb takes with coordinated subjects involving stressed pronouns is determined in the following way:

(a) If one of the pronouns is first person, the verb will be first person:

Lui et moi connaissons la famille
He and I know the family

Vous et moi connaissons la famille
You and I know the family
(b) In the absence of a first person pronoun, if one of the pronouns is second person, the verb will be second person:

Vous et lui connaissez la famille  
You and he know the family

(See also Chapter 9.1.1.)

A frequent way of expressing the notion ‘somebody and I did X’ is:

Avec quelqu’un nous avons fait X  
Christine and I opened the parcels

### 3.3.6 Stressed pronouns with ne . . . que and ni . . . ni . . . ne

Stressed pronouns are used with the expressions ne . . . que, and ni . . . ni . . . ne:

Ce n’est que lui  
It’s only him

Francine ne connaît qu’eux  
Francine only knows them

Pour moi, il n’y a qu’elle qui compte  
For me, she’s the only one who matters

Ni moi ni lui ne saurons quoi faire  
Neither I nor he will know what to do

### 3.3.7 Use of soi

soi is a non-specific stressed pronoun which is normally used either when it refers to non-specific persons or things, or indefinite phrases like on, chacun, nul, aucun, personne, tout le monde. It tends to be used after prepositions, with -même, and after ne . . . que:

On pense à soi  
People think of themselves

Pour une fois, personne ne songeait à soi  
For once, no-one was thinking of themselves

On doit prendre la décision soi-même  
One must take the decision oneself
3.4 Demonstrative pronouns

TABLE 3.G Summary table of demonstrative pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proximate</th>
<th>Non-proximate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>masc</td>
<td>celui-ci/this one</td>
<td>celui-là/that one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem</td>
<td>celle-ci/this one</td>
<td>celle-là/that one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masc</td>
<td>ceux-ci/these one</td>
<td>ceux-là/those ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem</td>
<td>celles-ci/those</td>
<td>celles-là/those ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plur</td>
<td>ones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demonstrative pronouns are used where English uses ‘the one’. They agree in gender with the noun they refer to:

Sur ce mur nous voyons deux portraits. Celui qui est à droite représente le premier propriétaire de la maison
On this wall we see two portraits. The one on the right is of the first owner of the house

Nous avons acheté trois propriétés en Dordogne. Celle qui est près de Bergerac sera revendue la première
We have bought three properties in the Dordogne. The one near Bergerac will be resold first

Demonstrative pronouns are used particularly frequently to ‘head’ relative clauses (see Chapter 15.1):

Ceux qui m’écoutent ce soir sauront que je n’ai rien à cacher
Those who are listening to me tonight will know that I have nothing to hide

Je ne peux rien faire pour vous: il faut vous adresser à celui qui est responsable de l’administration
I can do nothing for you: you must talk to the person who is responsible for administration

(For ce qui, ce que, ce dont, etc., see Chapter 15.9.)

3.4.1 Demonstrative pronouns with -ci and -là

The forms celui-ci/celle-ci/ceux-ci/celles-ci and celui-là/celle-là/ceux-là/celles-là translate English ‘this one/these ones’ and ‘that one/those ones’ respectively. These distinctions are mainly used in formal French:

Des deux tissus qui sont sur le comptoir, là-bas, il est évident que celui-ci est plus cher que celui-là
Of the two pieces of material on the counter over there, it’s obvious that this one is dearer than that one

Pour moi tous les diamants se ressemblent. Mais ceux-ci coûtent deux fois plus cher que ceux-là
To me diamonds all look the same. But these ones here cost twice as much as those over there
NB: The pronouns with -ci can also mean ‘the latter’, and those with -là ‘the former’:

J’ai rencontré Pierre et Jean-Marie au café. Celui-là arrivait à l’instant d’un entretien avec le percepteur

I met Pierre and Jean-Marie at the café. The former had just come from a meeting with the tax inspector

Est-ce que vous désirez le flan ou la tarte aux pommes? Celle-ci sort directement du four

Do you want the custard pie or the apple tart? The latter has just come out of the oven

3.5 Possessive pronouns

TABLE 3.H Summary table of possessive pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First person</th>
<th>msg</th>
<th>le mien</th>
<th>mine</th>
<th>le nôtre</th>
<th>ours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fsg</td>
<td></td>
<td>la mienne</td>
<td></td>
<td>la nôtre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mpl</td>
<td></td>
<td>les miens</td>
<td></td>
<td>les nôtres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fpl</td>
<td></td>
<td>les miennes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td>msg</td>
<td>le tien</td>
<td>yours</td>
<td>le vôtre</td>
<td>yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fsg</td>
<td></td>
<td>la tienne</td>
<td></td>
<td>la vôtre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mpl</td>
<td></td>
<td>les tiens</td>
<td></td>
<td>les vôtres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fpl</td>
<td></td>
<td>les tiennes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person</td>
<td>msg</td>
<td>le sien</td>
<td>his</td>
<td>le leur</td>
<td>theirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fsg</td>
<td></td>
<td>la sienne</td>
<td></td>
<td>la leur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mpl</td>
<td></td>
<td>les siens</td>
<td></td>
<td>les leurs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fpl</td>
<td></td>
<td>les siennes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possessive pronouns agree in gender and number with a noun mentioned or implied elsewhere in the discourse:

Voici ta clef. Rends-moi la mienne
Here is your key. Give me back mine

Il portait un chapeau qui n’était pas le sien
He was wearing a hat which wasn’t his

Ils ont emporté mes notes, mais j’ai gardé les leurs
They took away my notes, but I kept theirs

Tu ne peux pas prendre ceux-là, ils ne sont pas à nous. Ce sont les leurs
You can’t take those, they don’t belong to us. They are theirs.

Vos idées ne sont pas toujours les nôtres
Your ideas aren’t always the same as ours

N.B.: les siens also has the special meaning of ‘one’s family’: On travaille pour les siens ‘People work for their families’.

les nôtres can mean ‘with us’, as in: Elle n’était pas des nôtres ‘She wasn’t with us’.
4 Adjectives

An adjective is a word that modifies a noun. It normally agrees with the noun it modifies. Adjectives may occur next to the noun (before or after) or separated from the noun in the second part of a sentence, e.g. after a verb such as être, devenir, rester. Adjectives may sometimes have complements.

un petit problème (preceding adjective, agreeing with a masculine noun)
*a small problem

une boîte carrée (following adjective agreeing with a feminine noun)
*a square box

Cette robe est chère (following a verb, agreeing with a feminine noun)
*This dress is expensive

Ce problème est facile à résoudre (adjective with a complement)
*This problem is easy to solve

4.1 Adjectives modifying the noun

Most French adjectives follow the noun. But there is a small set which normally precede, and another set which regularly appear before and after the noun, often with a change of meaning.

4.1.1 Adjectives which normally follow the noun

Since the majority of French adjectives normally follow the noun, English speakers really only need to learn those which can precede. However, here are some typical classes of adjectives which almost always follow the noun:

Colour adjectives
bleu, gris, vert, blanc, noir, violet, etc.:

un manteau gris
*a grey coat

une souris grise
*a grey mouse

un gazon vert
*a green lawn

une veste verte
*a green jacket

un nuage noir
*a black cloud

une robe noire
*a black dress

Adjectives of nationality

un livre français
*a French book

de la bière française
*French beer

du vin algérien
*an Algerian wine

une ville algérienne
*an Algerian town
Adjectives §4.1

du fromage grec
Greek cheese
une antiquité grecque
a Greek antique

NB: Adjectives of nationality in French begin with a small letter, unlike English. When français, britannique, etc., are used as nouns, however, they begin with a capital letter. Compare: Elle est française ‘She is French’ with C’est une Française ‘She is a Frenchwoman’. (See also 4.5 and Chapter 3.1.22.)

Adjectives of shape or form:
rond ‘round’, carré ‘square’, rectangulaire ‘rectangular’, oval ‘oval’, etc.:

un bureau carré
a square desk
une boîte carrée
a square box
un plateau rond
a round tray
une table ronde
a round table
un cadre rectangulaire
a rectangular frame
une cour rectangulaire
a rectangular courtyard

Adjectives describing religious affiliation


un prêtre catholique
a Catholic priest
une jeune fille catholique
a Catholic girl
un père juif
a Jewish father
une mère juive
a Jewish mother
un garçon musulman
a Muslim boy
une jeune fille musulmane
a Muslim girl

Adjectives which relate to a time or place of origin

une église médiévale
a medieval church
une ambiance citadine
an urban atmosphere
un paysage rural
a rural landscape
un accent campagnard
a rustic accent

Past and present participles

un mariage forcé
a forced marriage
une grille rouillée
a rusty gate
un élève brillant
a brilliant pupil
une étoile brillante
a brilliant star
un voyage fatigant
a tiring journey
une voiture puissante
a powerful car

NB: Present participles, which are formed by adding -ant to the first person plural stem of a verb (e.g. amus-ons/amusant, ralentiss-ons/ralentissant, dev-ons/devant, etc.), can function both as a verb in a subordinate clause, and as an adjective. As verbs in subordinate clauses present participles are invariable (see Chapter 17.9.2):
En enfilant son manteau, elle a dit au revoir
*Putting her coat on, she said goodbye*

J’ai rencontré des touristes prenant l’air sur l’esplanade
*I met some tourists taking a stroll along the promenade*

As adjectives they agree in gender and number with the noun they modify, as in the examples above: *une étoile brillante* (see Chapter 17.9.1).

A number of present participles are also spelled differently when they function as verbs in subordinate clauses, and when they are adjectives. Some common cases are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb in subordinate clause</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>convainquant</td>
<td>convincing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>différent</td>
<td>différent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>équivalent</td>
<td>étant équivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fatiguant</td>
<td>fatigant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>négligeant</td>
<td>négligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>précédant</td>
<td>précédent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Adjectives which normally occur before the noun

- autre
- beau/bel/belle
- bon/bonne
- bref/brève
- double
- haut/e
- joli/e
- mauvais/e
- nouveau/nouvel/nouvelle
- petit/e
- vaste
- vieux/vieil/vieille

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une autre histoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un bel homme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un bon professeur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un bref épisode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un double whisky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de hautes montagnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une jolie femme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une mauvaise odeur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une nouvelle maison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un petit problème</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une vaste enceinte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un vieux château</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Adjectives which regularly occur before and after the noun, but with a change of meaning

The meaning given to a certain number of adjectives when they occur after a noun and when they occur after the verb *être* is the same:

*Cette maison est ancienne*  *It’s an old house*

But when these adjectives occur before the noun the meaning is different. Compare:

*La rue est bordée de maisons anciennes*  *The street is lined with old(-style) houses*

*Son ancienne maison a été détruite*  *His former house was destroyed*

When adjectives occur before the noun they tend to contribute to the meaning of the noun itself. So, *un ancien soldat* is an ‘ex-soldier’ rather than a soldier who is old; *un gros fumeur* is not ‘a fat smoker’, but ‘a heavy smoker’ (*un fumeur gros* is ‘a fat smoker’).
Common adjectives which have different meanings when they precede or follow nouns are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ancien</td>
<td>un ancien élève</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an old boy/girl i.e. (ex-)pupil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une maison ancienne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an old house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brave</td>
<td>un brave type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a nice guy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>un homme brave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a courageous man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain</td>
<td>d’un certain âge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>middle-aged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une vérité certaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a certain truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cher</td>
<td>mon cher ami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my dear friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une robe chère</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an expensive dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chic</td>
<td>un chic type (rather old-fashioned now; one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is more likely to hear: un mec sympa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a nice guy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une robe chic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a smart dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curieux</td>
<td>une curieuse histoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an odd story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une personne curieuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an inquisitive person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dernier</td>
<td>son dernier livre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>his last book (latest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>la semaine dernière</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>last week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drôle</td>
<td>une drôle d’histoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an odd story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une histoire drôle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a funny story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fameux</td>
<td>ton fameux problème</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the problem you keep on going on about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>un vin fameux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a delicious wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>franc</td>
<td>une franche idiote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a real idiot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une personne franche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a frank person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grand</td>
<td>un grand homme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a great man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>un homme grand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a tall man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gros</td>
<td>un gros effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a big effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>un homme gros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a fat man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jeune</td>
<td>une jeune femme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a young woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une femme jeune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a woman who is not old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>méchant</td>
<td>une méchante histoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a nasty business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une fille méchante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an unpleasant girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>même</td>
<td>toujours les mêmes histoires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>always the same stories/problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>le jour même</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that very day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pauvre</td>
<td>un pauvre homme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a man you feel sorry for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>un homme pauvre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a man who isn’t rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>propre</td>
<td>ma propre chambre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my own bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>une serviette propre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a clean towel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§4.1 Adjectives modifying the noun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pure</td>
<td>une pure illusion</td>
<td>a complete illusion</td>
<td>de race pure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rare</td>
<td>un rare moment de paix</td>
<td>a precious moment of peace</td>
<td>un moment rare de l'histoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sale</td>
<td>une sale histoire</td>
<td>a nasty business</td>
<td>une nappe sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seul</td>
<td>le seul inconvénient . . .</td>
<td>the only disadvantage . . .</td>
<td>un homme seul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simple</td>
<td>une simple question de . . .</td>
<td>simply a matter of . . .</td>
<td>une question simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>triste</td>
<td>une triste histoire</td>
<td>a sorry story</td>
<td>une histoire triste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>véritable</td>
<td>un véritable problème</td>
<td>a real problem (serious)</td>
<td>un problème véritable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vert</td>
<td>une verte réprimande</td>
<td>a real dressing-down</td>
<td>une voiture verte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vilain</td>
<td>une vilaine action</td>
<td>a bad deed</td>
<td>un enfant vilain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: *neuf* and *nouveau*. *Ma voiture neuve* is likely to be ‘my brand new car’ (not second-hand), while *ma nouvelle voiture* is a car which is different from the one I had before (it may or may not be ‘brand new’). *Feu* ‘late, deceased’ can be used in two ways: *feu la reine/la feue reine*. Both mean ‘the late queen’, but note that in the first case *feu* does not agree with *reine*. Usually limited to legal papers.

4.1.4 Adjectives which normally follow the noun but can also precede, without significant changes in meaning

Most adjectives which normally follow the noun can occur before it as well, without a significant change in the meaning of the adjective. Such pre-positioning is usually for stylistic effect: to vary sentence structure or avoid having two or more adjectives following the same noun. The position before the noun is favoured where the adjective in some way measures or quantifies the meaning of the noun:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un léger rhume</td>
<td>a slight cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une charmante soirée</td>
<td>a delightful evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une forte odeur</td>
<td>a strong smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un misérable repas</td>
<td>a measly meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une importante augmentation</td>
<td>a large increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.5 Combinations of adjectives

Multiple adjectives before the noun
Cardinal numbers are usually the first in any combination of adjectives preceding a noun, but after that the order of adjectives is the same as it is in English:

- les deux premières semaines (the first two weeks)
- les quatre dernières jolies phrases (the last four pretty sentences)
- au bon vieux temps (in the good days)
- une autre nouvelle maison (another new house)
- un vrai beau grand château (a really beautiful large castle)
- ce pauvre cher homme (that poor dear man)

The exception to cardinal numbers occurring first is when a complex number is involved:

Il m’a versé les derniers sept cents euros qu’il me devait
He paid me the last seven hundred euros he owed me

To avoid having a long string of adjectives before the noun, one or more may be combined with et, and/or moved after the noun. To illustrate, ‘a young pretty little cat’ could be:

- un jeune et joli petit chat
- un petit chat jeune et joli

Multiple adjectives after the noun
The order of adjectives after the noun is the mirror image of English. For example, ‘the Spanish Civil War’ becomes ‘the War Civil Spanish’:

- la guerre civile espagnole

Similarly (these examples are from Waugh, 1977):

- des lignes parallèles invisibles (invisible parallel lines)
- des milieux politiques américains (American political circles)
- des feuilles mortes humides (damp dead leaves)
- un agent commercial français (a French business agent)

4.1.6 Adjectives modified by adverbs and prepositional phrases

When adjectives which normally precede the noun are modified by adverbs or prepositional phrases, they may appear after the noun. The longer the modifying expression, the more likely this is:

- un bel homme (a handsome man)
- un très bel homme (a very handsome man)
- un homme vraiment beau (a really handsome man)
- un gros effort (a great effort)
- un effort démesurément gros (an inordinately large effort)
- une jolie figure (a pretty face)
- une figure un peu trop jolie (a face which is a bit too pretty)
- un grand jardin (a large garden)
- un jardin grand comme un mouchoir de poche (a garden the size of your hand)
This also applies to superlatives (see 4.1.2):

- un bref aperçu — a brief outline
- le plus bref aperçu — the briefest outline
- un aperçu des plus brefs — the briefest of outlines

### 4.1.7 Adjectives preceded by *de*

When nouns are quantified by numbers, following adjectives may directly follow the noun or they may be preceded by *de*. The use with *de* is found in informal French. For a number of speakers there is a difference in meaning between the two. When *de* is present, the implication is that there were more of the things described by the noun than the number indicates:

- Il y avait dix voyageurs de blessés
  *There were ten travellers injured*
  (implies that there were more than ten involved, but the rest weren’t injured)

- Il y avait dix voyageurs blessés
  *There were ten injured travellers*
  (has no implication about whether there were other, non-injured travellers)

- J’ai une heure de libre aujourd’hui
  *I have an hour free today*
  (implies that all the other hours in my day are busy)

- J’ai une heure libre aujourd’hui
  *I have a free hour today*
  (has no implication about whether my other hours are busy or not)

Note that the contrast in English is captured by whether the adjective precedes or follows the noun.

### 4.2 Adjectives which follow verbs or verbal expressions

Some verbs and verbal expressions can be followed by adjectives. With the following verbs/verbal expressions, adjectives must agree in number and gender with the subject:

- avoir l’air — to seem, appear
- être — to be
- être considéré comme — to be thought of as
- devenir — to become
- se montrer — to show oneself to be
- paraître — to appear
- passer pour — to be considered to be
- sembler — to seem

- Elle est aussi belle que sa sœur
  *She is as pretty as her sister*

- Les enfants semblent énervés par ce temps
  *The children seem over-excited by this weather*

- Tous les membres de la famille passent pour pauvres
  *All the members of the family are thought to be poor*
92  Adjectives §4.3

With the following verbs, mainly those which express an opinion, adjectives must agree in number and gender with the direct object:

- croire  to believe
- considérer to consider
- deviner to guess
- imaginer to imagine
- s’imaginer to imagine oneself

Je croyais la bataille perdue d’avance
I thought the battle was already lost

Je les devine un peu fâchés par cette histoire
I guess they are a little bit annoyed by this affair

Vous les voyez toujours petits; mais ils ont grandi
You see them as if they were still little; but they’ve grown up

Les enfants traitaient les petits voisins de lâches
The children were calling the little neighbours cowards

4.3 Adjectives with complements

Some adjectives can be followed by nouns, pronouns or infinitives, with a linking de or à:

- Ils étaient blancs de colère
  They were white with anger

- Ces jeunes femmes sont très sûres d’elles
  These young women are very self-confident

- Je suis très heureux de faire votre connaissance
  I am very pleased to meet you

- Ce problème est facile à résoudre
  This problem is easy to solve

(For the use of de with adjectives followed by nouns see Chapter 13.15.2; and followed by infinitives see Chapter 12.7.)

4.4 Indefinite and negative noun phrases with adjective complements

Indefinite noun phrases such as quelque chose ‘something’, quelqu’un ‘someone’, ceci ‘this’, cela ‘that’, quoi? ‘what?’ and negative expressions such as rien ‘nothing’, personne ‘no-one’, can be followed by adjectives linked by de. The adjective is invariable in this construction:

- quelque chose de bon  something good
- quelqu’un d’intéressant  someone interesting
- rien de plus facile  nothing easier
- Quoi de neuf?  What’s new?
4.5 Adjectives used as nouns

In French it is almost always possible to convert an adjective into a noun simply by placing an article in front of it:

- Je ne veux que les mûrs (I only want the ripe ones)
- Nous prendrons les grands (We’ll take the big ones)
- Les petits sont déjà partis (The small ones have already gone)
- Les gentils gagnent à la fin (The goodies win in the end)
- Les méchants sont punis (The baddies are punished)
- J’adore le rustique (I love rural styles)
- Elle aurait préféré du moderne (She would have preferred something up-to-date)
- Le plus énervant, c’est sa voix (It’s her voice that is the most annoying thing)
- Le rouge te va bien (Red suits you)
- L’important c’est de partir tôt (The important thing is to leave early)

As can be seen, because English does not permit the creation of nouns with such freedom, translations either have to use vague terms like ‘ones’, ‘thing(s)’ or it is necessary to rephrase the sentence.

NB: Compare the post-verbal use of adjectives as nouns with the post-verbal use of numbers and quantifiers as nouns:

- Nous prendrons les grands (We’ll take the big ones)
- Nous en prendrons deux (We’ll take two)
- Nous avons acheté les ovales (We bought the oval ones)
- Nous en avons acheté plusieurs (We bought several)

With numbers and quantifiers en must be inserted in front of the verb (see Chapter 3.2.25 and Chapter 6.1.7).

Adjectives of nationality and nouns of nationality are usually identical in form when used as adjectives or nouns EXCEPT that the nouns are written with capital letters:

- Elle est américaine (She is American)
- Tout Français qui se respecte aime le fromage (Every true French person loves cheese)
- Elle est de nationalité française (She is of French nationality)

4.6 Adjectives used as adverbs, and adverbs used as adjectives

A limited number of adjectives can also be used as adverbs. In this case they are invariable (see also Chapter 5.3):

- bas Ils parlent bas (They’re talking very quietly)
- bon Le café sent bon (The coffee smells good)
- cher Cela coûte trop cher (That’s too expensive)
- clair Je n’arrive pas à y voir (I can’t make much sense of his argument)
- clair dans son raisonnement (They are walking straight)
- dur Ils travaillent dur (They work hard)
A few adverbs are used as adjectives as in:

Il y a un problème avec les roues arrière
There is something wrong with the back wheels

Elles sont montées par les portières avant
They got in through the front doors of the car

J’ai toujours pensé que c’était une femme bien
I always thought she was a woman of integrity

Il ne reste que des places debout
There is only standing room left

In these cases the adverb/adjective is always invariable.

### 4.7 Masculine and feminine forms of adjectives

The general rule is that an -e is added to the masculine written form of adjectives to produce the feminine form.

#### 4.7.1 A change in written, but not spoken, French

In cases where the masculine form ends in one of the following vowels or consonants, there is a change in the written form but not in the spoken form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-u</td>
<td>absolue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>absolue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aigu</td>
<td>aiguë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high (sound)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambigu</td>
<td>ambiguë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contigu</td>
<td>contiguë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>contiguous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: In the case of aigu, ambigu, contigu, a diacritic (ê) is added to the feminine -e in written French to indicate that the -u sound is maintained in spoken French (aigue* would be pronounced rather like English ‘egg’ otherwise; compare long/longue).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-é</td>
<td>fermé</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-er</td>
<td>fière</td>
<td>proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chère</td>
<td>expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>amère</td>
<td>bitter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NB: In these cases, where the final \( r \) is pronounced in the masculine, a grave accent is added to the first written \( e \).

- **i**
  - hardi
  - favori
  - public
  - grec
  - direct
  - sûr
  - national
  - personnel
  - nul

- **c**
  - hardie
  - favorite
  - publique
  - grecque
  - directe
  - sûre
  - nationale
  - personne
  - nulle

NB: Exception:
- **-ct**
  - ct
  - r
  - al
  - ct
  - r
  - al

NB: c is maintained in:
- **-ct**
  - direct
  - directe
  - ct
  - r
  - ct
  - r

NB: **c** is maintained in:
- **-ct**
  - ct
  - r
  - ct
  - r

NB: In these cases, it is **-le** which is added and not just **-e**.

- **-il**
  - espace
  - père
  - maçon

NB: In these cases, the \( l \) is pronounced in the masculine.

By contrast in the following adjectives the final **-il** is pronounced as indicated:

- **gentil** **[-i]**
  - gentille **[-ij]**
  - pareil **[-ej]**
  - pareille **[-ej]**
  - vermeil **[-ej]**
  - vermeille **[-ej]**

### 4.7.2 A change in written and spoken French

In the following cases, addition of feminine **-e** to the written masculine form also corresponds to the pronunciation of a final consonant in spoken French:

**Addition of -e without further changes:**

- **-t**
  - petit
  - cuit
  - gris
  - mauvais
  - grand

- **-s**
  - cuite
  - grise
  - mauvaise
  - mauvaise
  - mauvaise

- **-d**
  - petite
  - cooked
  - grey
  - bad
  - tall, big
Addition of -e and doubling of the final consonant

-as  bas  basse  low
    gras  grasse  fatty
    épais  épaisse  thick
    las  lasse  tired
-et  muet  muette  mute
    coquet  coquette  cute
-ot  sot  sotte  stupid

Addition of -e and a grave accent

-et  complet  complètement  complete
    inquiet  inquiète  worried
    secret  secrète  secret
    discret  discrète  discreet
    concret  concrète  concrete
    replet  replète  plump

4.7.3 A change from a nasal vowel to an oral vowel

In the following cases, addition of -e, and sometimes the doubling of the final consonant, corresponds to a change from a nasal vowel to an oral vowel + consonant in spoken French:

paysan  paysanne  peasant
partisan  partisane  biased
ancien  ancienne  old
enfantin  enfantine  childlike
européen  européenne  European
féminin  féminine  feminine
fin  fine  fine
mignon  mignonne  pretty
bon  bonne  good
brun  brune  brown
opportun  opportune  opportune

NB: In some cases -ne is added and not just -e.

4.7.4 A change in the final consonant or syllable

In the following cases, addition of final -e is accompanied by a change in the final consonant or the whole of the final syllable:

-ais/aîche  frais  fraîche  fresh
-aux/ausse  faux  fausse  false
-er/ère  premier  première  first
dernier  dernière  last
étranger  étrangère  foreign
### §4.7 Masculine and feminine forms of adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>--eux/euse</th>
<th>heureux</th>
<th>heureuse</th>
<th>happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amoureux</td>
<td>amoureuse</td>
<td>in love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nerveux</td>
<td>nerveuse</td>
<td>nervous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affreux</td>
<td>affreuse</td>
<td>frightful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peureux</td>
<td>peureuse</td>
<td>frightened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-eux/-eille</td>
<td>vieux</td>
<td>vieille</td>
<td>old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-eur/euse</td>
<td>voleur</td>
<td>voleuse</td>
<td>dishonest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>flatter</td>
<td>flatteuse</td>
<td>flattering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trompeur</td>
<td>trompeuse</td>
<td>misleading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moqueur</td>
<td>moqueuse</td>
<td>likes to make fun of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>joueur</td>
<td>joueuse</td>
<td>playful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-eur/eresse</td>
<td>vengeur</td>
<td>vengeresse</td>
<td>vengeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-eur/rice</td>
<td>consolateur</td>
<td>consolatrice</td>
<td>consoling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observateur</td>
<td>observatrice</td>
<td>consoling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>créateur</td>
<td>créatrice</td>
<td>creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conservateur</td>
<td>conservatrice</td>
<td>conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-eau/elle</td>
<td>nouveau</td>
<td>nouvelle</td>
<td>new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>beau</td>
<td>belle</td>
<td>beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jumeau</td>
<td>jumelle</td>
<td>twin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-c/che</td>
<td>sec</td>
<td>sèche</td>
<td>dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blanc</td>
<td>blanche</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>franc</td>
<td>franche</td>
<td>frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-f/ve</td>
<td>neuf</td>
<td>neuve</td>
<td>new</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>actif</td>
<td>active</td>
<td>active</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bref</td>
<td>brève</td>
<td>brief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>créatif</td>
<td>créative</td>
<td>creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vif</td>
<td>vive</td>
<td>lively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-in/igne</td>
<td>bénin</td>
<td>bénigne</td>
<td>benign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>malin</td>
<td>maligne</td>
<td>sharp, clever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ong/ongue</td>
<td>long</td>
<td>longue</td>
<td>long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ou/olle</td>
<td>mou</td>
<td>molle</td>
<td>soft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fou</td>
<td>folle</td>
<td>mad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-oux/ouce/</td>
<td>doux</td>
<td>douce</td>
<td>gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>roux</td>
<td>rousses</td>
<td>red-haired</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB:** *beau, fou, mou, nouveau, vieux* also have a special masculine form – *bel, fol, mol, nouvel, vieil* – which appears when a following noun begins with a vowel or a so-called ‘silent h’:

- un bel effet  
  a fine effect
- un fol espoir  
  a vain hope
- un nouvel homme  
  a new, a changed man
- un mol effort  
  a weak effort
- un vieil hélicoptère  
  an old helicopter
4.7.5 No change in written or spoken French

In cases where the adjective already ends in -e, there is no change:

- manifeste masculine and feminine
- sale masculine and feminine
- tranquille masculine and feminine
- utile masculine and feminine

4.8 Plural forms of adjectives

4.8.1 The normal case

In most cases -s is added to the singular form of the adjective and there is no change in the pronunciation:

- Elle est contente
  She is happy
- Il est content
  He is happy
- La veste est rouge
  The jacket is red
- Le sac est rouge
  The bag is red
- Elles sont contentes
  They (f) are happy
- Ils sont contents
  They (m) are happy
- Les vestes sont rouges
  The jackets are red
- Les sacs sont rouges
  The bags are red

If the word ends in -s or -x, it will be invariable:

- Notre fils est heureux
  Our son is happy
- Le cahier est gris
  The exercise book is grey
- Nos fils sont heureux
  Our sons are happy
- Les cahiers sont gras
  The exercise books are grey

4.8.2 Adjectives which end in -eau add x rather than s

- Un nouveau portable
  A new laptop (or mobile phone)
- Un beau cadre
  A beautiful setting
- De nouveaux portables
  New laptops (or mobile phones)
- De beaux cadres
  Beautiful settings

4.8.3 Adjectives which end in -al generally change to -aux

- Le chanteur principal
  The principal singer
- Le principe général
  The general principle
- Des chanteurs principaux
  Principal singers
- Des principes généraux
  General principles
§4.9 Adjective agreement with nouns

Adjectives agree in gender and number with the noun whose meaning they modify. This is usually straightforward when there is just one noun:

- **d’une voix hésitante** in a faltering voice
- **ce fameux dimanche** that famous Sunday
- **L’eau était froide** The water was cold
- **Il lançait aux passants** He shot rapid and
- **des regards rapides et insistant** insistent glances at the passers-by

NB: A plural noun might be modified by a string of singular adjectives, depending on the meaning: _Les économies russe, bulgare et roumaine rencontrent de graves difficultés_ 'The Russian, Bulgarian and Romanian economies are (each) encountering serious difficulties.'
4.9.2 An adjective agreeing with nouns linked by et, ou or ni

The adjective may agree with the closest noun only:

- une table et une chaise bleue  
  a table and a blue chair

The adjective may agree with all the nouns, in which case it will be plural, and will be feminine only if all the nouns are feminine. Otherwise it will be masculine:

- une table et une chaise bleues  
  a blue table and chair

- Il ne portait ni veste ni pantalon bleus  
  He was wearing neither a blue jacket nor a blue pair of trousers

- un stylo ou un cahier bleus  
  a blue pen or exercise book

4.9.3 An adjective agreeing with nouns linked by de

The adjective may agree with the first or the second noun, depending on the meaning:

- un groupe de chantteuses talentueuses  
  a group of talented female singers

- une bande de voyous agressives  
  an aggressive gang of layabouts

- des bains de mer fréquents  
  frequent dips in the sea

- un geste de générosité déplacée  
  an act of misplaced generosity

NB: un/une drôle de can be used adjectivally meaning ‘weird’, ‘strange’. Its gender is determined by the following noun: une drôle d’idée ‘a strange idea’, un drôle de type ‘a weird bloke’.

4.9.4 Adjective agreement with gens

Gens ‘people’ is usually said in dictionaries to be feminine plural. When an adjective precedes gens it takes a feminine plural form, as in de bonnes gens ‘good people’, de vieilles gens ‘old people’. BUT when the adjective follows gens it is masculine plural, as in des gens bons et honnêtes ‘good, honest people’.

When the adjective follows a verb, e.g. être, it is also masculine plural as in Ces bonnes gens sont bien naïfs ‘Those good people are rather naïve’. Les vieilles gens sont attachés à leurs racines ‘Old people are close to their roots’.

Jeunes gens is always masculine, as in de beaux jeunes gens ‘fine young people-men’, and des jeunes gens ‘young men’ is often opposed to the set phrase des jeunes filles ‘young women’.

(See also Chapter 1.2.4.)

4.10 Invariable adjectives

A number of adjectives do not change either in relation to gender or to number. It is sometimes argued that these are nouns being used adjectivally.

- un pull marron  
  a brown pullover

- une jupe marron  
  a brown skirt

- des chaussures marron  
  brown shoes

- un carton orange  
  an orange box

- une voiture orange  
  an orange car

- des rideaux orange  
  orange curtains

- un chemisier crème  
  a cream blouse

- une jupe crème  
  a cream skirt

- des sous-vêtements crème  
  cream underwear
4.11 Compound adjectives

Like compound nouns (see Chapter 1.2.11) compound adjectives can be made up in a variety of ways. Their internal structure determines the way in which they agree with the noun they modify.
4.11.1 Adjective–adjective compounds

Where adjectives are coordinated, both agree with the noun:

sourd-muet  
*deaf-mute*

Les enfants sourds-muets ont fait des progrès exceptionnels  
*The deaf-mute children have made exceptional progress*

aigre-doux  
*sweet and sour*

J’adore les sauces aigres-douces  
*I adore sweet and sour sauces*

nouveau-né  
*new-born*

Les bébés nouveaux-nés sont très fatigants pour leurs parents  
*New-born babies are very exhausting for their parents*

dernier-né  
*last-born*

Les filles dernières-nées profitent de la présence de leurs frères et sœurs  
*Last-born girls take advantage of the presence of their brothers and sisters*

grand-ouvert  
*wide open*

Ils dorment la bouche grande-ouverte  
*They sleep with their mouths wide open*

**Exception:** where the first adjective ends in -i, -o, only the second part agrees:

tragi-comique  
*tragi-comedy*

Toutes ses pièces étaient tragi-comiques  
*All her plays were tragi-comedies*

franco-allemand  
*Franco-German*

Dans le cadre de l’union européenne, les accords franco-allemands ont duré plus de quarante ans  
*Within the European framework, the Franco-German agreements have lasted for more than forty years*

4.11.2 Adverb–adjective compounds

Where an adverb and an adjective are combined, the adverb (always the first element) remains invariable and the adjective agrees:

haut placé  
*highly placed*

Je connais des fonctionnaires haut placés qui pourraient nous aider  
*I know some highly placed civil servants who could help us*

bien intentionné  
*well-intentioned*

Ce sont toujours les personnes bien intentionnées qui créent le plus de problèmes  
*It’s always the well-intentioned people who cause the most problems*

avant-coureur  
*early-warning*

Voilà les signes avant-coureurs d’une maladie grave  
*There are the early-warning signs of a serious illness*

4.11.3 Colour adjective compounds

Combinations of colour adjectives remain invariable:

des cheveux châtain clair  
*light-brown hair*

des vêtements bleu foncé  
*a dark-blue jacket*

des mers vert-bouteille  
*a bottle-green sea*

des couvertures gris-rouge  
*a red-grey cover*
4.11.4 Compounds involving demi-, nu- and mi-

In combinations involving demi-, nu- and mi-, demi- and nu- are invariable before the noun, but agree when they follow it:

- une demi-heure but une heure et demie
  - a half-hour an hour and a half
- une demi-page
  - a half-page
- nu-tête
  - bareheaded
- sortir tête nue
  - to go out without a hat
- nu-pieds
  - barefoot
- sortir pieds nus
  - to go out bare footed

mi- can only occur before the noun and is invariable:

- à mi-temps
  - part-time (e.g. work)
- la mi-juin
  - halfway through June
- la mi-saison
  - middle season (Spring, Autumn)
- la mi-journée
  - the middle of the day
- mi-américain
  - half-American
- mi-clos
  - half-open, half-closed
- mi-cuisse
  - mid-thigh

4.12 Comparative and superlative forms of adjectives

4.12.1 Comparatives

In English, adjectives can be used to compare one entity with another by adding ‘-er’, or putting ‘more’ or ‘less’ in front: ‘bigger’, ‘lighter’, ‘more dangerous’, ‘less interesting’. In French, the comparative forms of adjectives are created by putting plus ‘more’ or moins ‘less’ in front of them. The adjective stays in the position it would normally occupy, before or after the noun, and agrees with the noun as usual (see 4.9):

Il désire avoir une plus grande voiture
He wants to have a bigger car

Je n’ai jamais fait de traversée plus dangereuse
I have never made a more dangerous crossing

Ce film est moins intéressant pour les enfants
This film is less interesting for children

Elle semble moins malade aujourd’hui
She seems less ill today

plus and moins make unequal comparisons between entities. A related construction is aussi ‘as’ (which often changes to si after a negation), which makes a comparison of equality between entities:

Il désire avoir une aussi grande voiture
He wants to have as big a car

Le courant n’est pas si dangereux par ici
The current isn’t as dangerous here

§4.12 Comparative and superlative forms of adjectives
NB: Adding *aussi* to a preceding adjective does not alter its position. This contrasts with English. Compare: *une aussi grande voiture* with *as big a car*.

In clauses dependent on nouns modified by comparative adjectives with *plus* and *moins*, writers often insert *ne, le* or *ne le* in formal written French:

- **Ces virages sont plus dangereux qu’on (ne) (le) pense.** *These bends are more dangerous than one thinks.*
- **Le film est moins intéressant qu’on (ne) (l’)espérait.** *The film is less interesting than we hoped.*

In clauses dependent on nouns modified by comparative adjectives with *aussi*, only *le* may be inserted in formal written French:

- **La charge de travail est aussi lourde que je le croyais.** *The workload is as demanding as I thought.*

There are two irregular comparative forms of adjectives which are used productively in French:

- **meilleur/-é**  
  *better (comparative of *bon* ‘good’)*
- **pire**  
  *worse (comparative of *mauvais* ‘bad’)*

*meilleur* is used everywhere that *bon* could be, and agrees with the noun it modifies:

- **Il désire avoir une meilleure place.** *He wants to have a better seat.*
- **Ces marchandises sont meilleures.** *These goods are better.*
- **Le texte est meilleur maintenant que tu l’as raccourci.** *The text is better now you have shortened it.*

*plus bon* ‘more good’ is only possible where English can use ‘more good’, but, again as in English, the form is rather unusual:

- **Il est plus bon qu’intelligent.** *He is more good than intelligent.*

(For the distinction between *meilleur* and *mieux* see Chapter 5.6.6.)

*pire* and *plus mauvais* both exist. *plus mauvais* is the most commonly used form, but *pire* will be used where the comparison is between two things which are already both bad:

- **Le remède est pire que le mal.** *The cure is worse than the illness.*

or to refer to abstract nouns:

- **La vérité est pénible, mais le mensonge est pire.** *Truth hurts, but lying is worse.*
4.12.2 Superlatives

In English, adjectives can be used to describe the best or worst of something by adding ‘-est’ or putting ‘most’ or ‘least’ in front of them: ‘biggest’, ‘lightest’, ‘most dangerous’, ‘least interesting’. These are superlative forms of adjectives.

In French the superlative forms of adjectives are created by putting the definite article – *le*, *la*, *les* – in front of the comparative forms: *la plus grande* voiture ‘the biggest car’, *la plus forte* odeur ‘the strongest smell’. When adjectives follow the noun, this means that there are two definite articles, one before the noun and one before the comparative form of the adjective: *la voiture la plus puissante* ‘the most powerful car’, *les virages les plus dangereux* ‘the most dangerous bends’. Note that the article agrees in gender and number with the noun:

C’était **le plus grand** joueur de tous  
*He was the greatest player of all*

Elle est **la moins ambitieuse** de sa famille  
*She is the least ambitious in her family*

C’est la route **la plus dangereuse** de la région  
*It’s the most dangerous road in the region*

NB: ‘in’ after superlative adjectives is usually *de*: *la route la plus dangereuse* *de* la région, *la moins malade* *de* sa famille. (See Chapter 13.15.3.)

There are three irregular superlative forms of adjectives which are used productively in French:

le/la/les meilleur(e)(s)  *the best*  (superlative of *bon* ‘good’)  
le/la/les pire(s)  *the worst*  (superlative of *mauvais* ‘bad’)  
le/la/les moindre(s)  *the least*  (superlative of *petit* ‘small’)

The conditions under which *meilleur* and *pire* are used are the same as those described in 4.12.1:

Notre chef de cuisine est **le meilleur** de la ville  
*Our chef is the best in town*

Elle porte **les meilleurs** vêtements  
*She wears the best clothes*

Cette solution est **la pire** des trois proposées  
*This solution is the worst of the three proposed*

**Le pire**, c’était qu’elle voulait revenir  
*The worst thing was that she wanted to come back*

le/la/les moindre(s) is used in semi-fixed expressions, and with abstract nouns:

le principe du moindre effort  
*the principle of least effort*

Ils ont essayé de suivre la politique du moindre mal  
*They tried to follow the policy which would do the least harm*
Where concrete nouns are involved, however, *le/la/les plus petit(e)(s)* is used:

Il a choisi *le plus petit* diamant  
*He chose the smallest diamond*

When adjectives which normally precede nouns are used in a superlative form, they may follow the noun they modify on the grounds that they are ‘too long’ to appear in front of the noun (see 4.1.6):

- *un bref aperçu*  
  *a brief outline*
- *le plus bref* aperçu or *l’aperçu le plus bref*  
  *the briefest outline*
- *un jeune homme*  
  *a young man*
- *le plus jeune* homme or *l’homme le plus jeune*  
  *the youngest man*

### 4.13 Subjunctive versus indicative in clauses dependent on a superlative adjective

Clauses dependent on nouns modified by a superlative adjective have a verb in the subjunctive if the construction claims a unique status for the noun. For example:

 Ils ont acheté le plus grand sapin de Noël qu’ils *aient* pu trouver  
*They bought the biggest Christmas tree that they could find*  
(They couldn’t find a bigger tree, so it is unique)

But where the construction does not claim a unique status for the noun, the verb in the dependent clause is in the indicative:

 Ils ont acheté le plus grand sapin de Noël qu’ils *ont* pu transporter dans leur voiture  
*They bought the biggest Christmas tree that they could take in their car*  
(there is no claim that it is the biggest Christmas tree available)

(For more on this construction see Chapters 11.1.8 and 15.11.3.)

### 4.14 Absolute use of the superlative

One way of translating into French expressions like ‘the simplest of all’, ‘the most interesting imaginable’ (known as ‘absolute superlatives’) is to put the expression *des plus* in front of the adjective: *des plus simple(s)*, *des plus intéressant(s)*. In this construction the adjective must agree in gender with the noun it modifies, but if the noun is singular the adjective may be either singular or plural:

- *C’était une journée des plus intéressante(s)*  
  *It was the most interesting of days*
- *C’était un voyage des plus intéressant(s)*  
  *It was the most interesting trip imaginable*

In modern French the plural form is probably the more frequent of the two.
Other ways of expressing an absolute superlative are:

Ce raisonnement est tout ce qu’il y a de plus simple
This line of argument is of the simplest kind

Un raisonnement on ne peut plus simple
The simplest line of argument of all

Il préfère des solutions les plus simples possible (possible is invariable in this construction)
He prefers the simplest possible solutions
5 Adverbs

5.1 Function of adverbs
Adverbs are words or phrases of invariable form which modify the meaning of words, phrases or whole sentences:

Il est entré dans un monde étrangement silencieux
(étrangement modifies just silencieux; it is the silence which is strange, not the person or the world he enters)

J’ai entendu un bruit dehors
(dehors modifies just entendre un bruit; it indicates where the noise was, not where the person hearing it was)

Soudain j’ai entendu un bruit
(soudain modifies the sentence and expresses the suddenness of the whole event)

5.2 Formation of adverbs with the ending -ment

5.2.1 Adverbs ending in -ment derived from the feminine form of an adjective

Most adverbs ending in -ment are formed from the feminine form of a corresponding adjective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>affreux</td>
<td>affreuse</td>
<td>affreusement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clair</td>
<td>claire</td>
<td>clairement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distinct</td>
<td>distincte</td>
<td>distinctement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doux</td>
<td>douce</td>
<td>doucement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mou</td>
<td>molle</td>
<td>mollement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naturel</td>
<td>naturelle</td>
<td>naturellement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public</td>
<td>publique</td>
<td>publiquement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professionnel</td>
<td>professionnelle</td>
<td>professionnellement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sec</td>
<td>sèche</td>
<td>sèchement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sûr</td>
<td>sûre</td>
<td>sûrement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vif</td>
<td>vive</td>
<td>vivement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exception:

gentil kind gentille kind gentiment kindly

Although -ment corresponds broadly to English ‘-ly’, French is much less productive than English. Often English ‘-ly’ adverbs must be translated by phrases (see 5.5).
5.2.2 Adverbs ending in -ment derived from the masculine form of an adjective

Where an adjective ends in -i (not -oi), -é, or -u (not -eau or -ou), the adverb is formed from the masculine form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>absolu</td>
<td>absolute</td>
<td>absolument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambigu</td>
<td>ambiguous</td>
<td>ambigument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aisé</td>
<td>easy</td>
<td>aisément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joli</td>
<td>pretty</td>
<td>joliment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vrai</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>virement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exception:**

| gai | cheerful | gaie | cheerful | gaiement | cheerfully |

Seven adjectives which end in -u but add a circumflex accent in the adverbial form are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assidu</th>
<th>Assiduous</th>
<th>Assiduement</th>
<th>Assiduously</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continu</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Continûment</td>
<td>Continuously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cru</td>
<td>Crude</td>
<td>Crûment</td>
<td>Crudely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dû</td>
<td>Owd</td>
<td>Dûment</td>
<td>Duly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goulu</td>
<td>Greedy</td>
<td>Goulûment</td>
<td>Greedly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incongru</td>
<td>Incongruous</td>
<td>Incongrûment</td>
<td>Incongruously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indu</td>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>Indûment</td>
<td>Inappropriately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.3 Adverbs ending in -amment and -emment derived from adjectives ending in -ant or -ent

Adjectives ending in -ant and -ent form the adverb with -amment and -emment, respectively:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abondant</td>
<td>Abondamment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparent</td>
<td>Apparemment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brillant</td>
<td>Brillamment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Constamment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courant</td>
<td>Couramment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Précédent</td>
<td>Précédemment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudent</td>
<td>Prudemment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>Violemment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaillant</td>
<td>Vaillamment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are three forms which do not follow this pattern exactly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lent</th>
<th>Slow</th>
<th>Lentement</th>
<th>Slowly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Présent</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Présentement</td>
<td>Presently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Véhément</td>
<td>Vehement</td>
<td>Vêhémentement</td>
<td>Vehemently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB:** *Vêhémentement* is quite rare, and *avec véhémence* is usually preferred.
Three forms follow the pattern, but the present participles from which they derive no longer exist in modern French:

- précipiter to precipitate
  (précipitant – old French)
- noter to note
  (notant – old French)
- (scire – old French/Latin)

5.2.4 Adverbs ending in -(é)ment derived from past participles

Adverbs can also be formed in a similar way from the masculine form of past participles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Past participle</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aveugler</td>
<td>to blind</td>
<td>aveuglé</td>
<td>aveuglément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conformer</td>
<td>to conform</td>
<td>conformé</td>
<td>conformément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forcer</td>
<td>to force</td>
<td>forcé</td>
<td>forcément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>préciser</td>
<td>to specify</td>
<td>précisé</td>
<td>précisément</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a similar, but irregular, vein we find:

- impuni   unpunished impunément with impunity

5.2.5 Adverbs ending in -ément derived from adjectives ending in -e

A small number of adverbs ending in -ément have been created from adjectives ending in -e: some always end in -e, others are the feminine form of adjectives:

Adjectives which always end in -e

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>énorme</td>
<td>enormous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immense</td>
<td>immense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intense</td>
<td>intense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uniforme</td>
<td>uniform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commode</td>
<td>useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exceptions

- probable
- véritable

- probable
- véritablement

Feminine forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>commun</td>
<td>commune</td>
<td>communément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confus</td>
<td>confuse</td>
<td>confusément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importun</td>
<td>importune</td>
<td>importunément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obscur</td>
<td>obscure</td>
<td>obscurément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportun</td>
<td>opportune</td>
<td>opportunément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profund</td>
<td>profonde</td>
<td>profondément</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profus</td>
<td>profuse</td>
<td>profusément</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>commonly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>embarrassed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>disagreeably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>obscurely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>deeply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(literary)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.6 Adverbs ending in -ment derived from words no longer in the language

Some adverbs ending in -ment are derived from words which no longer exist in the language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brief</td>
<td>brève</td>
<td>brièvement briefly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(brief – old French)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serious</td>
<td>grave</td>
<td>grièvement seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(grief – old French)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treacherous</td>
<td>traiètresse</td>
<td>traîreusement treacherously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(traîtreux – old French)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journelment</td>
<td>journellement daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nuitamment</td>
<td>nuitamment nightly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: grief is still used in certain set expressions: faire grief à quelqu’un de quelque chose ‘to hold something against somebody’, formuler des griefs ‘to express grievances’.

5.2.7 Adverbs ending in -ment derived from nouns

There are a few adverbs ending in -ment which are derived from nouns and function like degree adverbs (see 5.6.2). These would be used only in spoken French: vachement in particular is used in very informal spoken French:

- C’est bougrement difficile It’s bloody difficult
- Cette voiture est diablement lourde This car is hellishly heavy
- Elles sont vachement jolies, tes bottes Those are great boots!

5.3 Adjectives used as adverbs without addition of -ment

Not all adverbs derived from adjectives end in -ment. The masculine forms of several adjectives can be used as adverbs in combination with a particular set of verbs. They do not change in gender or in number when used in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Used in expressions such as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bas</td>
<td>parler bas to talk quietly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voler bas to fly low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bon</td>
<td>sentir bon to smell nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tenir bon to hold on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chaud</td>
<td>servir chaud to serve hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cher</td>
<td>coûter cher to cost a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>payer cher to pay a lot (for sth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clair</td>
<td>voir clair to see clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>court</td>
<td>tourner court to come to an abrupt end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>couper court à qch to cut sth short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s’habiller court to wear one’s skirts/dresses short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creux</td>
<td>sonner creux to ring hollow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doux</td>
<td>filer doux to keep a low profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>droit</td>
<td>aller droit to go straight on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dru</td>
<td>tomber dru to fall in stair-rods (rain)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adverbs §5.4

dur travaille dur  
faux chanter faux  
ferme tenir ferme  
fort parler fort  
frais servir frais  
franc parler franc  
gras manger gras  
gros parler gros  
risque gros  
haut être haut placé  
juste viser juste  
deviner juste  
lourd peser lourd  
mauvais sentir mauvais  
et s’arrêter net  
casser net  
paireil penser pareil  
(proinformal)  
profond creuser profond  
serré jouer serré

to work hard  
to sing out of tune  
to hold out  
to talk loudly  
to serve cool  
to say what you think  
to eat rich food  
to bet heavily  
to take big risks  
to be in a position of authority  
to aim correctly  
to guess right  
to weigh right  
to smell heavily  
to make a clean break  
to think the same  
to dig deep  
to play a close game

The fact that some of these adjectives are used as adverbs has allowed the creation of related forms ending in -ment with different meanings:

bon

bонnement

bонnement is used almost always with tout to give tout bonnement: ‘quite simply’

cher

chèrement

chèrement is used with the verb vendre in the set phrase: vendre chèrement sa vie: ‘to sell one’s life dearly’.

bas

bassement

bassement has taken the meaning: ‘in a mean or despicable way’ and is used in the set phrase agir bassement: ‘to act in a mean or despicable way’.

5.4 Phrases used as adverbs

A number of adverbs are composed of invariable phrases. The following are a sample:

au maximum to the utmost
à bon escient advisedly
au fur et à mesure as we go along
à brûle-pourpoint point blank
à côté beside
à l’heure on time
à tire-larigot (informal) non-stop
à tue-tête at the top of one’s voice
à plat ventre on one’s belly
à qui mieux mieux each one more than the next
à peu près nearly
à la fois at the same time
à part separately
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French phrase</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d’ores et déjà</td>
<td>from this time onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d’habitude</td>
<td>usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d’emblée</td>
<td>straightaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d’emblée plus belle</td>
<td>with renewed vigour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d’arrache-pied</td>
<td>flat out (to work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de bonne heure</td>
<td>early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de temps en temps</td>
<td>from time to time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en haut</td>
<td>up (stairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en bas</td>
<td>down (stairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en arrière</td>
<td>behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en avant</td>
<td>in front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en retard</td>
<td>late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en avance</td>
<td>early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en amont</td>
<td>upstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en aval</td>
<td>downstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en dehors</td>
<td>outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en vain</td>
<td>in vain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en catimini</td>
<td>in secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en général</td>
<td>in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en particulier</td>
<td>in particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en définitive</td>
<td>finally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n’importe où</td>
<td>anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n’importe quand</td>
<td>anytime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n’importe qui</td>
<td>anybody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par hasard</td>
<td>by chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par monts et par vaux</td>
<td>over hill and dale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par ailleurs</td>
<td>in addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par devant</td>
<td>in the front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par dessus</td>
<td>over and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par contre</td>
<td>on the other hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dans la suite</td>
<td>in what followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>et ainsi de suite</td>
<td>and so on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de suite</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par la suite</td>
<td>in what followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sans cesse</td>
<td>continuously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sans détour</td>
<td>straight, to the point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sur ces entrefaites</td>
<td>and with that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tout à fait</td>
<td>completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tout de suite</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tout à l’heure</td>
<td>in a moment, later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tout d’un coup</td>
<td>suddenly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tout de go</td>
<td>straight out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>côte à côte</td>
<td>side by side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ça et là</td>
<td>here and there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petit à petit</td>
<td>little by little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sur-le-champ</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaille que vaille</td>
<td>somehow or other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Borrowings from Latin, frequently heard, are:

- *grosso modo* (more or less)
- *a fortiori* (even more so)
- *a priori*
- *a posteriori*
- *vice versa*
- *in extremis* (at the last moment)

### 5.5 English and French adverb formation

`-ly` is a more productive form in English than `-ment` is in French. Therefore, not every English form in `-ly` will find a ready translation in `-ment` in French. The most frequent solution is an adverbial phrase introduced by a preposition such as *avec, d’une manière . . ., d’une façon* . . ., *sur un ton . . .*:

- *avec colère, sur le ton de la colère* (angrily)
- *d’une manière concise, avec concision* (concisely)
- *avec charme, d’une manière charmante* (charmingly)
- *avec beaucoup de talent, d’imagination* (creatively)
- *sur le ton de la plaisanterie* (jokingly)
- *de façon possessive* (possessively)
- *de façon réfléchie* (reflectively)
- *avec tristesse* (sadly)
- *avec entêtement* (stubbornly)
- *de façon surprenante, à ma/ta grande surprise* (surprisingly)
- *sur un ton vengeur* (vengefully)

When colours are used as adverbs they are preceded by _en_:

- *le colorier en bleu* (to colour it blue)
- *le peindre en rouge* (to paint it red)

When shapes are used as adverbs, they have to be turned into an expression involving a noun in French:

- *lui donner une forme ronde* (to make it round)
- *le couper au carré* (to cut it square)

### 5.6 Types of adverbs

There are five main types of adverbs: manner adverbs, degree adverbs, time adverbs, place adverbs and sentence-modifying adverbs. Some forms fall into more than one of these categories. Typical examples of each are given in Tables 5.A, 5.B, 5.C, 5.D and 5.E (but the lists are not exhaustive).

#### 5.6.1 Manner adverbs

Adverbs which describe the manner in which something is done are manner adverbs:

- *Je dors bien* (I sleep well)
- *Les choses tournent mal* (Things are turning out badly)
### TABLE 5.A Typical manner adverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical manner adverbs</th>
<th>Ending in -ment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ainsi (can also be a sentence-modifying adverb – see 5.6.17)</td>
<td>affectueusement affectionately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bien (can also be a degree adverb – see 5.6.2)</td>
<td>autrement differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debout (can also be a degree adverb – see 5.6.2)</td>
<td>clairement clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensemble</td>
<td>confusément in a confused manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exprès</td>
<td>correctement correctly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mal</td>
<td>facilement easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mieux (for a comparison with meilleur see 5.6.6)</td>
<td>lentement slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vite</td>
<td>précautionneusement cautiously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à dessein</td>
<td>purposely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à genoux</td>
<td>on one’s knees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à pied</td>
<td>on foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à la fois</td>
<td>at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à tort</td>
<td>wrongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de travers</td>
<td>crookedly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Representative examples:

Il s’est toujours comporté ainsi
Tu chantes bien
Mets-toi debout
Il a mal lu l’étiquette
Hier soir ça n’allait guère mieux
It was hardly any better yesterday evening
Je l’oublierai très facilement
I’ll forget it very easily
Elle étendait soigneusement son tailleur
She carefully laid out her suit

### 5.6.2 Degree adverbs

Adverbs which indicate the extent to which something is the case are degree adverbs. As a class they can modify every kind of sentence element: verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions and other adverbs. But individually some of them may be restricted to modifying particular categories of item (e.g. très can modify adjectives, prepositions and adverbs – très heureux ‘very happy’, très à la mode ‘very fashionable’, très bien ‘very well’ – but not verbs *Je fume très ‘I smoke very’*):

Je bois du vin modérément
I drink wine moderately
Tout est si clair maintenant
*Everything is so clear*

Ce ne sera pas tout à fait la vérité
*That won’t be entirely the truth*

Je tends ma main jusqu’à presque toucher son visage
*I stretch out my hand almost to touch his face*

Elle a dressé trop brusquement la tête
*She lifted her head up too quickly*

**TABLE 5.B Typical degree adverbs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical degree adverbs</th>
<th>Ending in -ment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assez</td>
<td>sufficiently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aussi (modifies adjectives and adverbs)</td>
<td>as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autant</td>
<td>as much (modifies verbs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beaucoup</td>
<td>much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bien (can also be a manner adverb – see 5.6.1)</td>
<td>really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>davantage</td>
<td>more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encore</td>
<td>again; still; another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juste</td>
<td>just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>même (when it follows a noun it may correspond to English ‘very’)</td>
<td>even</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moins</td>
<td>less (see 5.6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peu</td>
<td>little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(expresses a concrete estimate of a quantity: au moins dix personnes blessées; du moins expresses the speaker’s view of an event: du moins, il n’est pas blessé – see 5.6.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plus (can modify verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions – see 5.6.5)</td>
<td>more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plutôt</td>
<td>rather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presque (does NOT contract to <em>presqu’</em> in front of a vowel: presque à la fin)</td>
<td>almost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si</td>
<td>so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tant</td>
<td>so much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tout</td>
<td>completely; quite (see 5.6.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>très</td>
<td>very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trop</td>
<td>too</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§5.6 Types of adverbs

Representative examples

C’est un acteur assez connu
He is quite a well-known actor

La route tue autant que la guerre
Road accidents are the cause of as many deaths as war

Elle est autrement intelligente que sa soeur
She is much more intelligent than her sister

Ils ont beaucoup discuté pendant le weekend
They spent a lot of time discussing over the weekend

C’est bien bête
That’s really stupid

Il y en a davantage qu’on ne le pense
There are more than you think

Elle a acheté un billet juste avant de prendre le train
She bought a ticket just before catching the train

On ramène même des souvenirs
They even bring back souvenirs

Voici le vélo même dont il s’est servi
This is the very bike he used

un monde si étrangement silencieux
such a strangely silent world

Elle est tellement plus sympathique
She is so much nicer

J’ai répondu tout de travers
I replied in a quite confused way

Je suis ici depuis très longtemps
I have been here for a very long time

Elle parle trop
She talks too much

A number of degree adverbs also function as quantifiers modifying nouns (see Chapter 6.9):

assez d’excuses
enough excuses

autant d’argent
as much money

beaucoup de clients
many customers

tellement de problèmes
many problems

bien des

so much work

davantage


Translated sentences such as ‘She was so beautiful’, ‘He drives so fast that he will have an accident’, ‘They cried so much’, ‘So many people came’, ‘(Very) many more are expected’, ‘The clothes are much prettier’, ‘They work a lot faster’ can be difficult for English speakers, because of the complex correspondences between English ‘so’, ‘(so) much’, ‘(so) many’, ‘more’, on the one hand and French si, tellement, tant, beaucoup, bien, davantage and the exclamative construction Qu’elle était jolie! ‘She was so beautiful’, Qu’il conduit vite! ‘He drives so fast’ on the other. Here are some rules of thumb, followed by examples of ways of translating such constructions.

si meaning ‘so’ can modify an adjective, or an adverb: Il est si grand! (adjective) ‘He is so tall!’, Tu chantes si bien! (adverb) ‘You sing so well!’

Il conduit si vite (adverb) qu’il risque d’avoir un accident! ‘He drives so fast that he will have an accident!’

tellement meaning ‘so’ can modify an adjective, an adverb or a verb: Il est tellement grand! (adjective) ‘He is so tall!’

Tu chantes tellement bien! (adverb) ‘You sing so well!’

Il conduit tellement vite qu’il risque d’avoir un accident! (adverb) ‘He drives so fast that he will have an accident!’

ils ont tellement crié! (verb) ‘They shouted so much!’

tant meaning ‘so much’ can modify a verb: Ils ont tant crié! ‘They shouted so much’.


tant and tellement meaning ‘so much, so many’ can modify nouns: Tant de personnes sont venues, Tellement de personnes sont venues ‘So many people came’, Tant de travail a été accompli, Tellement de travail a été accompli ‘So much work has been done’.

davantage meaning ‘more’ can modify nouns: Les PMEs emploient davantage de personnes ‘Small and medium-sized businesses are employing more people’.

Here are some examples of these uses. Often, word for word translations are impossible and other ways of rendering the same idea may need to be considered:

She was so beautiful!
Elle était si jolie! or Elle était tellement jolie! or Qu’elle était jolie!

The requiem was sung so beautifully that I nearly cried
Le requiem était si bien chanté que j’ai failli pleurer or
Le requiem était tellement bien chanté que j’ai failli pleurer

He drives so fast!
Il conduit si vite! or Il conduit tellement vite! or Qu’il conduit vite!

He drives so fast that he is sure to cause an accident one of these days
Il conduit tellement vite qu’il va sûrement provoquer un accident un de ces jours or
Il conduit si vite qu’il va sûrement provoquer un accident un de ces jours

She cried so much her mother was quite desperate
Elle a tant pleuré que sa mère était au désespoir or
Elle a tellement pleuré que sa mère était au désespoir

So many people came that I was overwhelmed
Tant de personnes sont venues que j’ai été un peu dépassé or
Tellement de personnes sont venues que j’ai été un peu dépassé (beaucoup de and bien de are not possible in this tant/tellement de personnes . . . que construction, and nor is si; *si beaucoup is an impossible combination under any circumstances)

The clothes on show are (so) much prettier
Les vêtements que nous montrons sont beaucoup plus jolis or
Les vêtements que nous montrons sont bien plus jolis or
Les vêtements que nous montrons sont tellement plus jolis

The crowds are (so) much more difficult to control this year
Les foules sont beaucoup plus difficiles à contrôler cette année or
Les foules sont bien plus difficiles à contrôler cette année or
Les foules sont tellement plus difficiles à contrôler cette année

Very many more can be expected tomorrow
On doit s’attendre à beaucoup plus demain or
On doit s’attendre à bien plus demain (it is not possible to use très in this kind of sentence: très and beaucoup never combine)

The designers have produced (so) much better models
Les couturiers ont produit de bien meilleurs modèles or
Les couturiers ont produit de tellement meilleurs modèles (beaucoup is not possible in this sentence before meilleurs)

This year more people want to see the fashion shows
Cette année davantage de personnes souhaitent voir les défilés or
Cette année plus de personnes souhaitent voir les défilés
§5.6 Types of adverbs

Many more people want to see the fashion shows
Beaucoup plus de personnes veulent assister aux défilés or
Bien plus de personnes veulent assister aux défilés or
Bien davantage de personnes veulent assister aux défilés
(‘many more’ can NOT be rendered by ‘beaucoup davantage’)

The models will have to work a lot more often
Les mannequins devront travailler beaucoup plus souvent or
Les mannequins devront travailler bien plus souvent

5.6.3 Comparative and superlative forms of adverbs

In English, the majority of adverbs can be made into comparative forms by putting ‘more’, ‘less’ or ‘as’ in front of them, and into superlative forms by putting ‘the most’ or ‘the least’ in front of them:

These days I can remember it
- easily
- more easily (than I used to)
- less easily (than I used to)
- as easily (as I used to)

This window opens
- the most easily (of all of them)
- the least easily (of all of them)

A small set of English adverbs, however, have special comparative and superlative forms:

She finishes
- fast
- faster
- the fastest

She sings
- well
- better
- the best

He behaves
- badly
- worse
- the worst

A similar pattern exists in French where the majority of adverbs can be made into comparative forms by putting the degree adverbs plus, moins or aussi in front of the adverb, and into superlative forms by putting le plus or le moins in front of the adverb. In the latter case le plus and le moins do not change in gender and number:

De nos jours je m’en souviens
- facilement
- plus facilement (qu’auparavant)
- moins facilement (qu’auparavant)
- aussi facilement (qu’auparavant)

Cette fenêtre-ci ouvre
- le plus facilement (de toutes)
- le moins facilement (de toutes)
5.6.4 *bien* ‘well’, *mieux* ‘better’, *mal* ‘badly’, *pis* ‘worse’

One adverb in French has special comparative and superlative forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bien</th>
<th>mieux</th>
<th>le mieux</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>well</em></td>
<td><em>better</em></td>
<td><em>the best</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moins bien</td>
<td>le moins bien</td>
<td>the least well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less well</td>
<td>the least well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elle chante

She sings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bien</th>
<th>mieux</th>
<th>le mieux</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>well</em></td>
<td><em>better</em></td>
<td><em>the best</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moins bien</td>
<td>le moins bien</td>
<td>the least well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less well</td>
<td>the least well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The adverb *mal* ‘badly’ has two sets of comparative and superlative forms, one regular and one irregular:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mal badly</td>
<td>plus mal</td>
<td>le plus mal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>badly</em></td>
<td><em>worse</em></td>
<td><em>the worst</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moins mal</td>
<td>le moins mal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>less badly</em></td>
<td><em>the least badly</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Irregular

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pis</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>le pis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>worse</em></td>
<td><em>the worst</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*pis* and *le pis* only occur these days in fixed expressions like:

- tant pis
  Les choses vont de mal en pis (or de pis en pis)
  qui pis est, . . .
  au pis aller
  en mettant tout au pis, . . .
  *too bad*
  *Things are going from bad to worse*
  *what’s worse, . . .*
  *if the worse comes to the worst*
  *at the worst, . . .*

5.6.5 *beaucoup* ‘much’, *plus* ‘more’, *peu* ‘little’, *moins* ‘less’

The comparative and superlative forms of the degree adverb *beaucoup* are *plus* and *le plus* (the final *s* is pronounced except in front of words beginning with a consonant); the comparative and superlative forms of the degree adverb *peu* are *moins* and *le moins*:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elle mange</td>
<td></td>
<td>She eats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| *beaucoup* | *plus [s]* | *a lot*
| *plus [s] (de toutes)* | *more* | *the most (of all)*
| *autant (que moi)* | *as much (as me)* |

| Elle mange |   | She eats |
| *peu* | *moins* | *little*
| *moins (de toutes)* | *less* | *the least (of all)*
| *aussi peu (que moi)* | *as little (as me)* |

*plus* and *moins* are also used in expressions such as:

**De plus en plus de** femmes enceintes veulent connaître le sexe de leur bébé
More and more pregnant women want to know what sex their baby is
§5.6 Types of adverbs

De moins en moins de femmes enceintes fument
Fewer and fewer pregnant women smoke

Plus on est âgé plus on a de difficultés à s’adapter au changement
The older one is, the more difficulty one has adapting to change

Moins on a de revenus moins on a de choix dans la vie
The less wealthy one is, the fewer choices one has in life

Elle est encore plus talentueuse que je n’avais pensé
She is even more talented than I had thought

Ce roman est encore moins lisible que je ne croyais
This novel is even less readable than I had thought

5.6.6 Difference between meilleur(e)(s) and mieux, and le/la/les meilleur(e)(s) and le mieux

meilleur(e)(s) and le/la/les meilleur(e)(s) are the comparative and superlative forms respectively of the adjective bon ‘good’. mieux and le mieux are the comparative and superlative forms respectively of the adverb bien ‘well’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>bon</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>meilleur(s)</th>
<th>meilleure(s)</th>
<th>better</th>
<th>le meilleur</th>
<th>la meilleure</th>
<th>les meilleur(e)s</th>
<th>the best</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td>bien</td>
<td>well</td>
<td>mieux</td>
<td></td>
<td>better</td>
<td>le mieux</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the best</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Il désire avoir une meilleure place
He wants to have a better seat

Ces marchandises sont meilleures
These goods are better

Elle s’habille mieux que les autres
She dresses better than the others

Elle s’habille le mieux de toutes
She dresses the best of all

Since the adverb bien ‘well’ can also sometimes function as an adjective close in meaning to bon, particularly with être, there are contexts where meilleur and mieux are both possible:

Tout est bien/Tout est mieux
Everything is fine/Everything is better

Tout est bon/Tout est meilleur
Everything is good/Everything is better

Elle est bien comme directeur/Elle est mieux comme directeur
She is fine as a director/She is better as a director

Elle est bonne comme directeur/Elle est meilleure comme directeur
She is good as a director/She is better as a director

On est bien ici/On est mieux ici
We’re fine here/We’re better here

C’est bon ici/C’est meilleur ici
It’s good here/It’s better here
5.6.7 Form and uses of tout

tout can function as a determiner, a quantifier, a pronoun and an adverb. It behaves differently with respect to agreement in each of these roles, so it is important to distinguish them.

tout as a determiner

tout is a determiner in constructions such as the following. Here there is no article and tout agrees with the noun which it determines:

Tout parent veut le bien de son enfant
Every parent wants what is best for his or her child

Toutes taxes comprises
All taxes included

Les repas sont servis à toute heure
Meals are served at any time

Ils sont venus à toute vitesse
They came as quickly as they could

Un tel menu convient à toute occasion
Such a menu is suitable for any occasion

tout as a quantifier

tout is a quantifier (see Chapter 6.9) in the following examples. Its translation equivalent in English is usually ‘all’. It agrees with the noun which it modifies:

Tous les garçons sont arrivés
All the boys have arrived

Toutes les chansons qu’ils passent sur cette chaîne sont dépassées
All the songs they play on that station are out of date

Il s’en est plaint toute la journée
He complained about it all day

tout as a pronoun

tout is a pronoun when it is used as a subject, direct object, indirect object or follows a preposition.

When it has the indefinite meaning ‘everything, all’ it is invariable:

Tout bien considéré, j’ai décidé de ne pas le faire
All things considered, I’ve decided not to do it

Tu m’avais dit que tout serait réglé avant ce soir
You told me that everything would be sorted out by this evening

When it refers to people or things mentioned or implied elsewhere in the discourse, it agrees in gender and number with those entities, and takes one of the forms tout, toute, tous, toutes. In this use the final -s of tous is pronounced:

Nous sommes infiniment redevables à tous (final -s pronounced)
We are eternally grateful to everyone
Nous allons chanter tous ensemble (final -s pronounced)
We’ll all sing together

Je n’aime plus ces chansons. Toutes sont dépassées
I don’t like these songs anymore. They are all out of date

tout as an adverb

tout is an adverb when it modifies another adverb, a preposition or an adjective. It has the meaning of ‘completely, very’.

In front of an adverb or preposition it is invariable:

Elle chante tout bas
She is singing very quietly

Son succès était tout bonnement la meilleure surprise de l’année
His success was quite simply the best surprise of the year

L’hôtel se trouve tout près de la gare
The hotel is really near the station

In front of an adjective it agrees if the adjective is feminine and begins with a consonant:

Les petites filles étaient toutes désesparées par l’annonce de la directrice
The little girls were completely taken aback by the headmistress’s announcement

Tes sœurs sont toutes prêtes à venir te rejoindre
Your sisters are quite ready to come out and join you

Agreement is optional in front of adjectives which are feminine and begin with a vowel or a silent h:

Tu sais bien que ta sœur serait tout (or toute) heureuse de te revoir
You know full well that your sister would be delighted to see you again

Les petites chattes étaient tout (or toutes) excitées par les mouvements de la bobine de fil
The little kittens were thoroughly excited by the movements of the cotton reel

5.6.8 Time adverbs

Adverbs which indicate the time at which something takes place, or the duration or frequency of an event, are time adverbs (as shown in Table 5.C):

L’image est nette à présent
The picture is clear now

Il y est toujours
He is still there

Soudain il y a eu comme un déplacement d’air
Suddenly there was a kind of movement of air
### Table 5.C Typical time adverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical time adverbs</th>
<th>then, at that time</th>
<th>soudain</th>
<th>suddenly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alors (can also be a sentence-modifying adverb – see 5.6.17)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aujourd'hui today</td>
<td></td>
<td>souvent</td>
<td>often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auparavant beforehand</td>
<td>tantôt</td>
<td>this afternoon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aussitôt immediately</td>
<td>tard</td>
<td>late</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autrefois in the past</td>
<td>tôt</td>
<td>early</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bientôt soon</td>
<td>toujours</td>
<td>always; still</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>déjà already</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demain tomorrow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depuis since then</td>
<td>actuellement currently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dorénavant henceforth</td>
<td>demièrement recently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encore again; still; yet (can also be a sentence-modifying adverb – see 5.6.17)</td>
<td>précédemment previously</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enfin finally</td>
<td>prochainement soon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensuite afterwards</td>
<td>récemment recently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entre-temps meanwhile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hier yesterday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jadis in the (distant) past (the final -s is always pronounced)</td>
<td>dès lors</td>
<td>from then on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jamais ever</td>
<td>d’un instant à l’autre at any moment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>longtemps a long time</td>
<td>en ce moment at the moment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintenant now</td>
<td>par la suite subsequently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naguère in the recent past</td>
<td>tout à coup suddenly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parfois sometimes</td>
<td>tout à l’heure just now; presently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quelquefois sometimes</td>
<td>tout de suite immediately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Representative examples:**

**Actuellement** il sort avec ma sœur
Il l’avait rencontrée deux ans **auparavant**
**Dès lors** il voulait passer sa vie avec elle

Currently, he’s going out with my sister
He had met her two years before
From then on he wanted to spend his life with her

Elle s’en est rendu compte **aussitôt**
**Ensuite** il ne s’est rien passé

She realized immediately
Afterwards nothing happened

**Entre-temps** elle avait rencontré quelqu’un d’autre
Son sourire n’a plus été le même **par la suite**

Meanwhile she had met someone else
His smile was never the same afterwards
 Nous avons parlé longtemps  
Le bureau occupe deux étages, naguère habités  
Quelquefois on me conduisait à Roubaix  
J’ai souvent voulu le faire  
Sors tout de suite

§5.6 Types of adverbs

Nous avons parlé longtemps  
Le bureau occupe deux étages, naguère habités  
Quelquefois on me conduisait à Roubaix  
J’ai souvent voulu le faire  
Sors tout de suite

5.6.9 **alors**

*alors* has two distinct adverbial uses. One as a time adverb meaning ‘then, at that time’:

Il était *alors* directeur d’une petite agence immobilière en province  
*At that time he was the manager of a small provincial estate agency*

In this use it can appear in the middle of a clause, as in the above example (for the position of adverbs see 5.7).

Its other use is as a sentence-modifying adverb meaning ‘so’, which occurs at the beginning of a clause. This use is as frequent in spoken French as ‘so’ is in spoken English:

**Alors**, quoi de neuf?  
**Alors**, qu’est-ce que tu en penses?

5.6.10 **encore** and **toujours**

*encore* and *toujours* have several meanings, and overlap in one of those meanings, which makes them difficult for the learner. Both *encore* and *toujours* can mean ‘still’ in clauses which express an ongoing state of affairs:

Est-il *encore/toujours* là?  
(His being here is an ongoing state of affairs)  
Elle se plaint *encore/toujours*  
(Her complaining is an ongoing state of affairs)

In clauses which describe a completed action, or the potential for the completion of an action, however, *encore* means ‘again’:

Il a *encore* perdu sa clef  
(His losing of the key is a completed action)  
J’ai peur de m’évanouir *encore*  
(Although I haven’t done so yet, fainting has the potential for being a completed action)

Note that if *encore* modifies the first clause, which expresses a state of affairs, it could mean either ‘still’ or ‘again’: *j’ai encore perdu de m’évanouir* ‘I’m still afraid of fainting’ or ‘Once again I am afraid of fainting’.

Where *encore* modifies noun phrases or other adverbs it means ‘still more, further’:

**Encore** du pain, s’il vous plaît  
Ils ont roulé *encore* dix ou vingt kilomètres  
Elle est *encore* plus douée que sa sœur

*More bread, please*  
*They travelled a further ten or twenty kilometres*  
*She is even more gifted than her sister*
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J’aime encore mieux votre idée que la mienne
I like your idea even more than mine

toujours, in addition to meaning ‘still’, can also mean ‘always’:

Elles ont toujours refusé de me parler
They have always refused to talk to me

On s’efforçait depuis toujours de me le cacher
They had always tried to hide it from me

In sentences negated by pas, if toujours precedes the pas it means ‘still’, if it follows it means ‘always’:

Il n’est toujours pas arrivé  He still hasn’t arrived
Il n’est pas toujours arrivé  He didn’t always arrive/turn up

encore can only follow pas and means ‘yet’:

Il n’est pas encore arrivé  He hasn’t yet arrived

5.6.11 ensuite and puis

ensuite and puis both mean ‘afterwards, then’, but ensuite is a time adverb which can occur in the middle of a clause (for the position of adverbs see 5.7), while puis is a coordinating conjunction which can occur only at the beginning of a clause (see Chapter 17.2):

Il a payé l’addition, et il est ensuite parti
He paid the bill, and afterwards left

Il a payé l’addition, puis il est parti
He paid the bill, then he left

5.6.12 jamais

jamais is mostly used with ne to mean ‘never’ (see Chapter 16.9). It can, however, also mean ‘ever’ in questions, in si- clauses or when it is a complement to sans:

As-tu jamais vu une chose pareille?
Have you ever seen anything like it?

Si jamais tu rencontres Jules, tu lui diras bonjour de ma part
If you ever meet Jules, say hello to him from me

Il a fait cet exercice cent fois sans jamais se tromper
He’s done that exercise a hundred times without ever making a mistake

5.6.13 tard versus en retard

Both of these terms translate as ‘late’ into English. However, en retard is restricted in meaning to the idea of ‘not on time’:

Tu es de nouveau en retard. Tu resteras après l’école
You are late again. You’ll stay behind after school
tard has a wider range of meaning:

Il est déjà **tard**, nous devons rentrer
It’s already late, we must go home

Pour toi, il est trop **tard**. Tu aurais dû le faire il y a plusieurs années
For you it’s too late. You should have done it several years ago

Il n’est jamais trop **tard**
It’s never too late

### 5.6.14 tout à l’heure

The meaning of **tout à l’heure** is determined by the tense of the verb in the clause which contains it. If the verb is in a past tense it means ‘just now’; if the verb is in a present or future tense it means ‘presently’:

Je suis arrivé **tout à l’heure**
I arrived just now

Elle va arriver **tout à l’heure**
She will arrive presently

### 5.6.15 Choice of some time adverbs relative to the moment of speaking

The meaning of some time adverbs is determined by their relation to the time of speaking. If someone says:

Je suis arrivé **hier**
I arrived yesterday

**hier** refers to the day before the day on which the person is speaking. Similarly, if someone says:

J’arriverai **demain**
I'll arrive tomorrow

**demain** refers to the day after the day on which the person is speaking. By contrast, if someone says:

Je suis arrivé **la veille**
I arrived the day before

they are referring to a day before some point prior to the time when they are speaking. Similarly in:

Je suis arrivé **le lendemain**
I arrived the day after

**le lendemain** refers to the day after some point prior to the moment of speaking.

Different series of adverbs must be used depending on whether they refer to before or after the actual moment of speaking, or whether they refer to before or after some point prior to the moment of speaking. Examples are presented in Tables 5.D and 5.E.
### TABLE 5.D Adverbs and time reference 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More distant past</th>
<th>Recent past</th>
<th>Concurrent with the time of speaking</th>
<th>Near future</th>
<th>More distant future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>avant-hier</td>
<td>hier</td>
<td>aujourd'hui</td>
<td>demain</td>
<td>après-demain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the day before</td>
<td>yesterday</td>
<td>today</td>
<td>tomorrow</td>
<td>the day after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alors</td>
<td>maintenant</td>
<td>bientôt</td>
<td></td>
<td>tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>then</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hier matin</td>
<td>ce matin</td>
<td>demain matin</td>
<td>demain matin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hier midi</td>
<td>ce midi</td>
<td>demain midi</td>
<td>demain midi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hier après-midi</td>
<td>cet après-midi</td>
<td>demain après-midi</td>
<td>demain soir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hier soir</td>
<td>ce soir</td>
<td>demain soir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yesterday</td>
<td>this morning,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>midday, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autrefois</td>
<td>tout à l'heure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>à l'avenir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jadis (literary)</td>
<td>just now</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formerly</td>
<td>récemment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dernièrement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>naguère</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5.E Adverbs and time reference 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More distant past</th>
<th>Recent past</th>
<th>Prior to the time of speaking</th>
<th>Near future</th>
<th>More distant future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>l'avant-veille</td>
<td>la veille</td>
<td>ce jour-là</td>
<td>le lendemain</td>
<td>le surlendemain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the day before</td>
<td>the day before</td>
<td>that day</td>
<td>the day after</td>
<td>the day after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>la veille au matin</td>
<td>ce matin-là</td>
<td>le lendemain</td>
<td>le lendemain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the morning of the day</td>
<td>that morning</td>
<td>matin</td>
<td>midi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>la veille à midi</td>
<td>ce midi-là</td>
<td>le lendemain</td>
<td>le lendemain midi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>midday of the day</td>
<td>that midday</td>
<td>midi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dans l'après-midi de</td>
<td>cet après-midi-</td>
<td>dans l'après-</td>
<td>dans l'après-midi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>la veille</td>
<td>là</td>
<td>midi du</td>
<td>midi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the afternoon of the</td>
<td>that afternoon</td>
<td>lendemain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>day before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>la veille au soir</td>
<td>ce soir-là</td>
<td>le lendemain</td>
<td>le lendemain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the evening of the</td>
<td>that evening</td>
<td>soir</td>
<td>soir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>day before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5.6.16 Place adverbs

Adverbs which describe the place where an event occurs are place adverbs:

- **J’entends des pas précipités **dehors  
  *I hear hurried steps outside*

- **On m’a tiré en arrière**  
  *I was pulled backwards*

**TABLE 5.F Typical place adverbs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical place adverbs</th>
<th>en amont</th>
<th>en aval</th>
<th>upstream</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ailleurs</td>
<td>elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
<td>en amont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dehors</td>
<td>outside</td>
<td></td>
<td>en aval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en dedans</td>
<td>inside</td>
<td></td>
<td>upstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au-dedans</td>
<td>inwardly; facing inwards</td>
<td>en avant</td>
<td>downstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>là-dedans</td>
<td>on the inside</td>
<td></td>
<td>en arrière</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in there</td>
<td></td>
<td>in/at the front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in/at the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dehors</td>
<td>outside</td>
<td>ici</td>
<td>here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en dehors</td>
<td>outwardly; facing outwards</td>
<td>en avant</td>
<td>in/at the front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au-dehors</td>
<td>on the outside</td>
<td></td>
<td>in/at the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derrière</td>
<td>behind</td>
<td>là</td>
<td>there (used a lot to mean here: ‘I’m here’ Je suis là)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par derrière</td>
<td>from behind</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dessous</td>
<td>underneath, on the bottom</td>
<td>loin</td>
<td>far away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en dessous</td>
<td>beneath, on the back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au-dessous</td>
<td>below</td>
<td></td>
<td>everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par-dessous</td>
<td>underneath (implying motion: passer par-dessous ‘to go underneath’)</td>
<td>partout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dessus</td>
<td>over, on the top</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en dessus</td>
<td>on the top, on the front</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au-dessus</td>
<td>above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par-dessus</td>
<td>across (sauter par-dessous ‘to jump across’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ci-contre</td>
<td>opposite (on a page)</td>
<td>près</td>
<td>nearby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ci-dessous</td>
<td>below (in a piece of writing: voir ci-dessous ‘see below’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ci-dessus</td>
<td>above (voir ci-dessus ‘see above’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ci-après</td>
<td>later</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ci-devant</td>
<td>earlier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en bas</td>
<td>(down) below</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en haut</td>
<td>(up) above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adverbs §5.6

Representative examples:

Nous voulons habiter ailleurs
We want to live elsewhere
Vous entrez dedans
You go inside
Quelqu’un, dehors, s’est inquiété
Someone, outside, got nervous
Derrière il y a un champ de betteraves
Behind there is a beet field
Vous trouverez l’étiquette dessous
You’ll find the label on the bottom
L’adresse est marquée dessus
The address is written on the top
bras dessus bras dessous
arm in arm
On a laissé des papiers un peu partout
Papers were left almost everywhere

5.6.17 Sentence-modifying adverbs

Sentence-modifying adverbs fall into two types. Those which establish a link between what has been said already and what is being said now:

La porte de la pièce est fermée. Je l’ai pourtant laissée ouverte derrière moi
The door to the room is closed. Yet I left it open behind me (pourtant highlights the contrast between a previous state of affairs and the current state of affairs)

Les arguments en faveur de cette ligne politique sont clairs. Nous devons donc la suivre de près
The arguments in favour of this policy are clear. Therefore we should follow it closely (donc signals a causal link between the first sentence and the second)

The second group of sentence-modifying adverbs express the speaker’s assessment of the probability or desirability of the event described by the sentence being true:

Elle était pauvre, probablement
She was probably poor
(probablement is the speaker’s judgement of the likelihood of her being poor)

Je n’ai malheureusement pas pu venir
Unfortunately I wasn’t able to come
(malheureusement is an expression of the speaker’s regret at not being able to come)

See Table 5.G for typical cases.

Representative examples:

J’ai beaucoup travaillé pour terminer à temps. Cependant, ils n’ont pas voulu me payer mon treizième mois
I worked very hard to finish in time. Yet they refused to pay me my bonus

M Bergamote a expliqué la situation très clairement. En effet, nous devrons prendre une décision aujourd’hui même
Mr Bergamote explained the situation very clearly. Indeed, we must take a decision this very day

Le ski est un excellent sport pour ceux qui sont en pleine santé. En revanche, il n’est pas recommandé pour les gens qui ont les articulations fragiles
Skiing is an excellent sport for those in good health. On the other hand, it is not recommended for those with weak joints

Le bateau a coulé au mois de juin. Néanmoins, la compagnie d’assurance établissait toujours les faits au mois de décembre
The boat sank in June. Nonetheless, the insurance company was still trying to establish the facts in December

Mon fils ne m’écrit jamais. Sa sœur, par contre, me tient au courant de tout ce qu’elle fait
My son never writes to me. His sister, on the other hand, keeps me informed of everything she is doing
Alors, que préférait-elle?  
So, what did she prefer?

Ils me répondraient, bien sûr, que j’aurais pu le faire depuis longtemps  
They would reply, of course, that I could have done it long before

**TABLE 5.G** Typical sentence-linking and speaker-oriented adverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical sentence-linking adverbs</th>
<th>Typical speaker-oriented adverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ainsi so, in the same way</td>
<td>alors so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(can also be a manner adverb – see 5.6.1)</td>
<td>(can also be a time adverb – see 5.6.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au contraire conversely</td>
<td>assurément surely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aussi so, thus</td>
<td>bien sûr of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(can also be a degree adverb – see 5.6.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cependant yet</td>
<td>certainement certainly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d’ailleurs moreover, what’s more</td>
<td>certes certainly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encore for all that</td>
<td>du moins at least</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(can also be a time adverb – see 5.6.8)</td>
<td>(expresses the speaker’s reservation – <em>au moins</em> is a degree adverb (see 5.6.2) used when ‘at least’ is concrete: <em>au moins dix fois</em> ‘at least ten times’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en effet indeed</td>
<td>en général in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en revanche on the contrary</td>
<td>évidemment evidently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en somme in sum, briefly</td>
<td>heureusement fortunately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>néanmoins nonetheless</td>
<td>peut-être perhaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par conséquent consequently</td>
<td>probablement probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en conséquence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>par contre on the other hand</td>
<td>sans doute doubtlessly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plutôt rather</td>
<td>seulement only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pourtant yet</td>
<td>soit so be it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quand même all the same</td>
<td>sûrement surely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toutefois nevertheless</td>
<td>vraisemblablement in all likelihood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Je n’aurais certainement pas pu le comprendre  
I certainly couldn’t have understood it

Elle ne s’en doutait certes pas  
She certainly didn’t suspect it

Le prof a du moins cette qualité qu’il articule bien  
The teacher has at least this quality, that he speaks very clearly

C’est sans doute un ami  
He’s probably a friend

Il a entrepris cette démarche avec de très bonnes intentions. Seulement, il ne possédait pas les connaissances requises  
He took these steps with the very best of intentions. Only he didn’t have the knowledge required
5.7 Location of adverbs

5.7.1 Location of adverbs modifying adjectives, prepositions, noun phrases and other adverbs

Adverbs which modify adjectives, prepositions, noun phrases, and other adverbs appear immediately in front of those items:

- **Je ne suis pas **vraiment mauvais (modifying an adjective)
  
  *I'm not really bad*

- **Nous irons **loin au-delà de la frontière (modifying a preposition)
  
  *We'll go far beyond the frontier*

- **Il y a **au moins dix ans (modifying a noun phrase)
  
  *At least ten years ago*

- **Je suis ici depuis **très longtemps (modifying an adverb)
  
  *I have been here for a very long time*

5.7.2 Location of adverbs modifying verb phrases

Adverbs which modify the verb phrase (manner, degree, some time and place adverbs) and adverbs which modify the sentence may have several possible locations.

Manner, degree and time adverbs which consist of just one word usually immediately follow the tense-marked verb:

- **Elle a **soigneusement étendu son tailleur sur le lit
  
  *She carefully laid out her suit on the bed*

- **On ramène **parfois des souvenirs
  
  *We sometimes bring back souvenirs*

- **J’ai souvent voulu le faire
  
  *I have often wanted to do it*

- **Ils ont **beaucoup discuté pendant le weekend
  
  *They discussed a lot during the weekend*

- **Il a **mal lu l’étiquette
  
  *He misread the label*

- **Elles ont toujours refusé de me parler
  
  *They have always refused to talk to me*

**NB:** With verbs in simple tenses it is normal in French for these adverbs to occur between the verb and its complement, but not between the subject and the verb: the reverse is the case in English:

- **On ramène **parfois des souvenirs
  
  *NOT*  
  
  *On parfois ramène des souvenirs*

- **Je veux souvent le faire
  
  *NOT*  
  
  *Je souvent veux le faire*

- **Elles refusent toujours de me parler
  
  *NOT*  
  
  *Elles toujours refusent de me parler*
Usually manner, degree and time adverbs consisting of just one word and modifying the verb phrase can also appear at the end of the clause:

Elle a étendu son tailleur **soigneusement**
On ramène des souvenirs **parfois**

But some appear most naturally in a clause-internal position after the verb. This tends to be the case for short monosyllabic adverbs: **bien**, **mal**, **vite**, **trop**, **tant**. An exception, though, is time adverbs which designate specific moments in the past or future: **hier** ‘yesterday’, **demain** ‘tomorrow’, **la veille** ‘the day before’, and so on. These usually appear at the beginning or the end of a clause, not in the middle:

J’ai ramassé les clefs **hier**  
*or*  
**Hier** j’ai ramassé les clefs

**La veille** elle avait vendu sa maison  
*or*  
Elle avait vendu sa maison **la veille**

Adverbs of manner, degree and time which consist of more than a single word, together with place adverbs as a class, usually come at the beginning or end of a clause, not in the middle:

Il a emporté le dossier à **dessein**  

**He took the file away on purpose**

**Ici** tout le monde fait la vaisselle  

**Everybody does the washing-up here**

**Nous voulons habiter ailleurs**  

**We want to live elsewhere**

**Derrière** il y a un champ de betteraves  

**Behind there is a beet field**

**Vous trouverez l’étiquette dessous**  

**You’ll find the label on the bottom**

**On a laissé des papiers un peu partout**  

**Papers were left almost everywhere**

It is always possible, however, for such adverbs to occur clause-externally with heavy pausing on either side (indicated by commas in written French). This has the effect of stressing the adverb:

J’ai ramassé, **hier**, les clefs  

**Quelqu’un, dehors, s’est inquiété**

Il y a, **derrière**, un champ de betteraves

### 5.7.3 Location of adverbs modifying sentences

Sentence-modifying adverbs can usually appear at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of clauses:

La porte de la pièce est fermée. Je l’ai **pourtant** laissée ouverte derrière moi/ **Pourtant** je l’ai laissée ouverte derrière moi/ **Je l’ai laissée ouverte derrière moi pourtant**

*The door to the room is closed. Yet I left it open behind me*

Il s’ensuit **donc** que nous devons la suivre de près/ **Donc** il s’ensuit que nous devons la suivre de près/ **Il s’ensuit que nous devons la suivre de près donc**

*It follows, therefore, that we should follow it closely*

**Malheureusement**, je n’ai pas pu venir/ **Je n’ai malheureusement pas pu venir**/ **Je n’ai pas pu venir malheureusement**

*Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to come*
There is a tendency in French not to put short constituents at the end of a sentence where a long constituent precedes. This can sometimes determine a preferred location for adverbs. For example, it is less natural to say:

Il s’ensuit que nous devons la suivre de près donc

where the short donc is in sentence-final position and is preceded by the long constituent que nous devons la suivre de près, than:

Il s’ensuit donc que nous devons la suivre de près

In a sentence such as:

On a laissé des papiers partout

the place adverb partout would normally appear at the end of the clause, rather than in the middle. But if the direct object is made longer, it becomes more natural to put it at the end, leaving partout in the middle:

On a laissé partout des papiers couverts de gribouillis

They left papers covered in doodles lying about everywhere

5.7.4 Inversion of subject and verb after some sentence-initial adverbs

In formal written French, a small set of adverbs (drawn from several of the classes described in this chapter) may provoke subject-verb inversion when they occur in sentence-initial position. Inversion is likely with the following adverbs:

A peine Pierre s’est-il assis qu’on lui a demandé de se déplacer

Hardly had Pierre sat down when he was asked to move

Peut-être Alice arrivera-t-elle demain

Perhaps Alice will arrive tomorrow

Sans doute vous a-t-elle écrit

Doubtless she has written to you

Toujours est-il que je ne peux pas vous payer

The fact remains that I cannot pay you

(For the properties of subject-verb inversion see Chapter 14.2.3.)

An alternative in the case of peut-être and sans doute is the use of a following que without inversion:

Peut-être qu’Alice arrivera demain

Sans doute qu’elle vous a écrit

In spoken French peut-être que and sans doute que are frequent, but inversion is not, speakers locating the adverbs in a different position, or simply not inverting after the adverb.
Other adverbs after which inversion is possible (but less likely) in formal written French are:

Ainsi a-t-elle gagné le prix  
*In that way she won the prize*

Il n’a plus d’argent; aussi doit-il rentrer  
*He has no more money; so he must go home*

Du moins ont-ils gardé leur calme  
*At least they kept their cool*

Encore ne suis-je là que pour prendre des notes  
*For all that, I’m here just to take notes*

En vain a-t-il cherché  
*In vain he searched*

Rarement trouve-t-on une affaire pareille  
*Rarely does one find such a bargain*
6 Numbers, measurements, time and quantifiers

6.1 Cardinal numbers

Numbers like *un*, *deux*, *trois*, etc., are called cardinal numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>zéro</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>un</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>deux</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>trois</td>
<td>three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>quatre</td>
<td>four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>cinq</td>
<td>five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>six</td>
<td>six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>sept</td>
<td>seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>huit</td>
<td>eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>neuf</td>
<td>nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>dix</td>
<td>ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>onze</td>
<td>eleven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Un* (masculine) is used in contexts like the following: *il porte le numéro ‘un’*, ‘He is wearing the number “one”’; *à la page un*, ‘on page one’; *la partie un*, ‘part one’. It is also used as a masculine pronoun: *As-tu un stylo? Pierre en a un* ‘Have you got a pen? Pierre has one’. *Une* (feminine) is used as a feminine pronoun: *Il ne m’en reste qu’une (carte postale)*, ‘I’ve only got one left (postcard)’. NB: *à la une* ‘on the front page’.

*Quatre* is invariable and never takes a plural -s: *les quatre chats* ‘the four cats’.

The final *q* of *cinq* is always pronounced [k], except when it precedes *cent*, where it is not pronounced: *cinq cents*.

*Six* is pronounced with a final [s] when it is at the end of a phrase: *j’en ai vu six* ‘I saw six’; it is pronounced with a final [z] when it precedes a noun beginning with a vowel: *six hommes* ‘six men’. When it precedes a noun beginning with a consonant the *x* is not pronounced: *six joueurs* ‘six players’.

*Huit* is pronounced with a final [t] when it is at the end of a phrase: *j’en ai vu huit* ‘I saw eight’, and when it precedes a noun beginning with a vowel: *huit entreprises ont fermé* ‘eight firms have closed’. When it precedes a noun beginning with a consonant the *i* is not pronounced: *huit semaines plus tard* ‘eight weeks later’.

*Neuf* is pronounced with a final [f] except in *neuf ans* ‘nine years’ and *neuf heures* ‘nine hours, nine o’clock’ where it is pronounced [v].

The pronunciation of *dix* is the same as for *six*.

Forms of *le* and *de* do not shorten before *onze*: *le onze janvier* ‘the eleventh of January’, (NOT ‘l’onze janvier), *le train de onze heures* ‘the eleven o’clock train’. In plural expressions like *les onze membres d’une équipe de football* ‘the eleven members of a football team’, the final *s* of *les* or *des* is not pronounced.
§6.1 Cardinal numbers

12 douze  
   *douze* is invariable, and never takes a plural -s: *douze hommes* 'twelve men'.

13 treize

14 quatorze

15 quinze

16 seize

17 dix-sept

18 dix-huit  
The pronunciation of *dix-huit* is the same as for *huit*.

19 dix-neuf  
The pronunciation of *dix-neuf* is the same as for *neuf*.

20 vingt  
   *vingt* is pronounced like *vin*, with the following exceptions: it is pronounced with a final [t] when it precedes a noun beginning with a vowel: *vingt exercices* 'twenty exercises', and also in the numbers 21–29 inclusive.

21 vingt et un  
   *vingt et un(e), trente et un(e), quarante et un(e)*, etc. are used in similar ways to *un(e)*; *un(e)* agrees with the gender of a following noun: *vingt et un joueurs* 'twenty-one players', *vingt et une voitures* 'twenty-one cars'.

22 vingt-deux

23 vingt-trois

...  

29 vingt-neuf

30 trente

31 trente et un

32 trente-deux

...  

39 trente-neuf

40 quarante

41 quarante et un

42 quarante-deux

...  

49 quarante-neuf

50 cinquante

51 cinquante et un

52 cinquante-deux

...  

59 cinquante-neuf

60 soixante

61 soixante et un

62 soixante-deux

...  

69 soixante-neuf

70 soixante-dix  
   In Belgian and Swiss French the word *septante* is used instead of *soixante-dix*: *septante et un, septante-deux*, etc.

71 soixante et onze

72 soixante-douze

73 soixante-treize

...  

79 soixante-dix-neuf
§6.1

80 quatre-vingts
81 quatre-vingt-un
82 quatre-vingt-deux

The [t] of vingt is NOT pronounced.

89 quatre-vingt-neuf
90 quatre-vingt-dix

In Belgian and Swiss French the word nonante is used instead of quatre-vingt-dix: nonante-un, nonante-deux, etc.

91 quatre-vingt-onze
92 quatre-vingt-douze
93 quatre-vingt-treize

The [t] of vingt is NOT pronounced.

99 quatre-vingt-dix-neuf
100 cent

‘one hundred, a hundred’ is simply cent: ‘a hundred times’ cent fois

cent une réponses ‘a hundred and one answers’. The [t] of cent is NOT pronounced.

101 cent un
102 cent deux

111 cent onze

The [t] of cent is NOT pronounced in cent un, cent huit, cent onze, but it is pronounced when followed by a non-numeral noun beginning with a vowel:
cent ans ‘a hundred years’.

200 deux cents
201 deux cent un
202 deux cent deux

1 000 mille

‘one thousand, a thousand’ is simply mille: ‘a thousand times’ mille fois

1 001 mille un

You will hear the idiom (j’ai) mille et une choses à faire ‘(I’ve) a thousand and one things to do’. This is not meant as a precise figure.

1 100 onze cents or mille cent

There are two ways of describing numbers between 1 100 and 1 999: onze cents or mille cent (1 100);
dix huit cent soixante or mille huit cent soixante (1 860);
dix-neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf or mille neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf (1 999), etc.

1 101 onze cent un or mille cent un

1 200 douze cents or mille
deuex cents
1 201 douze cent un or mille deux cent un

1 500 quinze cents or
mille cinq cents

2 000 deux mille
2 001 deux mille un
2 101 deux mille cent un
1 000 000  un million
1 201 101  un million deux un
cent mille cent un
1 000 000 000  un milliard

6.1.1 *et* in cardinal numbers

*et* is used for cardinal numbers ending in -1 between 21 and 71 inclusive (note the absence of hyphens):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>vingt et un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>trente et un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>quarante et un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>cinquante et un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>soixante et un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>soixante et onze</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*et* is NOT used in numbers ending in -1 between 81 and 101 inclusive (note the use of hyphens in the case of 81 and 91), nor in 1 001, 1 000 001 and 1 000 000 001:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>quatre-vingt-un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>quatre-vingt-onze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>cent un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 001</td>
<td>mille un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 000 001</td>
<td>un million un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 000 000 001</td>
<td>un milliard un</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1.2 Hyphens in written cardinal numbers

Compound cardinal numbers less than 100 are linked by hyphen (other than those ending in -1 between 21 and 71 inclusive):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>dix-sept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>dix-huit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>dix-neuf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>vingt-deux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>vingt-trois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But cardinal numbers of 100 and above are not linked to other numbers by hyphen, in compound numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>cent un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>cent deux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192</td>
<td>cent quatre-vingt-douze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 340</td>
<td>dix mille trois cent quarante</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1.3 Plurals in cardinal numbers

The numbers quatre-vingts and deux cents, trois cents, quatre cents, etc., take a plural -s in the written language when they are used in isolation or phrase-final position:

J’en ai vu quatre-vingts  
I saw eighty
La capacité de la salle est de huit cents  
The room can hold eight hundred

and when they precede non-numeral nouns:

trois cents visiteurs  
three hundred visitors
quatre-vingts candidats  
eighty applicants

However, when these numbers precede other numerals, there is generally no plural -s:

quatre-vingt-deux
quatre-vingt-trois

deuX cent deux
deux cent trois

trois cent mille

unless those numerals are millions or milliards:

deuX cents millions d’habitants  
two hundred million inhabitants
cinquant cent milliards de francs  
five hundred billion francs

mille never takes a plural -s:

mille personnes  
a thousand people
dix mille gagnants  
ten thousand winners
deux mille vingt lecteurs  
two thousand and twenty readers

When quatre-vingts or cent are used in phrases such as à la page quatre-vingt ‘on page 80’, à la page trois cent ‘on page 300’ they are generally written without a final -s.

6.1.4 When to use figures and when to use words

Numbers are usually written in words, except in the following cases:

in scientific or academic texts
in dates: Elle est arrivée le 25 mars 1996 ‘She arrived on the 25th of March 1996’
in prices: Cela coûte 32 euros ‘That costs 32 euros’
in weights and measures: Il mesure 1 mètre 50 ‘He is 1 metre 50 tall’
describing kings and queens: Henri IV ‘Henry the Fourth’
in percentages: 12 pour cent ‘12 per cent’
6.1.5 Conventions for writing cardinal numbers in figures

Where English uses a comma to separate hundreds from thousands, and thousands from millions, French normally uses spaces; and where English uses a full stop to separate whole numbers from decimals, French normally uses a comma:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63,321</td>
<td>63 321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>412,633,221</td>
<td>412 633 221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£4.50</td>
<td>4,50 EUR/4,50€</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In speech, the English ‘four point five’ is quatre virgule cinq.

(For money, see 6.8.)

6.1.6 nombre, chiffre and numéro

nombre refers to a number as a concept:

Pensez à un nombre
nombres entiers
un nombre cardinal

Le nombre de femmes qui fument a augmenté

The number of women who smoke has increased

chiffre refers to the figures or digits which make up a number; it can also be used to mean ‘statistics’:

Ecrire un nombre en chiffres et en lettres

To write a number in figures and words

Ces chiffres ne reflètent pas la situation exacte

These figures do not reflect the real situation

numéro refers to a numbered entity:

un numéro de téléphone
le numéro d’une maison
Il porte le numéro un
un numéro d’immatriculation

a telephone number
a house number
He’s wearing the number one
a car number plate

6.1.7 Necessity to use en when numbers are direct objects

The pronoun en must be inserted before the verb when a number on its own (or followed by an adjective, e.g. deux grands) is a direct object:

J’en prends deux (grands), s’il vous plaît
I’ll take two (big ones), please

Elle lui en a offert une douzaine
She offered him a dozen
This is not the case, however, when a number alone (or followed by an adjective) is a subject:

Deux (grands) ont disparu  
Two (big ones) have disappeared
Une douzaine me suffira  
A dozen will be enough for me

*en* must be similarly inserted before the verb when quantifiers like *quelques-uns*, *plusieurs* and *certains* stand alone as direct objects:

J’en ai encore quelques-uns  
I still have a few
J’en ai encore plusieurs  
I still have several
J’en ai encore certains  
I still have some

(For quantifiers, see 6.9.)

### 6.1.8 Non-agreement of direct object numerals with *coûter*, *peser*, *mesurer*

Although past participles normally agree with preceding direct objects (see Chapter 9.3.1), including direct objects involving numerals:

Les cinq cents euros que j’ai gagnés  
The five hundred euros I won

with the verbs *coûter* ‘cost’, *peser* ‘weigh’, *mesurer* ‘measure’, and other measure verbs, numerals are normally adverbs rather than direct objects, so there is no agreement when the numeral precedes the past participle:

Les cinq cents euros que cela m’a coûté  
The five hundred euros which that cost me

(See Chapter 9.3.5.)

### 6.1.9 Simple arithmetic (*le calcul*)

- trois et quatre font sept  
  \(3 + 4 = 7\)
- trois moins un égale deux  
  \(3 - 1 = 2\)
- deux fois cinq font dix  
  \(2 \times 5 = 10\)
- dix divisé par deux égale cinq  
  \(10 \div 2 = 5\)

NB: As in English, the verbs can vary between singular and plural: *trois et quatre fait/font sept* ‘three plus four makes/make seven’.
### 6.2 Ordinal numbers

Numbers like *premier, deuxième, troisième*, etc., are called ordinal numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;er&lt;/sup&gt;/1&lt;sup&gt;ère&lt;/sup&gt; premier, première</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>2e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>3e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>4e</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>5e</td>
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<td>6th</td>
<td>6e</td>
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<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>7e</td>
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<td>8th</td>
<td>8e</td>
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<td>9th</td>
<td>9e</td>
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<td>10th</td>
<td>10e</td>
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<td>20th</td>
<td>20e</td>
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<td>21st</td>
<td>21e</td>
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<td>22nd</td>
<td>22e</td>
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<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
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<tr>
<td>40th</td>
<td>40e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41st</td>
<td>41e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70th</td>
<td>70e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71st</td>
<td>71e</td>
</tr>
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<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80th</td>
<td>80e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81st</td>
<td>81e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th</td>
<td>90e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91th</td>
<td>91e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100th</td>
<td>100e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000th</td>
<td>1000e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 Fractions

6.3.1 Ordinal numbers as fractions

The majority of fractions can be constructed from the ordinal numbers, and are masculine in gender. They are usually introduced by the definite article (as opposed to the indefinite article or absence of article in English):

- **Le cinquième des élèves ont été recalés**
  *A fifth of the pupils have failed*

- **Les sept dixièmes de la population du monde sont pauvres**
  *Seven-tenths of the world’s population are poor*

Another way of expressing these figures is: **Un sur cinq des élèves a échoué** ‘One in five pupils has failed’; **Sept sur dix personnes de la population du monde sont pauvres** ‘Seven out of ten people in the world are poor’.

6.3.2 ‘half’, ‘third’, ‘quarter’

‘Half’, ‘third’, ‘quarter’ have their own names. ‘Half’ is translated by *la moitié* (de) when it is a noun (i.e. is followed by *de* or stands alone):

- **La moitié des conducteurs ont dépassé la limite de vitesse**
  *Half of all drivers have broken the speed limit*

- **La moitié seront recyclés**
  *Half will be retrained*

However, ‘half’ is translated by *demi* when it is part of a hyphenated compound noun (and is invariable):

- un *demi-verre* de cognac
  *a half-glass of brandy*

- une *demi-heure*
  *a half an hour*

- la *demi-finale*
  *the semi-final*

It is also translated by *demi* in compounds involving *et*, but here it agrees with the preceding noun in gender:

- deux heures et *demie*
  *two and a half hours*

- un litre et *demi*
  *one and a half litres*

- deux kilos et *demi*
  *two and a half kilos*

Some compounds are constructed with invariable *mi*:

- la *mi-trimestre*
  *half-term*

- à *mi-chemin*
  *half-way*

- *mi-clos*
  *half-closed*

‘Third’ is translated by **tiers**:

- **Un tiers des étudiants ont des dettes**
  *A third of students are in debt*

- **Les deux tiers des blessés ont été évacués**
  *Two-thirds of the injured were evacuated*

NB: *le tiers monde* ‘the Third World’.
‘Quarter’ is translated by *quart*:

**Un quart** seulement des accidents ont lieu sur les autoroutes  
*Only a quarter of accidents happen on motorways*

**Les trois quarts** étaient des hommes  
*Three-quarters were men*

NB: Il est deux heures et *quart*  
*It’s quarter past two*

Il est deux heures moins le *quart*  
*It’s quarter to two*

*Cinq kilos et quart*  
*five and a quarter kilos*

(See 6.7 for time.)

### 6.3.3 Verb agreement with fractions

Verbs are usually plural when fractions are subjects and refer to plural entities:

Le cinquième (des élèves) **ont** été recalés  
*A fifth (of the pupils) have failed*

La moitié (des conducteurs) **ont** dépassé la limite de vitesse  
*Half (of all drivers) have broken the speed limit*

Un tiers (des étudiants) **ont** des dettes  
*A third (of students) are in debt*

Verbs are singular when fractions are subjects and refer to singular entities:

La moitié (de l’année) **est** déjà passée  
*Half (of the year) has already passed*

Un tiers (du livre) **reste** à écrire  
*A third (of the book) remains to be completed*

### 6.4 Some differences in the use of cardinal and ordinal numbers in French and English

#### 6.4.1 Dates

While English uses ordinal numbers in dates French uses cardinal numbers, with the exception of ‘first’, which is *premier*:

- **Le premier** janvier  
  *the first of January*
- **Le deux** février  
  *the second of February*
- **Le trois** mars  
  *the third of March*

In letter headings the normal way of writing dates is:

- Le 1er janvier 2015
- Le 2 février 2015
- Le 3 mars 2015
or where the day is included:

le lundi 1er janvier 2015  or  lundi, le 1er janvier 2015
le vendredi 2 février 2015  or  vendredi, le 2 février 2015

NB: Months and days are written with a lower case initial letter in French, but with a capital letter in English.

### 6.4.2 Kings, queens and popes

As with dates, where English uses ordinal numbers, French uses cardinal numbers, with the exception of ‘first’ *premier*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>François I</td>
<td>Francis the First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth I</td>
<td>Elizabeth the First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henri II</td>
<td>Henry the Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis XIV</td>
<td>Louis the Fourteenth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean XXIII</td>
<td>(Pope) John the Twenty-third</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4.3 Ordinal number abbreviations

The abbreviated forms of *premier*, *première* are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinal</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1er, 1ère</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

where *er* and *ère* are superscripts. The abbreviation for all other ordinal numbers is an *e* which can either be a superscript or a simple lower case letter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinal</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2e</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3e</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4e</td>
<td>4th etc.</td>
<td>4th etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4.4 Order of cardinal numbers and adjectives

In English, cardinal numbers follow adjectives:

*the last nine chapters*
*the other four guests*
*the first three winners*

In French they precede adjectives:

*les neuf derniers chapitres*
*les quatre autres invités*
*les trois premiers gagnants*

(See also Chapter 4.1.5.)

### 6.4.5 Page numbers, bus numbers, etc.

As in English, French page numbers, bus numbers and so on are cardinal numbers which follow the noun; *un* is invariable in this usage. *Quatre-vingt* and *cent* are written without an *s*. A definite article always accompanies the noun in French:

à la page un  on page one
Prenez le trente-deux  Catch the number 32
6.4 Addresses

Like English, address numbers are cardinal numbers in French. But the French for ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’ is bis, ter, quater:

12, rue Lamarck
12bis, rue Lamarck
12ter, rue Lamarck

NB: In addresses, rue, avenue, boulevard, etc., usually begin with lower case letters.

6.4.7 ‘hundreds’, ‘thousands’, ‘millions’ and ‘billions’

The numeral nouns centaine, millier, million, milliard are always followed by de when they are followed by other nouns:

- des centaines de personnes: hundreds of people
- des milliers de personnes: thousands of people
- un million de dollars: a million dollars
- des millions de personnes: millions of people
- cinq milliards de dollars: five billion dollars
- des milliards de personnes: billions of people
- des centaines de milliers de personnes: hundreds of thousands of people
- des centaines de millions de personnes: hundreds of millions of people

6.4.8 mille, milliers, milliards

These numbers are often confused by English speakers:

- mille ‘thousand’ is directly followed by a noun: mille euros ‘a thousand euros’
- des milliers ‘thousands’ is followed by de when followed by another noun: des milliers d’euros ‘thousands of euros’
- des milliards ‘billions’ is also followed by de when followed by another noun: des milliards d’euros ‘billions of euros’

6.4.9 ‘once’, ‘twice’, ‘three times’, etc.; ‘both’, ‘all three’, ‘all four’, etc.

Whereas English has the forms ‘once’, ‘twice’, then a regular pattern from ‘three’ onwards: ‘three times’, ‘four times’ etc., French has a fully regular pattern from ‘one’ on:

- une fois: once
- deux fois: twice
- trois fois: three times
- quatre fois: four times
- . . .
French has alternative forms for ‘both’, ‘all three’, ‘all four’, one with a definite article and one without (found only in formal written French); but from ‘all five’ onwards the definite article must be used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Form</th>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tous/toutes les deux</td>
<td>both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tous/toutes les trois</td>
<td>all three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tous/toutes les quatre</td>
<td>all four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tous/toutes les cinq</td>
<td>all five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tous/toutes les six</td>
<td>all six</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...  

Tous les deux sont arrivés  
Je les ai invitées toutes les six  

Both have arrived  
I invited all six  

NB: These expressions cannot precede a noun directly. To translate phrases like ‘both players’, ‘all six singers’, either use the definite article and a numeral alone: les deux joueurs, les six chanteuses:

Les deux joueurs sont arrivés  
J’ai invité les six chanteuses  

or, when the phrase is in subject position, move the tous/toutes (les) X to a position after the verb marked for tense:

Les joueurs sont tous deux arrivés

(See also 6.9.5.)

6.5 Measurements and comparisons

6.5.1 Numbers with length, height, depth etc.

With the verb être, numbers specifying length, height, depth, width, distance, thickness and so on, are preceded by de:

La piscine est longue de 50 mètres  
\(\text{La longueur de la piscine est de 50 mètres}\)  
\(\text{The swimming pool is 50 metres long}\)  

Cette tour est haute de 20 mètres  
\(\text{La hauteur de cette tour est de 20 mètres}\)  
\(\text{This tower is 20 metres high}\)  

Le lac est profond de 300 mètres  
\(\text{La profondeur du lac est de 300 mètres}\)  
\(\text{The lake is 300 metres deep}\)  

Le fleuve est large de 2 kilomètres à cet endroit  
\(\text{La largeur du fleuve à cet endroit est de 2 kilomètres}\)  
\(\text{The river is 2 kilometres wide at this point}\)  

Le mur est épais de 89 centimètres  
\(\text{L’épaisseur du mur est de 89 centimètres}\)  
\(\text{The wall is 89 centimetres thick}\)  

La distance de Londres à Paris est de 500 kilomètres  
\(\text{The distance from London to Paris is 500 kilometres}\)
For long, haut, large there is another way of expressing the same idea using the verbs faire and avoir; in this case de precedes long, haut, large, which remain invariable in form:

- La piscine fait/a 50 mètres de long
- Cette tour fait/a 20 mètres de haut
- Le fleuve fait/a 2 kilomètres de large

However, this structure can NOT be used with profond or épais.

With faire and avoir it is also possible to say La piscine fait (or a) 50 mètres de longueur, Cette tour fait (or a) 20 mètres de hauteur, Le fleuve fait (or a) 2 kilomètres de largeur, although the construction with the adjectives long, haut, large is probably more natural.

Profondeur and épaisseur are also possible in this construction: La piscine fait (or a) 2 mètres de profondeur, Le mur fait (or a) 89 centimètres d’épaisseur.

In talking about how tall people are, the verbs mesurer, faire are usually used:

- Je mesure 1,97 mètres  
  I am 1.97 metres tall
- Elle fait 1,80 mètres  
  She is 1.80 metres tall

The verbs mesurer, faire are the equivalent of English ‘is’ in describing dimensions:

- La table mesure (or fait) trois mètres sur deux  
  The table is three metres by two

### 6.5.2 Numbers in comparisons

When numbers figure in comparisons with the verb être, they are often preceded by de:

- Elle est mon aînée de six ans  
  She is six years older than me
- La fenêtre est trop grande de cinq centimètres  
  The window is five centimetres too big
- Elle est plus lourde de huit kilos  
  She is eight kilograms heavier

In some of these cases alternative expressions with avoir are possible:

- Elle a six ans de plus que moi  
  I have six years more than her
- J’ai six ans de moins qu’elle  
  I am six years younger than her

Translating ‘more than’ and ‘less than’ into French often causes English speakers some difficulty, because there are two possibilities:

- plus de  
  plus que
- moins de  
  moins que

plus de, moins de imply that there is a specific benchmark against which something is measured as being ‘more than’ or ‘less than’, and this is often a number:

- Elle gagne plus de 3 000 euros par mois  
  She earns more than 3,000 euros a month
- (3 000 euros is the benchmark – she earns more than this)
§6.5 Numbers, measurements, time and quantifiers

Il travaille moins de deux heures par jour
He works less than two hours a day
(deux heures is the benchmark – he works less than this)

Interdit aux moins de 15 ans
Not suitable for children under fifteen
(15 ans is the benchmark – below this age, children are not allowed)

plus que, moins que imply a comparison between one person or thing and another, without a specific benchmark being mentioned:

Elle gagne plus que moi
She earns more than me
(how much I earn isn’t specified – but she earns more)

Il travaille moins que son frère
He works less than his brother
(how much his brother works isn’t specified – but he works less)

The difference between the two can be illustrated in the following pair of sentences:

Elle a réuni plus de cinquante de ses collègues pour la fête
She got more than fifty of her colleagues together for the party
(cinquante de ses collègues is the benchmark – she managed to persuade more colleagues than this to come)

Elle a gagné plus que tous ses collègues ensemble pendant l’année
She earned more than all her colleagues during the year
(her colleagues earned an unspecified amount during the year – however much it was, she earned more than this)

NB: The following expressions compare one measurement with another:

quatre mètres sur trois
four metres by three
un Français sur sept
one French person in seven
une chose à la fois
one thing at a time
20% par an
20% a year
deux heures par jour
two hours a day

‘miles per gallon’ is measured in French by the number of litres consumed per hundred kilometres: dix litres aux cent (kilomètres) (roughly 30 miles per gallon).

6.5.3 Numeral nouns and approximations

The following numeral nouns describe approximate, rather than specific, numbers:

une dizaine
ten or so
une quinzaine
fifteen or so
une vingtaine
twenty or so
une trentaine
thirty or so
une quarantaine
forty or so
une cinquantaine
fifty or so
une soixantaine
sixty or so
une centaine
a hundred or so

Je reviendrai dans une quinzaine (une huitaine) de jours
I’ll come back in about a fortnight (a week) or so
Il a environ **la trentaine**
*He is thirty something*

Elle a **une quarantaine** d’années
*She is in her forties*

J’approche de **la cinquantaine**
*I’m approaching my fifties*

**une douzaine** (**une demi-douzaine**), however, means ‘a dozen (a half-dozen)’ exactly: **une douzaine d’œufs** ‘a dozen eggs’.

A variety of other expressions, when used with numbers, also express approximations:

Ça coûte **environ** 300€/à **peu près** 300€/**dans les** 300€/**près de** 300€
*That costs around/about/nearly 300 euros*

Il a **cinquante ans** et quelques
*He is over fifty*

Il a **autour de** cinquante ans
*He is around fifty*

Elle **va sur ses** vingt-six ans
*She is going on twenty-six*

Je l’ai rencontrée **il y a** quelque trente ans
*I met her about thirty years ago*

Le train arrive **vers** 11h/aux **alentours de** 11h/aux **environs de** 11 heures
*The train arrives around 11 a.m.*

NB: **ans** is always present when describing a person’s age.

### 6.6 Dates, days, years

#### 6.6.1 Dates

Dates always begin with **le** (which does not contract to *l’* even before numbers beginning with a vowel: **le huit mars, le onze septembre**):

- **le 1er janvier**
- **le 2 mai**
- **le 8 mars**
- **lundi le 11 juin**

**Quelle est la date d’aujourd’hui?** C’est **le 2 janvier**
*On is the combien? On is the 2 January*

NB: When writing dates, months always begin with lower case letters. When referring to events in a particular month use either **au mois de janvier, février, etc.**, or **en janvier, février, etc.**

(See also 6.4.1 for dates.)

Significant national dates in the French calendar include:

- **Le jour de l’an** | **New Year’s Day**
- **L’Épiphanie** | **Twelfth Night**
- **Le vendredi saint** | **Good Friday**
- **Pâques** | **Easter Sunday**
- **La Toussaint** | **All Saints Day**
- **Le onze novembre** | **Armistice Day**
- **Noël** | **Christmas Day**
6.6.2 Days

When days of the week are used without a determiner, they usually refer to a specific day:

Je viendrai vous voir lundi  I'll come and see you on Monday

(But in dates, days of the week are preceded by le: le lundi 8 août.)

When days of the week are preceded by a definite article they usually describe what habitually happens:

Le magasin est fermé le lundi (or tous les lundis)
The shop is closed on Mondays

le matin, l’après-midi, le soir, la nuit are used in the same way:

Elle se lève tôt le matin
She gets up early in the mornings

(versus Elle s’est levée tôt lundi matin ‘She got up early on Monday morning’.)

Seasons can be used in a similar way:

faire du ski l’hiver (also en hiver)  to go skiing in winter
jouer au tennis l’été (also en été)  to play tennis in summer

But the definite article may be used to stress that an event occurred on a particular day:

Le concours s’est déroulé le lundi
The competition took place on the Monday

Note the following expressions:

dimanche en huit  a week on Sunday
vendredi en quinze  a fortnight on Friday
tous les deux jours  every other day

6.6.3 Years

In referring to years in a date, cent is obligatory (while ‘hundred’ is often omitted in English):

1945  dix-neuf or mille neuf cent quarante-cinq
le 2 mai 1993  le deux mai dix-neuf cent quatre-vingt-treize

The second of May nineteen (hundred and) ninety-three

‘BC’ is av. J-C (avant Jésus-Christ) and ‘AD’ is ap. J-C (après Jésus-Christ):

50 av. J-C  50 BC
500 ap. J-C  500 AD
If *mille* is used in AD dates, it can be written optionally *mille* or (very rarely) *mil*:

- *en mille* neuf cent quinze or *en mil* neuf cent quinze
  - *in nineteen fifteen*

*an* is used in *l’an 2000* (*l’an deux mille*) ‘the year 2000’, *en l’an 2010* (*en l’an deux mille dix*) ‘in the year 2010’, etc.; but *année* is used in *les années 60* (*les années soixante*) ‘the 60s’, *les années 30* (*les années trente*) ‘the 30s’, etc. (See Chapter 1.5 for *an*/*année*.)

### 6.7 Clock time

In telling time, ‘it is’ is always *il est*, never *c’est*:

- *Quelle heure est-il? (Or Quelle heure avez-vous?)*
  - *What time is it?*

*heures* is obligatory:

- *Il est deux heures vingt; il est trois heures moins vingt*
  - *It’s two twenty; it’s twenty to three*

*et* links *quart* and *demi* to the hour in times past the hour – *demi* agrees in gender with the noun:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>onze heures et quart</td>
<td>a quarter past eleven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midi et quart</td>
<td>a quarter past midday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minuit et quart</td>
<td>a quarter past midnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onze heures et demi</td>
<td>half past eleven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midi et demi</td>
<td>half past midday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minuit et demi</td>
<td>half past midnight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘a quarter to’ the hour is *moins le quart* (or *moins un quart*):

- *onze heures moins le quart* | *a quarter to eleven*

As in English, one can equally say *onze heures quinze* ‘eleven fifteen’, *midi trente* ‘thirty minutes past midday’, etc.

In French timetables, times are usually written as *21h35* or *21:35*.

**NB:**

- *à l’heure* | *on time*
- *à temps*  | *in time*
- *à deux heures* | *précises* | *at two o’clock precisely* (official report)
- *justes* | *exactly two o’clock* (looking at watch)
- *sonnantes* | *bang on two o’clock* (for effect)
- *tapantes* | *spot on two* (for effect, more informal)

- *vers deux heures/vers les deux heures/autour de deux heures* | *about two*
- *à deux heures environ/dans les environs de deux heures* | *o’clock*

- *Je peux faire mes comptes dans une heure* | *I can do my accounts in an hour’s time*
- *Je peux faire mes comptes en une heure* | *I can do my accounts within an hour*

(See Chapters 13.14.4 and 13.26.3.)
6.8 Money

euro is always present in quoting prices, but centime is optional:

- huit euros cinquante (centimes)
  - eight euros fifty (centimes)

- deux cents euros quatre-vingts (centimes)
  - two hundred euros eighty (centimes)

Foreign currencies are described in the same way:

- deux livres cinquante
  - two pounds fifty

- trois dollars cinquante
  - three dollars fifty

Prices can be written in different ways:

- 8,50EUR
- 8,50€
- €8,50

Ça va chercher dans les quatre cents euros
That'll fetch around four hundred euros
(informal spoken style)

Paying for things in French does not involve a preposition equivalent to ‘for’:

- J’ai payé ce fauteuil 500 euros
  - I paid 500 euros for this armchair

6.9 Quantifiers

6.9.1 Common quantifiers

Quantifiers, like numbers, determine ‘how much’ there is of something, but are less specific than numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assez de</td>
<td>enough</td>
<td>autant de</td>
<td>as many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beaucoup de</td>
<td>many</td>
<td>bien des</td>
<td>many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certains</td>
<td>particular</td>
<td>chaque</td>
<td>every</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chacun des</td>
<td>each one of the</td>
<td>une majorité de</td>
<td>a majority of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une minorité de</td>
<td>a minority of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>client(s)</td>
<td>customer(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.9.2 Direct object quantifiers and en

When a quantifier on its own is a direct object, *en* must be inserted in front of the verb, as in the case of numbers (see 6.1.7):

\[
\begin{align*}
J' & \text{en ai encore certains} & \text{I still have some} \\
\text{Ils n'} & \text{en consomment qu'une partie} & \text{They only consume a portion} \\
& \text{en a vendu la plupart} & \text{He has sold most of it}
\end{align*}
\]

NB: When *quelques* 'some, a few' stands alone, it becomes *quelques-un(e)s*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Il y avait quelques clients dans le magasin} & \quad \text{There were a few customers in the shop} \\
\text{Il y en avait quelques-uns dans le magasin} & \quad \text{There were a few in the shop}
\end{align*}
\]

6.9.3 de or du, de la, des after quantifiers

The indefinite article *des* and the partitive articles *du, de la, des* (see Chapter 2.3.1 and 2.4) are omitted when a noun phrase follows one of the quantifiers listed with *de* in 6.9.1:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{assez de} & \quad + \quad \text{des clients} & \rightarrow & \text{assez de clients} \\
\text{enough} & \quad + \quad \text{customers} & \rightarrow & \text{enough customers} \\
\text{autant de} & \quad + \quad \text{de l'argent} & \rightarrow & \text{autant d'argent} \\
\text{as much} & \quad + \quad \text{money} & \rightarrow & \text{as much money} \\
\text{peu de} & \quad + \quad \text{du travail} & \rightarrow & \text{peu de travail} \\
\text{not much} & \quad + \quad \text{work} & \rightarrow & \text{not much work}
\end{align*}
\]

Quantifiers listed in 6.9.1 with *des*, however, are those which are followed by *des, du or de la*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bien des clients} & \quad \text{many customers} \\
\text{la plupart de l'argent} & \quad \text{most of the money} \\
\text{une partie du travail} & \quad \text{part of the work}
\end{align*}
\]
When the quantifiers listed with de in 6.9.1 are followed by a noun with a definite article, this is not omitted. Compare:

Beaucoup d’étudiants (indefinite) dorment moins qu’ils ne le souhaitent
Many students sleep less than they would wish

Beaucoup des étudiants interviewés (definite) dorment moins qu’ils ne le souhaitent
Many of the students interviewed sleep less than they would wish

See also Chapter 2.3.2 and 2.4.

6.9.4 Quantifiers and personal pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>certains</th>
<th>de entre</th>
<th>eux</th>
<th>some</th>
<th>of</th>
<th>them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beaucoup</td>
<td></td>
<td>elles</td>
<td>many</td>
<td></td>
<td>them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peu</td>
<td></td>
<td>nous</td>
<td>few</td>
<td></td>
<td>them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plusieurs</td>
<td></td>
<td>vous</td>
<td>several</td>
<td></td>
<td>us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la plupart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>most</td>
<td></td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chacun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>each</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preposition d’entre is used with quantifiers which precede stressed pronouns (for stressed pronouns see Chapter 3.3):

One can also find certains parmi eux ‘some of them’, chacun de nous ‘each of us’.

6.9.5 tout and chaque
tous/toutes, like other quantifiers, can appear with the nouns they quantify or on their own:

Toutes les assiettes sont sales/Toutes sont sales
All the plates are dirty/All are dirty

J’ai cassé toutes les assiettes/Je les ai toutes cassées
I broke all the plates/I broke them all

When tous/toutes quantifies a subject, it can be optionally moved to a position after the verb:

Tous les invités sont maintenant arrivés or Les invités sont maintenant tous arrivés
All the guests have arrived now/The guests have all arrived now

When tous/toutes is used alone as a direct object, it can be optionally moved to a position after the verb marked for tense:

Je les ai tous vus Je les ai vus tous I saw them all

Chaque means ‘each, every’:

Chaque passager est prié de se présenter à la porte 12
Every passenger is requested to go to gate 12
§6.9 Quantifiers

*chaque* cannot stand alone: it becomes *chacun(e)*:

Chaque assiette est peinte à la main / Chacune est peinte à la main

Every plate is hand painted / *Every one* is hand painted

(For adverbial use of *tout*, as in *toute blanche, tout blanc*, see Chapter 5.6.7.)

6.9.6 **Subject-verb agreement when subject quantifiers are present**

With some quantifiers, the verb agrees not with the quantifier but with the noun:

Beaucoup de professeurs *sont* surmenés

Many teachers are overworked

Similar quantifiers are:

* bien des, nombre de, pas mal de, peu de, la plupart de, quantité de, trop de *

With other quantifiers, however, the verb may agree with the noun or with the quantifier:

La majorité de nos étudiants *ont/a* moins de quarante ans

The majority of our students are under forty

Une bonne partie de ses clients *viennent/vient* de l’étranger

A good portion of his customers come from abroad

Similar quantifiers are: *une minorité de, le reste de, la moitié de, un tiers de*, and numeral nouns such as *une dizaine de, une vingtaine*, etc. (See Chapter 9.1.5.)
# 7 Verb forms

## 7.1 Introduction

As in many languages, verbs in French have different forms for the different functions they perform in sentences. It is traditional (and easiest for reference) to present verb forms in **paradigms** (i.e. lists), and this is what we do in this chapter. We follow Judge and Healey (1983) in dividing the paradigms into **simple forms**, **compound forms** and **double compound forms**. Simple forms are made up of **stems** to which **endings** are attached (see 7.3 for stems and endings). Compound forms are made up of forms of the auxiliary verbs *avoir* and *être* plus a past participle. Double compound forms are made up of forms of the compound auxiliary verbs *avoir eu* or *avoir été* plus a past participle. The set of verb forms that this produces is illustrated below, using the third person singular form of the verb *donner* ‘to give’ (stems are in normal type, endings are in bold).

Not all books and teachers use the terminology we employ here, so we have added other terms in common use in brackets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple tenses</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Il donn-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect</td>
<td>Il donn-ait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple past (past historic)</td>
<td>Il donn-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Il donn-era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td>Il donn-erait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present subjunctive</td>
<td>Qu’il donn-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect subjunctive</td>
<td>Qu’il donn-ât</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple non-finite forms</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple infinitive</td>
<td>donn-er</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present participle</td>
<td>donn-ant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past participle</td>
<td>donn-é</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>donn-ez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>donn-ons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound tenses</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compound past (perfect)</td>
<td>Il a donné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect</td>
<td>Il <em>avait</em> donné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past anterior</td>
<td>Il <em>eut</em> donné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound future (future perfect)</td>
<td>Il <em>aura</em> donné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound conditional (conditional perfect)</td>
<td>Il <em>aurait</em> donné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound past subjunctive</td>
<td>Qu’il ait donné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect subjunctive</td>
<td>Qu’il <em>eut</em> donné</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2 Conjugations

For the purposes of systematic presentation, French verbs are best grouped into four conjugations. These are:

1. Verbs whose infinitive ends in -er (e.g. donner, chanter, parler). This is by far the largest group.
2. Verbs whose infinitive ends in -ir. Within this group there are two subgroups:
   a. Verbs whose stems sometimes end in -iss- (e.g. finir: fin-iss-ons, fin-iss-ant, fin-iss-aient, etc.).
   b. Verbs whose stems do not add -iss- (e.g. dormir, mentir).
3. Verbs whose infinitive ends in -re (e.g. vendre, rendre).
4. Verbs whose infinitive ends in -oir (e.g. recevoir).

Verbs which differ from this pattern are included in the list of irregular verbs under 7.6.8.

7.2.1 Organization of the paradigms

The paradigms which follow in this chapter are divided into eight sections:

7.6.1 and 7.6.2 describe the forms of avoir and être, because these two verbs are essential to all the compound forms.
7.6.3 describes the forms of regular verbs belonging to the -er conjugation (e.g. donner, chanter, parler).
7.6.4 and 7.6.5 describe the forms of regular verbs belonging to the -ir conjugation. These subdivide into those whose stem sometimes ends in -iss- (such as finir: fin-iss-ons, fin-iss-ant, fin-iss-aient, etc.) – these are the majority of verbs in the -ir conjugation, and those whose stem does not add -iss- (such as dormir: dor-mons, dorm-ant, dorm-aient, etc.). There are only about 30 of these verbs.
7.6.6 describes the forms of regular verbs belonging to the -re conjugation (e.g. vendre, rendre).

7.6.7 describes the forms of regular verbs belonging to the -oir conjugation (e.g. recevoir, décevoir, concevoir).

7.6.8 lists the forms of irregular verbs (i.e. those whose stems change idiosyncratically at various points in the paradigm).

7.3 Easy ways of generating some parts of the paradigms

A number of the parts of the verb paradigms can be productively generated using a few simple rules. It is sometimes easier to learn these rules than learning every verb form individually. However, be aware that these only work with regular verbs – irregular verbs have idiosyncratic forms which have to be learned.

7.3.1 An easy way of generating the present tense

For regular verbs ending in -er (like donner), -ir (the finir kind whose stems sometimes end in -iss-: fin-iss-ons, fin-iss-ant, fin-iss-ai, etc., but NOT the dormir kind – see 7.6.4 and 7.6.5) or -re (such as vendre), take the infinitive form of the verb, omit the ending -er, -ir or -re (this creates a stem: donn-, fin-, vend-) and add the following endings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>je</th>
<th>tu</th>
<th>il/elle</th>
<th>nous</th>
<th>vous</th>
<th>ils/elles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-er verbs</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-es</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-ons</td>
<td>-ez</td>
<td>-ent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ir verbs (most verbs – see 7.6.4)</td>
<td>-is</td>
<td>-is</td>
<td>-it</td>
<td>-issons</td>
<td>-issez</td>
<td>-issent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-re verbs</td>
<td>-s</td>
<td>-s</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ons</td>
<td>-ez</td>
<td>-ent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Present tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>donner</td>
<td>donn</td>
<td>je donn- e, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finir</td>
<td>fin</td>
<td>je fin- is, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vendre</td>
<td>vend</td>
<td>je vend- s, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.2 An easy way of generating the imperfect tense

For all regular verb conjugations, take the first person plural nous form of the present tense, omit -ons and add the following endings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>je</th>
<th>tu</th>
<th>il/elle</th>
<th>nous</th>
<th>vous</th>
<th>ils/elles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-ais</td>
<td>-ais</td>
<td>-ait</td>
<td>-ions</td>
<td>-iez</td>
<td>-ient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§7.3 Easy ways of generating some parts of the paradigms

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>First person plural</th>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Imperfect tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>donner</td>
<td>donnons</td>
<td>donn</td>
<td>je donn-ais, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commencer</td>
<td>commençons</td>
<td>commenç</td>
<td>je commenç-ais, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partager</td>
<td>partageons</td>
<td>partage</td>
<td>je partage-ais, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finir</td>
<td>finissons</td>
<td>finiss</td>
<td>je finiss-ais, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormir</td>
<td>dormons</td>
<td>dorm</td>
<td>je dorm-ais, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vendre</td>
<td>vendons</td>
<td>vend</td>
<td>je vend-ais, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recevoir</td>
<td>recevons</td>
<td>recev</td>
<td>je recev-ais, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.3 An easy way of generating the simple past (past historic)

For -er verbs, take the first person plural nous form of the present tense, omit -ons and add the following endings: -ai, -as, -a, -âmes, -âtes, -èrent.

For -ir (both finir and dormir types – see 7.6.4 and 7.6.5) and -re verbs, take the past participle, omit the final vowel, and add the following endings: -is, -is, it, -îmes, -îtes, -irent.

For -oir verbs, take the past participle, omit the final vowel, and add the following endings: -us, -us, -ut, -ûmes, -ûtes, -urent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>je</th>
<th>tu</th>
<th>il/elle</th>
<th>nous</th>
<th>vous</th>
<th>ils/elles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-er verbs (most verbs – see 7.6.3)</td>
<td>-ai</td>
<td>-as</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-âmes</td>
<td>-âtes</td>
<td>-èrent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ir verbs</td>
<td>-is</td>
<td>-is</td>
<td>-it</td>
<td>-îmes</td>
<td>-îtes</td>
<td>-irent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-re verbs</td>
<td>-us</td>
<td>-us</td>
<td>-ut</td>
<td>-ûmes</td>
<td>-ûtes</td>
<td>-urent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-oir verbs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example:

Infinitive | First person plural | Stem | Simple past tense |
-----------|---------------------|------|------------------|
donner     | donnons             | donn | je donn-ai, etc. |
commencer  | commençons          | commenç | je commenç-ai, etc. |
           | partageons          | partage | je partage-ai, etc. |
finir      | finissons           | finiss | je finiss-ai, etc. |
dormir     | dormons             | dorm | je dorm-ai, etc. |
vendre     | vendons             | vend | je vend-ai, etc. |
recevoir   | recevons            | recev | je recev-ai, etc. |

Past participle

fini         | fin | fin- is, etc. |
dormi        | dorm | je dorm- is, etc. |
vendu        | vend | je vend- is, etc. |
reçu          | reç | je reç- us, etc. |
7.3.4 An easy way of generating the future and conditional

Take the infinitive form of -er, -ir and -re verbs (deleting the final e in the latter case) and add the following endings:

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive Stem</th>
<th>Future/conditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>donner</td>
<td>donner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finir</td>
<td>finir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormir</td>
<td>dormir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vendre</td>
<td>vendr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For the doubling of consonants in verbs like je jeterai, j’appellerai, the change from e to è in verbs like j’achèterai, il gèlera, and the change from é to è in verbs like j’espérerai, je complèterai, etc., see 7.4.)

7.3.5 An easy way of generating the present subjunctive

For all regular verb conjugations, take the third person plural ils/elles form of the present tense, omit -ent and add the endings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>je</th>
<th>tu</th>
<th>il/elle</th>
<th>nous</th>
<th>vous</th>
<th>ils/elles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-es</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-ions</td>
<td>-iez</td>
<td>-ent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Third person plural</th>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Present subjunctive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>donner</td>
<td>donnent</td>
<td>donn</td>
<td>je donn- e, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finir</td>
<td>finissent</td>
<td>finiss</td>
<td>je finiss- e, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormir</td>
<td>dorment</td>
<td>dorm</td>
<td>je dorm- e, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vendre</td>
<td>vendent</td>
<td>vend</td>
<td>je vend- e, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recevoir</td>
<td>reçoivent</td>
<td>reçoiv</td>
<td>je reçoiv- e, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: The stem reçoiv- changes when the ending does not begin with -e: reçoive, but recevions, receviez.
7.3.6 An easy way of generating the imperfect subjunctive

For all regular verb conjugations, take the first person singular je form of the simple past tense, omit the last letter and add the endings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>je</th>
<th>tu</th>
<th>il/elle</th>
<th>nous</th>
<th>vous</th>
<th>ils/elles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-sse</td>
<td>-sses</td>
<td>-s^t</td>
<td>-ssions</td>
<td>-ssiez</td>
<td>-ssent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>First person simple past</th>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Imperfect subjunctive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>donner</td>
<td>donnai</td>
<td>donna</td>
<td>je donna-sse, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commencer</td>
<td>commençaï</td>
<td>commença</td>
<td>je commença-sse, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partager</td>
<td>partageai</td>
<td>partagea</td>
<td>je partagea-sse, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finir</td>
<td>fini</td>
<td>fini</td>
<td>je fini-sse, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormir</td>
<td>dormis</td>
<td>dormi</td>
<td>je dormi-sse, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vendre</td>
<td>vendis</td>
<td>vendi</td>
<td>je vendi-sse, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recevoir</td>
<td>reçus</td>
<td>reçu</td>
<td>je reçu-sse, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.7 An easy way of generating the imperative

For all verbs (with four exceptions – see below) take the second person singular tu form, the second person plural vous form and the first person plural nous form of the present tense, delete the subject and the final -s of any verb which ends in -es or -as. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Present tense</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>donner</td>
<td>tu donnes</td>
<td>donne!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous donnez</td>
<td></td>
<td>donnez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous donnons</td>
<td></td>
<td>donnons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aller</td>
<td>tu vas</td>
<td>va!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous allez</td>
<td></td>
<td>allez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous allons</td>
<td></td>
<td>allons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finir</td>
<td>tu finis</td>
<td>finis!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous finissez</td>
<td></td>
<td>finissez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous finissons</td>
<td></td>
<td>finissons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormir</td>
<td>tu dors</td>
<td>dors!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormez</td>
<td></td>
<td>dormez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormons</td>
<td></td>
<td>dormons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vendre</td>
<td>tu vends</td>
<td>vends!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous vendez</td>
<td></td>
<td>vendez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous vendons</td>
<td></td>
<td>vendons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recevoir</td>
<td>tu reçois</td>
<td>reçois!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous recevez</td>
<td></td>
<td>recevez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous recevons</td>
<td></td>
<td>recevons!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: The final -s which disappears from second person singular verbs ending in -es or -as reappears where the pronouns y or en follow the imperative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aller</td>
<td>Va!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parler</td>
<td>Parle!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four exceptions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Present tense</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>être</td>
<td>tu es</td>
<td>sois!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous êtes</td>
<td>soyez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nous sommes</td>
<td>soyons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoir</td>
<td>tu as</td>
<td>aie!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous avez</td>
<td>ayez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nous avons</td>
<td>ayons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir</td>
<td>tu sais</td>
<td>sache!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous savez</td>
<td>sachez!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nous savons</td>
<td>sachons!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vouloir</td>
<td>tu veux</td>
<td>veuille</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous voulez</td>
<td>veuillez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nous voulons</td>
<td>not used</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Both veuille and veuillez mean ‘please’.)

NB: Although vouloir has irregular imperative forms, the related verb en vouloir à qn ‘to hold a grudge against sb’ has regular forms:

Tu ne lui en veux pas Ne lui en veux pas!
Vous ne lui en voulez pas Ne lui en voulez pas!
Nous ne lui en voulons pas Ne lui en voulons pas!

7.4 Changes in the stem form of some -er conjugation verbs

The stems of a number of verbs of the -er conjugation change their form when they are followed by an e. (See also listings under irregular verbs, Table 7.H.)

The majority of verbs ending in -eler or -eter double the final consonant of the stem when it is followed by -e in the present, future, conditional and present subjunctive:

**appeler**

- **Present**
  - j’appelle, tu appelles, il/elle appelle, ils/elles appellent
- **Future**
  - j’appellerai, . . . , nous appellerons, etc.
- **Conditional**
  - j’appellerais, . . . , nous appellerions, etc.
- **Present subjunctive**
  - que j’appelle, que tu appelles, qu’il/elle appelle, qu’ils/elles appellent

**jeter**

- **Present**
  - je jette, . . . etc.
- **Future**
  - je jetterai, . . . etc.
- **Conditional**
  - je jetterais, . . . etc.
- **Present subjunctive**
  - que je jette, . . . etc.
The following verbs, however, do not double the final stem consonant, but change the first e to è: acheter, celer, ciseler, corseter, crocheter, démanteler, écarter, fureter, geler, halter, marteler, modeler, peler (together with verbs derived from these like congeler, dégeler, etc.):

*acheter*
- **Present**: j’achète, . . . etc.
- **Future**: j’achèterai, . . . etc.

Other verbs which have an unstressed e in the syllable before the final -er also change that vowel to è in the same circumstances, for example *mener, semer:*

*mener*
- **Present**: je mène, . . . etc.
- **Future**: je mènerai, . . . etc.

Verbs of the -er conjugation whose stem ends in -y, for example *employer, nettoyer, essayer,* change the y to i in the same circumstances:

*employer*
- **Present**: j’emploie, . . . etc.
- **Future**: j’emploierai, . . . etc.

Verbs which have an é in the syllable before the final -er, for example *céder, espérer, révéler,* change the vowel to è when the stem is followed by -e only in the present tense and the present subjunctive:

*espérer*
- **Present**: j’espère, tu espères, il/elle espère, ils/elles espèrent.
- **Present subjective**: que j’espère, que tu espères, qu’il/elle espère, qu’ils/elles espèrent.
- **BUT**
- **Future**: j’espérerai, tu espéreras, il/elle espérera, etc.
- **Conditional**: j’espérerais, tu espérerais, il/elle espérerait, etc.

### 7.4.1 The forms of *créer, nier, scier, rire,* etc.

Verbs whose stems end in -é or -i behave just like any other verb: the final vowel does not change, for example:

- je crée (present tense)
- j’ai créé (compound past)
- l’entreprise que j’ai crée (past participle agreement with a preceding feminine direct object – see Chapter 9.3.)
- nous rions (present tense)
- nous riions (imperfect tense or present subjunctive)
- etc.

### 7.5 Verbs whose stems end in *c- or g-*

Verbs whose stems end in c-(pronounced [s]) change to ç-before an ending beginning with -a, -o, or -u, e.g. *commencer, recvoir:*

*commencer*
- nous commencer- ons (present)
- je commencer- ais (imperfect)
- nous commencer- âmes (simple past) etc.

*recvoir*
- je rec- ois (present)
- nous rec- ûmes (simple past) etc.
Verbs whose stems end in a g- (pronounced like ‘je’) change to ge- before an ending beginning with -a or -o, e.g. partag-er, protég-er:

partag-er  nous partage- ons (present)
je partage- ais (imperfect)
nous partage- âmes (simple past) etc.

7.6 Verb paradigms

7.6.1 The irregular verb avoir

| TABLE 7.A |
| Infinitive: | avoir |
| Past participle: | eu |
| Present participle: | ayant |
| Compound infinitive: | avoir eu |
| Compound present participle: | ayant eu |
| **Simple forms** | **Compound forms** |
| Present: | Compound past: |
| j’ai | nous avons |
| tu as | vous avez |
| il a | ils ont |
| j’ai eu | nous avons eu |
| tu as eu | vous avez eu |
| il a eu | ils ont eu |
| Imperfect: | Pluperfect: |
| j’avais | nous avions |
| tu avais | vous aviez |
| il avait | ils avaient |
| j’avais eu | nous avions eu |
| tu avais eu | vous aviez eu |
| il avait eu | ils avaient eu |
| Simple past (past historic): | Past anterior: |
| j’eus | nous eûmes |
| tu eus | vous eûtes |
| il eut | ils eurent |
| j’eus eu | nous eûmes eu |
| tu eus eu | vous eûtes eu |
| il eut eu | ils eurent eu |
| Future: | Compound future: |
| j’aurai | nous aurons |
| tu auras | vous aurez |
| il aura | ils auront |
| j’aurai eu | nous aurons eu |
| tu auras eu | vous aurez eu |
| il aura eu | ils auront eu |
| Conditional: | Compound conditional: |
| j’aurais | nous aurions |
| tu aurais | vous auriez |
| il aurait | ils auraient |
| j’aurais eu | nous aurions eu |
| tu aurais eu | vous auriez eu |
| il aurait eu | ils auraient eu |
| Present subjunctive: | Compound past subjunctive: |
| que j’aie | que nous ayons |
| que tu ais | que vous ayez |
| qu’il ait | qu’ils aient |
| que j’aie eu | que nous ayons eu |
| que tu aies eu | que vous ayez eu |
| qu’il ait eu | qu’ils aient eu |
### TABLE 7.A (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfect subjunctive:</th>
<th>Pluperfect subjunctive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>que j'eusse</td>
<td>que nous eussions eu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu eusses</td>
<td>que vous eussiez eu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu'il eût</td>
<td>qu'ils eussent eu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative:</td>
<td>Compound imperative:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aie</td>
<td>not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ayons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ayez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 7.6.2 The irregular verb être

### TABLE 7.B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive:</th>
<th>être</th>
<th>Compound infinitive:</th>
<th>avoir été</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past participle:</td>
<td>été</td>
<td>Compound past participle:</td>
<td>eu été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present participle:</td>
<td>étant</td>
<td>Compound present participle:</td>
<td>ayant été</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple forms</th>
<th>Compound forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je suis</td>
<td>nous sommes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu es</td>
<td>vous êtes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il est</td>
<td>ils sont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j'étais</td>
<td>nous étions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu étais</td>
<td>vous étiez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il était</td>
<td>ils étaient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j'avais été</td>
<td>nous avions été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu avais été</td>
<td>vous aviez été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il avait été</td>
<td>ils avaient été</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple past (past historic):</th>
<th>Past anterior:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je fus</td>
<td>j'eus été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu fus</td>
<td>tu eus été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il fut</td>
<td>il eut été</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future:</th>
<th>Compound future:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je serai</td>
<td>j'aurai été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu seras</td>
<td>tu auras été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il sera</td>
<td>il aura été</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.6.3 Conjugation 1: verbs whose infinitive ends in -er

**TABLE 7.B (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditional:</th>
<th>Compound conditional:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je serais</td>
<td>nous serions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu serais</td>
<td>vous seriez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il serait</td>
<td>ils seraient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j’aurais été</td>
<td>nous aurions été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu aurais été</td>
<td>vous auriez été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il aurait été</td>
<td>ils auraient été</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present subjunctive:</th>
<th>Compound present subjunctive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>que je sois</td>
<td>que nous soyons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu sois</td>
<td>que vous soyez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu’il soit</td>
<td>qu’ils soient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que j’aie été</td>
<td>que nous ayons été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu aies été</td>
<td>que vous ayez été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu’il ait été</td>
<td>qu’ils aient été</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfect subjunctive:</th>
<th>Pluperfect subjunctive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>que je fusse</td>
<td>que nous fussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu fusses</td>
<td>que vous fussiez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu’il fût</td>
<td>qu’ils fussent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que j’eusse été</td>
<td>que nous eussions été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu eusses été</td>
<td>que vous eussiez été</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu’il eût été</td>
<td>qu’ils eussent été</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperative:</th>
<th>Compound imperative:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sois</td>
<td>not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soyons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soyez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 7.C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive:</th>
<th>parler</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past participle:</td>
<td>parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present participle:</td>
<td>parlant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound infinitive:</td>
<td>avoir parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound past participle:</td>
<td>eu parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound present participle:</td>
<td>ayant parlé</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Simple forms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present:</th>
<th>Compound past:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je parle</td>
<td>nous parlons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu parles</td>
<td>vous parlez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il parle</td>
<td>ils parlent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j’ai parlé</td>
<td>nous avons parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu as parlé</td>
<td>vous avez parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il a parlé</td>
<td>ils ont parlé</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Imperfect:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>je parlais</th>
<th>nous parlions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tu parlais</td>
<td>vous parliez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il parlait</td>
<td>ils parlaient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j’avais parlé</td>
<td>nous avions parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu avais parlé</td>
<td>vous aviez parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il avait parlé</td>
<td>ils avaient parlé</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§7.6 Verb paradigms

### TABLE 7.C (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple past (past historic):</th>
<th>Past anterior:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je parlaï</td>
<td>nous parlâmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu parlaïs</td>
<td>vous parlâtes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il parlaï</td>
<td>ils parlèrent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future:</th>
<th>Compound future:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je parlerai</td>
<td>nous parlerons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu parleras</td>
<td>vous parleriez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il parleraï</td>
<td>ils parleront</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditional:</th>
<th>Compound conditional:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je parlerais</td>
<td>nous parlerions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu parlerais</td>
<td>vous parleriez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il parlerait</td>
<td>ils parleraient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present subjunctive:</th>
<th>Compound past subjunctive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>que je parle</td>
<td>que nous parlions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu parles</td>
<td>que vous parliez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu’il parle</td>
<td>qu’ils parlent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfect subjunctive:</th>
<th>Pluperfect subjunctive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>que je parlasse</td>
<td>que nous parlissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu parlasses</td>
<td>que vous parlissiez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu’il parlât</td>
<td>qu’ils parlissent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperative:</th>
<th>Compound imperative:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parle (but parles-en)</td>
<td>aie parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parlons</td>
<td>ayons parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parlez</td>
<td>ayez parlé</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Verbs whose stem ends in c or g are written ç and ge respectively before endings which begin with a or o: e.g. nous commençons, je mangeais – see 7.5.

NB: Verbs of the -er conjugation whose stem changes, like compléter, espérer (and other verbs ending in -érer, -éter), appeler, mener, jeter, employer, nettoyer (and other verbs ending in -oyer – see 7.4) are individually listed under irregular verbs.

### 7.6.4 Conjugation 2 (a): verbs whose infinitives end in -ir, and whose stems end in -iss- in certain paradigms

NB: Verbs which approximate to this pattern but which have significant differences are: fleurir, haïr. These are listed as irregular verbs.
### TABLE 7.D

| Infinitive: | finir | Compound infinitive: | avoir fini |
| Past participle: | fini | Compound past participle: | eu fini |
| Present participle: | finissant | Compound present participle: | ayant fini |

#### Simple forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present:</th>
<th>Compound past:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je finis</td>
<td>j’ai fini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu finis</td>
<td>tu as fini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il finit</td>
<td>il a fini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous finissons</td>
<td>nous avons fini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous finissez</td>
<td>vous avez fini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils finissent</td>
<td>ils ont fini</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Imperfect:  

| Pluperfect: |
|---|---|
| j’avais fini | nous avions fini |
| tu avais fini | vous aviez fini |
| il avait fini | ils avaient fini |

#### Simple past (past historic):  

| Past anterior: |
|---|---|
| j’eus fini | nous eûmes fini |
| tu eus fini | vous eûtes fini |
| il eut fini | ils eurent fini |

#### Future:  

| Compound future: |
|---|---|
| j’aurai fini | nous aurons fini |
| tu auras fini | vous aurez fini |
| il aura fini | ils auront fini |

#### Conditional:  

| Compound conditional: |
|---|---|
| j’aurais fini | nous aurions fini |
| tu aurais fini | vous auriez fini |
| il aurait fini | ils auraient fini |

#### Present subjunctive:  

| Compound past subjunctive: |
|---|---|
| que j’aie fini | que nous ayons fini |
| que tu aies fini | que vous ayez fini |
| qu’il ait fini | qu’ils aient fini |

#### Imperfect subjunctive:  

| Pluperfect subjunctive: |
|---|---|
| que j’eusse fini | que nous eussions fini |
| que tu eusses fini | que vous eussiez fini |
| qu’il eût fini | qu’ils eussent fini |

#### Imperative:  

| Compound imperative: |
|---|---|
| finis | aie fini |
| finissons | ayons fini |
| finissez | ayez fini |
### 7.6.5 Conjugation 2 (b): verbs whose infinitives end in -ir, and whose stems do not end in -iss- (e.g. dormir)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 7.E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infinitive:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past participle:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present participle:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Simple forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present:</th>
<th>Compound past:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je dors</td>
<td>j'ai dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu dors</td>
<td>tu as dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il dort</td>
<td>il a dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormons</td>
<td>nous avons dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormez</td>
<td>vous avez dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils dorment</td>
<td>ils ont dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfect:</th>
<th>Pluperfect:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je dormais</td>
<td>j'avais dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu dormais</td>
<td>tu avais dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il dormait</td>
<td>il avait dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormions</td>
<td>nous avons dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormiez</td>
<td>vous avez dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils dormaient</td>
<td>ils avaient dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple past (past historic):</th>
<th>Past anterior:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je dormis</td>
<td>j'eus dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu dormis</td>
<td>tu eus dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il dormit</td>
<td>il eut dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormimes</td>
<td>nous eûmes dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormites</td>
<td>vous êûtes dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils dormirent</td>
<td>ils eurent dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future:</th>
<th>Compound future:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je dormirai</td>
<td>j'aurai dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu dormiras</td>
<td>tu aurais dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il dormira</td>
<td>il aurait dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormirons</td>
<td>nous aurons dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormirez</td>
<td>vous auriez dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils dormiront</td>
<td>ils aient dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditional:</th>
<th>Compound conditional:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je dormirais</td>
<td>j'aurais dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu dormirais</td>
<td>tu aurais dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il dormirait</td>
<td>il aurait dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormirions</td>
<td>nous aurions dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormiriez</td>
<td>vous auriez dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils dormiraient</td>
<td>ils aient dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present subjunctive:</th>
<th>Compound past subjunctive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>que je dorme</td>
<td>que j'aie dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu dormes</td>
<td>que tu aies dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu'il dorme</td>
<td>qu'il ait dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormions</td>
<td>nous ayons dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormiez</td>
<td>que vous ayez dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils dorment</td>
<td>qu'ils aient dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfect subjunctive:</th>
<th>Pluperfect subjunctive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>que je dormisse</td>
<td>que j'eusse dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu dormisses</td>
<td>que tu eusses dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu'il dormît</td>
<td>qu'il eût dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormissions</td>
<td>que nous eussions dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormissiez</td>
<td>que vous eussiez dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils dormissent</td>
<td>qu'ils eussent dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Verb forms §7.6

NB: S’endormir, servir, desservir, mentir, démentir, partir, repartir, se repentir, sentir, consentir, ressentir, sortir and ressortir conjugate like dormir BUT asservir, impartir, répartir, assortir, conjugate like finir.

Verbs which are similar to one or other of these -ir conjugations are: cueillir, accueillir, recueillir, assaillir, tressaillir, couvrir, découvrir, recouvrir, offrir, ouvrir, rouvrir, souffrir but they have special characteristics. They are listed individually as irregular verbs.

7.6.6 Conjugation 3: verbs with infinitives which end in -re (e.g. vendre)

TABLE 7.E (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperative:</th>
<th>Compound imperative:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dors</td>
<td>aie dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormons</td>
<td>ayons dormi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormez</td>
<td>ayez dormi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 7.F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive:</th>
<th>vendre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past participle:</td>
<td>vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present participle:</td>
<td>vendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple forms</td>
<td>Compound forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je vends</td>
<td>nous vendons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu vendas</td>
<td>vous vendez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il vend</td>
<td>ils vendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je vendais</td>
<td>nous vendions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu vendais</td>
<td>vous vendiez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il vendait</td>
<td>ils vendaient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple past (past historic):</td>
<td>Past anterior:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je vendis</td>
<td>nous vendimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu vendis</td>
<td>vous vendites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il vendit</td>
<td>ils vendirent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future:</td>
<td>Compound future:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je vendrai</td>
<td>nous vendrons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu vendras</td>
<td>vous vendrez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il vendra</td>
<td>ils vendront</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound infinitive:</td>
<td>avoir vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound past participle:</td>
<td>eu vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound present participle:</td>
<td>ayant vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound past:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j’ai vendu</td>
<td>nous avons vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu as vendu</td>
<td>vous avez vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il a vendu</td>
<td>ils ont vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound past:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j’avais vendu</td>
<td>nous avions vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu avais vendu</td>
<td>vous aviez vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il avait vendu</td>
<td>ils avaient vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound past:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j’eus vendu</td>
<td>nous eûmes vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu eus vendu</td>
<td>vous eûtes vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il eut vendu</td>
<td>ils eurent vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound future:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j’aurai vendu</td>
<td>nous aurons vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu auras vendu</td>
<td>vous aurez vendu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il aura vendu</td>
<td>ils auront vendu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A few verbs follow this pattern in its entirety, especially those ending in -andre, -endre, -ondre, -erdre, -ordre, e.g. épandre, répandre, attendre, défendre, descendre, détendre, entendre, étendre, fendre, prétendre, rendre, tendre, vendre, confondre, correspondre, fondre, pondre, répondre, tondre, mordre, perdre, tordre.

Other verbs which have sufficient differences to be listed individually as irregular verbs are: prendre (and compounds of prendre), rompre (and compounds of rompre), battre (and compounds of battre), vaincre (and compounds of vaincre), verbs ending in -a/e/oindre: contraindre, craindre, plaindre, enfreindre, éteindre, êtreindre, êtreindre, astreindre, atteindre, ceindre, dépéindre, dépéindre, encéindre, feindre, geindre, peindre, reindre, teindre, joindre, and verbs ending in -aître: apparaître, connaître, disparaitre, méconnaître, paraître, reconnaître, repaire, accroître, décroître, croître.

A distinct group of verbs end in -uire, e.g. conduire, construire, cuire, déduire, détruire, enduire, introduire, produire, séduire, traduire. These all follow the same pattern which is illustrated by construire in the table of irregular verbs.

### 7.6.7 Conjugation 4: verbs with infinitives which end in -oir (e.g. recevoir)

NB: A number of verbs, e.g. voir and derivatives, do not follow this pattern. They are listed individually as irregular verbs.
TABLE 7.G

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive: recevoir</th>
<th>Compound infinitive: avoir reçu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past participle: reçu</td>
<td>Compound past participle: eu reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present participle: recevant</td>
<td>Compound present participle: ayant reçu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple forms</th>
<th>Compound forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present:</td>
<td>Compound past:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je reçois</td>
<td>j'ai reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu reçois</td>
<td>tu as reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il reçoit</td>
<td>il a reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous recevons</td>
<td>nous avons reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous recevez</td>
<td>vous avez reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils reçoivent</td>
<td>ils ont reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect:</td>
<td>Pluperfect:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je recevais</td>
<td>j'avais reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu recevais</td>
<td>tu avais reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il recevait</td>
<td>il avait reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous recevions</td>
<td>nous avions reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous receviez</td>
<td>vous aviez reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils recevaient</td>
<td>ils avaient reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple past (past historic):</td>
<td>Past anterior:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je reçus</td>
<td>j'eus reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu reçus</td>
<td>tu eus reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il reçut</td>
<td>il eut reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous receûmes</td>
<td>nous eûmes reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous receûtes</td>
<td>vous eûtes reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils receûrent</td>
<td>ils eurent reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future:</td>
<td>Compound future:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je recevrai</td>
<td>j'aurai reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu recevras</td>
<td>tu auras reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il recevra</td>
<td>il aurait reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous recevrons</td>
<td>nous aurions reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous recevrez</td>
<td>vous auriez reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils recevront</td>
<td>ils auraient reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional:</td>
<td>Compound conditional:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je recevrais</td>
<td>j'aurais reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu recevais</td>
<td>tu aurais reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il recevrait</td>
<td>il aurait reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous recevrions</td>
<td>nous aurions reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous receviez</td>
<td>vous auriez reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ils recevaient</td>
<td>ils auraient reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present subjunctive:</td>
<td>Compound past subjunctive:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que je reçoive</td>
<td>que j'aie reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu reçois</td>
<td>que tu aies reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu'il reçoive</td>
<td>qu'il ait reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que nous recevions</td>
<td>que nous ayons reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que vous receviez</td>
<td>que vous ayez reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu'ils receivent</td>
<td>qu'ils aient reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect subjunctive:</td>
<td>Pluperfect subjunctive:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que je reçusse</td>
<td>que j'eusse reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que tu reçusses</td>
<td>que tu eusses reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu'il reçût</td>
<td>qu'il eût reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que nous reçussions</td>
<td>que nous eussions reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que vous reçussiez</td>
<td>que vous eussiez reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qu'ils reçussent</td>
<td>qu'ils eussent reçu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperative:</th>
<th>Compound imperative:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reçois</td>
<td>aie reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recevons</td>
<td>ayons reçu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recevez</td>
<td>ayez reçu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 7.6.8 Irregular verbs

**TABLE 7.H**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Simple present</th>
<th>Participles</th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>Simple past</th>
<th>Imperfect</th>
<th>Subj (pres)</th>
<th>Subj (imp)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>abattre</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to knock down</td>
<td>j’abats&lt;br /&gt;tu abats&lt;br /&gt;il abat</td>
<td>nous abattons&lt;br /&gt;vous abattez&lt;br /&gt;ils abattent</td>
<td>abattant</td>
<td>abattis</td>
<td>que j’abatte&lt;br /&gt;que j’abattisse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>absoudre</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to absolve</td>
<td>j’absous&lt;br /&gt;tu absous&lt;br /&gt;il absorbe</td>
<td>nous absolvons&lt;br /&gt;vous absolvez&lt;br /&gt;ils absolvent</td>
<td>absolvent</td>
<td>j’absoudrai</td>
<td>j’absoudrais&lt;br /&gt;que j’absoulle&lt;br /&gt;que j’absolússe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>s’abstenir de</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to abstain from: see tenir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>abstraire</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to abstract: see traire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>accourir</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to run up: see courir</td>
<td>j’accrois&lt;br /&gt;tu accrois&lt;br /&gt;il accourt</td>
<td>nous accroissons&lt;br /&gt;vous accroisiez&lt;br /&gt;ils accroisissent</td>
<td>accroissant</td>
<td>j’accroîtra&lt;br /&gt;j’accroissais</td>
<td>que j’accroisse&lt;br /&gt;que j’accrusse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>accueillir</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to welcome: see cueillir</td>
<td>j’achète&lt;br /&gt;tu achètes&lt;br /&gt;il achète</td>
<td>nous achetons&lt;br /&gt;vous achetez&lt;br /&gt;ils achètent</td>
<td>achetant</td>
<td>j’achèterai&lt;br /&gt;(à in all forms)</td>
<td>que j’achète&lt;br /&gt;que nous achetions&lt;br /&gt;que vous achetiez</td>
<td>que j’achétasse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>achever</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to finish: is like acheter in the distribution of è</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>acquérir</strong>&lt;br /&gt;to acquire</td>
<td>j’acquiers&lt;br /&gt;tu acquiers&lt;br /&gt;il acquiert</td>
<td>nous acquérons&lt;br /&gt;vous acquérez&lt;br /&gt;ils acquièrent</td>
<td>acquérent</td>
<td>j’acquerrai&lt;br /&gt;j’acquerais&lt;br /&gt;j’acquivras&lt;br /&gt;que j’acquière&lt;br /&gt;que j’acquisse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjoindre to join: see joindre</td>
<td>je vais</td>
<td>nous allons</td>
<td>j’irai</td>
<td>j’allai</td>
<td>j’alla</td>
<td>que j’aillle</td>
<td>que j’allasse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admettre to let in: see mettre</td>
<td>tu vas</td>
<td>vous allez</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advenir to occur: see venir</td>
<td>il va</td>
<td>ils vont</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aller to go</td>
<td>nous allons</td>
<td>allant</td>
<td>allé</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 7.H (continued)**

<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amener to bring: is like mener in the distribution of è in certain forms</td>
<td>j’apparais</td>
<td>nous apparaissions</td>
<td>j’apparaîtrai</td>
<td>j’apparais</td>
<td>j’apparais</td>
<td>que j’apparaisse</td>
<td>que j’apparassee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apparaître to appear</td>
<td>j’apparaît</td>
<td>ils apparaissent</td>
<td>j’apparu</td>
<td>j’apparu</td>
<td>j’apparu</td>
<td>que j’apparaisse</td>
<td>que j’apparassee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>appeler to call</td>
<td>j’appelle</td>
<td>nous appelons</td>
<td>j’appellerai (ll in all forms)</td>
<td>j’appelai</td>
<td>j’appelais</td>
<td>que j’appelle</td>
<td>que j’appelles</td>
<td></td>
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| battre           | je bats               | nous battons          | je battrai                   | je battis                      | je battais                   | que je batte      | que je battisse   |
| *to beat*        | tu bats               | vous battez           |                             |                                |                               |                  |                  |
|                  | il bat                | ils battent           |                             |                                |                               |                  |                  |
| boire            | je bois               | nous buvons           | je boirai                    | je bu                         | je buvais                    | que je boive      | que je busse      |
| *to drink*       | tu bois               | vous buvez            |                             |                                |                               |                  |                  |
|                  | il boit               | ils boivent           |                             |                                |                               |                  |                  |
**TABLE 7.H (continued)**

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NB: The future and conditional have *cueiller* as a base and not *cueillir*. The same is true of *acceuillir* and *recueillir* (but not *assaillir*).
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TABLE 7.H (continued)

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<th>Particules:</th>
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<td>to incur: see courir</td>
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<td>enduire</td>
<td>to coat, render: see construire</td>
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<td>to call upon: see joindre</td>
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<td>to remove: is like mener in the use of è in some forms of the verb</td>
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<td>to undertake: see prendre</td>
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<td>to maintain: see tenir</td>
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### TABLE 7.H (continued)

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<th>Subj (imp)</th>
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<td>NB: ci-gît . . . here lies . . .</td>
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TABLE 7.H (continued)

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<th>Particules:</th>
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<td>vous haïssez</td>
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<td>il hait</td>
<td>ils haïssent</td>
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**NB:** The ï (i with trema) indicates two syllables. The verb is regular apart from the use of the trema.

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<th>Particules:</th>
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<td><em>inscrire</em> (to inscribe)</td>
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<td>see <em>écrire</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>instruire</em> (to instruct)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>see <em>construire</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>interdire</em> (to forbid)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>j’interdis</td>
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<th>Particules:</th>
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<td><em>intervenir</em> (to intervene)</td>
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<td><em>jeter</em> (to throw)</td>
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<th>Participles:</th>
<th>Particules:</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>joindre</em> (to join)</td>
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NB: è in cases where the following syllable contains a 'silent' 'e'.
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<td>pluvant</td>
<td>il pleur</td>
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NB: Two n s when n is followed by a ‘silent’ e. prenne, prennes, prennent.
### TABLE 7.H (continued)

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<th>Participles:</th>
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<td>promettre to promise</td>
<td>je promets</td>
<td>promis</td>
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<tr>
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<td>je proscrit</td>
<td>proscrié</td>
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<tr>
<td>protéger to protect</td>
<td>je protège</td>
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<td>je provient</td>
<td>provenu</td>
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<td>(se) rappeler to recall</td>
<td>je rappelle</td>
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<td>je recouvre</td>
<td>recouvert</td>
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<td>je refléte</td>
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<td>rejeter to throw back</td>
<td>je rejette</td>
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### TABLE 7.H (continued)

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Infinitive:
souffrir  to suffer

Infinitive:
soumettre  to submit; see mettre

Infinitive:
sourire  to smile; see rire

Infinitive:
souscrire  to sign; see écrire

Infinitive:
soustraire  to withdraw; see traire

Infinitive:
soutenir  to support; see tenir

Infinitive:
se souvenir de  to remember; see venir

Infinitive:
subvenir  to subsidize; see venir

Infinitive:
suivre  to follow

Infinitive:
survenir  to happen; see venir

Infinitive:
surseoir  to postpone

Infinitive:
surprendre  to surprise; see prendre
TABLE 7.H (continued)

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TRANSLATION

Infinitive: traduire to translate: see construire
### TABLE 7.H (continued)

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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous venez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je viinnent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je viendrai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je viendrait</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je vienne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je viinne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vêtir</td>
<td>je vêts</td>
<td>vêtant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to clothe</td>
<td>nous vêtons</td>
<td>vêtu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tu vêts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous vêtez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>il vêt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ils vêtent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vêts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous vêtez</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vêten</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vêtir</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je viendrai</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vêts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je vête</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je vêtsse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vivre</td>
<td>je vis</td>
<td>vivant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to live</td>
<td>nous vivons</td>
<td>vécu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tu vis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous vivez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>il vit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ils vivent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vivra</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vivrai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je vive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je vécusse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voir</td>
<td>je vois</td>
<td>voyant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to see</td>
<td>nous voyons</td>
<td>vu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tu vois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous voyez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>il voit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ils voient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je verrai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je voie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je visse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vouloir</td>
<td>je veux</td>
<td>voulant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to want</td>
<td>nous voulons</td>
<td>voulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tu veux</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vous voulez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>il veulent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je voudray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je voulaus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je veuille</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que je vouluosse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8 Verb constructions

8.1 Relations between verbs and their complements

Verbs can be classified by the kinds of complement they take. Table 8.A outlines the main types dealt with in this chapter.

TABLE 8.A Classification of verbs by the complements they take

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb type</th>
<th>Complement type</th>
<th>Direct object</th>
<th>Prepositional object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intransitive (8.2) e.g. partir</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne partira</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly Transitive (8.3) e.g. fermer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il ferme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectly Transitive (8.4) e.g. hériter</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvon hérite</td>
<td></td>
<td>d’une fortune</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditransitive (8.5) e.g. planter</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hervé a planté</td>
<td></td>
<td>de roses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronominal (8.7) (a) se is a direct object e.g. s’évanouir</td>
<td>(a) Marie s’est évanouie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) se is an indirect object e.g. se faire mal</td>
<td>(b) Elle s’est fait mal (à elle-même)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.2 Intransitive constructions

Intransitive verbs have no object:

Depuis janvier les prix ont augmenté  Since January prices have gone up
Il a acquiescé  He agreed
L’eau scintillait  The water sparkled
La neige tombe  Snow is falling
La fête continue  The party is going on
Elle avait disparu  She had disappeared
Vous descendez?  Are you going down?
Il ne souffrira pas  He won’t suffer
§8.2 Intransitive constructions

They may be accompanied (usually optionally, but sometimes obligatorily) by adverbs (see Chapter 5). Examples shown in brackets indicate that the adverb is optional:

Elle part (en vacances)  
She is going (on holiday)

Un léger brouillard montait (de la mer)  
A mist rose (from the sea)

Il a respiré fortement  
He breathed deeply

Christian serait tombé (du haut de la falaise)  
Christian apparently fell (from the cliff)

Elle est descendue (péniblement)  
She went down (gingerly)

Cet homme avait vécu plus de 90 ans  
That man had lived into his nineties

Louis tremblait (de tous ses membres)  
Louis was trembling (all over)

Les minutes passaient (léanlement)  
The minutes passed (slowly)

8.2.1 Intransitive verbs and auxiliary avoir

Most intransitive verbs employ the auxiliary avoir in compound tenses:

Depuis janvier les prix ont augmenté  
Since January prices have gone up

Il aurait acquiescé  
He agreed, apparently

La fête avait continué  
The party had gone on

Elle avait disparu  
She had disappeared

Il n’a pas souffert  
He didn’t suffer

La situation aura probablement empiré  
The situation will probably have got worse

A small set of verbs, including commencer, changer, disparaître, vieillir, normally appear with the auxiliary avoir in compound tenses, but their past participles may be used with être to describe a state of affairs. In this case the past participle is used in very much the same way as an adjective (for adjectives, see Chapter 4). Compare the following sentences:

Il a commencé à lire ce roman  
He began to read this novel

La pièce est commencée  
The play has begun

Il a changé les pneus de sa voiture  
He changed the tyres on his car

Elle est devenue veuve et maintenant elle est vraiment changée  
She was widowed, and now she is a changed person

NB: With être and a state of affairs, there will be agreement between the past participle and the subject. With avoir and an action there will not. (See Chapter 9.2 and 9.3.)

8.2.2 Intransitive verbs and auxiliary être

Intransitive verbs with être

A small set of intransitive verbs, some very frequently used, appear with the auxiliary être in compound tenses:

Un léger brouillard est monté de la mer  
A mist rose from the sea

Christian est tombé du haut de la falaise  
Christian fell from the cliff

Elle était descendue  
She had gone down

Marie-Christine est née en 1968  
Marie-Christine was born in 1968
The verbs which take être in this way are:

- aller to go
- naître to be born
- arriver to arrive
- partir to leave
- décéder to die
- rentrer to go home
- demeurer to remain
- rester to stay
- descendre to go down
- retourner to return
- devenir to become
- revenir to come back
- entrer to enter
- sortir to go out
- monter to go up
- tomber to fall
- mourir to die
- venir to come

and verbs derived from the above: redescendre, remonter, renaître, repartir, retomber, parvenir and survenir.

Intransitive verbs with avoir or être

A further set of intransitive verbs, e.g. accourir, apparaître, passer, can appear either with avoir or with être in compound tenses. It would seem that the use of être is now more common and avoir may appear dated:

- Quand il a appris la nouvelle il est accouru
- Il nous est apparu que le gardien avait menti
- Il est passé nous voir

(See 8.3.4. for intransitive verbs which can be used with avoir when used transitively.)

8.3 Directly transitive verbs

Directly transitive verbs have direct objects:

- lire la nouvelle dans le journal to read the item in the newspaper
- quitter le Pays de Galles to leave Wales
- composer un billet to punch a ticket
- fumer une cigarette to smoke a cigarette
- ouvrir la portière to open the (car, train) door
- prendre le train to take the train
- rencontrer un ami to meet a friend
- expliquer les faits to explain the facts
- étouffer un juron to stifle an oath
- lever la tête to raise one’s head

8.3.1 Directly transitive verbs without objects

Sometimes the objects of transitive verbs may be omitted. When this happens the object is still ‘understood’, but with a general or non-specific interpretation:

- Clément boit Clément drinks (‘alcohol’ understood)
- La vitesse tue Speed kills (‘people’ understood)
- Gustave enseigne Gustave teaches (‘pupils’ understood)
- Il ne sait pas conduire He can’t drive (‘cars’ understood)
- On attend We’re waiting (‘for something to happen’ understood)
§8.3 Directly transitive verbs

8.3.2 Directly transitive verbs take the auxiliary avoir

All transitive verbs take the auxiliary *avoir* in compound tenses, whether the object is present or omitted:

- Elle a quitté le Pays de Galles
- J’ai rencontré un ami
- Dans la bousculade Laurent avait reçu des coups
- On a attendu

She has left Wales
I met a friend
In the confusion Laurent had been hit
We waited

8.3.3 Verbs with intransitive and transitive uses

Some verbs can be used intransitively (without an object) and transitively (with an object):

- Les prix augmentent
- La chaîne augmente ses prix
- Il rentre
- Il rentre la voiture au garage
- Elle sort
- Elle sort son appareil-photo
- Le moteur a calé
- Alain a calé le moteur

Prices are going up
The store is increasing its prices
He is going home
He is putting the car in the garage
She is going out
She is getting her camera out
The engine stalled
Alain stalled the engine

8.3.4 être and avoir with verbs used intransitively and transitively

Intransitive verbs which take the auxiliary *être* in compound tenses take *avoir* when they are used transitively:

- Pierre est descendu
- Pierre a descendu les valises
- Marie est montée prendre son maillot de bain
- Marie avait monté un sac de charbon
- Mickey est sorti
- Mickey a sorti une pièce d’identité
- Bernard sera rentré
- Bernard avait rentré la voiture au garage
- Eliane était retournée à la banque
- Eliane a retourné tout l’appartement

Pierre went down
Pierre has taken the suitcases down
Marie has gone up to fetch her swimming costume
Marie had taken a sack of coal up
Mickey has gone out
Mickey got out some identification
Bernard will have gone home
Bernard had put the car in the garage
Eliane had gone back to the bank
Eliane has turned the flat upside down
The verbs *descendre* and *monter* also take the auxiliary *avoir* in compound tenses when they are used with adverbials of place like *l’escalier, la rue, la côte*:

- *Il a descendu l’escalier, la rue*  
  *He went down the stairs/the street*
- *Elle a monté la côte*  
  *She went up the hill*

Compare with:

- *Il est descendu vers la rue*  
  *He went down towards the street*
- *Elle est monté à l’échelle*  
  *She climbed up the ladder*

### 8.3.5 Verbs which are directly transitive in French but whose translation equivalents involve the object of a preposition in English

English speakers should pay special attention to the following verbs. Unlike their English counterparts, their objects are not preceded by a preposition:

- *approuver un choix*  
  *to approve of a choice*
- *attendre le train*  
  *to wait for the train*
- *chercher une enveloppe*  
  *to look for an envelope*
- *demander un verre d’eau*  
  *to ask for a glass of water*
- *descendre la rue*  
  *to go down the street*
- *écouter la radio*  
  *to listen to the radio*
- *espérer une récompense*  
  *to hope for a reward*
- *habiter une maison, une ville, une région*  
  *to live in a house, in a town, in a region*
- *longer la falaise*  
  *to go along the cliff*
- *monter la côte*  
  *to go up the hill*
- *payer un tour de manège*  
  *to pay for a ride on a roundabout*
- *payer une tournée*  
  *to pay for a round (of drinks)*
- *présider une séance*  
  *to be the chairperson of a session*
- *regarder le soleil*  
  *to look at the sun*
- *viser la cible*  
  *to aim at the target*

*habiter* also appears in constructions like: *habiter à la campagne, habiter en ville, habiter en France.* Here *à la campagne, en ville and en France* are not objects but adverbials; they can co-occur with direct objects: *habiter une petite maison à la campagne, habiter un bon quartier en ville,* etc.

Examples:

- *Il approuve mon choix*  
  *(NOT *Il approuve de mon choix)*
- *J’attends le train*  
  *(NOT *J’attends pour le train)*
- *Nous cherchons la gare*  
  *(NOT *Nous cherchons pour la gare)*
- *Cette publicité vise les jeunes*  
  *(NOT *Cette publicité vise aux jeunes)*

(See Chapter 3.2 to see how this influences the choice of object pronouns.)

### 8.4 Indirectly transitive verbs

Indirectly transitive verbs take an object introduced by a preposition:

**Introduced by à**

- *assister à une réunion*  
  *to be present at a meeting*
- *compatir à la douleur de quelqu’un*  
  *to feel for somebody in their sorrow*
croire au diable
tenir à son cousin
participer aux activités
penser à son avenir
réfléchir à son passé
songer à un voyage en Italie
veiller au bon règlement d’une affaire

to believe in the devil
to hold a grudge against one’s cousin
to take part in the activities
to think about one’s future
to provide for somebody’s needs
to reflect on one’s past
to envisage a trip to Italy
to see to the proper handling of a matter

NB: (a) Croire à is used to mean ‘to believe in the existence of some phenomenon’: croire au Père Noël ‘to believe in Father Christmas’, croire au bonheur ‘to believe in (human) happiness’. Croire can also take direct objects: Je crois cette histoire ‘I believe this story’, Elle le croit ‘She believes him’. Croire en means ‘to believe in’ in the sense of ‘to have faith in’: croire en Dieu ‘to believe in God’, croire en ses co-equipiers ‘to believe in one’s teammates’.

(b) Penser can also take an object preceded by de with the meaning ‘to have an opinion about something’: Qu’est-ce que vous pensez de son article? ‘What do you think of his article?’

(c) Veiller sur quelqu’un means ‘to watch over somebody’.

Introduced by de

déborder d’eau
déjeuner de fruits
dépendre des circonstances
dîner de moules et de frites
fourmiller d’abeilles
gémir de douleur
grouiller de fourmis
parler de ses amis
regorger de richesses
répondre de son ami
rire de ses compagnons
rougir de honte
tenir de sa mère
trembler de peur
triompher de son adversaire
vivre de l’air du temps
vivre de presque rien
to overflow with water
to lunch on fruit
to depend on the circumstances
to dine on mussels and French fries
to swarm with bees
to groan with pain
to swarm with ants
to speak of one’s friends
to abound in wealth
to answer for one’s friend
to laugh at one’s friends
to go red with shame
to take after one’s mother
to tremble with fear
to overcome one’s opponent
to live on fresh air alone
to live on next to nothing

(For pronominal verbs which take prepositional objects (s’habiter à, s’éloigner de, etc.) see 8.7.3.)

§8.4 Indirectly transitive verbs

8.4.1 Verbs which are indirectly transitive in French but whose translation equivalents are directly transitive in English

Special attention should be given to the following verbs because, while they are indirectly transitive in French, their English counterparts are directly transitive.

Objects introduced by à

ccontravenir à la réglementation
cconvenir à Julie
c(m)plaire à son professeur
c(dés)obéir à ses parents
to break the rule
to suit Julie
to (dis)please one’s teacher
to (dis)obey one’s parents
Verb constructions §8.4

échapper à la police  
eto evade capture by the police
échouer à un examen  
eto fail an exam
jouer au football, au rugby, au tennis  
eto play football, rugby, tennis
nuire à la réputation de quelqu’un  
eto harm somebody’s reputation
parvenir au sommet  
eto reach the summit
plaire à quelqu’un  
eto please somebody
remédier à la situation  
eto rectify the situation
renoncer à l’alcool  
eto give up alcohol
résister à une force  
eto resist a force
resssembler à son chien  
eto look like one’s dog
subvenir aux besoins de quelqu’un  
eto look after somebody financially
succéder à son père  
eto succeed one’s father
survivre à un accident  
eto survive an accident
téléphoner à quelqu’un  
eto telephone somebody
toucher aux affaires de quelqu’un  
eto mess about with somebody’s things

While échapper à means ‘to evade capture’, s’échapper de means ‘to escape from’: s’échapper de la prison.

Examples:

Il joue au football  
(Note *Il joue football)
Il a téléphoné à sa femme  
(Note *Il a téléphoné sa femme)
Elle ressemble beaucoup à sa mère  
(Note *Elle ressemble beaucoup sa mère)
Le nouveau poste plaisait à Antoine  
(Note *Le nouveau poste plaisait Antoine)

See Chapter 3.2 for the relevance of this distinction to the choice of object pronoun.

Objects introduced by de

abuser de son héritage  
eto misuse one’s inheritance
douter de la vérité d’une histoire  
eto doubt the truth of a story
hériter d’une fortune  
eto inherit a fortune
jouer du piano/du violon/de la flûte  
eto play the piano/violin/flute
jouir de privilèges sans précédent  
eto enjoy unprecedented privileges
médire de son voisin  
eto slander one’s neighbour
redoubler d’efforts  
eto double one’s efforts

Note that entrer is usually followed by dans: entrer dans la maison. Grimper is usually followed either by sur or by à: grimper sur un escabeau ‘to climb a stepladder’, grimper à l’échelle ‘to climb a ladder’.

Examples:

Elle espère hériter d’une fortune  
(Note *Elle espère hériter une fortune)
Elle jouait du piano  
(Note *Elle jouait le piano)

(For pronominal verbs which take prepositional objects – s’apercevoir de, se servir de, etc. – see 8.7.3.)
8.5 Ditransitive verbs

Ditransitive verbs take a direct object and an object introduced by a preposition.

Introduced by à and corresponding typically to English ‘to’

accoutumer un apprenti au métier  
àdmettre un invité à la fête  
appepler quelqu’un au téléphone  
apprendre le français à des élèves  
avouer un crime à la police  
condamner un malfaiteur à une peine de prison  
conduire les hôtes à leur chambre  
contraindre les rebelles à l’obéissance  
dire ses quatre vérités à quelqu’un  
destiner son fils à une belle carrière  
dire des mensonges à sa famille  
emmener les invités à leur hôtel  
exposer sa famille à des dangers  
forcer les citoyens à la révolution  
habituer les motocyclistes à port du casque

inciter les ouvriers à la révolte  
inviter les syndicalistes à une réunion

jurer amitié à quelqu’un  
louer une voiture à un touriste  
obliger ses créanciers à remboursement  
ordonner la retraite à ses troupes  
provoquer quelqu’un à une réaction trop vive  
réduire quelqu’un à la mendicité  
rendre la tondeuse à son voisin

suggérer une idée à un collègue

NB: louer une voiture à un garagiste is likely to mean: ‘to hire a car from a garage owner’.

Introduced by à and corresponding typically to English ‘from’ or ‘for’

acheter un camion à un garagiste  
arracher de l’argent à un avare  
cacher la catastrophe à sa famille  
dérober de l’argent à ses enfants  
emprunter cinq cents euros à un ami  
enlever le pistolet à l’agresseur  
ôter une écharde à quelqu’un  
louer une camionnette au garagiste  
préparer la famille à de bien tristes nouvelles  
reprocher des sièges aux invités  
retirer son permis au conducteur  
soustraire une grosse somme à une vieille dame  
voler une bague à sa cousine

àto get an apprentice used to a trade  
àto admit a guest to the party  
àto call somebody to the phone  
àto teach French to pupils  
àto confess to the police about a crime  
àto condemn a criminal to prison  
àto take the guests to their room  
àto invite friends to a party  
àto tell someone the unadorned truth  
àto arrange a great career for one’s son  
àto tell lies to one’s family  
àto take guests to their hotel  
àto expose one’s family to danger  
àto drive the citizens to revolution  
àto get motorcycle riders used to wearing a helmet  
àto incite workers to revolt  
àto invite the trade union representatives to a meeting  
àpledge one’s friendship to someone  
àto rent a car to a tourist  
àto force one’s debtors to pay up  
àto order one’s troops to retreat  
àto provoke somebody into a hasty reaction  
àto reduce somebody to beggary  
àto return the lawn-mower to one’s neighbour  
àto suggest an idea to a colleague

àto buy a lorry from a garage owner  
àto prise money from a miser  
àto hide the disaster from one’s family  
àto steal money from one’s children  
àto borrow five hundred euros from a friend  
àto take the revolver away from the attacker  
àto remove a splinter from somebody’s flesh  
àto hire a van from the garage owner  
àto prepare the family for very sad news  
àto be angry with one’s husband for having had an affair  
àto reserve some seats for the guests  
àto take the driver’s licence away from him  
àto swindle an old lady out of a large sum  
àto steal a ring from one’s cousin
Introduced by *de* and corresponding typically to English ‘with’ or ‘in’ or, less frequently, ‘from’ or ‘on’

- *accabler son amie de cadeaux*  
  to overwhelm one’s girlfriend with presents

- *accompagner ses commentaires de sarcasme*  
  to bring sarcasm into one’s comments

- *affranchir une population de l’esclavage*  
  to free a population from slavery

- *armer ses soldats de mitrailleuses*  
  to arm one’s soldiers with machine guns

- *coiffer un enfant d’un chapeau de paille*  
  to put a straw hat on a child’s head

- *combler ses invités de cadeaux*  
  to drown one’s guests in kindness

- *cribler un corps de balles*  
  to riddle a body with bullets

- *éloigner sa fille de ses admirateurs*  
  to remove one’s daughter from her admirers

- *encombrer la voiture d’affaires de sport*  
  to clutter up the car with sports equipment

- *entourer la famille de bons amis*  
  to surround the family with good friends

- *envelopper le cadeau d’un papier de soie*  
  to wrap the present in tissue paper

- *habiller son mari de vêtements sport*  
  to buy casual styles of clothes for one’s husband

- *menacer ses employés d’une réduction de salaire*  
  to threaten one’s employees with a drop in salary

- *munir les étudiants du savoir nécessaire*  
  to provide students with the necessary knowledge

- *ornier le parebrise d’autocollants*  
  to decorate the windscreen with stickers

- *planter le jardin de roses*  
  to plant the garden with roses

- *pourvoir un réfugié d’un faux passeport*  
  to provide a refugee with a false passport

- *remplir une salle de spectateurs*  
  to fill a hall with spectators

- *sémer un champ de haricots*  
  to sow a field with beans

- *soiller un drap de sang*  
  to soil a sheet with blood

- *tacher un pantalon de graisse*  
  to stain trousers with grease

- *tapisser la chambre de papier peint rose*  
  to paper the bedroom in pink

- *vêtir un cardinal d’une robe de pourpre*  
  to dress a cardinal in a purple robe

8.5.1 In French, unlike English, double object constructions with no preposition are impossible

Some ditransitive verbs in English allow the preposition introducing the second object to be omitted and the order of the objects to be switched around. This is not possible in French:

- *to give a present to one’s uncle*  
  *offrir un cadeau à son oncle*  
  BUT NOT *offrir son oncle un cadeau*

- *to pass the salt to one’s neighbour*  
  *passer le sel à son voisin*  
  BUT NOT *passer son voisin le sel*

(See 8.6.3 for the consequences of this in forming a passive.)

8.6 The passive

By use of the passive, emphasis may be placed on the receiver of an action (usually what would be the object in the equivalent active sentence) rather than on the agent of the action (usually the subject).
8.6.1 Formation of the passive

Passives are produced from directly transitive sentences by moving the object noun phrase into the position of the grammatical subject, introducing the verb être and, optionally, moving the erstwhile subject into a phrase introduced by par or de:

Nantes a battu Paris St Germain

Nantes beat Paris St Germain

becomes:

Paris St Germain a été battu (par Nantes)

Paris St Germain were beaten (by Nantes)

Quand elle est arrivée au commissariat, son mari l’accompagnait

When she got to the police station, her husband was with her

becomes:

Quand elle est arrivée au commissariat, elle était accompagnée de son mari

When she got to the police station, she was in the company of her husband

Note that the rules of agreement for the past participle are those of être (see Chapter 9.2.2): i.e. it agrees with the subject:

Delphine a été battue au tennis par Suzanne

Delphine was beaten at tennis by Suzanne

Georges a été battu au tennis par Jean-Claude

George was beaten at tennis by Jean-Claude

NB: The use of the preposition par to introduce the subject usually implies some degree of voluntary involvement; the use of de suggests more a state of affairs. See also Chapter 13.15.5.

8.6.2 Problems in the formation of the passive arising from different kinds of direct objects

Most verbs which have a direct object (directly transitive verbs – see 8.3) will convert into a passive, but there are limitations to whether the meaning is sensible or not. Connaître can be turned into a sensible passive:

Les milieux policiers connaissent cette organisation

The police know this organisation

Cette organisation est connue des milieux policiers

This organisation is known to the police

but lire produces a less natural sentence:

Je lis ce livre

I am reading this book

Ce livre est lu par moi (???)

This book is being read by me (???)
Usually passives which make an inanimate direct object a subject and put an animate subject in a par or de phrase are unnatural.

NB: The verb avoir is used in the passive only in the colloquial j'ai été eu ‘I have been had’ in the sense of ‘swindled’.

8.6.3 Possible confusions between English and French over what is a direct object: English ‘double object’ verbs

English has a set of verbs which allow two structures for a similar meaning: one has a direct object and a prepositional object, the other has two non-prepositional objects and the word order is different:

John gave flowers to Naomi
John gave Naomi flowers

In both sentences ‘Naomi’ is the indirect object of the verb ‘give’ and ‘flowers’ is the direct object, but in the ‘double object’ construction ‘Naomi’ directly follows the verb, which gives the impression that it is the direct object.

English allows either object to become the subject in a passive sentence:

Flowers were given to Naomi by John
Naomi was given flowers by John

French, however, only allows the prepositional object construction offrir quelque chose à quelqu’un: Jean a offert des fleurs à Naomi (NOT *Jean a offert Naomi des fleurs) Furthermore, French only allows the direct object to become the subject in a passive sentence. Thus:

Des fleurs furent offertes à Naomi par Jean
Flowers were given to Naomi by Jean

is an acceptable French sentence, but

*Naomi fut offerte des fleurs par Jean

is entirely unacceptable.

Sentences constructed with similar verbs run into the same problems:

**English**

To teach somebody something:

I taught French to John
I taught John French
French was taught to John by me
John was taught French by me

**French**

Enseigner quelque chose à quelqu’un:

J’ai enseigné le français à Jean
But *J’ai enseigné Jean le français is unacceptable
Therefore Le français fut enseigné à Jean par moi is acceptable
But *Jean fut enseigné le français par moi is unacceptable
§8.6 The passive

English
To tell somebody something:

- I told a story to John
- I told John a story
- A story was told to John by me
- John was told a story by me

French
Raconter quelque chose à quelqu’un:

- J’ai raconté une histoire à Jean
  - But *J’ai raconté Jean une histoire is unacceptable
  - Therefore Une histoire fut racontée à Jean par moi is acceptable
  - But *Jean fut raconté une histoire par moi is unacceptable

Common French verbs whose prepositional objects must keep the preposition and cannot be made the subject of a passive are listed below:

- accorder qc à qn to grant sb sth
- apprendre qc à qn to teach sb sth
- commander qc à qn to order sb to do sth/to order sth from sb
- conseiller qc à qn to advise sb to do sth
- défendre qc à qn to forbid sb sth
- demander qc à qn to ask sb sth
- donner qc à qn to give sb sth
- écrire qc à qn to write sb sth
- enseigner qc à qn to teach sb sth
- laisser qc à qn to leave sb sth
- montrer qc à qn to show sb sth
- offrir qc à qn to offer sb sth, treat sb to sth
- pardonner qc à qn to forgive sb sth
- passer qc à qn to pass sb sth
- permettre qc à qn to allow sb sth
- prescrire qc à qn to prescribe sb sth
- prêter qc à qn to lend sb sth
- promettre qc à qn to promise sb sth
- refuser qc à qn to refuse sb sth

8.6.4 Use of the passive in English and French

The passive is used much more frequently in English than in French. This is partly because there are fewer restrictions on which verbs can be made passive, and partly because there are many other ways in French of removing the agent from subject position or reducing the specificity of the subject.

Alternatives to the English passive which reduce the role of the subject as agent include:

(a) The use of on with the active form (see also Chapter 3.1.11.):

On ne nous a pas facilité l’accès à l’Ambassade
Access to the Embassy has not been made easy for us

(b) The use of an impersonal verb and/or an impersonal pronoun:

Il est interdit de fumer à l’intérieur de l’établissement
Smoking is forbidden inside the building
Verb constructions §8.7

Cela n’a certainement pas rendu notre travail plus facile
Our work certainly wasn’t made any easier

(c) The use of a reflexive verb (see 8.7.6.):

Les mirabelles ne se vendent plus le long de la route
Mirabelle plums are no longer sold on the roadside

Les faux ne s’emploient plus dans les champs
Scythes are no longer used in the fields

(d) The use of a noun to represent a process:

L’assemblage de ces alarmes par la société Sécurat-France a lieu en Chine
These alarms are assembled in China by Sécurat-France

To avoid using a passive, it is sometimes worth considering whether there is a verb with the opposite meaning that could be used in a non-passive transitive construction. For example, instead of:

Des pommes ont été vendues à Marianne
Some apples were sold to Marianne

Un livre a été donné a Paul
A book was given to Paul

the following transitive constructions might be used:

Marianne a acheté des pommes
Marianne bought some apples

Paul a reçu un livre
Paul received a book

However, whether these alternatives are appropriate will depend on the context in which the sentence occurs.

8.7 Pronominal verbs

Pronominal verbs are accompanied by an unstressed pronoun which agrees with the subject, and is one of me, te, se, nous, vous. This can function as a direct object:

Direct object

se laver ‘to wash (oneself)’

je me lave nous nous lavons
tu te laves vous vous lavez
Paul se lave ils se lavent
Virginie se lave elles se lavent

or as an indirect object:

Indirect object

se laver le visage ‘to wash one’s face’ (literally: ‘to wash the face to oneself’)

je me lave le visage nous nous lavons le visage
tu te laves le visage vous vous lavez le visage
Paul se lave le visage
Virginie se lave le visage
ils se lavent le visage
elles se lavent le visage

Some verbs exist in both a pronominal and non-pronominal form, as *laver* does: *laver la voiture* ‘to wash the car’, *se laver le visage* ‘to wash one’s face’. Others are always pronominal, for example *s’évanouir* ‘to faint’, *s’enorgueillir de* ‘to take pride in’, *s’évertuer à* ‘to try very hard to’.

All pronominal verbs are conjugated with *être* in compound tenses. (For the agreement of past participles with pronominal verbs see 8.7.7 and Chapter 9.4.)

### 8.7.1 Pronominal verbs used reflexively

When pronominal verbs are used to describe something which the subject does to herself, himself, themselves, etc., they are being used reflexively:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Je me vois dans la glace</td>
<td>I can see myself in the mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je me déteste</td>
<td>I hate myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il s’est fait mal</td>
<td>He hurt himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle s’était cassé la jambe</td>
<td>She had broken her leg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that English translations of pronominal verbs used reflexively do not always require a form of *-self*. In French, however, the reflexive pronoun is always required:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Je me lave</td>
<td>I am washing (myself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il se rase</td>
<td>He is shaving (himself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il s’est roulé par terre</td>
<td>He rolled (himself) on the ground</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pronoun itself may be the direct or indirect object of the verb. If the verb in its non-pronominal form is directly transitive, the pronoun will be a direct object. If the verb in its non-pronominal form is indirectly transitive, the pronoun will be an indirect object pronoun.

For example, *laver* takes a direct object: *laver la voiture*. Therefore in *Je me lave* the pronoun is direct. But *parler (parler à qn)* takes an indirect object, e.g. *parler à une amie*. Therefore in *Je me parle* the pronoun is indirect.

#### The reflexive pronoun is the direct object

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Je me lave à l’eau froide</td>
<td>I wash in cold water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle est maladroite et se blesse fréquemment</td>
<td>She is clumsy and often injures herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il se coiffe pendant des heures</td>
<td>He spends hours doing his hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu te baignes tous les jours?</td>
<td>Do you have a swim every day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne s’hable très mal</td>
<td>Suzanne dresses very badly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Pierre se nourrit très bien</td>
<td>Jean-Pierre has a healthy diet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne se cache dans l’armoire</td>
<td>Marianne is hiding in the cupboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The reflexive pronoun is the indirect object

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Je me parle constamment en me promenant</td>
<td>I constantly talk to myself when I go for a walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En répétant des confidences on ne peut que se nuire</td>
<td>By repeating secrets you only succeed in doing yourself harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu t’achèteras un nouveau blouson pour la rentrée</td>
<td>You’ll buy yourself a new jacket to go back to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je me reproche ces bêtises</td>
<td>I feel bad about this foolishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je me jure de continuer à travailler</td>
<td>I promise myself that I will continue to work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Il faut bien s’admettre la vérité
Marianne se cache la vérité

We just have to accept the truth
Marianne is hiding the truth from herself

The difference between direct object reflexives and indirect object reflexives is clear from the last example in each set:

Marianne se cache dans l’armoire
Marianne se cache la vérité

In the first example the se is the person who is hidden: Marianne cache Marianne dans l’armoire. In the second example it is la vérité which is hidden and the se is the indirect object: Marianne cache la vérité à Marianne. These differences are significant when it comes to past participle agreement (see 8.7.7 below and Chapter 9.4).

Many ordinarily directly transitive, indirectly transitive and ditransitive verbs can be used pronominally as reflexives, for example:

Il critique son patron
He criticizes his boss
Il se critique
He criticizes himself

Elle regarde son amie
She is looking at her girl friend
Elle se regarde
She is looking at herself

Tu offres un cadeau à Philippe
You are giving a present to Philip
Tu t’offres un cadeau
You are giving a present to yourself

Il parle à sa mère
He’s talking to his mother
Il se parle
He’s talking to himself

Elle cache la vérité à son mari
She is hiding the truth from her husband
Elle se cache la vérité
She is hiding the truth from herself

8.7.2 Pronominal verbs and body parts

The normal way of describing events in which subjects do things to their own bodies is to use a pronominal verb and the part of the body preceded by a definite or indefinite article, and not by a possessive determiner as in English:

Je me lave toujours les mains avant de déjeuner
I always wash my hands before lunch

Elle va se couper le doigt si elle ne fait pas attention
She will cut her finger if she’s not careful

Nathan s’est cassé la jambe en jouant au football
Nathan broke his leg playing football

Tu as encore oublié de te broser les dents!
You forgot to brush your teeth again!

J’aime bien me broser les cheveux
I like brushing my hair

Elle s’est cassé une dent de devant
She broke one of her front teeth

(See also Chapter 2.2.8 for the use of the definite article with parts of the body.)
8.7.3 Pronominal verbs without a reflexive interpretation

Some verbs include a pronoun but it is impossible to see in what way they can be assigned a reflexive interpretation, e.g. *s’abstenir, se douter, s’en aller, s’enfuir, s’évanouir, se repentir, se taire* etc.:

- *Je m’abstiendrai* de tout commentaire  
  *I will refrain from making any comment*

- *Tu t’es toujours douté qu’il lui ferait faux bond*  
  *You always guessed he would let her down*

- *Il reste encore aujourd’hui mais il s’en va demain*  
  *He’s staying today but he is going tomorrow*

- *A la vue de tout ce sang, ils se sont évanouis*  
  *At the sight of so much blood they fainted*

- *Il s’est toujours repenté de ces paroles*  
  *He always regretted those words*

- *Ils se sont tus pour protéger leur camarade*  
  *They kept quiet to protect their friend*

Common pronominal verbs which do not have a reflexive interpretation:

- s’abstenir de tout commentaire  
  *to refrain from making any comment*

- s’accouder au parapet  
  *to lean on one’s elbows on the parapet*

- s’accoutumer à conduire la nuit  
  *to get used to driving at night*

- s’accroupir derrière un arbre  
  *to crouch behind a tree*

- s’affaiblir lentement  
  *to get slowly weaker*

- s’affaissér/s’affaler/s’écrouler par terre  
  *to collapse on the ground*

- s’agenouiller près de quelqu’un  
  *to kneel down next to somebody*

- s’amuser en vacances  
  *to have fun on holiday*

- s’appeler Drissi  
  *to be called Drissi*

- s’approcher de qn  
  *to approach somebody*

- s’appuyer au rebord de la fenêtre  
  *to lean on the windowsill*

- s’arrêter aux feux  
  *to stop at the lights*

- s’asseoir dans un fauteuil  
  *to sit down in an armchair*

- s’assoupir au volant  
  *to doze off at the wheel*

- s’avancer vers la montagne  
  *to advance towards the mountain*

- se blottir contre sa mère  
  *to cuddle up to one’s mother*

- se cacher dans le noir  
  *to get undressed in the dark*

- se cacher derrière la maison  
  *to hide behind the house*

- se déshabiller derrière la fenêtre  
  *to undress behind the window*

- se déshabiller à l’avance  
  *to get dressed in advance*

- se détendre devant la montagne  
  *to relax in front of the mountain*

- se coucher tôt  
  *to go to bed early*

- se dépêcher de poser sa candidature  
  *to hurry to apply for the job*

- se désagréger dans le noir  
  *to gather in the dark*

- se diriger vers la maison  
  *to go towards the house*

- se distinguer par son intelligence  
  *to stand out by one’s intelligence*

- se douter de qc  
  *to suspect something*

- se dresser contre une injustice  
  *to protest against an injustice*

- s’écarter du chemin  
  *to stray from the track*

- s’échapper/s’évader d’une prison  
  *to escape from a prison*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French verb</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s’écouler vite</td>
<td>to pass quickly (of time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’écouter</td>
<td>to listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’éloigner de la ville</td>
<td>to move away from the town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’emparer de son adversaire</td>
<td>to get hold of one’s opponent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’en aller ailleurs</td>
<td>to go away somewhere else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’endormir dans la voiture</td>
<td>to go to sleep in the car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’enfuir dans les bois</td>
<td>to flee into the woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’ennuyer à la campagne</td>
<td>to become bored in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’enquérir auprès de l’ambassade</td>
<td>to inquire at the Embassy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’étonner de la vitesse de la voiture</td>
<td>to be surprised at the speed of the car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’évanouir</td>
<td>to faint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se fâcher de qc</td>
<td>to get annoyed at something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se fatiguer facilement</td>
<td>to get easily tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se fermer doucement</td>
<td>to close gently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se fier à ses collègues</td>
<td>to trust one’s colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’habiller en tenue de soirée</td>
<td>to wear evening dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’habiter à un nouvel emploi</td>
<td>to get used to a new job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’intéresser au latin</td>
<td>to be interested in Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se lever tard</td>
<td>to get up late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se méfier de la police</td>
<td>to distrust the police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se mêler à la conversation</td>
<td>to join in the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se mettre debout</td>
<td>to stand up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se moquer de qn</td>
<td>to make fun of somebody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se nourrir de pain</td>
<td>to live on bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s’occuper de ses enfants</td>
<td>to look after one’s children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se passer de cigarettes</td>
<td>to go without cigarettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se plaindre du temps</td>
<td>to complain about the weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se rappeler une amie</td>
<td>to remember a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se raviser brusquement</td>
<td>to change one’s mind suddenly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se réfugier sous les arbres</td>
<td>to take refuge under the trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se repentir de ses paroles</td>
<td>to regret one’s words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se retourner</td>
<td>to turn around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se réunir le dimanche</td>
<td>to meet on Sundays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se réveiller</td>
<td>to wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se servir d’une scie</td>
<td>to use a saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se soucier de la santé de qn</td>
<td>to worry about somebody’s health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se souvenir d’une amie</td>
<td>to remember a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se taire</td>
<td>to keep quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se tenir droit</td>
<td>to stand straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se tromper</td>
<td>to be wrong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.7.4 se faire and se laisser

`se faire` and `se laisser` are used to convey the idea that the subject causes some event to befall himself or herself without necessarily intending that it should:

- Julie s’est fait écraser par un camion
- Pierre s’est fait sortir du terrain
- Jean s’est fait embrasser par Christine
- Elle s’est laissé convaincre par son père
- Il se laissait guider
- Guido s’est laissé pousser les moustaches

(See Chapter 9.4 for agreement of the past participle of `faire` and `laisser` in this construction.)
8.7.5 Pronominal verbs used reciprocally

When a pronominal verb is used in the plural and describes a situation where several subjects are doing things to each other, it is being used reciprocally:

D’ordinaire, les journalistes se consultent avant de publier un article de ce genre

They will meet (each other) before publishing this kind of article

Ils se rencontreront à Paris

They will meet (each other) in Paris

Nous nous connaissons

We know each other

Les enfants se disputent

The children are arguing (with each other)

The pronoun can be a direct object, as in the above examples, or an indirect object, as in the following examples:

Souvent les participants s’écrivent et restent en contact après la conférence

Participants often write to one another and keep in touch after the conference

Il a ensuite été demandé aux élèves de se poser des questions sans le secours du professeur

Pupils were then required to ask each other questions without the teacher’s help

Nous nous envoyons des cadeaux à Noël chaque année

We send each other presents every year at Christmas

Sometimes there is a possible ambiguity between a reflexive interpretation of the pronoun and a reciprocal interpretation, for example:

Les boxeurs se sont blessés

The boxers hurt each other or The boxers hurt themselves (i.e. each hurt himself but not the other)

Les participants se sont posé des questions

The participants asked each other questions or The participants asked questions of themselves

One way to make the reciprocal interpretation entirely clear is to add the expression l’un l’autre ‘each other’ in its appropriate form. For example, where a direct object is involved:

Les boxeurs se sont blessés l’un l’autre

The boxers hurt each other

But where an indirect object is involved:

Les participants se sont posé des questions l’un à l’autre

The participants asked each other questions

l’un l’autre also varies for gender and number. If the subjects are feminine in gender l’une l’autre is required:

On s’aide l’une l’autre pour la garde des enfants

We help each other out with looking after the children

If more than just two subjects are involved a plural form of l’un l’autre is required:

Les universitaires du monde entier peuvent se contacter les uns les autres par courrier électronique

Academics all over the world can contact each other by electronic mail

(For agreement of the past participle see 8.7.7 and Chapter 9.4.)
8.7.6 Pronominal verbs used as passives

Pronominal verbs are increasingly used with a meaning equivalent to an English passive:

Les jeux électroniques se vendent comme des petits pains
*Computer games are selling like hot cakes*

Ces verbes se conjuguent avec ‘être’
*These verbs are conjugated with ‘être’*

Le français se parle au Canada et en Afrique
*French is spoken in Canada and in Africa*

Les baskets s’achètent dans les magasins de sport
*Trainers can be bought in sports shops*

Les valeurs se maintiennent à la Bourse
*Stocks and shares are holding up on the Stock Exchange*

Cela ne se fait pas
*That is just not done*

Ce vin se boit chambré
*This wine is drunk at room temperature*

La vengeance est un plat qui se mange froid
*Revenge is a meal to be eaten cold*

C’est une revue qui se lit facilement
*This journal is easy to read*

8.7.7 Pronominal verbs, the auxiliary être and the agreement of the past participle

Pronominal verbs are always conjugated with être in their compound tenses, and the question arises as to when the past participle is marked for agreement. Whereas the past participle of non-pronominal verbs which take être always agrees with the subject (elle est arrivée, nous sommes arrivés, elles sont arrivées – see Chapter 9.2), the participle with pronominal verbs only agrees with a direct object pronoun. For example:

(a) Where the meaning of the pronoun is reflexive and it is a direct object:

Je (fem) me suis lavée à l’eau froide
*I washed in cold water*

Elle était maladroite et s’était fréquemment blessée
*She was clumsy and often injured herself*

Suzanne s’est très mal habillée
*Suzanne dressed very badly*

Marianne s’est cachée dans l’armoire
*Marianne hid in the cupboard*

(See also 8.7.1)

(b) Where the meaning of the pronoun is reciprocal and it is a direct object:

Les deux équipes se sont rencontrées à Paris
*The two teams met (each other) in Paris*

Nous nous sommes attendus les uns les autres avant de rentrer
*We waited for each other before going home*
Jean-Pierre et Richard se sont rencontrés à Lyon
Jean-Pierre and Richard met in Lyons

Marianne et sa mère se sont attendues à la gare
Marianne and her mother waited for each other at the station

(c) Where the pronoun has no detectable reflexive or reciprocal meaning, but is an integral part of the verb, and is a direct object:

A la vue de tout ce sang, elles se sont évanouies
At the sight of so much blood, they fainted

Ils se sont toujours repenti de ces paroles
They always regretted those words

Ils se sont tus dès qu’ils ont vu le directeur
They kept quiet as soon as they saw the headmaster

This includes when the pronoun is used as a passive:

Les jeux vidéo se sont vendus comme des petits pains
Video games sold like hot cakes

BUT the past participle will not agree in any case where the pronoun is an indirect object (see 8.7.1). In particular this will be the case:

(i) where the non-pronominal version of the verb has a prepositional indirect object e.g. nuire à qn, cacher qch à qn, écrire à qn and therefore the se is seen as an indirect object:

Elle s’est nui en faisant de telles demandes
She did herself harm by these requests

Marianne s’est caché la vérité
Marianne hid the truth from herself

Les participants se sont écrit
The participants wrote to each other

(ii) where the pronoun is indirect, given that the direct object is a body part (as in 8.7.2):

Je (fem) me suis lavé les mains avant de déjeuner
I washed my hands before lunch

Elle s’est coupé le doigt parce qu’elle ne faisait pas attention
She cut her finger because she was careless

Nathan s’est cassé la jambe en jouant au football
Nathan broke his leg playing football

NB: Where the pronoun is an indirect object (and hence the participle does not agree with it), the participle may nevertheless agree with a preceding direct object, as in:

Les deux valises qu’il s’est achetées sont cassées
The two suitcases he bought are broken

Combien de valises s’est-il achetées?
How many suitcases did he buy?

(See Chapter 9 for the general rules of past participle agreement.)
8.8 Impersonal verbs

A number of verbs only exist in an impersonal (and infinitive) form. They only take the pronoun *il* as their subject, which in this case does not refer to a person or thing; i.e. it is an impersonal use.

8.8.1 Weather verbs

The best-known group of impersonal verbs describe the weather:

- *Il pleut* (It’s raining)
- *Il pleut des cordes* (It’s raining cats and dogs)
- *Il neige* (It’s snowing)
- *Il grêle* (It’s sleet)
- *Il tonne* (There’s thunder)
- *Il vente* (It’s windy)
- *Il bruine* (It’s drizzling)

More generally climatic conditions can be expressed by an impersonal use of *faire* followed by an adjective or a noun:

- *Il fait beau* (It’s a nice day)
- *Il fait du soleil* (It’s sunny)
- *Il fait mauvais* (It’s not a nice day)
- *Il fait chaud* (It’s hot)
- *Il fait lourd* (The weather is oppressive)
- *Il fait sec* (It’s very dry)
- *Il fait humide* (It’s very humid)
- *Il fait du brouillard* (It’s foggy)
- *Il fait de l’orage* (It’s stormy)
- *Il fait un froid de canard* (It’s very cold)

8.8.2 *falloir*

*falloir* only exists in impersonal forms (see the list of irregular verbs in Chapter 7). It may be followed by a noun, by an infinitive, by a clause – with the verb in the subjunctive – and it may be preceded by a pronoun acting as indirect object:

- *Il faut du temps* (Time is needed)
- *Il faut partir* (It is time to leave)
- *Il faut que nous partions* (We must leave)
- *Il nous faut partir* (We must leave)
- *Il nous faudra revenir dans trois semaines* (We must come back in three weeks)
- *Il a fallu trois mois pour que nous nous décidions* (It took us three months to make up our minds)
- *Il faudrait être certain que cela soit la bonne décision* (We need to be sure that this is the right decision)
8.8.3 il y a

*il y a* (‘there is’ or ‘there are’) also exists only in the impersonal form. It is usually followed directly by a noun but may also be followed by an infinitive introduced by à or by *de quoi*. It is frequently used in spoken French in the construction: *il y a* + noun + relative clause. In spoken French the pronunciation often reduces to /ja/:

- **Il y a quelques problèmes au garage**
  *There are a few problems at the garage*

- **Il y a eu de bons gouvernements, autrefois**
  *There have been good governments, in the past*

- **Il y avait toujours quelque chose à faire**
  *There was always something to be done*

- **Il y a à faire dans la cuisine**
  *There are things to do in the kitchen*

- **Il y a à boire et à manger dans le frigo**
  *There's something to eat and drink in the fridge*

- **Il y a de quoi vous occuper ici**
  *There's lots to do here*

- **Il y avait de quoi vous faire peur la nuit**
  *It was enough to make you afraid at night*

- **Il y a des gens qui vous attendent dehors**
  *There are people waiting for you outside*

- **Il y a ceux qui prétendent tout savoir**
  *There are those who think they know everything*

- **Il y en a qui disent du mal des autres**
  *Some people say bad things about others*

8.8.4 il s’agit de

*il s’agit de* is only ever used impersonally. It may be followed by a noun, by an infinitive and, rarely, by a clause. English-speaking learners frequently attempt to use it with a personal subject, e.g. *ce livre s’agit de*. . . . This is **impossible**.

- **Il s’agit de votre frère**
  *It’s about your brother*

- **Il s’agit de faire ce qui vous intéresse**
  *You have to do what interests you*

- **Il s’agit de convaincre votre tante**
  *It is a matter of convincing your aunt*

- **Il s’agissait de vous faire changer d’avis**
  *It was an attempt to make you change your mind*

- **Tout au long de cette affaire il s’est agi de mon honnêteté**
  *Throughout this matter it has been a question of my honesty*
Il ne s’agit pas que vous preniez toute la responsabilité sur vous
There is no question of your taking on the whole responsibility

Il ne s’agit pas de prendre du retard
We’d better not get behind schedule

8.8.5 Verbs which take a personal subject can also on occasions be used impersonally

Il se passe ici des choses qui vous intéresseront sûrement
There are things going on here which will probably interest you

Il est arrivé hier soir un événement très curieux
A very unusual event took place yesterday evening

Il convient d’être très circonspect de nos jours
It is sensible to be very careful these days

Il nous arrive assez souvent de recevoir des personnalités importantes
We quite often have important people as guests

Il manque des couverts à cette table
This table has not been laid properly

Il y va de sa vie
His life is at stake

Il nous manque plusieurs de nos camarades ce soir
Several of our comrades are missing tonight

Il ne me souvient pas d’avoir été présenté à cette personne
I don’t (seem to) remember having been introduced to this person (formal language)

 être can also be used impersonally, either in set expressions or more formally as an alternative to il y a:

Il est grand temps que nous partions
It is high time we went

Il n’est absolument pas question d’attendre
There can be no question of waiting

Il est dommage d’avoir attendu si longtemps
It is a pity to have waited so long

Est-il besoin de vous le rappeler?
Is there any need to remind you? (formal style)

Il est des jours où l’on souhaiterait être ailleurs
There are days when one would wish to be elsewhere

There are two set phrases used to introduce fairy stories:

Il était une fois . . . and
Il y avait une fois . . .
Once upon a time there was . . .
8.9 Verbs which take noun + adjective or noun + noun complements

A small number of verbs allow an adjective or predicative noun (président, directeur, etc.) to follow the noun which is the direct object:

- boire qc frais (to drink sth chilled)
- considérer qc peu probable (to consider sth unlikely)
- croire qn heureux (to believe sb happy)
- élire qn président (to elect sb president)
- estimer qn inapte (to reckon sb unsuitable)
- juger qn maladroit (to judge sb clumsy)
- laisser qn tranquille (to leave sb alone)
- manger qc chaud (to eat sth hot)
- nommer qn directeur (to appoint sb director)
- rendre qn malade (to make sb ill)
- trouver qc difficile (to find sth difficult)

Note that ‘to make somebody happy, sad, etc.’ or ‘to make something difficult, easy, etc.’ is the verb rendre, and NOT *faire: rendre qn heureux, rendre qn triste, rendre qc difficile, rendre qc facile.
9 Verb and participle agreement

9.1 Subject-verb agreement
As in English, French verbs agree with their subject in person and number:

- **Je ne voulais pas jouer**
  I didn’t want to play

- **Elle voulait partir en vacances**
  She wanted to go on holiday

- **Les garçons voulaient tous participer au match**
  The boys all wanted to take part in the match

9.1.1 Agreement with more than one subject linked by et
If one of the subjects is a first person pronoun, the verb will be in the first person plural form:

- **Hubert et moi sommes allés vous chercher**
  Hubert and I went to look for you

- **Ma sœur et moi serons dans la même famille en France**
  My sister and I are staying with the same family in France

- **Toi/Vous et moi sommes toujours d’accord**
  You and I always agree

If one of the subjects is a second person pronoun and there is no first person pronoun, the verb will be in the second person plural form:

- **Toi et ton copain avez intérêt à nettoyer cette pièce avant que tes parents ne rentrent.**
  You and your friend had better clean this room before your parents get back

- **Vous et vos amis devez vous dépêcher si vous voulez prendre le train de 15 heures**
  You and your friends will have to hurry if you want to catch the 3 o’clock train

If all the subjects are third person, the verb will be in a third person plural form:

- **Jeanne et Suzanne sont venues toutes les deux**
  Jeanne and Suzanne both came

- **Les deux grands groupes sont arrivés à un accord pour le développement d’un nouvel aéroport**
  The two large companies have reached agreement on the development of a new airport

(See also Chapter 3.3.5 for coordinated stressed pronouns.)
9.1.2 Agreement with more than one subject linked by: *ni . . . ni*, ‘neither . . . nor’, *soit . . . soit*, ‘either . . . or’ *and ou*, ‘or’

French tends to make a distinction between the two kinds of meaning which may be conveyed by these methods of coordination. If the meaning emphasizes the individual and does not ‘add them together’, the verb may well be singular:

Ni Simon ni Steven n’a pu me dire où se trouvaient les autres
Neither Simon nor Steven was able to tell me where the others were

C’est soit lui soit sa sœur qui doit te téléphoner
Either he or his sister must be responsible for telephoning you

If, on the other hand, the intention is to consider the two elements as a group, the verb will be plural:

Ni Lord Byron ni Chateaubriand n’ont pu comprendre l’inutilité des rêveries romantiques
Neither Lord Byron nor Chateaubriand could understand how useless romantic dreams are

The same principle underlies agreement with *ni l’un ni l’autre*. Where they are ‘additive’ the verb is likely to be plural, where they act as ‘alternative individuals’ the verb is likely to be singular:

Ni Alberte ni Suzanne n’avaient pu rencontrer le peintre
Neither Alberte nor Suzanne managed to meet the painter

Ni l’une ni l’autre n’ont pu rencontrer le peintre
Neither the one nor the other was able to meet the painter

Ni Alberte ni Suzanne ne viendra
Neither Alberte nor Suzanne will come

Ni l’une ni l’autre ne viendra
Neither the one nor the other will come

9.1.3 Verb agreement with collective noun subjects

Normally collective nouns which are singular require the verb to be in a singular form, unlike English where speakers use either a singular or plural verb form:

Le gouvernement a décidé de modifier la loi sur la nationalité
*The government has/have decided to change the nationality law*

Le comité a proposé une réunion pour 16 heures
*The committee has/have suggested a meeting at 4 o’clock*

La famille passe les vacances de Noël en Bretagne
*The family is/are spending the Christmas holidays in Brittany*

NB: Tout le monde always agrees with a singular verb:

Tout le monde vient passer le weekend chez moi
*Everybody’s coming to my place for the weekend*
This may change, however, when the collective noun is followed by a plural complement. The verb may then be in the singular or the plural (although some speakers still have a preference for the singular):

L’équipe de footballeurs anglais a (or ont) dû quitter la ville très rapidement
The team of English football players had to leave town in a hurry

La foule des supporters ont (or a) été rapidement dispersé(e)(s)
The crowd of supporters were rapidly dispersed

Note that in English there is a preference for a plural verb in these cases.

9.1.4 Verb agreement with fractions
When fractions (see Chapter 6.3) are subjects and have plural complements, whether they are present or implied, verbs normally agree with those complements:

La moitié (des gens) se sont exprimés
Half (of the people) made their views known

Un tiers (de ceux qui étaient présents) se sont exprimés
A third (of those present) made their views known

But when the fraction has a singular complement, whether present or implied, verbs agree with the fraction:

La moitié (de la population) s’est exprimée
Half (of the population) made their view known

Un tiers (de la maison) a été détruit
A third (of the house) was destroyed

NB: les deux tiers and percentages usually agree with a plural verb:

Les deux tiers des électeurs ont voté pour la droite
Two-thirds of the electorate voted for the right

66% ont voté pour la droite
66% voted for the right

9.1.5 Verb agreement with numeral nouns and quantifiers
When numeral nouns like une dizaine ‘ten or so’, une vingtaine ‘twenty or so’, une douzaine ‘a dozen’, etc. (see Chapter 6.5.3) are subjects, the verb can agree with the numeral noun or its complement, depending on where the emphasis lies:

Nous sommes vingt ce midi à la maison: une douzaine d’œufs ne nous suffira pas
There are twenty of us having lunch at home today: a dozen eggs won’t be enough

Une vingtaine de policiers ont été blessés
Twenty or so policemen were injured
When most quantifiers (like la plupart de ‘most’, (un grand) nombre de ‘a large number of’, quantité de ‘a lot of’, beaucoup de ‘many’) are subjects, the verb agrees with their complement, whether it is present or implied:

La plupart (des habitants) partagent mes sentiments
Most (of the inhabitants) share my feelings

La plupart (d’entre eux) sont prêts à nous aider
Most (of them) are ready to help us

Un grand nombre (des locataires) sont déjà allés se plaindre
A large number (of the tenants) have already been to complain

Beaucoup (de manifestants) se présenteront à la mairie cet après-midi
A lot (of demonstrators) will go to the Town Hall this afternoon

With la majorité de ‘the majority of’, une minorité de ‘a minority of’, le reste de ‘the rest of’, the verb can agree either with the quantifier or its complement:

La majorité (de nos étudiants) ont/a moins de quarante ans
The majority (of our students) are under forty

Plus d’un tends to be singular:

Plus d’un ami m’a incité à me présenter au premier tour
More than one friend suggested I should stand in the first round

But moins de tends to be plural:

Moins de dix personnes m’ont indiqué leur désaccord
Fewer than ten people told me they disagreed

9.1.6 Agreement with the verb être

Where two nouns are linked by the verb être, the verb normally agrees with the preceding subject, although some speakers will make it agree with what follows:

Mon problème était mes enfants, car je n’avais personne pour les garder
My problem was my children, for I had no-one to look after them

When ce is the subject of être, there is a choice between using c’est or ce sont. Whereas most nouns and pronouns follow c’est, for example:

C’est moi/nous  It’s me/us
C’est toi/vous/lui/elle  It’s you/him/her
C’est le facteur  It’s the postman

in formal French, plural nouns and third person plural pronouns are supposed to follow ce sont:

Ce sont mes parents  It’s my parents
Ce sont eux  It’s them
However, most speakers (and even writers) of formal French use *c’est* in these cases these days:

C’est mes parents
C’est eux

Where numbers are involved, *c’est* is always used:

C’est 1 000 euros que je vous dois
It’s 1,000 euros that I owe you

The *c’est/ce sont* construction is often used with relative clauses, and it is important to remember that the verb in the relative clause agrees in person and number with the complement of *c’est/ce sont*:

C’est moi qui suis le plus âgé
It’s me who’s the oldest

C’est nous qui sommes les responsables
We are the ones responsible

C’est vous qui avez pris ma serviette de bain
It’s you who has taken my towel

Ce sont elles qui ont fait cela
They are the ones who did that

9.2 Agreement of the past participle with the subject of *être*
There are three cases where the past participle agrees with the subject of *être*: (a) with intransitive verbs which select the auxiliary *être* in compound tenses; (b) in passives; (c) where the past participle functions like an adjective.

9.2.1 Agreement of the past participle with the subject of intransitive verbs which select auxiliary *être* in compound tenses
The past participles of *aller* ‘to go’, *monter* ‘to go up’, *mourir* ‘to die’, *naitre* ‘to be born’, *sortir* ‘to go out’, *tomber* ‘to fall’, etc (see Chapter 8.2.2 for the full list) agree with the subject in gender and number in compound tenses:

Les Hoarau étaient allé à La Réunion
The Hoaraus had gone to La Réunion

Suzanne est sortie
Suzanne went out

Elles sont tombé
They fell over

Samira et Luc sont monté au troisième
Samira and Luc went up to the third floor

NB: Some intransitive verbs which select auxiliary *être* in compound tenses can also be used transitively (see Chapter 8.3.4). In this case they select the auxiliary *avoir* in compound tenses and there is no agreement between the subject and the past participle:

Samira et Luc ont monté les valises au troisième
Samira and Luc took the cases up to the third floor
9.2.2 Agreement of the past participle following être with the subject of a passive

Passives are constructed from transitive verbs by turning the direct object into the subject and making the verb an être + past participle construction (see Chapter 8.6). The past participle agrees with the subject in gender and number in these cases:

- **La guerre a été déclenchée par un malentendu**
  The war was started by a misunderstanding

- **Ses amis ont été choqués par sa mort**
  His friends were shocked by his death

9.2.3 Past participles used as adjectives with être

When past participles are used like adjectives and follow être, they agree with the subject:

- **La piscine est couverte**
  The swimming pool is indoors

- **Les guichets sont fermés**
  The (ticket office) windows are closed

9.3 Agreement of the past participle of verbs conjugated with avoir with a preceding direct object

There are three cases where past participles agree with preceding direct objects in the compound tenses of verbs conjugated with avoir: (a) when the preceding direct object is an unstressed pronoun like le, la, les, me, te etc., e.g. *Je les ai vus* ‘I saw them’; (b) when the preceding direct object is the head of a relative clause: e.g. *La lettre que j’ai écrite* ‘The letter which I wrote’; (c) in questions, when the direct object has been moved to a position preceding the past participle, e.g. *Quelle lettre a-t-il écrite?* ‘Which letter did he write?’

9.3.1 Agreement of the past participle with preceding direct object pronouns

In compound tenses, the past participle of verbs conjugated with avoir normally agrees with preceding unstressed direct object pronouns:

- **J’ai vu Marie: Je l’ai vue**
  I saw Marie: I saw her

- **Les policiers avaient repéré les voleurs: Les policiers les avaient repérés**
  The police had found the thieves: The police had found them

- **Les voisins ont appelé ma sœur et moi (fem): Les voisins nous ont appelées**
  The neighbours called my sister and me: The neighbours called us

NB: *le* used to refer to a clause is invariably masculine (see Chapter 3.2.8), and so there is no agreement with the past participle:

- **Sa mère est malade; il l’a souvent dit**
  His mother is ill; he has often said so
Past participles do NOT agree with any other preceding pronouns, nor with indirect objects, nor with *en*:

J’ai parlé à Marie: Je lui ai parlé (NOT *parlé*)
I spoke to Marie: I spoke to her

J’ai indiqué le chemin à Jean-Claude et Paul: Je leur ai indiqué (NOT *indiqués*) le chemin
I told Jean-Claude and Paul how to get there: I told them how to get there

Ce matin il y a eu des vaches qui sont passées dans le champ du voisin. J’en ai vu (NOT *vues*) hier aussi
This morning there were some cows which got into the neighbour’s field. I saw some yesterday as well

### 9.3.2 Recognizing when an unstressed pronoun is a direct object

Whilst English speakers may learn to remember to make the agreement between a preceding direct object pronoun and the past participle without too much difficulty, they often still have problems in recognizing when a preceding pronoun is a direct object and when it is not. This is particularly the case where the pronouns are *me, te, nous, vous* which can function either as direct object or indirect object pronouns, and when the verbs involved are directly transitive in English but have indirectly transitive counterparts in French (see Chapter 8.4.1). For example, there is no agreement in the following cases because the pronouns are all indirect objects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Verb</th>
<th>Direct Object Pronoun</th>
<th>Indirect Object Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>convenir à qn</td>
<td>La situation nous a convenu</td>
<td>The situation suited us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>désobéir à qn</td>
<td>Lucien vous a désobéi</td>
<td>Lucien disobeyed you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nuire à qn</td>
<td>Hubert m’a nui</td>
<td>Hubert did me (fem) some damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>succéder à qn</td>
<td>Suzanne m’a succédé</td>
<td>Suzanne succeeded me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>téléphoner à qn</td>
<td>Les voisins vous ont téléphoné</td>
<td>The neighbours phoned you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>résister à qn</td>
<td>Les voleurs nous ont résisté</td>
<td>The thieves resisted us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 9.3.3 Agreement with a preceding direct object pronoun when the participle is followed by infinitives

When a verb is preceded by a direct object pronoun and followed by an infinitive, it is usually said that the participle only agrees when the pronoun is the subject of the infinitive and is the direct object of the verb containing the participle. There will be no agreement when it is the object of the infinitive. This means that there will be agreement in cases like the following:

Nathalie a vu une voiture écraser son chien
Nathalie saw a car run her dog over
*(une voiture is the subject of écraser and the object of *vu*)

Nathalie l’a vue écraser son chien
Nathalie saw it run her dog over

Hubert-Jean a regardé sa fille gagner la course
Hubert-Jean watched his daughter win the race
*(sa fille is the subject of gagner and the object of regardé)*
§9.3 Agreement of the past participle of verbs conjugated with avoir with a preceding direct object

Hubert-Jean l’a regardée gagner la course
Hubert-Jean watched her win the race

On a entendu les voix résonner dans la caverne
We heard the voices echoing in the cave
(les voix is the subject of résonner and the object of entendu)

On les a entendues résonner dans la caverne
We heard them echoing in the cave

But no agreement in cases like the following:

Nathalie a vu maltraiter des animaux
Nathalie saw some animals being mistreated
(des animaux is the object of maltraiter)

Nathalie les a vu maltraiter
Nathalie saw them being mistreated

Hubert-Jean a regardé détruire la forêt par des bulldozers
Hubert-Jean watched the forest being destroyed by bulldozers
(la forêt is the object of détruire)

Hubert-Jean l’a regardé détruire par des bulldozers
Hubert-Jean watched it being destroyed by bulldozers

Derrière la haie, j’ai entendu chanter une vieille chanson
Behind the hedge I heard (someone) singing an old song
(une vieille chanson is the object of chanter)

Derrière la haie, je l’ai entendu chanter
Behind the hedge I heard (someone) singing it

Verbs which are likely to be preceded by direct object pronouns and followed by infinitives are perception verbs like écouter ‘to listen to’, entendre ‘to hear’, voir ‘to see’, etc. (see Chapter 12.3.8).

Verbs of movement like amener ‘to bring’, emmener ‘to take’, envoyer ‘to send’ may also be followed by infinitives with subjects which give rise to agreement:

J’ai emmené les invités prendre le petit déjeuner à l’hôtel
I took the guests to have breakfast at the hotel
(les invités is the subject of prendre and the object of emmené)

Je les ai emmenés prendre le petit déjeuner à l’hôtel
I took them to have breakfast at the hotel

Jean-Claude a envoyé les secrétaires chercher du papier à lettres
Jean-Claude sent the secretaries to look for some typing paper
(les secrétaires is the subject of chercher and the object of envoyer)

Jean-Claude les a envoyées chercher du papier à lettres
Jean-Claude sent them to look for some typing paper.
The verb *laisser* follows the same pattern:

Nous avons laissé *les enfants* partir en vacances tout seuls  
*We let the children go on holiday on their own*  
(*les enfants* is the subject of *partir* and the object of *laisser*)

Nous *les* avons laissés partir en vacances tout seuls  
*We let them go on holiday on their own*

Les voisins ont laissé *les chiens* jouer dans le jardin  
*The neighbours let the dogs play in the garden*  
(*les chiens* is the subject of *jouer* and the object of *laisser*)

Les voisins *les* ont laissés jouer dans le jardin  
*The neighbours let them play in the garden*

(But see 9.4 for agreement of *se laisser.*)

*Faire*, however, is an exception. When it is followed by an infinitive, its past participle never agrees with a preceding direct object:

Nous *les* avons fait (NOT *faits*) partir en vacances tout seuls  
*We made them go on holiday on their own*

Les voisins *les* ont fait (NOT *faits*) jouer dans le jardin  
(See also Chapter 12.3.9. For object pronouns in this construction see Chapter 3.2.32. See 9.4 for agreement of *se faire.*)

NB: Perception verbs and *laisser* may allow a following infinitive with either a preceding or following subject:

J'ai entendu *les voisins* parler or  
J'ai entendu parler *les voisins*  
*I heard the neighbours talk(ing)*

J'ai laissé *les enfants* partir or  
J'ai laissé partir *les enfants*  
*I let the children leave*

In either case, if the subject of the infinitive is turned into an unstressed pronoun, it will give rise to agreement with the past participle:

Je *les* ai entendus parler  
*I heard them talk(ing)*

Je *les* ai laissés partir  
*I let them go*

(See Chapter 3.2.32 for position of pronouns.)
9.3.4 Agreement of past participles with preceding direct objects in relative clauses

When the head of a relative clause (see Chapter 15.1) is the implied direct object of that clause, and it precedes the verb, a past participle agrees with it in gender and number:

- Voilà l’homme que j’ai rencontré à la gare hier
  *There’s the man I met at the station yesterday*

- Voilà la femme que j’ai rencontrée à la gare hier
  *There’s the woman I met at the station yesterday*

- Voilà les enfants que j’ai rencontrés à la gare hier
  *There are the children I met at the station yesterday*

- Voilà les jeunes filles que j’ai rencontrées à la gare hier
  *There are the girls I met at the station yesterday*

NB: The past participles of impersonal verbs (see Chapter 8.8), such as *il y a ‘there is/are’, never agree with a preceding complement:

- Il y a eu des problèmes
  *There were problems*

- *Les problèmes qu’il y a eu (NOT *eu s*) ont été vite oubliés*
  *The problems that there were were quickly forgotten*

It is important to distinguish this **impersonal** use from the **personal** use where agreement would take place:

- Les problèmes qu’il a eus ont été vite oubliés
  *The problems which he had have been quickly forgotten*

9.3.5 Recognizing when the head of a relative clause is a direct object

Sometimes it is not easy to determine whether the head of a relative clause is a direct object or not. Verbs such as *courir ‘to run’, coûter ‘to cost’, dormir ‘to sleep’, marcher ‘to walk’, mesurer ‘to measure’, payer ‘to pay’, peser ‘to weigh’, valoir ‘to be worth’, vivre ‘to live’* can take complements which look like direct objects, but are in fact measure adverbs:

- Ce livre m’a coûté **cinquante euros**
  *This book cost me fifty euros*

- La valise pèse **vingt kilos**
  *The suitcase weighs twenty kilos*

- Il a marché une **dizaine de kilomètres**
  *He walked ten kilometres or so*

- Elle a dormi **deux heures**
  *She slept for two hours*

In each of these cases the phrase in bold is a measure adverb and not a direct object. One test you can use to find out if the complement of a verb is a direct object or not is to try to make it the subject of a passive sentence – most direct objects can be turned into passive subjects. None of the above examples can be: you cannot say *Cinquante euros ont été coûté par ce livre, nor *Une dizaine de kilomètres ont été marché, etc.*
If the head of a relative clause is an adverb, there is no agreement between it and the past participle:

Les cinquante euros que ce livre m’a coûté . . .
The fifty euros that this book cost me . . .

Les deux heures qu’elle a dormi . . .
The two hours she slept . . .

But to make matters more confusing, some of these verbs can also take direct objects. When direct objects are the heads of relative clauses there is agreement with the past participle:

J’ai pesé la valise (direct object)
I weighed the suitcase

La valise a pesé vingt kilos (adverb)
The suitcase weighed twenty kilos

9.3.6 Agreement with a preceding direct object in a relative clause when the participle is followed by an infinitive

As in the case of preceding direct object pronouns (see 9.3.3), when a verb is preceded by a direct object which is the head of a relative clause and followed by an infinitive, the participle only agrees when that head is the implied direct object of the verb containing the participle and the subject of the infinitive. This means that there will be agreement in cases like the following:

Nathalie a vu une énorme roche écraser sa maison
Nathalie saw a huge rock crush her house

Voilà l’énorme roche que Nathalie a vue écraser sa maison
There’s the huge rock which Nathalie saw crush her house

On a entendu les voix résonner dans la caverne
We heard the voices echoing in the cave

Ce sont les voix qu’ on a entendues résonner dans la caverne
Those are the voices we heard echoing in the cave

But no agreement in cases like the following:

Nathalie a vu écraser sa maison par une énorme roche
Nathalie saw her house crushed by a huge rock

C’est sa maison que Nathalie a vu écraser par une énorme roche
It’s her house that Nathalie saw crushed by a huge rock

Hubert-Jean a regardé détruire la forêt par des bulldozers
Hubert-Jean watched the forest being destroyed by bulldozers

Voilà la forêt que Hubert-Jean a regardé détruire par des bulldozers
There’s the forest that Hubert-Jean watched being destroyed by bulldozers

As in the case of preceding direct object pronouns, the types of verb which give rise to these contexts are perception verbs, movement verbs and laisser (but not faire) (see 9.3.3).
9.3.7 Agreement of past participles with preceding direct objects in questions

Questions can be formed in various ways (see Chapter 14). When they are constructed in such a way that the direct object precedes the past participle in compound tenses, the past participle agrees with it in gender and number:

**Quel livre** as-tu acheté?
Which book did you buy?

**Quelle voiture** as-tu achetée?
Which car did you buy?

**Laquelle** a-t-il choisi?
Which one did he buy?

**Lesquels** ont-ils acceptés?
Which ones did they accept?

**Combien de citrons** as-tu achetés?
How many lemons did you buy?

**Combien de bouteilles de vin** as-tu achetées?
How many bottles of wine did you buy?

NB: The past participles of impersonal verbs (see Chapter 8.8), such as *il y a* ‘there is/are’, never agree with a preceding questioned complement:

**Quels problèmes** y a-t-il eu (NOT *eus*)?
What problems were there?

This must be distinguished from the personal use where agreement would take place:

**Quels problèmes** a-t-il eu?
What problems did he have?’

9.3.8 Recognizing when a questioned phrase is a direct object

Sometimes it is not easy to determine whether a questioned phrase is a direct object or not. Verbs such as *courir* ‘to run’, *coûter* ‘to cost’, *dormir* ‘to sleep’, *marcher* ‘to walk’, *mesurer* ‘to measure’, *payer* ‘to pay’, *peser* ‘to weigh’, *valoir* ‘to be worth’, *vivre* ‘to live’ can take complements which look like direct objects, but are in fact measure adverbs. Where such phrases are questioned there is no agreement with a past participle (see also 9.3.5):

Elle a dormi deux heures
She slept for two hours

**Combien d’heures** a-t-elle dormi (NOT *dormies*)?
How many hours did she sleep?

Ce livre m’a coûté cinquante euros
This book cost me fifty euros

**Combien d’euros** ce livre a-t-il coûté (NOT *coûtés*)?
How many euros did this book cost?
Verb and participle agreement §9.4

9.3.9 Agreement with a preceding questioned direct object when the participle is followed by an infinitive

As in the case of preceding direct object pronouns (see 9.3.3), when a verb is preceded by a questioned direct object and followed by an infinitive, the participle only agrees when the questioned phrase is the implied direct object of the verb containing the participle and is the subject of the infinitive. This means that there will be agreement in cases like the following:

Nathalie a vu une voiture écramer son chien
Nathalie saw a car run her dog over

Quelle voiture Nathalie a-t-elle vue écramer son chien?
Which car did Nathalie see run her dog over?

On a entendu les voix résonner dans la caverne
We heard voices echoing in the cave

Quelles voix avez-vous entendues résonner dans la caverne?
What voices did you hear echoing in the cave?

But no agreement in cases like the following:

Nathalie a vu écramer sa maison par une énorme roche
Nathalie saw her house crushed by a huge rock

Quelle maison Nathalie a-t-elle vu écramer par une énorme roche?
Which house did Nathalie see crushed by a huge rock?

Hubert-Jean a regardé détruire la forêt par des bulldozers
Hubert-Jean watched the forest being destroyed by bulldozers

Quelle forêt Hubert-Jean a-t-il regardé détruire par des bulldozers?
Which forest did Hubert-Jean see destroyed by bulldozers?

As in the case of preceding direct object pronouns, the types of verb which give rise to these contexts are perception verbs, movement verbs and laisser (but not faire).

9.4 Agreement of the past participle of pronominal verbs in compound tenses

Pronominal verbs (see Chapter 8.7) include an unstressed object pronoun which agrees with the subject:

Je me rase
I’m shaving

Elle se lève
She’s getting up

In compound tenses the past participle agrees with this preceding object pronoun only if it is a direct object. The problem is determining when it is a direct object and when it is not.
§9.4 Agreement of the past participle of pronominal verbs in compound tenses

With verbs where the pronoun is not understood as a reflexive (that is, where it does not mean anything, but is just a part of the verb – see Chapter 8.7.3), the participle always agrees, with one exception:

- **Elle s’est levée**  
  *She got up*
- **Ils se sont tus**  
  *They fell silent*
- **Nous nous sommes abstenus de tout commentaire**  
  *We refrained from making any comment*

**Exception:** *se rire de* ‘to make light of’: **Ils se sont ri de vos menaces* ‘They made light of your threats’.

Where a pronominal verb is used reflexively (see Chapter 8.7.1), it will have a non-reflexive counterpart. If the verb has a direct object in its non-reflexive counterpart, the reflexive pronoun is a direct object, and a past participle will agree with it in compound tenses:

**Reflexive use**  
- **Je me rase**  
  *I am shaving*
- **Elle se sert la première**  
  *She serves herself first*

**Non-reflexive counterpart**  
- **Le coiffeur rase son client**  
  *The barber is shaving his client*
- **Elle sert sa fille la première**  
  *She serves her daughter first*

- **Ils se sont rasés de bonne heure**  
  *They shaved early*
- **Elle s’est servie la première**  
  *She served herself first*

If the verb has an indirect object in its non-reflexive counterpart, the reflexive pronoun is an indirect object, and there will be no agreement with a past participle:

**Reflexive use**  
- **Elle s’offre un gâteau**  
  *She treats herself to a cake*
- **Nous nous cachons la vérité**  
  *We hide the truth from ourselves*

**Non-reflexive use**  
- **Elle offre un gâteau à Jean**  
  *She treats Jean to a cake*
- **Nous cachons la vérité à nos amis**  
  *We hide the truth from our friends*

- **Elle s’est offert (NOT *offerte*) un gâteau**  
  *She treated herself to a cake*
- **Nous nous sommes caché (NOT *cachés*) la vérité**  
  *We hid the truth from ourselves*

The past participles of pronominal verbs used with parts of the body do not agree with the preceding pronoun where the body part is a direct object:

- **Elle s’est coupé (NOT *coupée*) le doigt** (= Elle a coupé le doigt à elle-même, although you cannot say this)  
  *She cut her finger (can even mean ‘Her finger was cut off’)*
But where the body part is an indirect object, the pronoun is a direct object and a past participle agrees with it:

Elle s’est coupée au doigt (= Elle a coupé sa main au doigt, although again you cannot say this)
She cut her finger (can only mean a surface cut)

There is no agreement between the past participle and the preceding pronoun with *se laisser* + infinitive, *se faire* + infinitive or *se voir* + infinitive:

Elle s’est laissé (NOT *laissée*) convaincre
She let herself be persuaded

Julie s’est fait (NOT *faite*) écraser par un camion
Julie got run over by a lorry

Jeanette s’est vu (NOT *vue*) offrir des fleurs par Georges
Jeanette has been given flowers by Georges
10 Tense

10.1 Introduction

One of the essential functions of verbs is to express distinctions in time. Tenses serve (a) to situate events as taking place in the present, past or future; (b) to indicate the time at which events occur relative to other events. The verb forms for each of the tenses mentioned in this chapter are given in full in Chapter 7.

10.2 The present

(a) The present tense is used to refer to an action or a state of affairs which exists at the time of speaking:

Je ne peux pas lui parler parce que je suis dans mon bain
I can’t speak to him because I’m in the bath

Il vous téléphone pour demander votre aide
He’s phoning to ask for your help

(b) It is used to express timeless facts:

L’eau se transforme en vapeur quand elle bout
Water turns to steam when it boils

La Terre tourne autour du soleil
The earth goes round the sun

(c) It is used to refer to an action which is habitual:

Je prends un bain tous les matins à huit heures
I take a bath every morning at eight o’clock

Il vient me voir toutes les semaines pour s’assurer que tout va bien
He comes to see me every week to check that everything’s OK

(d) In certain contexts, notably when the context provides a clear temporal reference to the future, it can refer to the future:

Je viens demain, c’est sûr
I’ll come tomorrow for sure

Demain, il part pour Paris
Tomorrow he will be leaving for Paris

(e) Some writers use the present tense to refer to past events when they wish to render the past event more immediate. This can be found particularly in the writings of historians, journalists, novelists, and so on:

Grâce au vignoble, les villes sont prospères dès le 16e siècle
The vineyard enabled the towns to prosper from the 16th century
10.2.1 Differences between French and English in the use of the present tense

French simple present for the English progressive

English indicates that an event is in progress via a special form of the verb called the ‘progressive’: ‘be + V-ing’, e.g. ‘I am thinking’. French does not have an equivalent special form for this. The English present progressive will normally be translated into French by the simple present:

Je réfléchis
I think or I am thinking

However, if it is important to stress the length of time, or the simultaneity of the event, French can use en train de:

Je suis en train de réfléchir
I am thinking

Thus, when French uses a present tense, this may correspond either to the simple present or the present progressive of English. The meaning will depend on the context. For example, Je promène mon chien will be ‘I walk my dog’ in the first example below, but ‘I am walking my dog’ in the second:

Je promène mon chien tous les matins aux Champs Elysées
I walk my dog in the Champs Elysées every morning
(Simple present in English because it expresses an habitual action)

Qu’est-ce que vous faites?
What are you doing?
Je promène mon chien
I am walking my dog
(Progressive form in English because it stresses the ongoing nature of the current action)

French simple present for English perfect

English has a form of the verb called the ‘perfect’: ‘have + V-ed/V-en’, e.g. ‘I have walked’, ‘He has spoken’. It is used for reference to an event which happened in the past, but whose consequences continue into the present. In some cases the English perfect will be translated by the simple present in French:

J’envisage souvent de partir
I have often thought of leaving

Je vous apporte des fraises
I have brought you some strawberries

10.3 The past

Three forms are available to express PAST events:

The imperfect: Je jouais du piano
The simple past (past historic): Je jouai du piano
The compound past (perfect): J’ai joué du piano
10.3.1 The imperfect

(a) This tense is used to describe ongoing past events without reference to a time of starting or finishing:

Pierre lisait  Pierre was reading
Il était tard  It was late
La ville dormait  The town was sleeping

In narratives, the imperfect typically provides a background of ongoing events against which particular completed events are acted out. If the narrative is written, these completed events will be in the compound past and/or simple past; if the narrative is spoken, they will be in the compound past (see 10.3.3):

Il était tard. M. Dupont arrêta sa voiture devant un café
It was late. M. Dupont pulled up in front of a café

Les voleurs faisaient beaucoup de bruit. Les gendarmes se glissèrent dans la pièce sans se faire remarquer
The thieves were making a great deal of noise. The policemen slipped into the room without being noticed

Je somnolais tranquillement quand quelqu’un a sonné à la porte
I was dozing quietly when someone rang the door bell

(b) It also typically refers to an habitual action in the past. This is generally described in English through the use of the forms ‘used to’ or ‘would’:

M. Dupont s’arrêtait toujours au café quand il avait le temps
M. Dupont always used to stop at the café when he had the time or
M. Dupont would always stop at the café when he had the time

Since ‘would’ can also express the conditional in English, it is important for the English speaker to distinguish the ‘would’ which corresponds to the French imperfect from the ‘would’ which corresponds to the French conditional. If ‘would’ is imperfect, it should be possible to replace it with ‘used to’ and still have a grammatical sentence. If substitution of ‘would’ by ‘used to’ produces an ungrammatical sentence, it is a conditional:

Le dimanche, j’allais manger dans un restaurant à Paris
On Sundays, I would (‘used to’ is OK) go to a restaurant in Paris

Si tu me donnais de l’argent, j’irais manger dans un restaurant à Paris dimanche
If you gave me some money, I would (NOT ‘used to’, therefore a conditional) go to a restaurant in Paris on Sunday

(See 10.4.2 for the conditional tense. See Chapter 11.3.1 for the use of ‘would’.)

(c) It can be used to describe completed past events where the speaker or writer wishes to make the past event more immediate by presenting it as if it were in progress:

Je courais jusqu’à la voiture. J’attendais un instant, puis je faisais marche arrière. Je roulais en me répétant: « Fais attention »
I ran to the car. I waited a moment, then I put it into reverse. I drove, repeating to myself: ‘Be careful’
10.3.2 The simple past (past historic)

The simple past tense refers to completed events in the past which are not seen as having any particular relevance to the present from the point of view of the speaker. Nowadays, the simple past (past historic) is usually only used in writing (including literature aimed at small children) and in very formal spoken French (e.g. very formal speeches).

Les Jeux Olympiques eurent lieu à Londres en 2012
The Olympic Games took place in London in 2012

Les dinosaures vécurent au jurassique
Dinosaurs lived in the Jurassic period

Le président partit à 22h pour New York
The president left at 10 p.m. for New York

10.3.3 The compound past (perfect)

The compound past tense refers to a completed event in the past. In contrast to the simple past (past historic), however, it may refer to an action in the past whose effect continues into the present. It is available both in spoken and written French:

Nous sommes arrivés hier de Dijon
We came in from Dijon yesterday

Ils ont vendu leur maison et ils sont partis à l’étranger
They sold their house and went abroad

Ils ont acheté six croissants pour notre petit déjeuner
They bought six croissants for our breakfast

In some texts the simple past and the compound past are used together. The simple past refers to completed events which do not give rise to consequences continuing into the present, from the perspective of the writer. The compound past, by contrast, refers to past events whose consequences do continue to have present relevance, from the perspective of the writer. For example, the following extract from a newspaper article marking the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the French airman and novelist Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, opens with the following passage:

Le 31 juillet 1944, quand un officier porta [simple past] officiellement disparu le Lightning P38 no. 223 piloté par Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, un colosse trop à l’étroit dans sa combinaison d’aviateur est entré [compound past] dans la légende

On 31 July 1944, when an officer officially reported as lost the Lightning P38 no. 223 piloted by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, a giant of a man, too big for his aviator’s suit, became a legend

The simple past porta describes an event which is seen as over and done with; the compound past est entré describes an event which is seen as having a continuing consequence for the present, from the perspective of the writer: Saint-Exupéry became and still is a legendary figure.
10.3.4 An illustration of the working of the past tenses in context

Compound past (perfect) and imperfect

Here is a literary example taken from the novel *L’Été meurtrier* by Sébastien Japrisot. The completed events are in the compound past because, although written, this particular piece of narrative is told in the first person from the point of view of one of the characters, giving the effect of a spoken narrative. These events are set against a descriptive background defined by the imperfect:


I met Gabriel in April 1945 when we fled from Berlin, and when I was following, with my mother and other refugees, the columns of soldiers going south. It was in a village very early one morning, near Chemnitz. We had lost my cousin Herta, who was three years older than me, between Torgèn and Leipzig because she had found one lorry, and we another. And it was the same morning that I lost my mother. I believe she changed direction, and that she went towards Kassel, to the West, where she had friends . . .

Simple past (past historic)

The simple past tense refers to completed events in the past which are not seen as having any particular relevance to the present from the point of view of the speaker. For example, consider the following narrative from another novel by Sébastien Japrisot, *La Dame dans l’auto avec des lunettes et un fusil*. Here a series of events are over and done with at some point prior to when the narrator is speaking:

Elle ramassa ses vêtements épars [simple past – completed event with no consequences continuing into the present from the perspective of the narrator]. Elle les rangea soigneusement dans sa valise noire [simple past – completed event with no continuing consequences]. Elle ne prit pas la route déserte [simple past – completed event with no continuing consequences] par où ils étaient venus [pluperfect – see 10.5.1 – earlier completed event]. Elle gravit à nouveau la colline [simple past – completed event with no continuing consequences] et, sur la roche plate où ils s’étaient assis [pluperfect – see 10.5.1 – earlier completed event], elle étala [simple past – completed event with no continuing consequences], ouvert en deux, le sac en papier qui avait enveloppé [pluperfect – see 10.5.1 – earlier completed event] ses nu-pieds neufs. Elle écrivit dessus [simple past – completed event with no continuing consequences] . . .

She picked up her scattered clothes. She packed them carefully into her black suitcase. She didn’t take the deserted road along which they had come. She climbed the hill again and, on the flat rock where they had sat, she spread the opened-out paper bag which had contained her new flip-flops. She wrote on it . . .
In modern French the simple past tense is restricted to written French. It is found in literary texts (novels, plays, poems) and in newspaper articles. It is used typically in passages of *impersonal third-person narration*, as in the above example. Engel (1990) has conducted a survey of the use of the simple past in newspaper articles. Among other things, she found that the simple past was likely to be used in formal, objectivity-seeking articles, in sports reports, in *faits divers* (reports of accidents, fires, rescues, etc.), and in items on the arts.

As noted above, the simple past is not found in all contexts in written French, even in literary French. Where a narrative is told from a personal, first-person perspective (and hence is more like spoken French than written) it is very likely that it will be told in the compound past. Japrisot, for example, in the novel quoted from above, has passages narrated in the third person and simple past tense, and passages narrated in the first person and compound past. The extract cited above would become the following if recounted from the point of view of the woman in question:


**10.3.5 Differences between French and English in the use of past tense forms**

**French compound past/simple past and imperfect for English simple past**

The English simple past is used in a range of contexts where French distinguishes between the compound past/simple past on the one hand and the imperfect on the other. Take, for example, the English sentence ‘He slept all afternoon’. This can describe a one-off, completed past event, in which case the French equivalent would be a compound past or a simple past form of the verb:

- (Hier) il a dormi tout l’après-midi
- (Hier) il dormit tout l’après-midi
  
  *(compound past or simple past (past historic) because it is a completed action in the past)*

  *(Yesterday) he slept all afternoon*

Or it can describe an habitual action, in which case the French equivalent would be an imperfect form of the verb:

- (Quand il était plus jeune,) il dormait tout l’après-midi
- *(When he was younger,) he slept all afternoon (= he used to sleep . . .)*

Note that there is a distinction between viewing an action as habitual and viewing it as repeated. Repeated actions which are completed are described by verbs in the compound past/simple past in French:

> Tous les jours de cette année-là elle a travaillé d’arrache-pied/elle travailla d’arrache-pied

  *(compound past or simple past because each of the repeated actions, i.e. the work carried out each day, is envisaged as a completed action in the past)*

  *Every day that year she worked like mad*
French imperfect for English past progressive

English indicates that an event was in progress in the past via a special form of the verb known as the ‘progressive’: ‘was/were V-ing’, e.g. ‘He was sleeping’. French does not have an equivalent special form for this. The English past progressive will normally be translated into French by the imperfect tense:

Quand je l’ai trouvé, il dormait paisiblement sur la plage
When I found him he was sleeping peacefully on the beach

Nous allions vers l’Arc de Triomphe quand les avions sont passés/passèrent au-dessus de nous
We were going towards the Arc de Triomphe when the planes flew over us

If there is a need to emphasize the duration, en train de can be used:

Elle était en train de mettre la dernière touche à son dessin quand on a frappé/frappa à la porte
She was putting the finishing touches to her drawing when someone knocked at the door

10.4 The future

Two tenses are used to refer to future time: the future and the conditional, although the conditional also expresses meanings which are not simply related to future time.

10.4.1 The future tense

The future tense has three main functions:

(a) It is used to describe events which take place in the future:

Quand il ira à Paris il m’achètera des livres
When he goes to Paris he will buy me books

(b) As in English, it can be used as a more polite alternative to the imperative to give orders:

Vous fermerez la porte, s’il vous plaît
Will you close the door, please

Je prendrai un kilo de vos prunes jaunes
I’ll have a kilo of your yellow plums

Vous m’excuserez
Will you excuse me

(c) It is sometimes the equivalent of English ‘may’, when a speaker is speculating about possible causes or outcomes:

Elle aura encore sa migraine
She may have her headache again

Peut-être qu’elle viendra
She may perhaps come

(See Chapter 11.3.4 for more on ‘may’.)
The future can be replaced by a present tense form of the verb aller + an infinitive where a greater certainty about the likelihood of an event taking place is implied than is given by the future. In many contexts the future and aller + an infinitive can be interchanged, e.g.:

Tu vas y aller, je le sais bien or Tu iras, je le sais bien
I'm quite sure you will go

But in some contexts there is a clear difference in meaning between the two:

Elle va avoir un bébé
She will have a baby or She's having a baby (i.e. She's pregnant)

Compared with:

Elle aura un bébé (un jour, mais elle n'est pas pressée)
She will have a baby (one day, but she is in no hurry)

### 10.4.2 The conditional tense

The conditional has six main functions:

(a) It refers to events which would take place in the future if certain conditions were met:

Il m’achèterait des livres à Paris si je lui donnais l’argent
He would buy me books in Paris if I gave him the money

Je l’accompagnerais volontiers si je ne devais pas retourner à Dijon
I would love to go with him if I didn’t have to go back to Dijon

(b) In reported speech (see 10.7) it is the equivalent of a future tense in direct speech:

Il a dit: 'Je viendrai'
He said: 'I will come'

Il a dit qu’il viendrait
He said he would come

Je lui ai demandé: 'Est-ce tu pourras venir?'
I asked him, 'Will you be able to come?'

Je lui ai demandé s’il pourrait venir
I asked him if he could come

This use of the 'future in the past' is not restricted to cases where the reported events are introduced by verbs like dire que ‘say that’, demander si ‘ask whether’, écrire que ‘write that’, etc. If a situation like the following:

Pierre habite déjà le village, mais Marie ne viendra le rejoindre que deux ans plus tard
Pierre is already living in the village, but Marie won’t come to join him for another two years

is reported as having occurred in the past, the future form viendra can become a conditional:

Pierre habitait déjà le village, mais Marie ne viendrait le rejoindre que deux ans plus tard
Pierre was already living in the village, but Marie wouldn’t come to join him for another two years
§10.4 The future 245

The conditional is not obligatory here, however, and past tense forms of the verb are also possible:

Pierre habitait déjà le village, mais Marie n’est venue le rejoindre que deux ans plus tard
Pierre was already living in the village, but Marie didn’t come to join him for another two years

(c) The conditional is used, especially in journalistic language, to state something as an ‘alleged’ fact, i.e. one which the writer doesn’t wish to state as definitely true and often one attributed to other sources:

Selon des sources bien informées, le Prince de Galles rejoindrait le reste de la famille royale aux sports d’hiver la semaine prochaine
According to reliable sources, the Prince of Wales will be joining the rest of the royal family for a skiing holiday next week

D’après notre correspondant à Tel Aviv, un accord de paix serait réalisable dans la semaine à venir
According to our correspondent in Tel Aviv, a peace agreement will be possible in the coming week

(d) The conditional (and even the compound conditional – see 10.5.5) can be used in French as ‘could’ and ‘would’ are in English to make a request sound more polite:

Je voudrais réserver deux places, s’il vous plaît
I would like to book two seats, please

Je voudrais vous demander un renseignement
J’aurais voulu vous demander un renseignement
I was wondering if I could ask you for information

(e) Sometimes the conditional can be the equivalent of English ‘might’ when the speaker is speculating about possible causes or outcomes – it expresses greater uncertainty than the future tense used for the same purpose:

Elle aurait encore sa migraine
She might have her headache again

Peut-être qu’elle viendrait
She might come, perhaps

(See Chapter 11.3.5 for more on ‘might’.)

(f) In formal French a clause with a conditional verb followed by a que-clause, also with a verb in the conditional tense, can be used as an alternative to a si-clause (see also Chapter 17.3.7). Compare the following:

Je n’irais pas même s’il me proposait un million d’euros!
I wouldn’t go even if he offered me a million euros!

Il me proposerait un million d’euros que je n’irais pas!
Even if he offered me a million euros I still wouldn’t go!

In (very) informal French two clauses with verbs in the conditional tense, but without the que, can also be used as an alternative to a construction involving si:

Il me proposerait un million d’euros, je n’irais pas!
Even if he offered me a million euros I still wouldn’t go!
Ils viendraient demain, on le saurait
If they were coming tomorrow, we’d know about it

Ils seraient venus, on l’aurait su (or on le saurait)
If they’d come, we’d have known

(For tenses in si clauses see 10.8 and Chapter 17.3.6.)

10.4.3 Differences between French and English in the use of future and conditional tenses

In English, verbs in clauses introduced by conjunctions such as ‘when’, ‘as soon as’, ‘as long as’, ‘after’, ‘once’ are usually in a present or past tense verb form:

When she comes I’ll tell her
He will arrive as soon as I have left

Where such clauses refer to events which are yet to happen (as they mostly do), in French you must use a future, conditional, compound future or compound conditional, as appropriate. These clauses are introduced by conjunctions such as: quand, lorsque, aussitôt que, dès que, sitôt que, dès lors que, tant que, après que, une fois que.

Quand elle viendra (NOT *vient), je le lui dirai
Il arrivera dès que je serai parti (NOT *suis parti)

Une fois que nous serons passés à l’hôtel je pourrai enfin me débarrasser de ces valises
Once we’ve been to the hotel I will finally be able to get rid of these suitcases

A good indicator that the event has yet to happen is the verb in the other clause, which will be in a future tense, conditional tense, etc., in English: ‘He will arrive as soon as I have left’. (See also Chapter 17.3.2.)

10.4.4 Use of tenses with depuis, il y a, pendant and pour

depuis
In clauses containing the preposition depuis ‘for’ or ‘since’, the tense of the verb differs systematically between French and English.

(a) In the case of the present, there are two points in time, now and an event in the past. Where the consequences of the event in the past continue into the present, from the perspective of the speaker, French uses a present tense, while English uses the perfect:

je suis ici depuis plus d’un an
I have been here for more than a year
(My being here continues at the time I am speaking)

Elle habite notre village depuis Pâques
She has been living in our village since Easter
(She is still living there at the time of speaking)
However, if the event does not have consequences which continue into the present, a past tense form of the verb will be used in French:

Il n’est pas venu ici depuis plus d’un an
*He hasn’t been here for more than a year*
(The last time he was here was over a year ago, so the event does not continue at the time of speaking)

Il a arrêté de fumer depuis plus d’un an
*He has stopped smoking for more than a year*
(His giving up smoking was an event which was completed more than a year ago, and so does not continue at the time of speaking)

Compare with:

Il fume depuis plus d’un an
*He has been smoking for more than a year*
(His smoking started more than a year ago and continues into the present)

(b) In the case of the past, there are also two points in time, one in the past and one further back in the past. If the consequences of the event further back in the past continue forwards to the event in the past, French uses the imperfect tense where English uses the pluperfect:

J’étais là depuis plus d’un an
*I had been there for more than a year*

But if the more distant event does not have continuing consequences, a pluperfect form of the verb will be used in French:

Il avait arrêté de fumer depuis plus d’un an quand il est tombé malade
*He had stopped smoking for more than a year when he became ill*

(For *depuis que* see Chapter 17.3.4.)

il y a

By contrast *il y a ‘ago’* focuses on the completion of an event in the past, and the tense used in French is a past tense, just as it is in English:

Je suis arrivé il y a un an
*I arrived a year ago*

Elle a commencé à habiter notre village il y a six mois
*She began living in our village six months ago*

Nous y sommes allés il y a plus de dix ans
*We went there more than ten years ago*

**pendant**

*pendant ‘for’, enables the speaker to indicate the length of time associated with an event, whether it is in the present, future or is a completed event in the past: It can sometimes be translated in English by ‘during’:

Nathan prétend qu’il veut maintenir son silence pendant trois semaines
*Nathan says that he wants to keep quiet about it for three weeks*
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Ensuite nous **irons** passer des vacances en Irlande pendant quinze jours
*After that we will spend a fortnight on holiday in Ireland*

J’**y suis resté** pendant trois semaines l’année dernière
*I stayed there for three weeks last year*

(For *il y a un mois que* . . . ‘it’s a month since . . .’, *voilà/voici plusieurs ans que* . . . ‘it’s several years since . . .’, see Chapter 17.3.4.)

**Pour**

‘*Pour*’ is generally used to indicate an intended length of time in the future and is most frequently associated with the verbs *aller, venir, partir*. It does not normally occur with *rester*. It is preferred in such usage to *pendant*.

J’**irai** à Londres **pour** trois semaines à partir de demain
*I’ll be in London for three weeks from tomorrow*

Je **viendrai** à Rome **pour** le week-end
*I will come to Rome for the weekend*

Je **dois** partir à Naples **pour** quelques jours
*I must go to Naples for a few days*

But:

Je suis **resté** trois semaines à Londres
*I stayed in London for three weeks*

(See Chapter 13.47.)

**10.5 Other tenses indicating the time at which events occur relative to other events**

**10.5.1 The pluperfect tense**

Whereas the simple past and compound past tenses refer to events completed in the past from the perspective of the speaker or writer, the pluperfect describes events completed at some point even before these past events:

La police laissa une balise pour indiquer où l’accident *étaient arrivé*
*The police left a marker to show where the accident happened/had happened*

(Pluperfect – an event which occurred prior to the police marking the spot)

Je n’ai pas pris la route déserte par où nous *étions venus*
*I didn’t take the very quiet road along which we had come*

(Pluperfect – an event which occurred prior to me taking a different road)

**10.5.2 The past anterior tense**

The past anterior is not used very frequently and can only occur in texts in which the simple past is used. It has two functions:

(a) It refers to a past event which **immediately** precedes another past event described by the simple past (as opposed to one past event preceding another without any specification of the length of the period between the two events – in this case a pluperfect would be used).
§10.5 Other tenses indicating the time at which events occur relative to other events

A typical context for the past anterior is a clause introduced by the conjunctions *quand*, *lorsque* ‘when’, *aussitôt que*, *dès que*, *sitôt que*, *dès lors que* ‘as soon as’, *tant que* ‘as long as’, *après que* ‘after’, *une fois que* ‘once’:

Apres qu’elle *fut* sortie, il *enleva* la nappe  
*After she left, he removed the tablecloth*  
(Her leaving immediately preceded his removing the tablecloth)

Dès que j’*eus* fini, je *m’en* rendis chez moi  
*As soon as I had finished, I went home*  
(My finishing immediately preceded my going home)

**(b)** It is used with adverbs such as *vite* ‘quickly’, *bientôt* ‘soon’ where the idea of speed or urgency is expressed, and the verb would otherwise be in the pluperfect:

Elle *eut* bientôt écrit la lettre  
*She had soon written the letter*

Il *fut* vite envoyé chercher un médecin  
*He had quickly been sent to fetch a doctor*

(See also Chapter 17.3.3.)

### 10.5.3 The double compound past and compound pluperfect tenses

The double compound past tense and compound pluperfect tense can be used in spoken French where the past anterior is used in written French, to describe an event which immediately precedes another past event (typically in clauses introduced by *quand*, *lorsque* ‘when’, etc. – see 10.5.2), or to express speed or urgency. Where the verb describing the main past event is in a compound past tense form, the verb describing the preceding event is in a double compound past form:

Ils ont gardé le silence pendant tout mon discours, mais ils *ont applaudi* quand j’ai eu fini  
*They were quiet throughout my speech but they applauded when I had finished*  
(The main past event is their applauding, and the verb is in a compound past form; my finishing the speech immediately precedes their applauding, and is in a double compound past form)

Where the verb describing the main past event is in a pluperfect tense form, the verb describing the preceding event is in a compound pluperfect form:

Quand ils *avaient eu fini* de préparer leurs questions, ils les *avaient données* au Président de séance  
*When they had finished preparing their questions, they had given them to the Chair of the session*  
(The main past event is their having given the questions to the Chair, and the verb is in a pluperfect form; their finishing preparing the questions immediately precedes their giving the questions to the Chair, and is in a compound pluperfect form)

In expressing speed or urgency, only the double compound past tense is possible:

J’ai *eu* vite fini le livre  
*I quickly finished the book*

The use of the double compound past and compound pluperfect tenses is not obligatory and is in fact relatively rare. Ordinary compound past and pluperfect tenses are the normal forms to use in these contexts.
10.5.4 The compound future tense (future perfect)

Typically the compound future tense describes a future event from the perspective of its completion (as opposed to the future tense, which views an event simply from the perspective of its futurity). It usually corresponds to English ‘will have’:

J’aurai fini mon travail dès lundi
I will have finished my work from Monday
(versus: Je finirai mon travail lundi ‘I will finish my work on Monday’)

Given this perspective, a compound future can describe an event which takes place before another event in the future:

J’aurai fini mon travail avant de partir en vacances
I will have finished my work before going on holiday

The compound future can also be the equivalent of English ‘may have’, when a speaker is speculating about an event which may have occurred before another in the past:

Elle aura fini peut-être ses devoirs avant de vous téléphoner
She may perhaps have finished her homework before she telephoned you

10.5.5 The compound conditional tense (conditional perfect)

The compound conditional has four main functions:

(a) It refers to events which would have taken place if certain conditions had been met (but weren’t):

C’aurait été la chute du gouvernement, s’il y avait eu des élections à ce moment-là
The government would have fallen if there had been elections at that time

Tu l’aurais vu partir si tu étais venu plus tôt
You would have seen him leave if you had come earlier

(b) In reported speech (see 10.7) it is the equivalent of a compound future in direct speech:

Direct speech: Il a dit: ‘J’aurai fini mon travail avant de partir en vacances’
He said: ‘I will have finished my work before going on holiday’

Reported speech: Il a dit qu’il aurait fini son travail avant de partir en vacances
He said he would have finished his work before going on holiday

(c) The compound conditional can be used to indicate that the speaker is stating something as a possible fact and not as a certainty, most often a fact asserted by others:

Le Président serait déjà parti pour l’Allemagne
(It is said that) the President may have already left for Germany
(i.e. I have been told he has but I am not repeating it as a fact)

Selon mes collègues, j’aurais dit que le président allait prendre sa retraite
According to my colleagues, I said that the chairman was going to retire
This is widely used in the press to express unsubstantiated or alleged facts:

On ne sait donc toujours pas si l’assassin présumé, qui aurait avoué son crime, était bien le seul tireur ou s’il avait été aidé de plusieurs complices

We therefore still do not know whether the suspected killer, who has allegedly admitted his crime, was indeed the only one who fired or whether he was helped by several accomplices

(d) In formal French the compound conditional can be used as an alternative to a si clause containing a verb in the pluperfect (see also Chapter 17.3.7):

Il me l’aurait dit plus tôt, j’aurais pu m’y prendre autrement
S’il me l’avait dit plus tôt, j’aurais pu m’y prendre autrement
If he’d told me earlier, I could have done it another way

10.5.6 The double compound future

The double compound future can be used (but need not be) to describe an event completed in the future immediately before another future event. Typical contexts where it might be found are clauses introduced by dès que, quand, lorsque, aussitôt que, and so on (see 10.5.2 for the list):

Dès qu’ils auront eu bu leur café, il faudra qu’ils se dépêchent de partir
As soon as they have drunk their coffee, they will have to hurry up and leave

10.6 Combining tenses

When it is necessary to use tenses to indicate one moment in time relative to another, French is much more precise than English. In many sentences one clause establishes the main tense and another situates a second event in relation to it. When this is the case, it is essential to express the relative time relationship clearly in French by use of the appropriate tense as exemplified below.

10.6.1 Time relative to the present

(a) Assuming that one clause of a sentence relates to the present, events which precede the present will be in:

the imperfect if one wishes to stress the duration of the action;

the compound past (perfect) if one wishes to link the past action to the present or to leave that possibility open;

and in the simple past (past historic) if one wishes to indicate, in written French, that the action is definitely completed.

The English sentence:

She often played the violin, now she plays the piano
could be rendered into French in each of the following ways, depending on which of three possible meanings is intended:

(i) If ‘played’ refers to an habitual action in the past compared with the situation now, then the imperfect will be the appropriate tense:

   Elle jouait souvent du violon, maintenant elle joue du piano
   (jouait indicates that she was in the habit of playing the violin: a meaning which could have been conveyed by the English ‘used to’ or ‘would’)

(ii) If ‘played’ refers to an event completed in the past but possibly still relevant to the present, then the compound past (perfect) will be the appropriate tense:

   Elle a souvent joué du violon, maintenant elle joue du piano
   (a joué indicates that on several occasions in the past, she played the violin: it is neutral about whether she still plays it or not but leaves open that possibility)

(iii) If ‘played’ refers to an event (or a repeated set of events) seen as completed in the past and with no relevance to the present, the simple past (past historic) will be the appropriate tense in writing:

   Elle joua souvent du violon, maintenant elle joue du piano
   (joua suggests that for a specified period in the past (e.g. up to the age of ten), she played the violin but that the event is sharply cut off from the present)

(b) Assuming that one clause of the sentence relates to the present, events which follow the present will be expressed through the future:

   J’exige une excellente performance de mes employés aujourd’hui, et je l’exigerai encore demain
   I demand a high-level of performance from my employees now and I will continue to do so in the future

   Il pleut aujourd’hui et il va pleuvoir encore demain
   It’s raining today and it will rain again tomorrow

(c) An event which occurs immediately before an event which is in the present can be expressed by the present tense of _venir de_. The English translation usually involves ‘just’:

   Mais non! Tu ne fais que répéter ce que je viens de te dire!
   Not at all! You are simply repeating what I have just told you!

   Nous venons de présenter nos idées aux clients
   We have just presented our ideas to the clients

   Nous reviendrons sur la question que nous venons d’évoquer
   We will come back again to the topic we have just been discussing

10.6.2 Time relative to the past

(a) Assuming that one clause of a sentence indicates that an event has taken place in the past, the following forms are used to indicate events further in the past than the given past event. Where the past event is expressed by the compound past (perfect) or the simple past (past historic), an event further in the past will be expressed by the pluperfect (see 10.5.1), or, in
certain styles, the past anterior (see 10.5.2). These differences are frequently not expressed in
the equivalent English sentences where simple past forms are used:

Elle a voulu revendre le meuble dès qu’elle l’avait acheté
She wanted to sell the piece of furniture as soon as she bought it

Quand elle eut fini de jouer du violon elle joua du piano
When she finished playing the violin, she played the piano

It is frequently possible for English to use the pluperfect ‘had bought’, ‘had finished
playing’, etc. but most often users prefer the simpler forms and leave the interpretation
to the reader: normally it is clear in context what is meant. However, despite the fact that
English frequently does not mark these temporal distinctions, they cannot be left vague in
French:

Papa veut savoir à quelle heure elle est rentrée hier soir
Dad wants to know at what time she came in last night

Papa a voulu savoir à quelle heure elle était rentrée hier soir
Dad wanted to know at what time she came in last night

On déposa des fleurs sur le trottoir pour indiquer où l’accident était arrivé
Flowers were left (or people left flowers) on the pavement to show where the accident happened

Quand je suis entré dans la pièce je me suis rendu compte que Jean était arrivé avant moi
When I went into the room I realized that John was there before me

(b) The double compound past is used in cases where it is required that the event further in
the past is marked as completed:

Ils ont gardé le silence pendant tout mon discours, mais ils ont applaudi quand j’ai eu fini
They were quiet throughout my speech but they applauded when I had finished

(c) The compound conditional is used to refer to a hypothetical event related to an event
in the past:

Nous aurions acheté votre maison si nous en avions entendu parler à temps
We would have bought your house if we had heard of it in time

Vous auriez pu l’acheter si vous aviez voulu
You could have bought it if you had wanted to

(d) The imperfect of venir de can be used when one event is indicated as just having been
completed prior to another one already expressed in the past tense. Note that the French
imperfect must be translated by an English pluperfect ‘had told/presented etc.’:

Il ne faisait que répéter ce que je venais de lui dire
He simply repeated what I had just told him

Nous venions de conclure notre présentation quand la panne d’électricité est survenue
We had just finished our presentation when there was a power cut

La question que nous venions d’évoquer avait soulevé beaucoup de controverse
The matter we had just discussed raised a great deal of controversy
### 10.6.3 Time relative to the future

(a) A sequential relationship between two events in the future can be expressed through the compound future:

\[
\text{Est-ce qu’elle aura fini ses devoirs avant de partir demain matin?} \\
\text{Will she have finished her homework before she leaves tomorrow morning?}
\]

marks a future action which **precedes** the indicated future point in time.

\[
\text{Est-ce qu’elle finira ses devoirs après avoir pris sa douche demain matin?} \\
\text{Will she finish her homework after having her shower tomorrow morning?}
\]

marks a future action which **follows** the indicated future point in time. (Note the preferred translation with ‘-ing’.)

\[
\text{Une fois que nous serons passés à l'hôtel je pourrai enfin me débarrasser de ces valises} \\
\text{Once we’ve been to the hotel I will finally be able to get rid of these suitcases}
\]

\[
\text{Lorsqu’il m’aura fourni des explications valables, nous pourrons nous mettre d’accord sur la solution à adopter} \\
\text{Once he has provided me with a satisfactory explanation, we shall be able to agree on the solution to be chosen}
\]

both mark a future action which **precedes** another future action. (Note the translation into English by a present perfect.)

(b) The double compound future is used to indicate the completed nature of the event preceding another event in the future:

\[
\text{Quand vous aurez eu fini de préparer vos questions, vous les présenterez au Président de séance} \\
\text{When you have finished preparing your questions, you (will) give them to the Chair of the session}
\]

### 10.7 Tenses in direct and reported descriptions of events

When descriptions of events (e.g. *Le prisonnier s’est évadé par la fenêtre* ‘The prisoner escaped through the window’) or the utterances of others (‘direct speech’- e.g. *«Je viens demain»* ‘I’m coming tomorrow’) are **reported** to a third party, the tense of the verb in the original sentence can change in certain circumstances, and there may also be consequential changes in any associated time adverbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct description</th>
<th>Reported description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Le prisonnier s’est évadé par la fenêtre</em></td>
<td><em>La police croyait que le prisonnier s’était évadé par la fenêtre</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The prisoner escaped through the window</em></td>
<td><em>The police thought that the prisoner had escaped through the window</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct speech</th>
<th>Reported speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Je viens demain</em></td>
<td><em>Il a dit qu’il venait le lendemain</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m coming tomorrow</em></td>
<td><em>He said that he was coming the following day</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For the choice of appropriate time adverbs see Chapter 5.6.15.)
Verbs which introduce reported descriptions or reported speech are those such as dire que ‘to say that’, expliquer que ‘to explain that’, penser que, croire que ‘to think, believe that’, maintenir que ‘to maintain that’, prétendre que ‘to claim that’, and so on.

Mostly, the tense of the verb in the reported clause is the same as the tense of the verb in the original statement or utterance. But where the reporting verb is in a past tense – imperfect, compound past/simple past or pluperfect – the following systematic changes occur in the tense of the reported verb:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original tense</th>
<th>Reported tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>imperfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(compound) future</td>
<td>(compound) conditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compound/simple past</td>
<td>pluperfect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.A illustrates the pattern.

**TABLE 10.A Tenses following a reporting verb in a past tense**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct description</th>
<th>Reporting verb (imperfect, compound or simple past, pluperfect)</th>
<th>Reported verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elle parle (present)</td>
<td>Ils croyaient qu’ils ont cru qu’elle parlait</td>
<td>elle parlait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle parlera (future)</td>
<td>Ils croyaient qu’ils avaient cru qu’elle parlait</td>
<td>elle parlerait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle aura parlé (compound future)</td>
<td>Ils croyaient qu’ils avaient cru qu’elle parlait</td>
<td>elle aurait parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle a parlé (compound past)</td>
<td>Ils croyaient qu’ils avaient cru qu’elle parlait</td>
<td>elle avait parlé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle parla (simple past)</td>
<td>Ils avaient cru qu’elle parlait</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other tenses of reported verbs remain the same as the original. To take some typical examples:

**Direct description**  | ** Reported**                          |
---                      |----------------------------------------|
Elle parlaît            | Ils avaient cru qu’elle parlait         |
Elle aurait parlé       | Ils ont cru qu’elle aurait parlé        |
Elle avait parlé        | Ils croyaient qu’elle avait parlé       |
And where the reporting verb is in a non-past tense (i.e. present or any form of the (compound) future or (compound) conditional) the tense of the reported verb remains the same as the original:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct description</th>
<th>Reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Elle parle         | Ils croiraient qu’elle parle  
*They would think that she is speaking* |
| Elle parlera       | Ils croient qu’elle parlera   
*They think that she will speak* |
| Elle a parlé       | Ils auraient cru qu’elle a parlé  
*They would have thought that she spoke* |

### 10.8 Tenses with *si*

*si* has two distinct functions. One is to introduce indirect questions, and corresponds to English ‘if’ when it can also mean ‘whether’: *Elle m’a demandé si je voulais y aller* ‘She asked me if/whether I wanted to go there’. Tenses following indirect question *si* are determined in exactly the same way as for reported speech, as described in 10.7. (See also Chapter 17.3.6.)

The other function of *si* is to introduce ‘hypothetical clauses’. In this use it corresponds to English ‘if’ when it cannot alternate with ‘whether’, e.g. ‘I won’t stay if (NOT *whether*) he comes’ *Je ne resterai pas s’il vient*. The tense of the verb in the hypothetical *si* clause can **never** be in the (compound) future or (compound) conditional tense. Rather, it will typically obey one of the following patterns:

- **Je ne reste pas s’il vient**  
  *I’m not staying if he comes*

- **Je ne resterai pas s’il vient**  
  *I won’t stay if he comes*

- **Je ne resterais pas s’il venait**  
  *I wouldn’t stay if he came*

- **Je ne serais pas resté s’il venait/était venu**  
  *I wouldn’t have stayed if he came/had come*

- **Je ne restais pas s’il venait**  
  *I wasn’t staying if he was coming*
11 The subjunctive, modal verbs, exclamatives and imperatives

11.1 The attitude of the subject to events: the subjunctive

The subjunctive is expressed by a particular set of forms which verbs can typically take only in subordinate clauses (but see 11.4.4 for an exception). Verb forms that are not those of the subjunctive (e.g. the simple present, imperfect, simple past, compound past, and so on) are traditionally called the indicative. This distinction is used in this chapter for expository purposes. The selection of the subjunctive in a subordinate clause (rather than the normal indicative) is always determined by the nature of the clause on which it is dependent.

It should be noted that in many cases there is no choice about whether to use the subjunctive or indicative: certain types of main clause ALWAYS select the subjunctive in a dependent subordinate clause; others ALWAYS select the indicative. However, some main clause constructions are ambiguous, and allow the verb in a dependent subordinate clause to be either subjunctive or indicative: the choice of one or the other produces different meanings.

The majority of main clause constructions which select the subjunctive have a general property in common, and it is useful to consider the subjunctive from this perspective. The subjunctive is selected in a subordinate clause where the subject of the main clause views the event described in the subordinate clause with a significant degree of personal interpretation. This notion of ‘personal interpretation’ can be broken down into three types, which are illustrated below:

(a) The subject judges an event to be more towards the ‘unlikely’ end of a scale going from ‘probable’ to ‘unlikely’.
(b) The subject projects his or her personal desires or feelings on to an event.
(c) The subject cannot present an event as probable from his or her point of view, because it is in some way conditional on other events, is hypothetical, is unknowable or is simply vague.

Subjunctive: dependent on the subject’s belief that an event is unlikely to occur

Where the subject of the main clause expresses a belief in the relative probability of an event’s occurring (whether in the past or the future), the indicative will be used. For example, expressions like the following give rise to the indicative in dependent subordinate clauses:

Jean affirme que  Jean declares that
Jean pense que Pierre est venu  Jean thinks that
Jean imagine que Pierre came

In the case of impersonal subjects – il est certain que, il est probable que, etc. – or with verbs where the subject is in the first person – je crois que, j’imagine que, etc. – it is the speaker of the sentence who expresses a belief in the probability of an event’s occurring and this equally gives rise to the indicative:
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Je crois que
Je juge que
Je pense que
Je suppose que
Il est certain que
Il est probable que

\[ \text{Pierre viendra} \]

I believe that
I reckon that
I think that
I suppose that
It’s certain that
It’s probable that

\[ \text{Pierre will come} \]

BUT where the main clause expresses the subject’s belief that an event is unlikely to occur or to have occurred, the subjunctive is required. For example, where the above expressions are negated or questioned, or when other terms suggesting less certainty are used, the event becomes more ‘unlikely’ than ‘probable’. This gives rise to the subjunctive in dependent subordinate clauses:

Jean ne pense pas que
Jean n’imagine pas que etc.

\[ \text{Pierre soit venu} \]

Jean doesn’t think that
Jean doesn’t imagine that etc.

\[ \text{Pierre came} \]

Je ne crois pas que
Il n’est pas certain que
Il est possible que etc.

\[ \text{Pierre vienne} \]

I don’t believe that
It’s not certain that
It’s possible that etc.

\[ \text{Pierre will come} \]

Est-il certain que
Crois-tu que etc.

\[ \text{Pierre vienne?} \]

Is it certain that…
Do you think that etc.

\[ \text{Pierre will come?} \]

Est-ce que Jean pense que
Est-ce que Jean imagine que etc.

\[ \text{Pierre soit venu?} \]

Does Jean think that…
Does Jean imagine that etc.

\[ \text{Pierre came?} \]

Subjunctive: dependent on the subject’s attitude to an event

Where the construction which introduces the subordinate clause inherently presents the event as simply a matter of fact, the indicative will be used. For example, after the verb savoir que ‘to know that’ the indicative will always be used because savoir que states the subject’s view of an event as a matter of fact, uncoloured by a significant degree of personal interpretation:

\[ \text{Il sait que Pierre est venu} \]

(Il sait que states ‘Pierre’s having come’ as a factual reality)

BUT where the construction which introduces the subordinate clause inherently expresses the subject’s personal desires or feelings, the subjunctive will be required. For example, after the verb regretter que ‘to be sorry that’, the subjunctive will always be used because regretter places the event in the context of an emotional, personal interpretation by the subject:

\[ \text{Il regrette que Pierre soit venu} \]

(‘Pierre’s having come’ is not in doubt, but il regrette que expresses a personal attitude towards that event)

Thus, where a subject places a particular personal interpretation on an event described in a subordinate clause, the subjunctive is likely to be used – even if the factual reality of the event is not in doubt. It is the attitude towards the event, the way the subject wishes it to be seen, which is more important than the reality or otherwise of the event. For example, Josette Alia, writing in the Nouvel Observateur in 1990 about the beginning of the feminist movement wrote:

\[ \text{L’essentiel, pour nous, était que le scandale fût là} \]

The most important thing for us was that there should have been a scandal
To have written the following, equally grammatical, sentence would have changed the meaning in an important way:

L’essentiel, pour nous, était que le scandale fut là
The most important thing for us was that there was a scandal

In using the subjunctive Josette Alia does not lay the stress on the concept that there actually was a scandal (although she certainly thinks that there was) because that, from her point of view, is not what is important: she wishes to stress that the important thing was for the early feminists (with whom she identifies herself) to have created one – hence the subjunctive.

**Subjunctive: dependent on the subject’s view of an event as conditional, hypothetical, unknowable or vague**

In cases where the idea of conditionality is expressed overtly through the conditional word *si*, the indicative is always used (for tenses with *si* see 10.8):

**Si tu viens demain nous pourrons nous promener au bord du lac**
If you come tomorrow, we will be able to go for a walk beside the lake

**S’ils avaient répondu à mon premier email, j’aurais cessé de les importuner**
If they had replied to my first email, I would have stopped bothering them

**BUT** certain expressions introducing dependent clauses place a condition on an event; the subject can then only present it as something which, from his or her point of view, is possible in certain circumstances, but no more than that. Therefore with expressions such as *à condition que* ‘on the condition that’ and *à moins que* ‘unless’, the subjunctive is obligatory:

**Je veux bien y aller, à condition qu’on prenne l’avion**
I’d be very pleased to go, as long as we take the plane

**Jean Charles devra changer ses habitudes à moins qu’il veuille qu’on prenne pour un imbécile**
Jean Charles will have to change his ways unless he wants people to think he is a complete idiot

When time constraints make the outcome of events unknowable by the subject, references to events in an unknown time scale tend to be in the subjunctive: *avant que* ‘before’ and *jusqu’à ce que* ‘until’ must be followed by the subjunctive:

**Avant que tu (ne) me le dises, je te promets que je serai là à l’heure**
Before you say anything to me, I promise that I will be there on time

**Je veux attendre ici jusqu’à ce qu’il soit arrivé chez lui**
I want to stay here until he has got home

When subjects are confronted with a degree of vagueness which means that they do not know enough about the situation to be certain of anything they say, the subjunctive is used: *quoi que*, *quel(le(s)) que* ‘whichever, whatever’ must be followed by the subjunctive:

**Quoi qu’il fasse, il ne mettra plus jamais les pieds chez moi**
Whatever he does, he will never set foot in my house again

**Quels que soient ses problèmes, je ne vois pas très bien comment je pourrais l’aider**
Whatever her problems may be, I can’t easily see how I could help her
The subjunctive, modal verbs, exclamatives and imperatives

§11.1

SUMMARY

Contexts which give rise to the subjunctive

(a) The subjunctive is used mainly in subordinate clauses (but see 11.4.4).

(b) The subordinate clause is dependent on constructions which express a significant degree of personal interpretation of events: these interpretations present events as more unlikely than probable, and/or in a way which is coloured by the desires or feelings of the subject, and/or as conditional, hypothetical or unknowable.

NB: (i) As noted earlier, in the great majority of cases where the subjunctive is used, there is no choice: it is required after the relevant expression. However, in some limited subordinate contexts there is a genuine choice between using the indicative and the subjunctive because the construction on which the subordinate clause is dependent can be used with more than one meaning. This is the case in the example from Josette Alia used above. It is also the case in the following examples (the first from Judge and Healey, 1983:131).

A speaker trying to find a student who speaks Chinese might say:

Je cherche un étudiant qui sait parler chinois
I’m looking for a student who can speak Chinese

This would be used if the speaker is reasonably sure that there is such a student in a known group (i.e. ‘I know one of the students speaks Chinese – I’m looking for that student’). By contrast, if the speaker said:

Je cherche un étudiant qui sache parler chinois
I’m looking for a student who can speak Chinese

he or she would be expressing reservations about whether such a student is likely to be available (i.e. ‘I’m looking for any student who speaks Chinese – I don’t know whether any of them do’).

An irate parent waiting for a teenager who is coming in late might say:

Je suppose que tu vas me dire que tu es allé au cinéma avec ta copine
I suppose you’re going to tell me that you went to the cinema with your girl friend.

The indicative is used because the parent wants to express his or her certainty about what excuses are likely to be offered.

By contrast, an insurance agent wanting to sell holiday insurance to a client might say:

Supposez toujours que vous soyez aux Etats-Unis et que vous tombiez malade, qu’est-ce que vous allez faire sans assurance?
Just suppose that you are in the United States and you fall ill, how could you manage without health insurance?

Here the whole issue is hypothetical. Hence the subjunctive.

(ii) Although the subjunctive is typically marked in verbs in subordinate clauses introduced by que, not every subordinate clause introduced by que requires the verb to be in the subjunctive – in fact most of them don’t! It is only when the subordinate clause is dependent on a construction which expresses a significant degree of subjective interpretation of the event along the lines described above, usually through the use of one of the specific ways of introducing the subordinate clause, that the subjunctive is used.
11.1 Forms of the subjunctive

The conjugation of verbs in the subjunctive is described fully in Chapter 7. Here is a brief summary of the way that regular verbs form the subjunctive in the various tenses (but see Chapter 7 for irregular verbs).

Present subjunctive
For many verbs, take the third person plural, present tense form of the indicative, delete -ent:

for example:

(ils) parlement → parl-
finissent → finiss-
dorment → dorm-
vendent → vend-
reçoivent → reçoiv-

and add the endings:

-e
-es
-e
-ions
-iez
-ent

for example:
parle, parles, parle, parlions, parliez, parlement
finisse, finisses, finisse, finissions, finissiez, finissent etc.

NB: The stem reçoiv- changes when the ending does not begin with -e: reçoive, reçoives, reçoive, recevions, receviez, reçoivent.

Imperfect subjunctive
For many verbs, take the first person singular, simple past tense form of the indicative, delete the last letter: for example:

(je) parlaï → parla-
finis → fini-
dormis → dormi-
vendis → vendi-
reçus → reçu-

and add the endings:

-sse
-sses
-ss
dsions
-ssiez
-ssent
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for example:

parlasse, parlasses, parlât, parlassions, parlassiez, parlassent
finisse, finisses, finît, finissions, finissiez, finissent
reçusse, reçusses, reçit, reçussions, reçussiez, reçussent
etc.

Compound past and pluperfect subjunctive
The compound past subjunctive is formed from the present subjunctive forms of avoir or être, as appropriate, followed by the past participle. The pluperfect subjunctive is formed from the imperfect subjunctive of avoir or être, as appropriate, followed by the past participle. (See Chapter 7 for details.)

11.1.2 Which tense of the subjunctive should be used?
In formal written French it is still possible to use all of the tenses of the subjunctive: present, imperfect, compound past and pluperfect. In such cases the tense to use is determined in a broadly similar way to the choice of tenses with indicative forms of the verb (see Chapter 10). The only difference is that because there is no future or conditional subjunctive, the present tense form of the subjunctive is normally used in contexts where the future or conditional would be appropriate.

However, in less formal written French, and generally in spoken French, only the present tense and the compound past tense of the subjunctive are used. In this case, the present tense forms of the subjunctive typically cover all cases where present, imperfect, simple past, future or conditional tenses of the indicative would be used. For example:

Nous préférons qu’il soit au courant
We prefer him to know about it
(Compare: Nous savons qu’il est au courant – present tense)

Le professeur se plaignait que ses élèves ne sachent pas employer correctement le subjonctif
The teacher used to complain that his pupils didn’t know how to use the subjunctive correctly
(Compare: Le professeur disait que ses élèves ne savaient pas employer correctement le subjonctif – imperfect tense)

Il était heureux dans le bureau jusqu’à ce que le patron embauche une nouvelle secrétaire
He was happy in the office until the boss hired a new secretary
(Compare: Il était heureux dans le bureau. Mais alors le patron embaucha une nouvelle secrétaire – simple past tense)

Je démissionnerai tout de suite à moins que vous ne la renvoyiez
I’ll resign immediately unless you sack her (Compare: Vous ne la renverrez pas? Alors je démissionnerai – future tense)

Il serait peu probable que nos amis sachent que nous sommes partis
It would be unlikely that our friends would know that we have left (Compare: Il serait probable que nos amis sauraient que nous sommes partis – conditional tense)
The compound past tense forms of the subjunctive typically cover all cases where compound past, pluperfect, compound future or compound conditional tenses of the indicative would be used. For example:

**Quoiqu’ils aient fait de gros efforts, l’entreprise reste en difficulté.**

**Although they have made considerable efforts, the company is still in difficulty.**

(Compare: Ils *ont* fait de gros efforts, mais l’entreprise reste en difficulté – compound past tense)

**N’ont-ils pas cru que l’autre équipe *ait* été éliminée?**

**Didn’t they think that the other team had been eliminated?**

(Compare: Ils *ont* cru que l’autre équipe *ait* été éliminée – pluperfect tense)

**Quoi que mes parents aient décidé, je n’y consentirai pas.**

**Whatever my parents have decided, I won’t agree to it.**

(Compare: Mes parents *auront* décidé, mais je n’y consentirai pas – compound future tense)

**Crois-tu que les élèves aient obtenu d’aussi bonnes notes si quelqu’un d’autre avaient été leur professeur?**

**Do you believe that the pupils would have got such good marks if someone else had been their teacher?**

(Compare: Je crois que les élèves *auraient* obtenu d’aussi bonnes notes si quelqu’un d’autre avait été leur professeur – compound conditional tense)

### 11.1.3 Subjunctive after verbs, adjectives and nouns which express the personal desires, orders, expectations, fears, regrets or other emotional states of the subject in relation to the event

#### Verbs and adjectives

Verbs and adjectives of wishing, ordering, expressing fears and other emotional states are normally followed by subjunctive subordinate clauses. The verb in subordinate clauses dependent on the following verbs is almost always in the subjunctive:

- **aimer que**  
  to wish that
- **attendre que**  
  to wait for
- **s’attendre à ce que**  
  to expect that
- **avoir envie que**  
  to really want that
- **commander que**  
  to order that
- **consentir que**  
  to agree or to accept that
- **être content que**  
  to be pleased that
- **craindre que**  
  to fear that
- **demander que**  
  to ask that
- **désirer que**  
  to wish that
- **être désolé que**  
  to be sorry that
- **être dommage que**  
  to be a pity or to be regretted that
- **douter que**  
  to doubt that
- **s’étonner que**  
  to be surprised that
- **exiger que**  
  to require that
- **être heureux que**  
  to be happy that
- **insister pour que**  
  to insist that
- **ordonner que**  
  to order that
- **permettre que**  
  to allow that
- **avoir peur que**  
  to be afraid that
- **préférer que**  
  to prefer that
- **être ravi que**  
  to be delighted that
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J’aimerais que tous les étudiants puissent trouver du travail en fin d’études.
I would like all the students to be able to obtain a job at the end of their period of study

‘Attendez que ma joie revienne et que soit mort le souvenir . . .’ (chanson de Barbara)
‘Wait until I can be happy again and for the memory to die . . .’

Je consens que tu fasses ce stage de photo mais n’oublie pas que tu devras quand-même aller à tes cours
I agree that you can go on this photography course, but don’t forget that you will still have to go to your lectures

Je crains que cela (ne) soit vrai
I’m afraid that may be true

Il est dommage que le gouvernement n’ait pas pu obtenir la libération des otages plus tôt
It is to be regretted that the government was not able to obtain the release of the hostages at an earlier date

Personnellement, je ne doute pas que leur version soit véridique mais ils auront du mal à convaincre leurs parents
I don’t doubt that their version is true but they will find it difficult to convince their parents

Il a exigé que nous l’emmenions jusqu’à Paris
He demanded that we should take him all the way to Paris

Elle était ravie que ses copains aient obtenu l’autorisation de passer dans la classe supérieure
She was very happy that her friends had been allowed to move up to the next class

J’ordonne que les prisonniers soient libérés tout de suite
I order that the prisoners should be freed immediately

J’ai peur que la vérité soit différente
I’m afraid that the truth might be different

Nous préférons qu’il soit au courant
We prefer him to know about it

Je suis ravi que tu ais trouvé l’âme sœur
I am delighted that you have found your partner for life

Je veux que tu sois là à la naissance
I want you to be present at the birth

(For the use of non-negative ne in subordinate clauses see Chapter 16.16.)
§11.1 The attitude of the subject to events: the subjunctive

Nouns
The subjunctive is normally required in clauses dependent on nouns which express similar meanings to the verbs listed above, i.e. wishing, ordering, being pleased, sad, surprised, etc.: l’attente que, la crainte que, le désir que, l’ordre que, la peur que, le souhait que:

La crainte qu’il soit relâché a provoqué une manifestation devant la prison
The fear that he might be freed gave rise to a demonstration in front of the prison

Yvonne et Pierre ont exprimé le désir qu’elle soit invitée
Yvonne and Pierre have said that they want her to be invited

L’ordre qu’il soit exécuté a été donné au plus haut niveau
The order that he should be executed was given at the highest level

NB: Where the subject of the main clause is unspecified, as in a passive, or is the same as the subject of the subordinate clause, the subjunctive can be avoided by the use of an infinitive with la crainte de, le désir de, la peur de, l’ordre de etc.:

L’ordre qu’il soit exécuté a été donné au plus haut niveau
L’ordre de l’exécuter a été donné au plus haut niveau

11.1.4 Subjunctive after verbs of saying, thinking and believing in negatives and questions

Verbs of saying, thinking and believing – affirmer que ‘to state that’, croire que ‘to believe that’, déclarer que ‘to declare that’, imaginer que ‘to imagine that’, penser que ‘to think that’, trouver que ‘to find that’, and so on – normally present an event simply as a fact and, where they are followed by a dependent subordinate clause, the verb in this clause is in the indicative:

Ils ont cru que l’autre équipe avait été éliminée
They thought that the other team had been eliminated

But when such verbs are negated or questioned, this introduces uncertainty about the likelihood of the event occurring, and verbs in the dependent clause are in the subjunctive:

N’ont-ils pas cru que l’autre équipe ait été éliminée?
Didn’t they think that the other team had been eliminated?

Nous n’affirmons pas que l’accident soit de votre faute, mais les circonstances prétent à croire que cela pourrait être le cas
We are not saying that the accident was your fault, but the circumstances lead us to believe that this might be the case

Croyez-vous que la guerre froide soit vraiment terminée?
Do you think the cold war is really over?

Peut-on dire que cette statue soit un bon exemple du style de Michel-Ange?
Would you say that this statue is a good example of Michelangelo’s style?

Je ne pense pas que cela soit vrai
I don’t think that is correct

Je ne trouve pas que votre plaisanterie soit de mauvais goût, mais simplement déplacée dans ce contexte
I don’t think that your joke was in bad taste but merely out of place in this context
Similarly, when verbs of saying, thinking and believing are used to introduce hypothetical cases, verbs in clauses dependent on them will be in the subjunctive:

Imaginez quelle ait été sa surprise
Just imagine what her surprise must have been

Supposons que nous ayons gagné la loterie nationale
Let’s suppose that we won the national lottery

On imagine mal que ce film ait été tourné par Godard
It’s difficult to imagine that this film was made by Godard

NB: Note that espérer que ‘to hope that’ does NOT give rise to the subjunctive in a dependent clause, even when negated or questioned:

Ils espéraient que l’autre équipe avait été éliminée
They hoped the other team had been eliminated

N’espéraient-ils pas que l’autre équipe avait été éliminée?
Didn’t they hope that the other team had been eliminated?

11.1.5 Subjunctive after impersonal verbs expressing the belief that an event is unlikely as opposed to probable

Some impersonal verbs and expressions present the occurrence of events described in dependent subordinate clauses as probable: verbs in these clauses are in the indicative. Examples of such cases are: il est certain que ‘it is certain that’, il s’ensuit que ‘it follows that’, il est évident que ‘it is obvious that’, il est probable que ‘it is probable that’, il me semble que ‘I think that’, il est vrai que ‘it is true that’:

Il est probable que nous arriverons à Paris après-demain
It is probable that we will arrive in Paris the day after tomorrow

Il me semble que tout ce travail valait la peine
I think that all this work was worth it

But others present the events as less probable, only possible or even impossible; these require the subjunctive in dependent clauses: il n’est pas certain que ‘it is not certain that’; il est douteux que ‘it is doubtful that’; il est improbable que ‘it is impossible that’; il est invraisemblable que ‘it is unbelievable that’; il se peut que, il est possible que ‘it is possible that’; il est peu probable que ‘it is unlikely that’; il n’est pas sûr que ‘it is not sure that’; il n’est pas vrai que ‘it is not true that’.

Note particularly the following contrasts:

il est certain que + indicative     il n’est pas certain que + subjunctive
il est probable que + indicative    il est peu probable que + subjunctive
il est sûr que + indicative        il n’est pas sûr que + subjunctive
il est vrai que + indicative       il n’est pas vrai que + subjunctive

Il n’est pas certain que tes explications soient acceptées par tous
It is not certain that your explanations would be accepted by everyone

Il est douteux que le contrat ait été signé à temps
It is doubtful the contract will have been signed on time
§11.1 The attitude of the subject to events: the subjunctive

Il est invraisemblable qu’ils aient pu s’enfuir sans être remarqués
*It is incredible that they should have been able to escape without anyone noticing*

Il se peut que nous rencontrions nos camarades à la sortie de la ville
*We may meet up with our friends on the outskirts of town*

Il est possible que nous puissions trouver une solution à votre problème
*It is possible that we may be able to find a solution to your problem*

Il est peu probable que vous réussissiez le permis la première fois
*It is not very likely that you’ll pass your driving test first time*

Il n’est pas sûr que nous ayons choisi la meilleure solution
*We can’t be sure that we have chosen the best solution*

Il n’est pas vrai que Juliette nous ait proposé de rester sur place
*It is not true that Juliette proposed that we should stay where we were*

Some impersonal constructions express the subjective desires or feelings of the speaker of the sentence: *il faut que* ‘it is necessary that’ (often equivalent to ‘must’); *il est important que* ‘it is important that’; *il est nécessaire que* ‘it is necessary that’; *il est regrettable que* ‘it is regrettable that’; *il semble que* ‘it seems that’; *il est temps que* ‘it is time that’; *il vaut mieux que* ‘it is better if’.

Il faut qu’ils soient prêts à partir tout de suite
*They must be ready to leave immediately*

Il est important que tous comprennent la nécessité d’améliorer la productivité
*It is important that everyone understands the need to increase productivity*

Il est nécessaire que vous partiez avec eux: il serait trop dangereux de les laisser voyager seuls
*It is necessary for you to go with them: it would be too dangerous to let them travel on their own*

Il est regrettable que nous n’ayons pas pu transmettre ces renseignements
*It is a pity that we were not able to pass on this information*

Il semble que l’ennemi soit mieux préparé
*It seems that the enemy is better prepared*

Il est temps que nous préparions à aider les sans-abri
*It is time for us to get ready to help the homeless*

Il vaut mieux que ce soit Jean-Claude qui fournisse les explications
*It is better that it should be Jean-Claude who puts forward the explanations*

NB: Note in particular the contrast:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>il me semble que + indicative</th>
<th>Il me semble que l’ennemi est mieux préparé</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I think that the enemy is better prepared</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>il semble que + subjunctive</th>
<th>Il semble que l’ennemi soit mieux préparé</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>It seems that the enemy is better prepared</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11.1.6 Subjunctive after certain conjunctions

Some subordinating conjunctions introduce hypothetical situations or establish conditions: these are normally followed by verbs in the subjunctive in the subordinate clause:

- afin que: *in order that*
- pour que: *
- en attendant que: *whilst waiting for*
- non que:
- ce n’est pas que:
- à moins que: *
- à supposer que:
- supposé que:
- en supposant que:
- en admettant que:
- bien que: *
- quoique:
- encore que:
- malgré que:
- de façon que: *
- de manière que:
- de sorte que:
- si bien que:
- de peur que:
- de crainte que:
- pour peu que:
- si peu que:
- pourvu que:
- à condition que:
- sans que:
- soit que:
- tel que:

Cover your exercise books *afin qu’ils ne se salissent* pas

*Ils sont allés habiter à Paris* *pour que* leur fils *puisse* suivre des cours à Henri IV

*En attendant que* le beau temps *revienne*, on passait les soirées à lire au coin du feu

I asked her to change the manuscript; *non que* je *sois déçu*, mais je voudrais qu’il y ait plus de dialogue
§11.1 The attitude of the subject to events: the subjunctive

Je passe te prendre à six heures à moins que tu ne m’appelles avant
I’ll call by to pick you up at six unless you ring me beforehand

A supposer que la réponse soit favorable, qu’est-ce que vous allez faire?
Supposing that the reply is positive, what will you do?

Bien que ces arguments soient en partie valables, ils ne justifient pas votre comportement
Although these arguments are valid to a certain degree, I do not think that they justify your behaviour

Quoique les ouvrières aient fourni de gros efforts, la compagnie est toujours en difficulté
Although the workers have made considerable efforts, the company is still in difficulty

J’ai éteint mon portable de crainte qu’on ne me dérange pendant la réunion
I’ve switched off my mobile for fear that I might be interrupted during the meeting

Ils ont fait mettre leur numéro sur la liste rouge de peur qu’on ne les dérange chez eux
They have gone ex-directory for fear of being disturbed at home

Je te montrerai comment cela fonctionne de façon que tu puisses l’expliquer à Georges plus tard
I’ll show you how it works so that you can explain it to George later

Je mets les chaises au jardin de manière que tu puisses lire au soleil
I’ll set out the garden chairs in such a way that you can read in the sun

Expliquez-moi ce que vous avez décidé de sorte que je sois en mesure de rédiger un rapport
Let me know in detail what you have decided, so that I may write a report

Je veux bien vous conduire jusqu’à Lyon à condition que vous payiez mon billet de retour
I am quite willing to drive you to Lyons as long as you pay for me to come back

Nous nous offrirons des vacances cette année, pourvu que nos marges bénéficiaires nous le permettent
We will take some holidays this year, provided that we make sufficient profit

Elle aurait bien pu quitter le village sans que je m’en aperçoive
She could well have left the village without my noticing

Et s’il avait créé un scandale tel que vous ayiez été obligé de céder, vous auriez perdu beaucoup d’argent
And if he had created such a scandal that you had been obliged to give in, you would have lost a lot of money

The conjunctions de façon que, de manière que, de sorte que, si bien que ‘so that’ have two distinct meanings. On the one hand they express a wish that something which has not yet happened might happen. With this meaning they have the force of ‘creating the conditions for another event to occur’ and are followed by the subjunctive:

Je te montrerai comment cela fonctionne de façon que tu puisses l’expliquer à Georges
I’ll show you how it works so that (‘creating the conditions for you to’) you can explain it to George
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Dis-m’en un peu plus sur ce qui se passe au bureau, de sorte que je puisse te conseiller
Tell me a little more about what’s happening at the office so that (‘creating the conditions for me to’) I can advise you

On the other hand, they can describe a causal effect of one event on another. With this meaning they have the force of ‘with the result that’ and are followed by the indicative:

Le mécanicien a réglé le fonctionnement des vitesses de façon que tu puisses t’en servir de nouveau
The mechanic has adjusted the gears so that (‘with the result that’) you can use them again

Tu ne me racontes plus jamais ce qui se passe au bureau, de sorte que je suis incapable de te conseiller
You never tell me any more about what’s happening at the office so (‘with the result that’) I cannot advise you

(See also Chapter 17.3.8.)

11.1.7 Subjunctive after time conjunctions

With the time conjunctions: avant que ‘before’ and jusqu’à ce que ‘until’ the subjunctive is always used:

Il faut réagir rapidement, avant que le problème ne devienne insurmontable
We must react quickly before the problem becomes impossible to deal with

Sébastien va s’assurer de sa situation financière avant qu’il ne démissionne
Sebastien will sort out his financial position before he resigns

Il a persisté jusqu’à ce qu’elle sorte avec lui
He kept on until she went out with him

avant que can be replaced by avant de when the subject of the verb in the subordinate clause is the same as that in the introducing clause:

Sébastien va s’assurer de sa situation financière avant qu’il ne démissionne
Sébastien va s’assurer de sa situation financière avant de démissionner

The conjunction après que ‘after’ is normally followed by the indicative and not the subjunctive:

Nous avons commencé après qu’ils étaient arrivés
We began after they arrived

However, presumably by analogy with avant que, you will often hear people using the subjunctive after après que. (See also Chapter 17.3.1.)

(For the use of non-negative ne in dependent clauses see Chapter 16.16, and for non-negative ne in clauses dependent on conjunctions see Chapter 17.3.8.)

11.1.8 Subjunctive in clauses dependent on expressions which claim a unique status for an entity

Verbs in clauses which are dependent on superlatives, on nouns modified by one of the adjectives dernier, premier, seul, unique, or on personne or rien, are in the subjunctive if the
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A sentence makes the claim that the entity referred to is ‘peerless’ (i.e. is the biggest, best, worst, first, last, only one of its kind ever):

Ce chou-fleur est le plus gros que j’aie jamais vu

This cauliflower is the biggest I have ever seen

Jennifer est la meilleure spécialiste que j’aie entendue sur ce sujet

Jennifer is the best specialist I have heard on this subject

Jeanne est la seule qui soit capable de le faire

Jeanne is the only woman who could do it

Mon frère est l’unique candidat qui ait été sélectionné

My brother is the only candidate who has been selected

Je ne connais personne qui soit mieux qualifié que lui pour exprimer les espoirs de la jeune génération

I don’t know anyone better qualified than him to express the aspirations of the young

Il possède la dernière des voitures qui soit équipée d’un moteur spécial

He owns the last of the cars which have a special engine

However, where there is no claim about the ‘peerless’ quality of the entity (e.g. when it is described as the biggest, best, worst, first etc. of a particular set, but there may be other bigger, better, worse, etc., entities in the world) the verb is in the indicative:

C’est le premier film que j’ai vu

That’s the first film I saw

There is nothing peerless about this. It is simply the assertion of a fact. Other people see their first film as well. But compare with:

C’était la première personne qui ait fait l’ascension du Matterhorn

He was the first person to scale the Matterhorn

This was a ‘peerless’ first, and so the subjunctive is used. Similarly, compare:

Je ne connais personne qui soit plus doué pour le piano que vous

I don’t know anyone more gifted for the piano than you (peerless)

Je ne connais personne qui sait jouer du violon

I don’t know anyone who plays the violin

(not peerless – there are plenty of people in the world who can play the violin; it’s just that one of them is not in my set of acquaintances)

Other examples of non-peerless cases:

C’est la dernière fois que je viens vous voir

This is the last time I am coming to see you

La première fois que je t’ai vu, je t’ai trouvé un peu farfelu

The first time I saw you I thought you were a bit eccentric

Le livre de cuisine est le seul qui est tombé de l’étagère

The cook book is the only one which fell off the shelf

(See also Chapter 15.11.3.)
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11.1.9 Use of the indicative in clauses introduced by an adverb

When an adverb, such as peut-être que ‘perhaps’, heureusement que ‘luckily’, certainement que ‘of course’, apparemment que ‘apparently’, is used in the first part of a clause, despite the fact that they often express the meanings which in other clauses give rise to the subjunctive, the subjunctive is NOT used:

Peut-être qu’il viendra, peut-être qu’il viendra pas  
Maybe he’ll make it, maybe not

Heureusement que tu étais là, sinon j’aurais eu peur  
Lucky you were here otherwise I’d have been afraid

Certainement que ton copain peut dormir ici  
Of course your friend can sleep here

NB: This construction is more frequent in informal than formal French.

11.1.10 Use of the subjunctive in hypothetical clauses coordinated by et que

When a hypothetical clause introduced by si is extended by a coordinated clause, the second clause is introduced by que and the verb is usually in the subjunctive:

S’il retéléphone demain et qu’il veuille savoir où j’étais, dis-lui que j’étais chez ma mère  
If he rings again tomorrow and he wants to know where I was, tell him I was at my mother’s

Si Hélène hérite de la maison et qu’elle la vende, tante Zoë sera furieuse  
If Helen inherits the house and sells it, Aunt Zoë will be furious

Si le temps change et qu’il se mette à pleuvoir, on annulera la sortie  
If the weather changes and it starts to rain, we’ll cancel the outing

(See also Chapter 17.5.)

A related construction is an adverbial clause introduced by que which also requires the subjunctive, and is translated by ‘whether . . . or’ in English:

Que Jeanne vienne ou ne vienne pas, il faudra inviter sa fille  
Whether Jeanne comes or not, we will have to invite her daughter

Que tu sois présent ou que tu sois absent, cela m’indiffère totalement  
Whether you are present or absent is all the same to me

11.1.11 Subjunctive in subject clauses

When a clause, rather than a noun phrase, is the subject of a sentence, the verb in that clause is in the subjunctive:

Que des Allemands soient présents à la cérémonie du souvenir ne peut que renforcer la solidarité européenne  
European solidarity can only be reinforced by the fact that Germans are present at the commemoration
The attitude of the subject to events: the subjunctive

*Que* Suzanne et Jean-Paul *aient choisi* le mariage religieux a pu paraître choquant à certains de leurs amis

*(The fact) That* Suzanne and Jean-Paul chose to get married in church may have been a shock for some of their friends

The subjunctive is also used when such subject clauses are introduced by *le fait que* ‘the fact that’, or *l’idée que* ‘the idea that’:

*Le fait que* Suzanne et Jean-Paul *aient accepté* de se marier . . . *L’idée que tu veuilles* assister à cette cérémonie . . .

Note that the subjunctive is required in subject clauses even with verbs and adjectives which normally require the indicative when subordinate clauses are not in subject position. Compare:

*Il est probable que nous arriverons* à Paris après-demain (indicative)  
*It is likely that we will arrive in Paris the day after tomorrow*

*Que nous arrivions* à Paris après-demain est probable (subjunctive)  
*That we shall arrive in Paris the day after tomorrow is likely*

*Il me semble certain qu’il est parti* (indicative)  
*I think it certain that he has left*

*Qu’il soit parti* me semble certain (subjunctive)  
*That he has left seems certain*

**11.1.12 Use of the subjunctive in clauses dependent on indefinite expressions**

Verbs in subordinate clauses following the indefinite expressions *qui que* ‘whoever’, *quoi que* ‘whatever’, *où que* ‘wherever’, *quelque + [noun] que* ‘whichever, whatever [noun]’, *quel que* ‘whatever’, *quelque/si/aussi/pour + [adjective] que* ‘however [adjective]’ are in the subjunctive:

*Qui que vous soyez*, je n’accepterai pas ce comportement  
*Whoever you are, I won’t accept that behaviour*

*Quoi qu’en disent* mes parents, j’ai décidé d’y aller  
*Whatever my parents say, I have decided to go there*

*Où qu’il se cache*, je le trouverai  
*Wherever he is hiding, I will find him*

*Quelques bêtises que tu aies faites*, ton père et moi te pardonnons  
*Whatever stupid things you may have done, your father and I forgive you*

*Quelles que soient* les raisons qui vous ont amené chez nous, je suis heureux de vous accueillir  
*Whatever might be the reasons which have brought you to us, I am happy to welcome you*

*Quelque rares que soient* ces pierres, on arrivera quand même à les vendre  
*However rare these stones may be, we will manage to sell them anyway*

Note that in this last example *quelque* does not agree with *rares* or *pierres*. (For more on these constructions see Chapter 15.10 and 15.11.1.)
More generally, where a subordinate clause is dependent on an indefinite expression which describes a hypothetical, rather than real, state of affairs, the verb in the subordinate clause is likely to be in the subjunctive:

S’il connaissait un endroit qui convienne, il le dirait
*If he knew of a place which was suitable, he would say so*
(There is no particular place that he knows of)

Elle veut acheter une maison qui ait une piscine
*She wants to buy a house with a swimming pool*
(There is no particular house in mind)

Compare with:

S’il connaît un endroit qui convient, allons-y
*If he knows of a suitable place, let’s go there*

Elle veut acheter une maison qui a une piscine
(Which suggests that there is a specific house with a swimming pool which she wants to buy)

(See also Chapter 15.11.2 and 15.11.4.)

11.2 The use of *devoir, pouvoir, savoir, falloir*

The modal verbs *devoir, pouvoir, savoir* and *falloir* enable a speaker to express a number of attitudes about events and the participants in events: the likelihood of an event occurring; the ability of a participant to perform some action; how obligated a participant is in an event. Modal verbs are also used in granting permission and in formulas expressing politeness.

In this section we describe the various uses of these four verbs. Then in 11.3 we take a different perspective and describe how the English modals ‘would’, ‘should’, ‘could’, ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘ought to’ and ‘must’ are rendered in French.

11.2.1 *devoir*

*devoir* expresses four main meanings:

(a) something which the speaker sees as very probable, usually because it is logical;
(b) something which the speaker sees as a moral obligation;
(c) something which the speaker thinks of as planned or agreed;
(d) something which the speaker thinks of as an act, usually in the past, which was a necessary outcome of events.

**Probability (logical necessity)**

Les nouveaux joueurs sont les premiers sélectionnés du département, donc l’équipe *devrait* maintenant faire de meilleures performances
*The new players are the best in the département, so the team should now produce some better performances*

Cela *doit* être vrai
*It must be true*
Il doit être revenu puisqu’il recommence le travail demain
*He must have come back because he starts work again tomorrow*

Il pleut depuis trois semaines presque constamment. Nous *devrons* nous attendre à des inondations
*It has been raining almost constantly for three weeks. We must expect floods*

J’ai dû payer la facture puisque je n’ai reçu aucun courrier de relance
*I must have paid the bill since I haven’t had a reminder*

**Moral obligation**

Il est absolument essentiel que je parle à Sylvain. Vous savez où il est et vous *devez* me le dire
*It is absolutely essential that I should speak to Sylvain. You know where he is and you must tell me*

Tu *dois* revenir demain sinon maman sera très déçue
*You must come back tomorrow or Mum will be very disappointed*

Vous êtes allés dîner chez eux, maintenant vous *devrez* les inviter chez vous
*You have been to dinner at their house, now you will have to invite them to yours*

Ce toit est dangereux; vous *devriez* en parler au propriétaire
*This roof is dangerous; you should speak to the landlord about it*

**A planned event (usually which did not or will not happen)**

Ils *devaient* annoncer le nom du gagnant à 18 heures mais une panne d’électricité est survenue
*They were to reveal the name of the winner at 6pm when a power cut happened*

Le jour de l’accident je *devais* accompagner mon père à Paris
*The day of the accident I was to accompany my father to Paris*

**A necessary outcome of events**

Plus tard, il *devait* souvent repenser à ces quelques instants
*Later on he was often to reflect on these few moments*

Même si elle avait voulu occulter ces faits, elle ne le pouvait plus. Elle *devait* en tirer les conséquences
*Even if she had wanted to remain unaware of these facts, she could no longer do so. She was obliged to accept what followed from them*

50 ans après la fin de la guerre, son hérosime *devait* être reconnu par le gouvernement
*Fifty years after the end of the war his heroism was to be recognised by the government*

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**11.2.2 pouvoir**

*pouvoir* expresses five main meanings:

(a) The granting or refusing of permission by the speaker;
(b) An indication that the speaker believes someone else is capable of doing something;
(c) An indication that the speaker feels that something is probable in the future;
(d) A general assertion by the speaker about what may happen;
(e) An expression of politeness by the speaker.
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The granting or refusing of permission by the speaker

Vous pouvez disposer!
You are dismissed!

Non, tu ne peux pas aller chez ce garçon
No, you cannot go to this boy’s house

Il pourra m’en parler quand il voudra
He may talk to me about it when he wishes

Vous pourrez partir dès que la réunion sera terminée mais pas avant
You may go as soon as the meeting is over but not before

An indication that the speaker believes someone is capable of doing something

Elle a déjà fait la cuisine pour toute la famille: elle peut très bien s’occuper du repas de nos invités
She has already cooked for the whole family: she is quite capable of preparing the meal for our guests

Un grand garçon comme toi! Bien sûr que tu pourras porter ma valise jusqu’à ma chambre
A big boy like you! Of course you will be able to carry my case up to my room

Nous ne pourrons prendre notre décision que lorsque les experts nous aurons remis leur rapport
We will only be able to take our decision once the experts have put in their report

An indication that the speaker feels that something is quite probable in the future

Votre lettre peut très bien arriver lundi matin; elle a sans doute été retardée à cause des fêtes de Noël
Your letter may very well arrive on Monday morning; it has probably been delayed by the Christmas holidays

S’ils continuent à jouer comme ça, ils pourraient gagner le championnat
If they go on playing like that, they could well win the title

Tu passes trop de temps devant ton écran d’ordinateur: tu peux t’abîmer la vue
You spend too much time working on your computer: you could damage your eyesight

La gouttière fuit: si cela continue, l’eau pourrait abîmer le mur
The gutter’s leaking: if it goes on, the water could ruin the wall

Il faut soigner cette égratignure, elle pourrait s’infecter
Treat this scratch, it could get infected

A general assertion by the speaker about what may happen

On peut toujours faire mieux
It is always possible to do better

Dans une pièce où il y a une cheminée, une étincelle peut toujours mettre le feu
In a room with an open hearth, a spark can always cause a fire

Il n’est pas trop tard; il peut encore venir
It is not too late; he may still come
§11.2 The use of *devoir, pouvoir, savoir, falloir*

Comme papa a trouvé du travail, on **va pouvoir** déménager
Since dad has got a job we’ll be able to move house

**An expression of politeness by the speaker**

**Puis**-je vous demander de m’aider?
May I request your assistance?

**Pourriez**-vous m’indiquer le chemin de Douaumont?
Could you show me the way to Douaumont?

On **pourrait** voir les choses sous cet angle, mais personnellement je pense que l’important est ailleurs
It *would* be possible to see things in this way but I personally think that there is a much more important point

11.2.3 **savoir**

savoir expresses two main meanings:

(a) ‘to know’ in the sense of ‘to possess knowledge about’;
(b) ‘to know’ in the sense of ‘to know how to do something’.

‘to know’ (possess knowledge)

Je **sais** mes leçons par cœur
I know my lessons by heart

Jean et Marie **savent** où nous trouver
Jean and Marie *know where to find us*

Monet **savait** beaucoup de choses sur l’utilisation de la couleur en peinture
Monet *knew a lot about* the use of colour in painting

‘to know’ (know how to . . .)

N’ayez pas peur. Je **sais** nager
Don’t worry. I can swim

Elle n’a que quatre ans mais déjà elle **sait** lire
She is only four but already she *can read*

Tu n’as pas besoin de parler si lentement. Ils **savent** parler français
You don’t need to speak so slowly. They *can speak* French

Nous n’avons pas peur d’y aller. Nous **savons** nous défendre
We are not frightened to go there. We *know how* to look after ourselves

NB: There can be confusion between *pouvoir* and *savoir* in this area. *Savoir* is ‘to know how to in principle’ and *pouvoir* is ‘to be able to do it in a particular situation’:

Oui je **sais** réparer le moteur mais je ne **peux** pas le faire sans outils
Yes I can (= I *know how to*) repair the engine, but I can’t do it (= I *am unable to do so here and now*) without tools

If people were feeling threatened in some way, they might say:

Nous **savons** nous défendre
We *can look after ourselves*
to indicate that they have necessary skills (karate, boxing, a willingness to fight etc.). In a situation where they may have to make use of these skills, they would say:

Nous **pourrons** nous défendre contre les attaques de l’extrême droite

*We can defend ourselves against attacks by the extreme right*

to indicate that they think they will be able to apply these skills in these circumstances.

### 11.2.4 *falloir*

*falloir* (impersonal) expresses one main meaning: it is equivalent to English: ‘must’, or ‘ought to’:

- *Il faut* qu’ils viennent m’aider
  *They must come and help me*

- *Il aurait fallu* que les Anglais restent en dehors de l’Union Européenne
  *The English should have stayed out of the European Union*

### 11.3 The French equivalents of the English modal verbs: ‘would’, ‘should’, ‘could’, ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘ought to’ and ‘must’

As can be seen from the translations in the preceding section, *devoir, pouvoir, savoir* and *falloir* can be translated in a number of ways depending on the context. The most frequent translations are ‘would’, ‘should’, ‘can’, ‘could’, ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘ought to’, and ‘must’. The problems which arise in this area for English speakers are mainly to do with errors in establishing how these forms relate to the English modal verbs which express many of the same meanings.

The English modal verbs also, however, express a number of other meanings. For correct usage, it is essential that learners should be able to distinguish the meanings of the English modals in order to know which French forms to use. In some cases one of the French modal verbs is appropriate; in other cases, a sentence with *si*, a conditional tense, an imperfect tense, a present or future tense or a subjunctive may be the appropriate form.

#### 11.3.1 ‘would’

‘would’ has three main meanings:

(a) ‘would’ may be used in English to express possible future behaviour which is dependent on some condition. It will usually be rendered by the conditional form of the verb in French:

*Je viendrais à ton anniversaire si j’avais assez d’argent pour me payer le train*

*I would come to your birthday party if I had enough money to pay the train fare*

*(the conditional form *viendrais* is used to denote a possible future action envisaged IF certain other events take place)*

(b) ‘would’ may be used to indicate something which is desired or not desired. In this case it is often rendered by a form of the verb *vouloir*:

*Elle n’a pas voulu me dire où le trouver*

*She wouldn’t tell me where to find him*

*(the ‘wouldn’t’ in English is quite close in meaning to ‘did not want to’: it is therefore rendered as *n’a pas voulu*)
(c) ‘would’ may also indicate an habitual action in the past. This is generally rendered by the imperfect form of the verb in French:

Ces événements avaient souvent lieu pendant les vacances d’été
These events would often take place during the summer holidays

(The imperfect tense is used to indicate an habitual action in the past – see Chapter 10.3.1.)

11.3.2 ‘should’

‘should’ has four main meanings:

(a) ‘should’ may indicate a moral obligation. This is usually rendered by the use of devoir:

Tu devrais téléphoner chez toi plus souvent
You should phone home more often
(devoir in the conditional form to indicate the moral duty)

Note also that the English ‘should have’ is rendered by aurait dû plus an infinitive and not by a participle form of the main verb:

Tu aurais dû me dire (not *avoir dit) cela plus tôt
You should have told me that before

falloir is also possible here:

Il aurait fallu me le dire plus tôt

(b) ‘should’ may convey a conditional. This is usually rendered by a conditional form of the verb in French:

Si j’avais su cela, je ne serais pas venu
If I had known about that I should not have come

(c) ‘should’ may express a probable future action. Depending on the degree of probability, this may be rendered by a form of devoir or by a future tense:

Le livre devrait sortir le mois prochain
Le livre devra sortir le mois prochain
Le livre sortira le mois prochain
The book should be coming out next month

These three sentences indicate an increasing degree of probability going from top to bottom.

(d) ‘should’ can also indicate a chance event. This may be translated by some means of expression other than the verb:

Si par hasard vous entendez parler d’un appartement à louer, dites-le-moi
If you should hear of a flat to let, do let me know
(a present tense plus an adverb expressing the idea of chance conveys the meaning of ‘should’)

Sometimes a simple present tense will convey the meaning of ‘should’:

Si Jean téléphone, dis-lui que je le rappellerai
If John should telephone, tell him I’ll call him back
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Where one wants to stress the improbability of the chance event occurring, a form of devoir can be used:

Si Jean devait téléphoner, il faudrait lui dire que je le rappellerais
In the unlikely event of John telephoning, tell him I’ll call him back

(For more on the use of tenses with si see Chapter 10.8 and Chapter 17.3.6.)

11.3.3 ‘could’

‘could’ has four main meanings:

(a) ‘could’ may be a simple past tense of the verb ‘can’ i.e. ‘was able to’. This is particularly frequent in reported speech. There is little difficulty here in using pouvoir:

Malgré tout le mal qu’on s’est donné, il n’a quand même pas pu venir
After all the trouble we had taken he still couldn’t come

Il a dit: ‘Je peux venir’
He said: ‘I can come’

and in reported speech:

Il a dit qu’il pouvait venir
He said he could come

(See Chapter 10.7.)

(b) ‘could’ may indicate a possibility. This will normally be a conditional or a form of the impersonal verb il se peut que:

Il faut que tu fasses attention; cela pourrait être un piège
You must be careful; it could be a trap

Cela fait plusieurs jours que je ne le vois plus: il se peut qu’il soit parti
I haven’t seen him for a few days: he could have left

(c) ‘could’ may indicate that permission has been given. This may be rendered by the use of pouvoir or by another verb, such as permettre:

Sa mère a dit qu’il pouvait venir
Sa mère lui a permis de venir
Her mother said he could come

(d) ‘could’ may imply that something should be done or should have been done: this can be rendered by a suitable tense of pouvoir:

Elle aurait pu me dire qu’elle ne pourrait pas le faire
She could have told me that she couldn’t do it
11.3.4 ‘may’

‘may’ has four main meanings:

(a) ‘may’ indicates something which is simply envisaged. Sometimes, especially in informal speech, an adverb will suffice. Or the impersonal forms cela se peut, il se peut que + subjunctive:

Peut-être qu’elle viendra, ou peut-être qu’elle ne viendra pas
She may come or she may not

Cela se peut mais nous ne pouvons en être certains
That may be the case but we can’t be sure

Il se peut que ce soit lui le coupable mais cela reste à prouver
He may be the guilty party but it has yet to be proved

The subjunctive on its own is used very often when possible consequences are feared:

Je fais photocopier le certificat de peur que tu ne le perdes
I am photocopying the certificate because I am frightened you may lose it

(b) ‘may’ can indicate permission. This is most often rendered by the use of pouvoir:

Cendrillon peut aller au bal, dit la méchante belle-mère
‘Cinderella may go to the ball’, said the wicked stepmother

Vous pouvez rester jusqu’à onze heures
You may stay till eleven

(c) ‘may’ can be a kind of blessing. This will normally be rendered by a subjunctive in the main clause:

Que Dieu vous bénisse tous
May God bless you all

Que Dieu nous protège
May God protect us

(d) ‘may’ can indicate an open-ended possibility. This is often rendered by a subjunctive:

Quoi qu’il en soit, je n’ai toujours pas récupéré mon argent
That’s as may be, I still haven’t got my money back

Quoi qu’il dise, je ne le croirai pas
Whatever he may say I won’t believe him

11.3.5 ‘might’

‘might’ has three main meanings:

(a) ‘might’ is sometimes simply a past ‘may’ as in giving permission in indirect speech. In this case a form of pouvoir is to be expected:

Elle a dit: Vous pouvez y aller
She said: You may go

Elle a dit qu’on pouvait y aller si on finissait nos devoirs d’abord
She said we might go if we finished our homework first
The subjunctive, modal verbs, exclamatives and imperatives §11.3

(b) ‘might’ indicates something which is envisaged. The French equivalents are the same as for ‘may’ (see 11.3.4.(a)). Sometimes, especially in informal speech, an adverb will suffice. Or the impersonal form il se peut que + subjunctive may be used. Or the subjunctive on its own may be used when possible consequences are feared:

Peut-être qu’elle viendra, ou peut-être pas
Il se peut qu’elle vienne (on ne sait pas)
She might come or she might not

Je surveillais les enfants de peur qu’ils ne se fassent mal
I kept an eye on the children for fear that they might hurt themselves

(c) ‘might’ can be a polite form. This usually corresponds to a form of pouvoir, or a use of permettre:

Puis-je vous suggérer d’essayer autre chose?
Might I suggest that you try something else?

Permettez-moi de vous demander pourquoi vous êtes venu?
Might I ask why you have come?

11.3.6 ‘ought to’
‘ought to’ conveys one main meaning:

‘ought to’ expresses a moral obligation. It is usually rendered by devoir, often in a conditional form:

Vous devriez sortir davantage
You ought to get out more

Tu devrais renouveler ta garde-robe
You ought to buy some new clothes

falloir is also possible:

Il faut que tu sortes davantage
Il faut que tu renouvelles ta garde-robe

11.3.7 ‘must’
‘must’ has two main meanings:

(a) ‘must’ can express moral obligation. This usually requires devoir or falloir:

Vous devez venir: nous ne pourrions pas prendre de décision sans vous
Il faut que vous veniez: nous ne pourrions pas prendre de décision sans vous
Il vous faut venir: nous ne pourrions pas prendre de décision sans vous
You must come: we couldn’t decide without you

(b) ‘must’ can indicate a logical possibility/certainty. This is usually rendered by devoir:

Si elle le dit, c’est que ça doit être vrai . . .
If she says so, then it must be the case . . .

Vous avez dû sortir l’atlas de la voiture parce qu’il n’y est plus
You must have got the road map out of the car because it isn’t there now
11.4 Exclamatives

Exclamatives are the direct expression of a speaker’s surprise, disgust, anger, fervour and analogous emotions:

Comme elle a grandi!  How she’s grown!
Que de monde!   What a lot of people!
Que le diable l’emporte!  The devil take him!
Vive la France!   Long live France!

There are four types of exclamative in French.

11.4.1 Exclamatives formed with comme or que + the indicative

Sentences can be turned into exclamations simply by putting comme or que in front of them, and without changing word order. The verb remains in the indicative:

Pierre a changé  Comme Pierre a changé!
Pierre has changed  How Pierre has changed!

Il se plaignait  Comme il se plaignait!
He used to complain  How he used to complain!

C’est dégoûtant  Comme c’est dégoûtant!
It’s disgusting  How disgusting it is!

Elle parle vite  Comme elle parle vite!
She speaks quickly  How quickly she speaks!

Quel vent!  What a wind!
Quelle surprise!  What a surprise!
Quels progrès ces étudiants ont faits!  What progress these students have made!
Avec quelle adresse il a résolu le problème!  With what skill he solved the problem!

NB: In informal French, ce que and qu’est-ce que are common alternatives to comme and que: Ce que Pierre a changé! Qu’est-ce qu’il se plaignait!, etc.

When exclamations are reported – that is when they follow verbs like savoir, raconter, dire, and so on – comme/que are replaced by combien:

Elle sait combien Pierre a changé
She knows how Pierre has changed

Ils ont raconté combien il se plaignait
They recounted how he used to complain

11.4.2 Exclamatives formed with quel

Exclamations can bear specifically on nouns. French uses quel to perform this function. Where a sentence is involved, the quel-phrase is placed at the beginning of the sentence and quel agrees in gender and number with the noun:

Quel vent!  What a wind!
Quelle surprise!  What a surprise!
Quels progrès ces étudiants ont faits!  What progress these students have made!
Avec quelle adresse il a résolu le problème!  With what skill he solved the problem!
When the direct object is the focus of the exclamation, in formal French it is possible optionally to invert the subject and the verb (in an operation known as ‘stylistic inversion’ – see Chapter 14.3.7), providing that there is no other material following the verb:

- **Quels progrès ces étudiants ont faits!**
- **Quels progrès ont faits ces étudiants!**

### 11.4.3 *que de* + noun meaning ‘what a lot of X!’

*que de* followed by a noun is used to create an exclamative of the form ‘what a lot of X!’ or ‘so much/so many X!’:

- **Que de monde!**  
  *What a lot of people!*  
- **Que de difficultés!**  
  *So many difficulties!*  
- **Que de problèmes on doit affronter!**  
  *What a lot of problems we have before us!*

### 11.4.4 The subjunctive used in two kinds of main clause exclamative

Although the subjunctive normally only occurs in subordinate clauses, it can be used in main clause exclamations like:

- **Vive la Bretagne!**  
  *Long live Brittany!*  
- **Dieu soit loué!**  
  *Praise God!*  
- **Sauve qui peut!**  
  *Every man for himself!*  
- **Puissiez-vous réussir!**  
  *May you succeed!*

and also those headed by *que*:

- **Que la Sainte Vierge vous bénisse!**  
  *May the Holy Virgin bless you!*
- **Que Dieu nous protège!**  
  *May God help us!*
- **Qu’il aille au diable!**  
  *The devil take him!*
- **Qu’il aille se faire voir ailleurs!**  
  *May he get lost!*

Both of these types of exclamation are remnants from an earlier period in the history of French, and are rather formal and archaic. Only **Vive X!** and **Qu’il/elle/ils/elles V!** are used productively in modern French (**Vive les vacances! ‘Long live the holidays!’**, **Vive la révolution! ‘Long live the revolution!’**; **Qu’il m’attende! ‘Let him wait for me!’**, **Qu’elle cherche ailleurs! ‘Let her look elsewhere!’**, etc.).

### 11.5 Imperatives

Imperatives in French are used very much as they are in English to give orders, express encouragement, give advice, and so on:

- **Asseyez-vous**  
  *Sit down*
- **Allez la France!**  
  *Come on, France!*
- **Allons-y**  
  *Let's go*
- **Fais attention!**  
  *Watch out!*
11.5.1 Form of imperatives

Imperatives are formed from the second person, singular and plural, and the first person plural of the present tense forms of verbs. Delete the subject and the final s of any verb that ends in es or as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Third Person Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tu parles</td>
<td>parle (speak)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous parlez</td>
<td>parlez (speak)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous parlons</td>
<td>parlons (let's speak)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu vas</td>
<td>va (go)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous allez</td>
<td>allez (go)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous allons</td>
<td>allons (let's go)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu ouvres</td>
<td>ouvre (open)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous ouvrez</td>
<td>ouvrez (open)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous ouvrons</td>
<td>ouvrons (let's open)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu finis</td>
<td>finis (finish)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous finissez</td>
<td>finissez (finish)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous finissons</td>
<td>finissons (let's finish)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu dors</td>
<td>dors (sleep)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous dormez</td>
<td>dormez (sleep)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous dormons</td>
<td>dormons (let's sleep)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu reçois</td>
<td>reçois (receive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous recevez</td>
<td>recevez (receive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous recevons</td>
<td>recevons (let's receive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are four verbs with irregular imperative forms:

- **être**
  - sois (be)
  - soyez (be)
  - soyons (let's be)

- **avoir**
  - aie (have)
  - ayez (have)
  - ayons (let's have)

- **savoir**
  - sache (know)
  - sachez (know)
  - sachons (let's know)

- **vouloir**
  - veuille (used almost exclusively to mean please – see 11.5.5)
  - veuillez (used almost exclusively to mean please – see 11.5.5)

Verbs which double a consonant in their present tense singular forms (like *appeler* – *tu appelles*, *jeter* – *tu jettes*) or change a vowel (like *acheter* – *tu achètes*, *espérer* – *tu espères*, *nettoyer* – *tu nettoies*) carry this change over to the imperative: *appelle!, jette!, nettoie!*, etc. (See Chapter 7.4 for these changes.)

The final s which disappears from the second person singular of verbs ending in es or as reappears when the verb is followed by y or en:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Third Person Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parle</td>
<td>speak</td>
<td>parles-en (speak about it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>va</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>vas-y (go on)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The equivalent of English contrastive imperatives like 'you go (instead of me)', 'you shut up (instead of me)' are the forms *vous-même, toi-même*: *Allez-y vous-même, Tais-toi toi-même.*
11.5.2 Pronominal verbs in imperatives

Pronominal verbs like se lever ‘to get up’, se réveiller ‘to wake up’, se servir ‘to help (serve) oneself’, se taire ‘to shut up’, etc., drop their subjects in the imperative, but keep their object pronouns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Object Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tu vous</td>
<td>tu sers</td>
<td>sers-toi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous vous</td>
<td>vous sers</td>
<td>servez-vous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous vous</td>
<td>nous sers</td>
<td>servons-nous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu vous</td>
<td>vous</td>
<td>vous sers-toi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vous vous</td>
<td>vous</td>
<td>servez-vous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous vous</td>
<td>vous</td>
<td>servons-nous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.5.3 Location and order of pronouns with imperatives

In affirmative imperatives, direct and indirect object pronouns, and the pronouns y and en, come immediately after the verb which governs them. The pronouns me and te become the stressed forms moi and toi. Pronouns are linked to their governing verb in written French by hyphens (see also Chapter 3.2.5):

- Prends-les ➜ Take them
- Suivez-nous ➜ Follow us
- Écoutez-moi ➜ Listen to me
- Tais-toi ➜ Shut up

NB: Pronouns governed by an infinitive following an imperative are NOT linked to the imperative by a hyphen:

- Monte les chercher ➜ Go up and look for them (les is the object of chercher)
- Courez lui téléphoner ➜ Run and phone him (lui is the indirect object of téléphoner)

When more than one pronoun is present the order is:

verb – direct object – indirect object – y/en

moi and toi become m’, t’ if they are followed by y or en:

- Donne-le-moi ➜ Give it to me
- Donnez-le-lui ➜ Give it to him
- Donne-m’en ➜ Give me some of it
- Accroche-t’y ➜ Hang on to it

(See also Chapter 3.2.31.)

In negative imperatives pronouns precede the verb and the order is the same as in simple non-imperative sentences (see Chapter 3.2.5 and 3.2.31):

- Ne me le donne pas ➜ Don’t give it to me
- Ne le lui donnez pas ➜ Don’t give it to him
- Ne m’en donne pas ➜ Don’t give me any
- Ne t’y accroche pas ➜ Don’t hang on to it
11.5.4 **Compound imperatives**

Compound imperatives are formed from the imperative of *avoir* or *être*, as appropriate, and a past participle. They are used to express orders to be fulfilled in the future:

*Ayez tapé cette lettre avant la fin de la journée*

*Type the letter before the end of the day*

11.5.5 **Toning down imperatives**

Orders can be toned down by the use of *veuillez*, which is an equivalent of *s’il vous plaît*:

- **Asseyez-vous** *Sit down*
- **Veuillez vous asseoir** *Please sit down*
- **Asseyez-vous, s’il vous plaît** *Sit down, please*

or by the use of a non-imperative declarative sentence with a future tense:

- **Vous fermerez la porte, s’il vous plaît** *Close the door, please*
- **Vous me donnerez deux baguettes** *Give me two baguettes (French loaves), please*

11.5.6 **Infinitives used as imperatives**

Infinitives can be used in French as imperatives when the addressee is non-specific (e.g. in road signs addressed to all road users, or in instructions addressed to the purchasers of a food product):

- **Ralentir** *Slow down*
- **Ouvrir doucement** *Open carefully*

(See also Chapter 12.10.)

11.5.7 **Third person imperatives**

Third person imperatives which are formed in English by the use of ‘let’ are formed in French by the use of *que* + a verb in the subjunctive (see 11.4.4):

- **Qu’il s’asseye** *Let him sit down*
- **Qu’elle descende me commander une bière** *Let her go down and order me a beer*
- **Qu’ils te le donnent** *Let them give it to you*
12 The infinitive

12.1 Introduction: what are infinitives?

‘Infinitive’ means ‘not expressing tense, person or number’. The infinitive forms of the verb are those such as aller ‘to go’, finir ‘to finish’, descendre ‘to go down’, recevoir ‘to receive’. Whereas in English the infinitive form of the verb is signalled by the presence of ‘to’: ‘to go’, in French the infinitive is signalled by an infinitive ending: aller. There are four infinitive endings, and all French verbs take one of these endings in their infinitive form:

- er  e.g. aimer, placer, arriver, étudier
- ir  e.g. finir, courir, venir, dormir
- re  e.g. vendre, rire, être, paraître
- oir(e)  e.g. s’asseoir, recevoir, avoir, boire, croire

Most dictionaries, by convention, use the infinitive form of the verb as the headword for the entry for all parts of the verb.

A past infinitive is made up of the appropriate auxiliary verb (être or avoir) and the past participle: être allé, s’être promené, avoir vendu, avoir gagné. These are especially useful in constructions with après:

Après avoir pris cette photo, le photographe a été arrêté
After taking/having taken this photo, the photographer was arrested

(See also Chapter 17.7.)

French infinitives may or may not translate as infinitives in English. Forms ending in -ing often provide better translations.

Vendre des meubles n’est pas un bon métier pour moi
Selling furniture is not a good job for me

J’aime beaucoup être allé en Grèce, mais je n’y retournerai plus: il y a trop de touristes
I like having been to Greece but I won’t go back again: there are too many tourists

J’aime acheter des vêtements
I like to buy clothes or I like buying clothes

(See Chapter 16.2.2 for negation with infinitives.)

There are FIVE main ways in which infinitives are used in French:

(a) As complements to other verbs:
Marie refuse de sortir  Marie refuses to come out

(b) As complements to adjectives:
C’est utile à savoir  It’s useful to know
12.2 Infinitives as complements to other verbs

Infinitives may immediately follow other verbs:

Marie veut partir
Marie wants to leave

or they may follow the direct object or the indirect object of another verb:

Christine a encouragé Jean à démissionner
(follows the direct object)
Christine has encouraged Jean to resign

Pierre a ordonné à Miguel de revenir
(follows the indirect object)
Pierre ordered Miguel to come back

In such cases it is important to know whether there is a linking preposition: . . . a encouragé Jean à démissionner, . . . a ordonné à Miguel de revenir, or no preposition at all: . . . veut partir. This is a difficult area for English speakers because in English infinitives are only ever preceded by to.

It is not easy to give firm rules because usage is sometimes idiosyncratic. However, rough rules-of-thumb can be given by grouping verbs together into loose meaning classes. Each class tends to select one option or the other – à, de or no linking preposition – when followed by an infinitive. The classes are listed in the following sections. Within each section verbs are listed alphabetically, and at the end of the chapter there is a comprehensive, alphabetically ordered, quick reference index to all the verbs taking infinitive complements listed in this chapter. There are special rules dealing with the agreement of the past participle in verb + infinitive constructions. These are dealt with in Chapter 9.3.3 and 9.3.9.
12.3 Verbs which take infinitive complements without a linking preposition

12.3.1 ‘Movement’ verbs without objects

Movement verbs which do not have objects typically take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- aller dîner quelque part  
  to go and have dinner somewhere
- s’en aller vivre ailleurs  
  to go and live somewhere else
- arriver réparer la machine à laver  
  to come to repair the washing machine
- courir téléphoner à la police  
  to run and phone the police
- descendre commander une bière  
  to go down and order a beer
- monter chercher ses lunettes  
  to go up and look for one’s glasses
- partir s’installer à Paris  
  to leave to go live in Paris
- rentrer prendre son maillot de bain  
  to go home and get one’s swimming costume
- retourner faire des courses  
  to go back to do some shopping
- revenir ouvrir les fenêtres  
  to come back to open the windows
- sortir acheter un journal  
  to go out to buy a newspaper

The verb être in the past tense, with an infinitive complement, is sometimes used to mean ‘go’: nous avons été la voir ‘we went to see her’. 

12.3.2 ‘Movement’ verbs with objects

Movement verbs with objects typically take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- amener un copain dîner chez soi  
  to bring a friend home for dinner
- emmener ses enfants jouer au square  
  to take one’s children to play in the park
- envoyer Marie chercher le docteur  
  to send Marie to fetch the doctor
- mener son oncle voir le château  
  to take one’s uncle to see the castle

12.3.3 ‘Modal’ verbs

Verbs of ‘obligation’, ‘necessity’ and ‘possibility’ – modal verbs – take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition (see also Chapter 11.2):

- devoir parler au directeur  
  to have to speak to the director
- oser critiquer son patron  
  to dare to criticize one’s boss
- pouvoir persuader son oncle  
  to be able to persuade one’s uncle
- savoir parler italien  
  to be able to speak Italian
- vouloir construire une rocade  
  to want to build a ring-road

12.3.4 Verbs of ‘saying’

Verbs of saying typically take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- affirmer connaître le patron  
  to state that one knows the boss
- confirmer avoir reçu le paquet  
  to confirm that one received the package
- déclarer comprendre ce livre  
  to declare that one understands this book
- dire s’intéresser à la psychologie  
  to say that one is interested in psychology
- nier avoir brisé l’assiette  
  to deny having broken the plate
- prétendre être heureux  
  to claim to be happy
- reconnaître s’être trompé  
  to admit that one was wrong
§12.3 Verbs which take infinitive complements without a linking preposition

dire, with an indirect object, can also be used as a verb of ordering (see 12.5.16). In this case it takes an infinitive complement preceded by the preposition de: dire à quelqu’un de fermer la porte ‘to tell somebody to close the door’.

12.3.5 Verbs of ‘thinking’ and ‘imagining’

Verbs of thinking and imagining typically take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- **croire** avoir fini
  - to believe that one has finished
- **estimer** pouvoir prendre le train
  - to reckon to be able to take the train
- **(s’)imaginer** avoir gagné la partie
  - to imagine having won the match
- **penser** rencontrer un ami
  - to think one might meet a friend
- **se rappeler** avoir visité l’abbaye
  - to remember having visited the abbey

But **se souvenir** ‘to remember’ takes infinitive complements with the preposition de: se souvenir d’avoir visité l’abbaye.

12.3.6 Verbs expressing ‘personal attitude’ to something

Verbs which express ‘liking’, ‘wishing’ or ‘inclination’ typically take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- **adorer** dîner au restaurant
  - to love eating out
- **aimer** travailler le soir
  - to like to work in the evenings
- **aimer autant** rester chez soi
  - to just as soon stay at home
- **aimer mieux** éviter les embouteillages
  - to prefer to avoid traffic jams
- **compter** commencer bientôt
  - to count on starting soon
- **daigner** donner son opinion
  - to deign to give one’s opinion
- **désirer** dormir un peu
  - to want to sleep a little
- **entendre** être obéi
  - to mean to be obeyed
- **espérer** partir en vacances
  - to hope to go on holiday
- **préférer** manger seul
  - to prefer to eat alone
- **souhaiter** faire la connaissance de quelqu’un
  - to wish to make somebody’s acquaintance

**aimer** can sometimes be found with an infinitive complement preceded by à: aimer à travailler le soir.

12.3.7 Seem

sembler ‘to seem’, and verbs with similar meaning to sembler take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- **s’avérer** être efficace
  - to turn out to be effective
- **paraître** dire la vérité
  - to appear to be telling the truth
- **se révéler** avoir des conséquences inattendues
  - to turn out to have unexpected consequences
- **sembler** préférer les légumes
  - to seem to prefer vegetables
12.3.8 ‘Perception’ verbs

Verbs expressing the manner in which an event is perceived take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- écouter les enfants réciter une poésie
  to listen to the children reciting a poem
- entendre l'horloge sonner trois heures
  to hear the clock strike three o'clock
- regarder le chien manger
  to watch the dog eating
- sentir ses pieds s'enfoncer dans la boue
  to feel one’s feet sink into the mud
- voir Paul partir
  to see Paul leave

12.3.9 faire and laisser

The verbs faire and laisser take infinitive complements without a preceding preposition:

- faire travailler Pierre
  to make Pierre work
- faire payer les gens
  to make people pay
- laisser Pierre travailler
  to let Pierre work
- laisser travailler Pierre
  to let Pierre work
- laisser tomber le football pour le rugby
  to drop football and take up rugby instead

(For the placement of object pronouns in these constructions see Chapter 3.2.32.)

It is possible, but not necessary, to delete se in the verbs se taire ‘to be quiet’ and s’asseoir ‘to sit down’ when they follow faire (and sometimes also laisser):

- Il a fait (se) taire les enfants
  He made the children be quiet
- Elle a fait (s’)asseoir tout le monde
  She got everyone to sit down

12.4 Verbs which take infinitive complements preceded by the preposition à

12.4.1 Verbs of ‘beginning’ and ‘continuing’

Verbs which signal the beginning or continuation of an action typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- se mettre à rédiger un rapport
  to start to draft a report
- persister à demander une réponse
  to persist in asking for a reply

Commencer and continuer are verbs which take an infinitive complement preceded interchangeably by à or by de:

- commencer à/d’écire ses mémoires
  to begin to write one’s memoirs
- continuer à/de faire des efforts
  to continue to make an effort

The following verbs can take infinitive complements preceded by par:

- commencer par enlever le papier peint
  to begin by removing the wallpaper
- finir par vendre sa maison
  to finish by selling one’s house
§12.4 Verbs which take infinitive complements preceded by the preposition à

These are nearly always rendered in English by a construction involving ‘by + verb + ing’, and contrast with the use of the same verbs with infinitives preceded by à or de:

- commencer à/d’enlever le papier peint
- finir de tondre le gazon

**to begin to remove the wallpaper**
**to finish mowing the lawn**

12.4.2 **Verbs expressing ‘manner’**

Verbs which express the manner in which an action is conducted typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- s’abaisser jusqu’à demander de l’argent à ses proches
- s’appliquer à apprendre le russe
- s’apprêter à parler
- s’attarder à bavarder dans le restaurant
- se borner à considérer les points principaux
- concourir à assurer la défaite de l’ennemi
- condescendre à faire quelque chose
- conspirer à produire une catastrophe
- s’entêter à découvrir la vérité
- se limiter à corriger les plus grosses erreurs
- s’obstiner à découvrir la vérité
- s’obliquer à lire un roman
- s’en tenir à changer quelques détails
- travailler à se faire aimer

**to stoop to asking one’s family and friends for money**
**to apply oneself to learning Russian**
**to get ready to speak**
**to linger chatting in the restaurant**
**to limit oneself to considering the main points**
**to combine to defeat the enemy**
**to condescend to do something**
**to conspire to produce a catastrophe**
**to be bent on discovering the truth**
**to limit oneself to correcting the worst errors**
**to be bent on discovering the truth**
**to become absorbed in reading a novel**
**to stick to changing a few details**
**to work to get oneself liked**

12.4.3 **Pronominal verbs expressing an ‘emotional reaction’**

Pronominal verbs which express a subject’s emotional reaction to an event typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- s’abêtir à trop travailler
- s’abrutir à regarder la télévision
- s’affoler à imaginer le pire
- s’amuser à mettre le professeur en colère
- se délecter à visiter Bruges
- s’énerver à rattacher constamment ses lacets
- s’ennuyer à faire un travail monotone
- s’irriter à expliquer qc
- se plaire à tout critiquer

**to become stupid by working too hard**
**to become stupefied from watching television**
**to panic imagining the worst**
**to have fun making the teacher angry**
**to take delight in visiting Bruges**
**to get annoyed constantly retying one’s laces**
**to get bored doing a monotonous job**
**to get more and more annoyed as one tries to explain sth**
**to take pleasure in criticizing everything**

**Exceptions:**

- s’étonner d’être si calme
- s’inquiéter de trouver la route bloquée
- s’irriter d’avoir à expliquer chaque point trois fois
- se réjouir de/à écrire des contes pour enfants

**to be surprised to be so calm**
**to worry about finding the road blocked**
**to be annoyed by having to explain each point three times**
**to take real pleasure in writing children’s stories**
12.4.4 Pronominal verbs of ‘effort’

Pronominal verbs which express the effort with which an action is undertaken typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- s’acharner à trouver une solution  
  to be bent on finding a solution
- s’égoïsler à appeler les enfants  
  to go hoarse calling the children
- s’épuiser à travailler  
  to exhaust oneself working
- s’éreinter à traîner une valise  
  to tire oneself out dragging a suitcase along
- s’épuiser à travailler  
  to get out of breath climbing the hill
- s’évertuer à conclure l’affaire  
  to do one’s utmost to close the deal
- se fatiguer à répéter l’avertissement  
  to tire oneself out repeating the warning
- se tuer à le dire  
  to be sick and tired of saying it
- s’user à repeindre la maison  
  to wear oneself out repainting the house

12.4.5 Pronominal verbs expressing ‘dedication’

Pronominal verbs which express the dedication with which an action is undertaken typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- s’attacher à traduire la pensée du maître  
  to be careful to convey the master’s thoughts
- s’aventurer à faire des suggestions  
  to be so bold as to make suggestions
- se décider à prendre sa retraite  
  to persuade oneself to retire
- s’essayer à gérer un restaurant  
  to try one’s hand at running a restaurant
- se hasarder à faire une course en montagne  
  to venture to go up a mountain
- se résigner à tout perdre  
  to resign oneself to losing everything
- se résoudre à changer d’emploi  
  to come to terms with having to change jobs
- se risquer à jouer en Bourse  
  to take risks by playing the Stock Exchange

Note the following differences in meaning when some of these verbs are used with à and with de:

- se décider à prendre sa retraite  
  to persuade oneself to retire
- décider de prendre sa retraite  
  to decide to retire
- s’essayer à gérer un restaurant  
  to try one’s hand at running a restaurant
- essayer de gérer un restaurant  
  to try to run a restaurant
- se risquer à investir à l’étranger  
  to take risks by investing abroad
- risquer de tout perdre  
  to risk losing everything
- se résoudre à changer d’emploi  
  to accept having to change jobs
- résoudre de changer d’emploi  
  to resolve to change jobs

12.4.6 Verbs expressing ‘aspiration’ and ‘success’

Verbs which express the aspiration to do something, or success in achieving it, typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- arriver à obtenir gain de cause  
  to manage to get one’s way
- aspirer à dominer sa peur  
  to aspire to overcome fear
- chercher à faire fortune  
  to seek to make one’s fortune
- être disposé à favoriser qn  
  to be inclined to favour sb
- incliner à quitter son emploi  
  to be inclined to give up one’s job
- parvenir à battre un adversaire  
  to succeed in beating one’s opponent
- réussir à gagner la course  
  to succeed in winning the race
- tendre à éviter les problèmes  
  to have a tendency to avoid problems
- tenir à lire un livre  
  to be bent on reading a book
- viser à remporter la victoire  
  to aim to be victorious
12.4.7 Verbs expressing ‘unwillingness’

Verbs which express an unwillingness to do something typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- hésiter à critiquer qn  
  to hesitate to criticize sb
- rechigner à vendre ses livres  
  to baulk at selling one’s books
- renoncer à tout relire  
  to give up on the idea of re-reading everything
- répugner à tout faire soi-même  
  to be very reluctant to do the work oneself

12.4.8 Verbs of ‘forcing’

Verbs which express the pressure put on someone to do something typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- condamner qn à vivre sans ressources  
  to condemn sb to live in poverty
- contraindre Julie à revenir  
  to force Julie to come back
- forcer une entreprise à baisser ses prix  
  to make a company reduce its prices
- obliger Pierre à partir  
  to make Pierre leave

Note that the following verbs, when used in the passive, take an infinitive complement preceded by de:

- être contraint de démissionner  
  to be obliged to resign
- être forcé de rentrer  
  to have to go home
- être obligé de travailler à l’étranger  
  to be forced to work abroad

12.4.9 Verbs of ‘inviting’

Verbs which invite someone to do something typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- appeler un tiers à arbitrer  
  to call on a third party to arbitrate
- assigner le témoin à comparaître  
  to call on the witness to appear
- autoriser les clients à s’en servir  
  to authorize the clients to make use of it
- inviter Robert à donner son avis  
  to invite Robert to give his opinion

12.4.10 Verbs of ‘training’ and ‘teaching’

Verbs which train or teach someone to do something typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

- accoutumer un malade à prendre moins de calmants  
  to get a sick person used to taking fewer painkillers
- apprendre à ses élèves à parler italien  
  to teach one’s pupils to speak Italian
- dresser un chien à aller chercher le journal  
  to train a dog to fetch the newspaper
- enseigner à Jacques à jouer au tennis  
  to teach Jacques to play tennis
- habiter un citadin à travailler en plein air  
  to get a town-dweller used to working in the open air
- préparer quelqu’un à traverser une période de chômage  
  to prepare somebody for a period of unemployment
Note that *apprendre, enseigner* are the only two verbs in French which take both an indirect object preceded by *à* and an infinitive preceded by *à*:

- *apprendre à quelqu’un à faire quelque chose* to teach somebody to do something
- *enseigner à quelqu’un à faire quelque chose* to teach somebody to do something

Verbs which English speakers often think have indirect objects, but which in fact have direct objects, are:

- *aider quelqu’un à faire quelque chose* to help somebody to do something
- *inviter quelqu’un à faire quelque chose* to invite somebody to do something
- *obliger quelqu’un à faire quelque chose* to make somebody do something

12.4.11 Verbs of ‘encouragement’ and ‘cajoling’

Verbs which encourage or cajole someone to do something typically take an infinitive complement preceded by *à*:

- *amener* Jean à reparler de l’accident
to bring Jean to talk about the accident again
- *conduire* quelqu’un à se repentir
to bring somebody to repent
- *convier* son frère à réfléchir
to suggest that somebody’s brother should think something over
- *décider* quelqu’un à changer de cap
to make somebody decide to change direction
- *déterminer* quelqu’un à s’inscrire à l’université
to make somebody decide to go to university
- *encourager* sa secrétaire à chercher un nouvel emploi
to encourage one’s secretary to find another job
- *engager* quelqu’un à repenser un projet
to bring somebody to reconsider a plan
- *entraîner* des adolescents à voler des voitures
to encourage youngsters to steal cars
- *exhorter* quelqu’un à mener campagne
to exhort somebody to campaign
- *inciter* le gouvernement à agir
to incite the government to act
- *pousser* Claudine à se marier
to push Claudine into getting married

Note also the following contrasts involving *décider*:

- *décider quelqu’un à partir* to bring somebody to leave
- *décider de partir* to decide to leave
- *se décider à partir* to decide to leave (after much thought)
12.4.12 Verbs expressing ‘the dedication of time, money to doing something’

- **consacrer** ses loisirs à faire des croquis  
  to spend one’s free time making sketches
- **dépenser** de l’argent à réparer sa voiture  
  to spend money repairing one’s car
- **mettre** deux heures à ranger ses affaires  
  to take two hours to tidy one’s things
- **occuper** son temps à lire des romans policiers  
  to spend one’s time reading crime novels
- **passer** son temps à faire des mots croisés  
  to spend one’s time doing crosswords
- **utiliser** ses connaissances à améliorer le sort de ses semblables  
  to use one’s knowledge to improve the lot of one’s fellow beings

12.4.13 Verbs of ‘discovering’

- **attraper** qn à pêcher sans permis  
  to catch sb fishing without a licence
- **prendre** qn à fouiller dans un tiroir  
  to catch sb going through a drawer
- **surprendre** qn à voler des livres  
  to catch sb stealing books

12.5 Verbs which take an infinitive complement preceded by *de*

There is no real community of meaning in the verbs which take an infinitive complement preceded by *de* but some grouping by meaning is possible.

12.5.1 Verbs of ‘advising somebody to do or not to do something’

- **avertir** qn de ne pas recommencer  
  to warn sb not to do it again
- **conjurier** qn de laisser les choses comme elles sont  
  to plead with sb to leave things as they are
- **conseiller** (à qn) de ne pas intenter de procès  
  to advise sb not to bring something to court
- **convaincre** son employeur de hauser les salaires  
  to convince one’s employer to raise salaries
- **déconseiller** (à qn) de prendre l’autoroute  
  to advise sb not to take the motorway
- **désaccoutumer** qn de fumer  
  to encourage sb to lose the habit of smoking
- **déshabituer** qn de s’endormir en écoutant la radio  
  to get sb out of the habit of going to sleep whilst listening to the radio
- **dissuader** qn de manifester dans la rue  
  to persuade sb not to demonstrate in the street
- **enjoindre** à qn de s’inscrire à un parti politique  
  to suggest to sb that they join a political party
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**persuader qn de vendre sa maison**  
to persuade sb to sell his/her/their house

**recommander (à qn) de ne pas trop insister**  
to suggest to sb not to insist too much

**suggérer à qn de téléphoner**  
to suggest to sb that they telephone

Note that while *décourager* takes an infinitive complement preceded by *de*, *encourager* takes an infinitive complement preceded by *à*:

**encourager sa secrétaire à démissionner**  
to encourage one’s secretary to resign

### 12.5.2 Verbs of ‘allowing’, ‘admitting’ and ‘agreeing’

- **accepter de sortir les poubelles**  
to agree to put the dustbins out
- **choisir de poursuivre ses études à Paris**  
to choose to pursue one’s studies in Paris
- **convenir de retrouver qn à 20h**  
to agree to meet up with sb at 8.00 p.m.
- **décider de prendre sa retraite**  
to decide to retire
- **dispenser un étudiant de faire un test**  
to exempt a student from a test
- **entreprendre de rétablir des liens**  
to undertake to re-establish links
- **jurer à son père de lui rendre visite**  
to swear to one’s father to visit him
- **obtenir de pouvoir sortir tôt**  
to get permission to go out early
- **permettre (à qn) de rembourser sans payer les intérêts**  
to allow somebody to pay back without interest
- **résoudre de ne plus boire de café**  
to resolve to drink no more coffee

### 12.5.3 Verbs expressing the idea of ‘anger’

- **enrager d’avoir perdu son argent**  
to be very angry about having lost one’s money
- **être furieux d’être exclu du groupe**  
to be furious at being excluded from the group
- **s’indigner de se voir refuser l’entrée du club**  
to be indignant at being refused entry to the club
- **menacer les grévistes de les licencier**  
to threaten the strikers with being sacked

### 12.5.4 Verbs of ‘asking for’ and of ‘attempting to’

- **demander à Pierre de surveiller les enfants**  
to ask Pierre to keep an eye on the children
- **essayer de chanter une chanson**  
to try to sing a song
- **implorer qn de revenir**  
to implore sb to come back
- **parler de faire le tour du monde**  
to speak of doing a world tour
- **prier qn de bien vouloir partir**  
to ask sb to kindly leave
- **proposer à une municipalité de construire un théâtre**  
to put to a town hall the idea of building a theatre
- **supplier qn de faire attention**  
to beg sb to be careful
§12.5 Verbs which take an infinitive complement preceded by de

**tâcher de** terminer le travail à temps  
**tenter de** résoudre le problème sans avoir recours à l’extérieur  

**Note**: *demander à qn de faire qc* ‘to ask somebody to do something’, but *demander à faire qc* ‘to ask to do something’.

### 12.5.5 Verbs of ‘blaming’, ‘making responsible for’

- **accuser qn d’avoir collaboré avec l’ennemi**  
  to accuse sb of having collaborated with the enemy

- **blâmer qn d’avoir été négligent**  
  to blame sb for having been careless

- **charger qn d’apporter à manger tous les jours**  
  to make sb responsible for bringing in food every day

- **gronder son fils d’avoir perdu les clefs de la voiture**  
  to tell your son off for having lost the car keys

- **reprocher à qn d’avoir perdu les clefs**  
  to tell it against sb that they lost the keys

- **soupçonner qn d’avoir dissimulé la vérité**  
  to suspect sb of not having told the truth

### 12.5.6 Verbs of ‘(self-)congratulation’

- **s’applaudir d’avoir écrit au président**  
  to be pleased with oneself for having written to the president

- **féliciter qn d’avoir terminé sa thèse**  
  to congratulate sb on finishing their thesis

- **se flatter d’être le meilleur joueur**  
  to imagine that one is the best player

- **se glorifier d’avoir monté l’équipe tout seul**  
  to be very proud of having put together the team unaided

- **louer qn d’avoir gagné une course**  
  to praise sb for having won a race

- **mériter de gagner**  
  to deserve to win

- **se vanter d’être le meilleur joueur de l’équipe**  
  to boast of being the best player in the team
12.5.7 Verbs of ‘denial’

s’abstenir de boire du vin  
to abstain from drinking wine

se disculper d’avoir voulu supplanter qn  
to exonerate oneself from having wanted to take over from sb

refuser de s’abaisser à un compromis  
to refuse to stoop to a compromise

Exception: nier takes an infinitive complement without a linking preposition:

nier être impliqué dans l’affaire  
to deny being implicated in the affair

12.5.8 Verbs of ‘excusing’ and ‘pardoning’

excuser qn d’être arrivé en retard  
to overlook sb’s late arrival

pardonner (à qn) d’avoir fait souffrir la famille  
to pardon sb for having caused the family pain

12.5.9 Verbs of ‘forbidding’

défendre à qn d’afficher des avis au mur  
to forbid sb to stick up notices on the wall

interdire (à qn) de coller des affiches  
to prohibit bill posting

12.5.10 Verbs of ‘being fearful’

appréhender de devoir se présenter devant un tribunal  
to be fearful of having to appear before a court

avoir peur de conduire  
to be afraid to drive

craindre de devoir partir à l’étranger  
to be afraid of having to go abroad

frémir de penser à ce qui aurait pu arriver  
to shudder to think what might have happened

s’inquiéter d’avoir à rentrer  
to worry about having to go home

pâlir de voir un collègue promu avant soi  
to blanch at seeing a colleague promoted before oneself

redouter de devoir rembourser les billets  
to fear having to reimburse the tickets

se soucier de créer une bonne impression  
to care about making a good impression

trembler de penser qu’on a failli se faire écraser  
to tremble to think that one nearly got run over
§12.5 Verbs which take an infinitive complement preceded by *de*

12.5.11 Verbs of ‘forgetting’

négliger *de* fermer la porte à clé
to neglect to lock the door

omettre *de* préciser à son hôte qu’on arrivera en retard
to forget to tell one’s host that one will be late

oublier *de* signaler une absence
to forget to report an absence

12.5.12 Verbs of ‘hurrying’ or ‘delaying’

se dépêcher *d’* aller chez le boulanger avant la fermeture
to hurry to get to the baker’s before it shuts

se hâter *de* mettre en œuvre ses propres idées
to want to quickly put one’s own ideas into operation

12.5.13 Verbs of ‘delighting’ or ‘regretting’

avoir regret *de* ne pas avoir vu qn avant sa mort
to regret not having seen sb before he died

regretter *d’* avoir choisi la solution de facilité
to regret having chosen the easy way out

se réjouir *d’* avoir été élu
to be delighted at having been elected

se repentir *d’* avoir commis une erreur
to regret having made a mistake

12.5.14 Verbs of ‘pretending’

affecter *de* ne pas être au courant de ce qui se passe
to pretend not to know what’s happening

faire semblant *de* ne pas avoir entendu
to pretend not to have heard

feindre *d’* être malade
to pretend to be ill

12.5.15 Verbs of ‘pre-planning’

envisager *de* vivre sur une île déserte
to imagine living on a desert island

méditer *de* changer de métier
to think about changing jobs

préméditer *de* quitter sa femme
to plan on leaving one’s wife

projeter *de* quitter le pays
to think about leaving the country

proposer *de* partir tout seul dans le Midi
to propose going to the south of France on one’s own

ruminer *d’* écrire ses mémoires
to have it in mind to write one’s memoirs
12.5.16 Verbs of ‘ordering’

chuchoter à qn de fermer la porte
commander à un bataillon de se préparer
dire à Pierre de rejouindre la compagnie
ecrire à Marie d’aller voir sa mère
hurler à qn de passer le ballon
ordonner à qn de quitter les lieux
prescrire à qn de se reposer
répondre à qn de se taire
sommer qn de venir aussi vite que possible
téléphoner à sa mère d’envoyer de l’argent

12.5.17 Verbs of ‘finishing’ and of ‘stopping somebody doing something’

s’abstenir de fumer pendant trois mois
achever de construire sa maison
arrêter de faire l’idiot en cours
cesser de participer aux matchs de football
empêcher qn de partir en vacances
éviter de faire les mêmes erreurs
finir de se préparer

12.5.18 Verbs of ‘thanking’

remercier qn de vous avoir invité à manger
to thank sb for having invited you for a meal

savoir gré à qn de bien vouloir répondre rapidement
to be grateful to sb for replying quickly

12.5.19 Impersonal verbs expressing ‘personal reaction’ to an event

Compare some of the impersonal verbs below, which take de, with the same verbs used personally, which take à (see 12.4.3):

 Ça m’agace de les voir sans occupation
Ça m’amuse de le voir en colère
Ça l’attriste d’apprendre qu’elle est malheureuse
Ça me consterne de l’apprendre
Ça me dégoûte de voir ce gaspillage
Ça m’ennuie d’être suivi par des journalistes
Ça la fâche d’avoir à se justifier auprès de toi

Ça les fatigue de faire la navette
Ça l’intéresse de voir le manuscrit
Ça l’intrigue de savoir ce qu’ils ont dit
Ça nous irrite d’avoir à refaire le travail

It annoys me to see them idle
It amuses me to see him angry
It saddens him to learn that she is unhappy
It dismays me to learn that
It appals me to see this waste
I find it wearing to be followed by reporters
It irritates her to have to justify herself to you
It tires them to commute
It interests him to see the manuscript
It intrigues him to know what they said
It irritates us to have to do the work again
12.5.20 Other verbs with infinitive complements preceded by *de*

s’affliger d’avoir causé de la peine à qn
*to be sorry to have caused sb pain*

*ambitionner de* paraître dans un film
*to have ambitions to appear in a film*

*avoir droit de* donner son avis
*to have the right to give one’s opinion*

*en avoir marre de* tout faire à la maison
*to be fed up with doing everything in the house*

*brûler de* jouer dans l’équipe du collège
*to have a great desire to play in the school team*

*comploter de* renverser le gouvernement
*to plot to overthrow the government*

*consoler qn d’avoir perdu un parent*
*to console sb for having lost a relative*

*se contenter de* vivre à la campagne
*to be happy to live in the country*

*dédaigner d’accorder un entretien à un journaliste*
*to be snooty about giving an interview to a journalist*

*défier qn de* dire la vérité
*to challenge sb to tell the truth*

*dégoûter qn de* manger des fraises
*to put sb off eating strawberries*

*désespérer de* pouvoir sortir de prison
*to despair of getting out of prison*

*douter de* pouvoir faire qc
*to doubt that one will be able to do sth*

*s’efforcer de* manger du chou
*to force oneself to eat cabbage*

*entreprendre de* récupérer l’argent perdu
*to undertake to get back the money*

*envier qn d’avoir démissionné*
*to envy sb for having resigned*

*être tenu de* remplir ses obligations
*to be obliged to meet one’s obligations*

*se garder de* raconter la vérité
*to make sure not to tell the truth*

*gémir d’avoir à payer ses dettes*
*to groan at having to pay one’s debts*
se mêler de monter une affaire

offrir de dédommager les victimes

plaire à qn de ne pas avoir d’enfants

presser qn de s’accuser de ses dettes

prévoir de gagner beaucoup d’argent

promettre d’emmener toute la famille aux États-Unis

réclamer de pouvoir s’asseoir où on veut

se remettre d’avoir été attaqué dans la rue

se réserver de déterminer soi-même le jour de sa mort

rêver de devenir milliardaire

rougir de devoir parler en public

sourire de voir les enfants s’amuser dans le jardin

12.6 Omission of objects before infinitives

The direct or indirect objects of verbs with infinitive complements may be omitted in French when they have a non-specific or indefinite interpretation:

Le succès encourage ___ à continuer

Success encourages one to continue

Ce résultat force ___ à repenser le problème

This result forces us to rethink the problem

Dans cette région, c’est l’irrigation qui a permis ___ d’améliorer le rendement agricole

The irrigation of the region has allowed farmers to improve crop yield

L’expérience enseigne ___ à être prudent

Experience teaches one to be careful

Cette déclaration autorise ___ à penser que les dirigeants ont changé d’avis

This declaration allows us to think that the leaders have changed their opinion
§12.7 Infinitives as complements to adjectives

12.7 Infinitives as complements to adjectives

Adjectives take infinitive complements preceded either by à or de, never without a preposition.

12.7.1 Infinitives following adjectives in impersonal constructions

Adjectives used in impersonal constructions take an infinitive complement preceded by de:

Dans ce quartier il est dangereux de sortir le soir
In this part of the town it is dangerous to go out in the evening

Il ne sera pas évident de récupérer les papiers volés
It won’t be easy to get the stolen papers back

Il serait étonnant de trouver Jules dans une boîte de nuit
It would be surprising to come across Jules in a night club

Il est nécessaire de demander des explications précises
It is necessary to ask for precise explanations

Il est rare de voir Jean-Marie jouer au rugby
It is rare to see Jean-Marie play rugby

Il est regrettable de ne pas avoir de recours contre la pollution par le bruit
It is unfortunate that there is no redress against noise pollution

Other common adjectives which can be used impersonally in this way are:

agréable de faire qc       pleasant to do sth
bon de faire qc           good to do sth
commode de faire qc       convenient to do sth
difficile de faire qc     difficult to do sth
facile de faire qc        easy to do sth
important de faire qc     important to do sth
(im)possible de faire     (im)possible to do sth
intéressant de faire qc   interesting to do sth
inutile de faire qc       useless to do sth
mauvais de faire qc       bad to do sth
merveilleux de faire qc   amazing to do sth
pénible de faire qc       irksome to do sth
simple de faire qc        simple to do sth
utile de faire qc         useless to do sth

12.7.2 Infinitives following adjectives used personally

When the adjectives in 12.7.1 are used personally (that is to describe a noun or personal pronoun) they take an infinitive complement preceded by à. Compare the personal and impersonal constructions in the following:

La pâte à pain est agréable à toucher
Dough is nice to handle

Il est agréable de toucher de la pâte à pain
It’s nice to handle dough
The infinitive §12.7

Le foie de veau est bon à manger
Calf’s liver is good to eat

Il est bon de manger du foie de veau
It’s good to eat calf’s liver

C’est difficile à faire
That’s difficult to do

Il est difficile de le faire
It’s difficult to do that

Cette voiture va être difficile à vendre
This car will be difficult to sell

Il va être difficile de vendre cette voiture
It will be difficult to sell this car

Avec tout ce que tu as mis dedans, les poubelles sont difficiles à sortir
With all that you’ve put in them, the dustbins are difficult to put out

Il est difficile de sortir les poubelles, avec tout ce que tu as mis dedans
It’s difficult to put out the dustbins with all that you have put in them

Ces problèmes sont faciles à résoudre
These problems are easy to solve

Il est facile de résoudre ces problèmes
It is easy to solve these problems

Cette machine à laver est impossible à réparer
This washing machine is impossible to repair

Il est impossible de réparer cette machine à laver
It is impossible to repair this washing machine

La défaite est difficile à accepter
Defeat is hard to accept

Il est difficile d’accepter la défaite
It is hard to accept defeat

Since the pronouns il and ce can be used both impersonally and personally, this means that alternations like the following can be found:

Il est difficile de comprendre Pierre
It is difficult to understand Pierre

Il (i.e. Pierre) est difficile à comprendre
He is difficult to understand

C’est beau de voir tous ces enfants jouer ensemble
It’s wonderful to see all these children playing together

C’est beau à voir
It’s wonderful to see

(See also Chapter 3.1.22 for discussion of this construction.)
12.7.3 Infinitives following adjectives of ‘manner’ take à

Adjectives which describe the manner in which an action is carried out typically take an infinitive complement preceded by à:

Nous sommes prêts à accepter votre proposition
We are ready to accept your proposal

Vu ses qualifications, il est propre à assumer ces fonctions
With his qualifications, he is suitable for the job

Other common adjectives which behave in this way are:

- être disposé/enclin/porté à faire qc to be inclined to do sth
- être habile à faire qc to be skilful in doing sth
- être prompt à faire qc to be prompt in doing sth
- être seul à faire qc to be alone in doing sth

12.7.4 Infinitives following adjectives which take de

Most other adjectives which take an infinitive complement select the preposition de:

Nous sommes très heureux d’apprendre votre mariage
We are very happy to hear the news of your wedding

Nous vous sommes tous reconnaissants d’avoir bien voulu participer à nos activités
We are all grateful to you for having kindly agreed to take part in our activities

Vous êtes libre d’essayer
You are free to try

(but Libre à vous d’essayer
Up to you to try)

Other common adjectives which take de:

- certain/sûr de faire qc sure to do sth
- content de faire qc pleased to do sth
- désireux de faire qc keen to do sth
- désolé de faire qc sorry to do sth
- étonné de faire qc astonished to do sth
- fier de faire qc proud to do sth
- impatient de faire qc impatient to do sth
- (in)capable de faire qc (in)capable of doing sth
- susceptible de faire qc likely to do sth

12.8 Infinitives as complements to nouns

Nouns take infinitive complements preceded either by à or by de, never without a preposition.
12.8.1 Infinitives following nouns related to verbs and adjectives

Nouns related to verbs and adjectives which take an infinitive complement preceded by à or de typically take the same preposition:

- inviter qn à faire qc
- disposer à faire qc
- craindre de faire qc
- défendre à qn de fumer
- interdire à qn de faire qc
- menacer qn de faire qc
- ordonner à qn de faire qc
- permettre à qn de faire qc
- désireux de faire qc
- impatient de faire qc
- l’invitation à faire qc
- la disposition à faire qc
- la crainte de faire qc
- Défense de fumer
- Interdiction de pénétrer en ces lieux
- la menace de faire qc
- l’ordre de faire qc
- la permission de faire qc
- le désir de faire qc
- l’impatience de faire qc

12.8.2 Infinitives following nouns involved in the event described by an infinitive take à

Nouns which are understood as being involved in the event described by the infinitive (as subject, direct object, indirect object, instrument, or time when the event takes place) typically take an infinitive preceded by à:

- une maison à rénover
  (‘maison’ is understood as the object of ‘rénover’)
  *a house to renovate*

- C’était un soir à se promener sur la plage
  (‘soir’ is understood as the time when walking takes place)
  *It was an evening for walking on the beach*

Other common examples:

- un appartement à louer
  *an apartment to rent*
- du bois à brûler
  *firewood*
- une chambre à coucher
  *a bedroom*
- un exemple à ne pas suivre
  *an example not to be followed*
- un fer à repasser
  *an iron*
- un homme à craindre
  *a man to be feared*
- une idée à examiner
  *an idea to explore*
- une maison à vendre
  *a house for sale*
- un pays à voir l’hiver
  *a country to see in winter*
- une poêle à frire
  *a frying pan*
- une pomme à cuire
  *a cooking apple*
- des repas à emporter
  *take-away meals*
- un roman à lire
  *a novel to read*
- une salle à manger
  *a dining room*
12.8.3 Some common idioms in which the preposition is à

avoir intérêt à faire qc  
à avoir du mal à faire qc  
à avoir plaisir à faire qc  
à être d’âge à faire qc  
à Nous sommes cinq à faire qc  
à être d’humeur à faire qc  
à être le premier à faire qc  
à être le seul à faire qc  
à prendre plaisir à faire qc

to have a stake in doing sth  
to experience some difficulty in doing sth  
to take pleasure in doing sth  
to be old enough to do sth  
There are five of us doing sth  
to be the last to do sth  
to be in a mood for doing sth  
to be the first to do sth  
to be the only one to do sth  
to take pleasure in doing sth

12.8.4 Most other nouns take the preposition de

avoir l’air/l’apparence de faire qc  
à avoir besoin de faire qc  
à avoir de la chance de faire qc  
à avoir le droit de faire qc  
à avoir envie de faire qc  
à avoir hâte de faire qc  
à avoir honte de faire qc  
à avoir raison de faire qc  
à avoir tort de faire qc  
à avoir le toupet/le culot de faire qc  
à avoir la façon/la manière de faire qc  
à le moment de faire qc  
à les moyens de faire qc  
à l’occasion de faire qc  
à le temps de faire qc

to appear to be doing sth  
to need to do sth  
to be lucky to do sth  
to have the right to do sth  
to want to do sth  
to be quick to do sth  
to be ashamed to do sth  
to be right to do sth  
to be wrong to do sth  
to have the cheek to do sth  
to be lucky to do sth  
the manner of doing sth  
the moment to do sth  
the means to do sth  
the opportunity to do sth  
the time to do sth

12.9 Infinitives in subordinate clauses

Infinitives in subordinate clauses may play the role of subjects or objects. The examples we have quoted extensively above where infinitives follow the verb and/or are introduced by à and de mainly show infinitive clauses playing the role of objects in the sentence. They can also be subjects.

In some cases they are linked to the main clause by the use of c’est, in other cases they directly precede the main verb. In many cases both c’est and est are possible with minimal stylistic difference. Voici and voilà may also play a linking role:

Partir c’est mourir un peu  
To leave is to die a little

Se cacher la vérité, c’est remettre le problème à plus tard  
Hiding the truth from oneself is putting the problem off until later

Mettre les hommes politiques devant les réalités, voilà le problème  
Getting politicians to face up to reality, that’s where the problem is

S’accorder sur l’essentiel, voilà ce qu’on doit faire  
What we must do is agree on the basics
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Pleurer ne sert à rien
Crying won’t get us anywhere

Se fâcher dans cette situation ne fera qu’aggraver les choses
In this situation getting angry will make matters worse

Manger trop de fraises peut rendre malade
Eating too many strawberries could make you ill

Courir chercher un médecin était la seule chose à faire
To run to get a doctor was the only thing to do

Habiter Paris est très agréable
Living in Paris is very pleasant

Jouer Molière était sa plus chère ambition
Acting in a play by Molière was his most cherished hope

Se détendre le weekend, c’est important pour la santé
For health reasons it is important to relax at weekends

12.10 Infinitives as polite commands

In certain cases, instructions are conveyed by means of infinitives rather than the more forceful imperatives. This is particularly the case where the audience is non-specific, as in road-users, consumers or students taking exams:

Ralentir: Enfants (or Attention: Ecole)  Slow down. School
Soulever, écarter doucement  Lift and separate carefully (instructions for opening a packet of coffee)
Ecrire les réponses au verso  Write the answers on the back of this page
Ne répondre qu’à l’une des questions de la section ci-dessous  Answer only one question in this section
Ouvrir doucement  Be careful when opening
Ne pas renverser  Don’t spill
Ne pas retourner  Don’t turn over
A manier avec précaution  Be careful when handling
Remettre entre les mains de . . .  Only to be given to . . . personally
Appuyer sur le bouton  Press the button
Agiter avant d’ouvrir  Shake before opening

12.11 Quick-reference index to verbs taking infinitive complements

s’abaisser à faire qc (12.4.2)  to stoop to doing sth
s’abêtrir, s’abrutir à faire qc (12.4.3)  to become stupid from doing sth
s’abstenir de faire qc (12.5.7, 12.5.17)  to refrain from doing sth
accepter de faire qc (12.5.2)  to agree to do sth
accoutumer qn à faire qc (12.4.10)  to get sb used to doing sth
accuser qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.5)  to accuse sb of having done sth
§12.11 Quick-reference index to verbs taking infinitive complements 311

s’acharnner à faire qc (12.4.4) to be bent on doing sth
achever de faire qc (12.5.17) to finish doing sth
adorer faire qc (12.3.6) to adore doing sth
affecter d’avoir fait qc (12.5.14) to pretend to have done sth
affirmer avoir fait qc (12.3.4) to state that one has done sth
s’affliger d’avoir fait qc (12.5.20) to be sorry to have done sth
s’affoler à faire qc (12.4.3) to panic doing sth
aider qn à faire qc (12.4.10) to help sb do sth
aimer faire qc (12.3.6) to like doing sth
aimer autant faire qc (12.3.6) to just as soon do sth
aimer mieux faire qc (12.3.6) to prefer doing sth
s’en aller faire qc (12.3.1) to go and do sth
aller faire qc (12.3.1) to go and do sth
ambitionner de faire qc (12.5.20) to have ambitions to do sth
amener qn faire qc (12.3.2) to bring sb along to do sth
amener qn à faire qc (12.4.11) to bring sb to the point of doing sth
s’amuser à faire qc (12.4.3) to have fun doing sth
appeler qn à faire qc (12.4.9) to call on sb to do sth
s’applaudir d’avoir fait qc (12.5.6) to congratulate oneself on having done sth
s’appliquer à faire qc (12.4.2) to apply oneself to doing sth
appréhender de faire qc (12.5.10) to be fearful of doing sth
apprendre à qn à faire qc (12.4.10) to teach sb to do sth
s’apprêter à faire qc (12.4.2) to get ready to do sth
arrêter de faire qc (12.5.17) to stop doing sth
arriver faire qc (12.3.1) to come to do sth
arriver à faire qc (12.4.6) to succeed in doing sth
aspirer à faire qc (12.4.6) to aspire to do sth
assigner qn à faire qc (12.4.9) to call on sb to do sth
s’attacher à faire qc (12.4.5) to cling to doing sth
s’attarder à faire qc (12.4.2) to linger doing sth
attraper qn à faire qc (12.4.13) to catch sb doing sth
s’attrister à faire qc (8.4.3) to be saddened doing sth
autoriser qn à faire qc (12.4.9) to authorize sb to do sth
s’aventurer à faire qc (12.4.5) to be so bold as to do sth
s’avérer être qc (12.3.7) to turn out to be sth
avertir qn de faire qc (12.5.1) to warn sb to do sth
avoir droit de faire qc (12.5.20) to have the right to do sth
en avoir marre de faire qc (12.5.20) to be fed up doing sth
avoir peur de faire qc (12.5.10) to be afraid to do sth
avoir regret d’avoir fait qc (12.5.13) to regret having done sth
blâmer qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.5) to blame sb for having done sth
se borner à faire qc (12.4.2) to limit oneself to doing sth
brûler de faire qc (12.5.20) to have a great desire to do sth

cesser de faire qc (12.5.17) to stop doing sth
charger qn de faire qc (12.5.5) to make sb responsible for doing sth
chercher à faire qc (12.4.6) to seek to do sth
choisir de faire qc (12.5.2) to choose to do sth
chuchoter à qn de faire qc (12.5.16) to whisper to sb to do sth
commander à qn de faire qc (12.5.16) to order sb to do sth
commencer à faire qc (12.4.1) to start to do sth
commencer par faire qc (12.4.1) to start by doing sth
comploter de faire qc (12.5.20) to plot to do sth
compter faire qc (12.3.6)
concouir à faire qc (12.4.2)
condamner qn à faire qc (12.4.8)
condescendre à faire qc (12.4.2)
conduire qn à faire qc (12.4.11)
confirmer avoir fait qc (12.3.4)
conjur er qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
consacrer du temps à faire qc (12.4.12)
conséiller à qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
consoler qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.20)
conspirer à faire qc (12.4.2)
se contenter de faire qc (12.5.20)
continuer à/de faire qc (12.4.1)
contraindre qn à faire qc (12.4.8)
convaincre qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
convenir de faire qc (12.5.2)
convier qn à faire qc (12.4.11)
courir faire qc (12.3.1)
craindre de faire qc (12.5.10)
croire avoir fait qc (12.3.5)
daigner faire qc (12.3.6)
décider de faire qc (12.4.5, 12.4.11
and 12.5.2)
décider qn à faire qc (12.4.11)
se décider à faire qc (12.4.5, 12.4.11)
déclarer avoir fait qc (12.3.4)
déconseiller à qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
dédaigner de faire qc (12.5.20)
défier qn de faire qc (12.5.20)
défendre à qn de faire qc (12.5.9)
dégoutter qn de faire qc (12.5.20)
se délester à faire qc (12.4.3)
demander à qn de faire qc (12.5.4)
démontrer avoir fait qc (12.3.4)
se dépêcher de faire qc (12.5.12)
dépenser de l’argent à faire qc (12.4.12)
désaccoutumer qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
descendre faire qc (12.3.1)
désespérer de faire qc (12.5.20)
déséquilibre qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
désirer faire qc (12.3.6)
déterminer qn à faire qc (12.4.11)
devoir faire qc (12.3.3)
dire avoir fait qc (12.3.4)
dire à qn de faire qc (12.5.16)
se disculper d’avoir fait qc (12.5.7)
dispenser qn de faire qc (12.5.2)
dissuader qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
douter de pouvoir faire qc (12.5.20)
dresser un animal à faire qc (12.4.10)
écouter qn faire qc (12.3.8)
écrire à qn de faire qc (12.5.16)
§12.11 Quick-reference index to verbs taking infinitive complements

s’efforcer de faire qc (12.5.20)

to force oneself to do sth

s’égoïsser à dire qc (12.4.4)

to go hoarse saying sth

emmener qn faire qc (12.3.2)

to take sb to do sth

empêcher qn de faire qc (12.5.17)

to prevent sb from doing sth

courager qn à faire qc (12.4.11, 12.5.1)

to encourage sb to do sth

to get annoyed doing sth

s’énerver à faire qc (12.4.3)

to bring sb to do sth

gagner qn à faire qc (12.4.11)

to suggest to sb that they do sth

enjoindre à qn de faire qc (12.5.10)

to get bored doing sth

s’ennuyer à faire qc (12.3.6)

to be angry about having done sth

tenir à qn à faire qc (12.4.4)

to teach sb to do sth

s’énerver à faire qc (12.4.2)

to intend, mean to do sth

entraîner qn à faire qc (12.4.11)

to encourage sb to do sth

entreprendre de faire qc (12.5.20)

to cause sb to do sth

eviter de faire qc (12.5.17)

to bring sb to do sth

envier qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.20)

to bring sb to do sth

envoyer qn faire qc (12.3.2)

to bring sb to do sth

s’épuiser à faire qc (12.4.4)

to bring sb to do sth

ergagner qn à faire qc (12.5.17)

to suggest to sb that they do sth

envisager de faire qc (12.5.15)

to encourage sb to do sth

s’épuiser à faire qc (12.4.4)

to imagine doing sth

s’éternuer à faire qc (12.4.4)

to imagine doing sth

ersurer qn à faire qc (12.4.4)

to imagine doing sth

espérer faire qc (12.3.6)

to encourage sb to do sth

s’essayer à faire qc (12.4.5)

to bring sb to do sth

essayer de faire qc (12.4.5, 12.5.4)

to bring sb to do sth

s’essouffler à faire qc (12.4.4)

to bring sb to do sth

estimer avoir fait qc (12.3.5)

to bring sb to do sth

s’étonner de fait qc (12.4.3)

to bring sb to do sth

être contraint de faire qc (12.4.8)

to bring sb to do sth

être disposé à faire qc (12.4.6)

to bring sb to do sth

être forcé de faire qc (12.4.8)

to bring sb to do sth

être furieux d’avoir fait qc (12.5.3)

to bring sb to do sth

être obligé de faire qc (12.4.8)

to bring sb to do sth

être tenu de faire qc (12.5.20)

to bring sb to do sth

s’évertuer à faire qc (12.4.4)

to bring sb to do sth

éviter de faire qc (12.5.17)

to bring sb to do sth

excuser qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.8)

to bring sb to do sth

exhorter qn à faire qc (12.4.11)

to bring sb to do sth

faire faire qc à qn (12.3.9)

to bring sb to do sth

faire semblant de faire qc (12.5.14)

to bring sb to do sth

se fatiguer à faire qc (12.4.4)

to bring sb to do sth

feindre d’avoir fait qc (12.5.14)

to bring sb to do sth

féliciter qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.6)

to bring sb to do sth

finir de faire qc (12.4.1, 12.5.17)

to bring sb to do sth

finir par faire qc (12.4.1)

to bring sb to do sth

se flatter de faire qc (12.5.6)

to bring sb to do sth

forcer qn à faire qc (12.4.8)

to bring sb to do sth

frémir de faire qc (12.5.10)

to shudder at doing sth

se garder de faire qc (12.5.20)

to make sure not to do sth

gémir de faire qc (12.5.20)

to groan at doing sth

se glorifier d’avoir fait qc (12.5.6)

to be proud of having done sth

groser qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.5)

to scold sb for having done sth
The infinitive §12.11

habituer qn à faire qc (12.4.10) to get sb used to doing sth
se hasarder à faire qc (12.4.5) to venture to do sth
se hâter de faire qc (12.5.12) to hasten to do sth
hésiter à faire qc (12.4.7) to hesitate to do sth
hurler à qn de faire qc (12.5.16) to shout to sb to do sth

s’imaginer faire qc (12.3.5) to imagine doing sth
implorer qn de faire qc (12.5.4) to implore sb to do sth
inciter qn à faire qc (12.4.11) to incite sb to do sth
incliner à faire qc (12.4.6) to be inclined to do sth
s’indigner d’avoir fait qc (12.5.3) to be furious at having done sth
s’inquiéter de faire qc (12.4.3, 12.5.10) to worry about doing sth
interdire à qn de faire qc (12.5.9) to forbid sb to do sth
inviter qn à faire qc (12.4.9, 12.4.10) to invite sb to do sth
s’irriter de/à faire qc (12.4.3) to become irritated doing sth

jurer (à qn) de faire qc (12.5.2) to swear (to sb) to do sth

laisser qn faire qc (12.3.9) to let sb do sth
se limiter à faire qc (12.4.2) to limit oneself to doing sth
louer qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.6) to praise sb for doing sth

méditer de faire qc (12.5.15) to think about doing sth
se mêler de faire qc (12.5.20) to be mixed up in doing sth
menacer (qn) de faire qc (12.5.3) to threaten to do sth (sb with doing sth)
mener qn faire qc (12.3.2) to take sb to do sth
mériter de faire qc (12.5.6) to deserve to do sth
mettre x jours à faire qc (12.4.12) to take x days to do sth
se mettre à faire qc (12.4.1) to start doing sth
monter faire qc (12.3.1) to go up and do sth

négliger de faire qc (12.5.11) to neglect to do sth
nier avoir fait qc (12.3.4) to deny having done sth

obliger qn à faire qc (12.4.8, 12.4.10) to make sb do sth
se obstiner à faire qc (12.4.2) to be bent on doing sth
obtenir de qn de faire qc (12.5.2) to get permission from sb to do sth
occuper son temps à faire qc (12.4.12) to spend one’s time doing sth
offrir à qn de faire qc (12.5.20) to offer sb (the chance of) doing sth
omettre de faire qc (12.5.11) to omit to do sth
ordonner à qn de faire qc (12.5.16) to order sb to do sth
oser faire qc (12.5.13) to dare to do sth
oublier de faire qc (12.5.11) to forget to do sth
s’oublier à faire qc (12.4.2) to become absorbed in doing sth

pâlir de faire qc (12.5.10) to blanch at doing sth
paraître faire qc (12.3.7) to appear to do sth
pardonnez à qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.8) to pardon sb for having done sth
parler de faire qc (12.5.4) to speak of doing sth
partir faire qc (12.3.1) to leave to do sth
parvenir à faire qc (12.4.6) to succeed in doing sth
passer son temps à faire qc (12.4.12) to spend one’s time doing sth
penser faire qc (12.3.5) to think one might do sth
permettre à qn de faire qc (12.5.2) to allow sb to do sth
persistir à faire qc (12.4.1) to persist in doing sth
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Verb</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>persuader qn de faire qc</td>
<td>to persuade sb to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plaindre qn d’avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to pity sb for having done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se plaire à faire qc</td>
<td>to take pleasure in doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pousser qn à faire qc</td>
<td>to push sb into doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pouvoir faire qc</td>
<td>to be able to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>préférer faire qc</td>
<td>to prefer to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>préméditer de faire qc</td>
<td>to think about doing sth beforehand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prendre qn à faire qc</td>
<td>to catch sb doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>préparer qn à faire qc</td>
<td>to prepare sb for doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prescrire à qn de faire qc</td>
<td>to order sb to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prétendre avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to claim to have done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prévoir de faire qc</td>
<td>to foresee doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prier qn de faire qc</td>
<td>to ask sb politely to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>projeter de faire qc</td>
<td>to think about doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promettre à qn de faire qc</td>
<td>to promise sb to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proposer (à qn) de faire qc</td>
<td>to propose doing sth (to sb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se rappeler avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to remember having done sth</td>
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<tr>
<td>rechigner à faire qc</td>
<td>to baulk at doing sth</td>
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<tr>
<td>réclamer de faire qc</td>
<td>to demand to do sth</td>
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<tr>
<td>recommander à qn de faire qc</td>
<td>to recommend sb to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reconnaître avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to admit to having done sth</td>
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<tr>
<td>redouter de faire qc</td>
<td>to fear doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refuser de faire qc</td>
<td>to refuse to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regarder qn faire qc</td>
<td>to watch sb doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regretter d’avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to regret having done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se rejouir de/faire qc</td>
<td>to take pleasure in doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remercier qn d’avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to thank sb for having done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se remettre d’avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to recover from having done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>renoncer à faire qc</td>
<td>to give up doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rentrer faire qc</td>
<td>to go home and do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se repentir d’avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to regret having done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>répondre à qn de faire qc</td>
<td>to tell sb in response to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reprocher à qn d’avoir fait qc</td>
<td>to regret having done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>répugner à faire qc</td>
<td>to reproach sb for having done sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se résigner à faire qc</td>
<td>to be reluctant to do sth</td>
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<tr>
<td>se résigner à faire qc</td>
<td>to reserve the right to do sth</td>
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<tr>
<td>resoudre de faire qc</td>
<td>to resign oneself to doing sth</td>
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<tr>
<td>se résoudre à faire qc</td>
<td>to resolve to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retourner faire qc</td>
<td>to accept having to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>réussir à faire qc</td>
<td>to go back and do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se révéler avoir/être qc</td>
<td>to succeed in doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revenir faire qc</td>
<td>to turn out to have/be sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rêver de faire qc</td>
<td>to come back and do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risquer de faire qc</td>
<td>to dream of doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se risquer à faire qc</td>
<td>to risk doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rougir de faire qc</td>
<td>to take risks in doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruminer de faire qc</td>
<td>to blush at doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir faire qc</td>
<td>to think about doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir gré à qn de faire qc</td>
<td>to be able to do sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sembler faire qc</td>
<td>to be grateful to sb for doing sth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sembler faire qc</td>
<td>to seem to do sth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sentir qn faire qc (12.3.8)
sommer qn de faire qc (12.5.16)
sortir faire qc (12.3.1)
se soucier de faire qc (12.5.10)
souhaiter faire qc (12.3.6)
soupçonner qn d’avoir fait qc (12.5.5)
sourire de faire qc (12.5.20)
se souvenir d’avoir fait qc (12.3.5)
suggérer à qn de faire qc (12.5.1)
supplir qn de faire qc (12.5.4)
surprendre qn à faire qc (8.4.13)
tâcher de faire qc (12.5.4)
téléphoner à qn de faire qc (12.5.16)
tenir à faire qc (12.4.6)
s’en tenir à faire qc (12.4.2)
tenter de faire qc (12.5.4)
traîner à faire qc (12.4.2)
trembler de faire qc (12.5.10)
se tuer à faire qc (12.4.4)
s’user à faire qc (12.4.4)
utiliser ses connaissances à faire qc (12.4.12)
se vanter d’avoir fait qc (12.5.6)
viser à faire qc (12.4.6)
voir qn faire qc (12.3.8)
vouloir faire qc (12.3.3)  

The infinitive §12.11

to feel sb do sth
to instruct sb to do sth
to go out and do sth
to care about doing sth
to wish to do sth
to suspect sb of having done sth
to smile at doing sth
to remember having done sth
to suggest doing sth to sb
to beg sb to do sth
to surprise sb doing sth

to try to do sth
to phone sb to do sth
to have a tendency to do sth
to be bent on doing sth
to stick to doing sth
to try to do sth
to work at doing sth
to tremble to do sth
to be sick and tired of doing sth

to wear oneself out doing sth
to use one’s knowledge in doing sth

to boast of having done sth
to aim to do sth
to see sb doing sth
to want to do sth
13 Prepositions

13.1 Introduction

Prepositions are forms like de, à, dans, en, sur, par, pour, avec, au-dessus de, du haut de, à cause de, and so on. For many French prepositions one can normally find an English counterpart which is used in the same way in a majority of cases. For example:

- **de** ≈ ‘of’:
  - une boîte d’allumettes ≈ a box of matches
  - trois kilos de sucre ≈ three kilos of sugar

- **à** ≈ ‘at’:
  - à trois heures ≈ at three o’clock
  - être à l’école ≈ to be at school

- **dans** ≈ ‘in’:
  - dans sa chambre ≈ in her room
  - dans les années trente ≈ in the thirties

However, there are many cases where there is no direct relation between the prepositions used in each language. For example:

- un pichet rempli de cidre
  - *a pitcher filled with (NOT *of) cider*

- tenir un livre à la main
  - *to hold a book in (NOT *at) one’s hand*

**It’s kind of you**
C’est gentil à (NOT *de) vous

**She is good at languages**
Elle est bonne en (NOT *aux) langues

This chapter lists the major French prepositions alphabetically, illustrates their main uses and gives their English equivalents in sections 13.2–13.58. English prepositions and their French counterparts are listed in section 13.59.

13.2 à

13.2.1 à = ‘at’

**Referring to place**

Le camion ralentissait à chaque virage
Elle est à l’école, au café, au cinéma
à l’église, au restaurant, à la pharmacie
Si on se réunissait au café?
Il était assis au chevet de sa mère
Mis en bouteille à la source
au bord du lac

The lorry slowed down at every bend
She is at school, at the café, at the cinema
at church, at the restaurant, at the chemist’s
Shall we meet at the café?
He was sitting at his mother’s bedside
Bottled at the spring
at the edge of the lake
§13.2 Referring to time

à trois heures, à minuit, à midi  at three o’clock, at midnight, at midday
à la nuit tombée, au crépuscule  at nightfall, at dusk

BUT au petit matin is translated by: ‘in the early morning’.

au petit déjeuner, au dîner  at breakfast, at dinner
à la fin, au début  at the end, at the beginning
une chose à la fois  one thing at a time
à toute vitesse  at full speed
Il est mort à 26 ans  He died at 26

13.2.2 à = ‘to’

au nord, au sud, à l’est, à l’ouest  to the north, to the south, to the east, to the west


Elle va à l’école, au café, au cinéma,  She is going to school, to the café, to the cinema,
a à l’église, au restaurant, à la pharmacie  to church, to the restaurant, to the chemist’s
monter à sa chambre  to go up to one’s room
tourner à droite, à gauche  to turn to the right, to the left

‘to’ most countries of masculine gender is à:

au Japon  to Japan
au Danemark  to Denmark
au Portugal  to Portugal
au Canada  to Canada
aux États-Unis, aux USA  to the United States, to the USA

(For countries of feminine gender, and most countries of masculine gender beginning with a vowel, ‘to’ is en: en France, en Grèce, etc., see 13.26.1. See also Chapter 2.2.2. For the gender of countries see Chapter 1.2.6.)

‘to’ most small islands, and larger islands which are some distance away, is à:

à Malte, à Jersey, à Guernsey, à Chypre, à la Martinique, à la Réunion, à Madagascar,
à Tahiti, aux Philippines  to Malta, to Jersey, to Guernsey, to Cyprus, to Martinique, to Reunion, to Madagascar, to Tahiti, to the Philippines

NB: ‘to’ larger islands close to Europe, and very large islands generally is en: en Sicile, en Sardaigne, en Crète, en Nouvelle-Zélande, etc.

‘to’ towns and cities is à:

à Paris, à Londres, à Berlin  to Paris, to London, to Berlin
13.2.3 à = ‘in’

**Referring to place**

- **vivre à Paris** to live in Paris
- **à cet endroit** (BUT **dans** ce lieu) in this place
- **au village** (BUT **en** ville) in the village (in town)
- **se reposer au jardin, au parc, au salon** to rest in the garden, in the park, in the sitting-room

À in these cases is a simple statement of location; dans is used when the ‘containing’ properties of the location are given more emphasis, for example:

- **se promener au parc** to walk in the park (simple statement of location)
- **perdre ses clefs dans le parc** to lose one’s keys in the park (the park is the area within which the keys were lost)

Compare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ils sont partis se promener au parc</td>
<td>They have gone for a walk in the park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On se promenait dans le parc quand on a perdu nos clefs</td>
<td>We were walking in the park when we lost our keys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>vivre à Paris</strong></td>
<td>to live in Paris (simple statement of location)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Il est difficile de se garer dans Paris</strong></td>
<td>It’s difficult to park in Paris (i.e. within Paris, as opposed to anywhere else)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>au deuxième rang du parterre</strong></td>
<td>in the second row of the stalls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>à l’arrière</strong></td>
<td>in the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>à l’intérieur</strong></td>
<td>inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tenir quelque chose à la main</strong></td>
<td>to hold something in one’s hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>porter une fleur au chapeau</strong></td>
<td>to wear a flower in one’s hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>au paradis</strong> (BUT <strong>en enfer</strong></td>
<td>in heaven (in hell)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘in’ most countries of masculine gender is à:

- **au Japon** in Japan
- **au Danemark** in Denmark
- **au Portugal** in Portugal
- **au Canada** in Canada
- **aux États-Unis, aux USA** in the United States, in the USA

(For countries of feminine gender, and most countries of masculine gender beginning with a vowel, ‘in’ is **en**: en France, en Iran, etc. See 13.26.1 and 1.2.6.)

‘in’ or ‘on’ most small islands, and larger islands which are some distance away, is à:

- **à Malte, à Jersey, à Guernsey, à Chypre, à la Martinique, à la Réunion, à Madagascar, à Tahiti, aux Philippines** in Malta, in Jersey, in Guernsey, in Cyprus, in Martinique, in Reunion, in Madagascar, in Tahiti, in the Philippines
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NB: ‘in’ large islands close to Europe, and very large islands generally, is en: en Sicile, en Sardaigne, en Crète, en Nouvelle-Zélande, etc.

‘in’ towns and cities is à:

à Paris, à Londres, à Berlin, à Marseille

Referring to time

la veille au soir
à l’entracte
vivre au 21e siècle
arriver à temps

13.2.4 à = ‘on’

Je le ramasserai au retour
Il est arrivé à pied
Je l’ai appris au service militaire
Elle a essayé de le contacter à plusieurs reprises
à la page 2
à la télévision/à la radio
se mettre à genoux
avoir une cicatrice à la jambe
frapper à la porte, à la vitre
les pommes étaient à terre

Modes of transport

à bicyclette
à pied
à cheval
à dos de chameau

BUT also: en vélo, en taxi, en voiture, en ambulance, etc. (See 13.26.5.)

13.2.5 à = ‘by’

s’avancer pas à pas
partir un à un
travailler à la lumière d’une bougie
fabriquée à la main
reconnaître quelqu’un à sa voix

13.2.6 à used where English typically uses compound nouns

une tasse à thé
un livre à couverture de cuir
un moulin à vent, à café
un homme à cheveux gris, aux cheveux gris
un homme à barbe
une fille aux cheveux d’or

a tea cup
a leather-bound book
a windmill, coffee-mill
a grey-haired man
a bearded man
a golden-haired girl
un billet à 10 €
a 10 euro ticket
d’après/d’après
321
un bateau à roue
a paddle steamer
une chambre à air
an inner tube
une omelette aux champignons
a mushroom omelette
une sauce au vin
a wine sauce
de la soupe à l’oignon
onion soup

13.2.7 à = no preposition in English

La falaise était à pic
The cliff was steep
Les volets étaient à demi fermés
to have a headache
avoir mal à la tête
Rennes est à 348 kilomètres de Paris
Rennes is 348 kilometres from Paris
un restaurant à deux pas d’ici
a restaurant a stone’s throw from here
Ils se sont arrêtés à mi-chemin
They stopped halfway
à l’envers
back to front
rentrer à la maison
to go home

In the case of sports: au, à la is used:

jouer au tennis, au football, au rugby, au billard, etc.
to play tennis, football, rugby, billiards, etc.

But in the case of musical instruments: du, de la is used:

jouer du piano, du violon, de la flûte, etc.
to play the piano, the violin, the flute, etc.

13.2.8 à = other uses

monter/descendre à l’étage
to go upstairs/to go downstairs
C’est à vous de décider
It’s up to you to decide
C’est gentil à vous de m’aider
It’s kind of you to help me
C’est aimable à lui
That’s nice of him
un oncle à lui (also un de ses oncles)
an uncle of his
un livre à moi (also un de mes livres)
a book of mine
boire à la bouteille, à la source
to drink from the bottle, from the spring
emprunter de l’argent à la banque
to borrow money from the bank
un repas à la française
a meal in the French style
des pâtes à l’italienne
Italian-style pasta

13.3 après/d’après

après la fin du film
after the end of the film
après le repas
after the meal
après avoir acheté une glace
after buying an ice-cream
après être arrivé
after arriving
Il n’arrête pas de crier après tout le monde
He shouts at everyone
demander après quelqu’un
to ask after somebody
(both these uses of après are informal)
d’après les journaux
according to the newspapers
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d’après ce qu’on m’a dit
D’après leur tête, ils ont perdu le match
D’après vous, lequel est le meilleur?
un tableau d’après Van Gogh

from what I’ve been told
From the look on their faces, they lost the match
In your view, which is the better?
a painting in the style of Van Gogh

13.4 auprès de

Auprès de ces héros, nous sommes peu de chose (formal)
Compared with these heroes, we are as nothing

se plaindre auprès des autorités

to complain to the authorities

un ambassadeur auprès de la République française
an ambassador to France

13.5 autour de

autour de l’aéroport
around the airport
tourner autour de la question
to go around the question
Nous arriverons autour de huit heures
We will arrive around eight

13.6 avant

s’arrêter juste avant le tournant
to stop just before the bend
avant le mois de juin
before June
avant l’entraînement
before the interval
avant l’aube
before dawn
avant le weekend
before the weekend
arriver avant qn
to arrive ahead of sb
faire passer qn avant les autres
to let someone go first

NB: ‘ahead of’ in the sense of ‘outstripping’ one’s rivals is en avant de: Il est en avant de ses contemporains ‘He is ahead of his contemporaries’.

13.7 avec

Il devait venir avec moi au garage
He was to come with me to the garage
une voiture avec des banquettes de cuir
a car with leather seats
Elle est arrivée avec son père et sa mère
She arrived with her father and mother
s’entendre bien avec quelqu’un

to get on well with somebody
parler avec quelqu’un
to speak with somebody
remplir un verre avec de l’eau
to fill a glass with water
mouiller un ragoût avec du vin blanc
to thin a stew with white wine
Ce Calvados est fait avec nos propres pommes
This Calvados is made with our own apples
NB: In some of these examples it is also possible to use *de*: remplir un verre d’eau, mouiller un ragoût de vin blanc:

- se raser avec un rasoir électrique  
  to shave with an electric razor
- épousseter les meubles avec un plumeau  
  to dust with a feather duster
- On s’est moqué d’eux, avec Alain  
  Alain and I made fun of them
- On a fini l’article, avec Pierre (informal)  
  Pierre and I have finished the article
- aller quelque part avec la voiture  
  to go somewhere by car

(For modes of transport also see 13.26.5.)

### 13.8 bout: au bout de

- au bout de mon jardin  
  at the bottom of my garden
- au bout de trois heures  
  after three hours

### 13.9 cause: à cause de, pour cause de, pour raison de

- A cause de sa maladie, il n’a pas pu venir  
  Because of his illness, he couldn’t come
- Le restaurant est fermé pour cause de décès  
  The restaurant is closed due to a bereavement
- Il a démissionné pour raison de santé  
  He resigned for health reasons

### 13.10 chez

- Je suis chez moi samedi  
  I am at home on Saturday
- Ils l’ont ramené chez eux  
  They brought him back to their house
- Elle est venue chez nous en pleine nuit  
  She came to our house in the middle of the night
- Est-il vrai que chez les Anglais on boit du thé avec chaque repas?  
  Is it true that, among the English, tea is drunk with every meal?
- Chez Camus, le décor est très important  
  In Camus, the setting is very important

### 13.11 contre

- Je n’ai rien contre lui  
  I have nothing against him
- protéger ses plantes contre le froid  
  to protect one’s plants against the cold
- une table posée contre le mur  
  a table placed against the wall
- agir contre qn  
  to act against sb
- changer des euros contre des dollars  
  to change euros for dollars
- livraison contre remboursement  
  cash on delivery
13.12 côté: à côté de, du côté de

La boucherie est à côté de la pharmacie
Elle s’est assise à côté de moi

À côté de ses œuvres précédentes, celle-ci est moins impressionnante
Compared with his earlier works, this one is less impressive

rouler du côté de Brive
arriver du côté de Brive
habiter du côté de Brive
to travel in the direction of Brive
arrive from the direction of Brive;
to be coming from Brive
to live around Brive

NB: Du Côté de chez Swann (the title of one of the volumes of Proust’s A La Recherche du temps perdu) literally means ‘around where Swann lives’, and has been translated by Proust’s English translator as Swann’s Way.

13.13 cours: au cours de

au cours de la semaine
dauring the week
au cours de sa carrière
in the course of his career

13.14 dans

13.14.1 dans = ‘in’

J’ai aperçu la ferme dans la vallée
Elle était assise dans son fauteuil
BUT s’asseoir sur une chaise, sur un banc,
sur un siège
Il y avait de la pluie dans l’air
I saw the farm in the valley
She was sitting in her armchair
to sit on a chair, on a bench, on a seat
There was rain in the air

Nous l’avons croisé dans la rue, dans l’allée, dans l’avenue
We passed him in the street, in the alley, in the avenue

BUT sur la place, sur la route, sur le chemin, sur le boulevard, sur la chaussée, sur le trottoir
in the square, on the road, on the track, on the boulevard, in the road (as opposed to pavement), on the pavement

NB: When streets are named, there is usually no preposition in French for ‘in’: Je l’ai rencontré rue de Rivoli ‘I met him in the rue de Rivoli’, Nous l’avons croisé boulevard Montparnasse ‘We passed him in the boulevard Montparnasse’, Il y avait un accident place du Châtelet ‘There was an accident in the place du Châtelet’.

Il est dans sa chambre
Elle habite dans une belle maison
Je l’ai lu dans un journal, dans un livre
dans tous les sens
dans les années trente
Il vit dans la misère
Cela l’a laissé dans le doute
He is in his room
She lives in a fine house
I read it in a paper, in a book
in every direction
in the thirties
He lives in poverty
That left him in doubt
dans with the meaning ‘in’ is used with French départements, English counties and American states:

- dans le Calvados
- dans la Marne
- dans le Finistère
- dans la Haute-Garonne
- dans l’Aveyron
- dans l’Isère
- dans le Yorkshire
- dans l’Essex
- dans le Lancashire
- dans l’Arizona
- dans le Massachussets
- dans la Marne
- dans l’Essex
- dans le Nevada
- dans l’Arizona

Dans is also used with the meaning ‘in’ with countries and towns modified by adjectives, quantifiers or other expressions:

- dans toute la France
- dans la Pologne ravagée
- dans le sud de l’Espagne
- dans le Mexique d’aujourd’hui
- dans le vieux Paris
- in all France
- in war-torn Poland
- in southern Spain
- in today’s Mexico
- in old Paris

BUT en France, en Italie, en Espagne, à Paris etc. (See 13.26.1.)

13.14.2 dans = ‘in(side)’

Le manteau est dans l’armoire
The coat is in the wardrobe

Mettez le couteau dans le tiroir
Put the knife in the drawer

un petit navire dans une bouteille
a ship in a bottle

Modes of transport
Nous sommes venus dans (or par) le bus, dans (or par) le train, dans un taxi, dans une ambulance
We came by bus, by train, by taxi, in an ambulance

dans is used when the ‘containing’ properties of the vehicle are given prominence e.g.:

Elle a perdu son porte-monnaie dans le bus
She lost her purse on the bus

Il est décédé dans l’ambulance
He died in the ambulance

BUT also

- en auto, en voiture
- en vélo, à bicyclette
- à cheval
- en navire
- en avion
- en hélicoptère
- en ambulance
- en taxi

by car
by bike
on horseback
by ship
by plane
by helicopter
by ambulance
by taxi

(See section 13.26.5.)
13.14.3 *dans* = ‘*(in)to’

Elle est allée dans la cour  
*She went into the yard*

emmener quelqu’un dans un restaurant  
*to take somebody to a restaurant*

13.14.4 *dans* = ‘*in* (after a certain period of time has elapsed)

Je reviendrai dans une heure  
*I’ll come back in an hour’s time (i.e. after an hour has elapsed)*

Il peut le faire dans quinze jours  
*He can do it in a fortnight’s time*

Je l’attends dans deux jours  
*I expect him in two days*

Nous le ferons dans un instant  
*We’ll do it in a moment (i.e. later)*

This use of *dans* contrasts with *en* ‘*in* (within a certain period of time – see 13.26.3):

Je l’aurai lu en une heure  
*I’ll have read it (with)in an hour*

Il peut le faire en quinze jours  
*He can do it (with)in a fortnight*

Ça se fait en un instant  
*That’s done in an instant*

13.14.5 *dans* = ‘*during*’

Je le ferai dans la semaine  
*I’ll do it during the week*

Elle a écrit sa rédaction dans la journée  
*She finished her essay during the day*

Il était tombé malade dans la nuit  
*He became ill during the night*

Je l’avais vu dans la semaine  
*I had seen him during the week*

13.14.6 *dans* = ‘*around*, ‘*or so*’

Nous avons gagné dans les mille euros  
*We won around a thousand euros*

Ça pèse dans les 500 grammes  
*That weighs around 500 grams*

Il avait dans les 26 ans (informal)  
*He was around 26*

13.14.7 *dans* = ‘*among*’

Il a disparu dans les sapins  
*He disappeared among the firs*

J’ai cherché dans mes papiers  
*I looked among my papers*

*parmi* is also possible with non-human objects: Il a disparu *parmi* les sapins, J’ai cherché *parmi* mes papiers. BUT in talking of people, ‘among’ can only be *parmi* or *entre*:

Il n’était pas *parmi* les spectateurs  
*He wasn’t among the spectators*

Elle se faufilait *parmi* les manifestants  
*She threaded her way among the demonstrators*

Nous pourrons en discuter *entre* nous  
*We will be able to discuss it among ourselves*
13.14.8 **dans** = ‘on’

Nous l’avons rencontré dans l’escalier  
We met him on the stairs
Il bricolait dans des fermes  
He did odd jobs on farms

13.14.9 **dans** = ‘from’

Elle a pris le portefeuille dans le tiroir  
She took the wallet from the drawer
Il a pris son mouchoir dans sa poche  
He took his handkerchief from his pocket
Nous avons découpé des photos dans un journal  
We cut photos from a newspaper
Il boit son café dans un bol  
He drinks his coffee from a bowl
J’ai copié cela dans un livre  
I copied that from a book

BUT sortir, retirer un portefeuille **du** tiroir.

13.15 **de**

13.15.1 **de** = ‘of’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une tasse de thé</td>
<td>a cup of tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une boîte d’allumettes</td>
<td>a box of matches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un verre de vin</td>
<td>a glass of wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un bol de café</td>
<td>a bowl of coffee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: There is a contrast between **une tasse de thé** ‘a cup of tea’ and **une tasse à thé** ‘a tea-cup’. The first describes a cup which happens to have tea in it, the second describes a cup designed for drinking tea from. Tea cups can hold substances other than tea, so one can say **une tasse à thé de sucre** ‘a tea-cup of sugar’ (NOT **une tasse de thé de sucre**). Similarly **une boîte de lettres** ‘a box of letters’ contrasts with **une boîte aux lettres** ‘a letter box’, and **un verre de vin** ‘a glass of wine’ contrasts with **un verre à vin** ‘a wine glass’. (See 13.2.6.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une route pleine de virages</td>
<td>a road full of bends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J’entendais le bruit des campeurs</td>
<td>I heard the noise of the campers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le bombardement de Marseille en 1944</td>
<td>the bombing of Marseilles in 1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la moitié des spectateurs</td>
<td>half of the spectators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la plupart de la population</td>
<td>most of the population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un tiers des concurrents</td>
<td>a third of the competitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trois de mes amis</td>
<td>three of my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le plus grand joueur de tous</td>
<td>the greatest player of all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le plus intelligent de nous tous</td>
<td>the most intelligent of all of us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13.15.2 *de* = ‘with’

- une rue bordée de platanes
- un mur couvert d’affiches
- un vestibule encombré de chaussures
- un pichet rempli de cidre

*a street lined with plane trees*
*a wall covered with posters*
*a hall cluttered with shoes*
*a pitcher filled with cider*

*par* is a less frequently used equivalent of *de* in these cases, with an indefinite article: *une rue bordée par des platanes, un mur couvert par des affiches, etc.*

- rougir de honte
- tomber de fatigue
- trembler de peur
- piétiner d’impatience
- crier de colère
- sauter de joie

*to go red with shame*
*to drop with tiredness*
*to tremble with fear*
*to dance with impatience*
*to shout with anger*
*to jump with joy*

13.15.3 *de* = ‘in’

- vêtu de noir
- habillé d’un complet bleu

*dressed in black*
*dressed in a blue suit*

After a superlative (‘best in . . .’, ‘biggest in . . .’, etc.) or after *seul, dernier, premier, jamais:*

- le bâtiment le plus haut du monde
- le train le plus rapide d’Europe
- la seule fois de ma vie
- Jamais de ma vie je n’ai eu aussi peur
d’une certaine manière, façon
- trois dimanches de suite
- boire un whisky d’un trait
- Il est paralysé des jambes, court de jambes,
large d’épaules

*the tallest building in the world*
*the fastest train in Europe*
*the only time in my life*
*Never in my life have I been so scared*
*in a certain manner, fashion*
*three Sundays in a row*
*to drink a whisky in one go*
*He is paralysed in the legs, short in the leg,*
*broad in the shoulders*

13.15.4 *de* = ‘from’

- regarder quelqu’un d’en haut
- le train de Paris
- Elle venait de Marseille
- Il est sorti de derrière la maison
- regarder les choses d’un même œil
- aller de Londres à Paris
- passer du rouge au vert
- citer quelque chose de mémoire
- faire quelque chose de colère

*to watch somebody from above*
*the train from (also for) Paris*
*She came from Marseilles*
*He came out from behind the house*
*to see things from the same perspective*
*to go from London to Paris*
*to go from red to green*
*to cite something from memory*
*to do something from anger*

**NB:** *le train de Paris* is ambiguous between ‘the train from Paris’ and ‘the train for Paris’; *le train en provenance de Paris* is unambiguously ‘the train from Paris’, and *le train à destination de Paris* is unambiguously ‘the train for Paris’.
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13.15.5  de = ‘by’

Je le connais de vue, de réputation  
I know him by sight, by reputation
un film de François Truffaut  
a film by François Truffaut

de often corresponds to ‘by’ when a state is being described:

Il est connu de tous, détesté de certains, adoré de beaucoup  
He is known by everyone, detested by some, adored by many
Il était accablé de fatigue, de sommeil, de douleur  
He was overcome by tiredness, by sleep, worn down by pain

Le ciel est couvert de nuages  
The sky is covered by cloud

When ‘by’ introduces an agent, and an event rather than a state is involved, par is usually used (as for example in passives: see Chapter 8.6):

Il a été effrayé par l’orage  
He was frightened by the storm
Jean a été mordu par mon chien  
Jean was bitten by my dog

But when a passive can be understood as a state, rather than an event, de may be used:

Quand il est arrivé au commissariat, il était accompagné de sa femme  
When he arrived at the police station, his wife was with him
Les enfants ne sont autorisés que s’ils sont accompagnés d’un adulte  
Children are not allowed in unless accompanied by an adult

13.15.6  de = ‘s (possessive)

la sœur de sa mère  
his mother’s sister
le vélo de mon oncle  
my uncle’s bike
la maison de mes parents  
my parents’ house
le nom de son chien  
his dog’s name

13.15.7  de = ‘than’ (plus de, moins de)

Elle gagne plus de 3 000 euros par mois  
She earns more than 3,000 euros a month
Moins d’une dizaine de personnes assistaient au cours  
Fewer than ten people were at the lecture
Cela est arrivé il y a plus de trente ans  
That happened more than thirty years ago
Interdit aux moins de 15 ans  
No children under 15

NB: plus de, moins de contrast with plus que, moins que. Whereas plus de, moins de are typically followed by a numeral, plus que, moins que introduce an implied clause:

Elle gagne plus de 3 000 euros  
She earns more than 3,000 euros
BUT  
Elle gagne plus que sa sœur (ne gagne)  
She earns more than her sister (earns)
Il travaille moins de 2 heures par jour  
He works less than 2 hours a day
Il travaille moins que son frère (ne travaille)  
He works less than his brother (works)
13.15.8 *de* = no preposition in English

**Linking nouns to make them compound nouns**

- *un vieux tronc d’acacia* → *an old acacia tree*
- *un homme d’affaires* → *a businessman*
- *la boîte de vitesses* → *the gear-box*
- *un vélo de course* → *a racing bike*

**Introducing parts of countries, states, towns, etc., in relation to the points of the compass**

- *l’Afrique du Sud* → *South Africa*
- *le Sud de l’Afrique* → *southern Africa*
- *l’Italie du Sud* → *southern Italy*
- *la France du Nord* → *northern France*
- *les pays de l’ouest* → *western countries*
- *la Gare du Nord* → *the North Station*
- *la Gare de l’Est* → *the East Station*

**With many quantifiers**

- *la plupart des gens* → *most people (also ‘most of the people’)*
- *beaucoup de gens* → *many people*
- *bien des gens* → *many people*
- *la moitié des gens* → *half the people (also ‘half of the people’)*

For more on these quantifiers see Chapter 6.9.

**With the following adjectival construction used frequently in informal French**

- *une journée de libre* → *a free day*
- *encore un problème de réglé* → *one more problem solved*
- *il y avait trois passants de blessés* → *three passers-by were injured*

**Linking indefinite or negative nouns and adjectives**

- *quelqu’un d’important* → *someone important*
- *personne d’intéressant* → *nobody interesting*
- *rien d’autre* → *nothing else*
- *quelque chose de drôle* → *something funny*

**After *ce que* . . .**

*Ce qu’il y a de plus beau dans l’exposition, c’est le tableau de Constable*
*What’s most beautiful in the exhibition is the painting by Constable*

*Ce qu’il y a de moins intéressant dans les livres que j’ai lus cet été, c’est ce roman d’aventures*
*What’s least interesting among the books I read this summer is this adventure novel*

*Ce qu’ils produisent de bon, c’est le vin*
*What they produce that is good is wine*

**Measurements**

- *un mur épais d’un mètre* → *a wall one metre thick*
- *une rivière longue de 200 kilomètres* → *a 200-kilometre long river*
- *une clôture haute de cinq mètres* → *a five-metre high fence*
- *Elle est âgée de 15 ans* → *She is 15*
- *Le train est en retard de 20 minutes* → *The train is 20 minutes late*

(For measurements see also Chapter 6.5.1.)
13.15.9 **de = other uses**

Je ne me nourris que de pommes de terre  
I live on potatoes  
**être de permanence**  
to be on duty, on call  
On n’a plus revu Bernard de l’après-midi  
We didn’t see Bernard again for the rest of the afternoon  
**traiter quelqu’un de voleur**  
to call somebody a thief  
**Quoi de neuf?**  
What’s new?  
**Quoi de plus éprouvant?**  
What can be more harrowing?

13.16 **dehors: en dehors de**

une randonnée en dehors de la ville  
a hike outside the town  
En dehors de ses cousins, elle ne connaît personne  
Apart from her cousins, she knows no-one

13.17 **delà: au-delà de**

au-delà de la frontière  
beyond the frontier

13.18 **dépit: en dépit de**

En dépit de mes conseils, elle s’est mariée  
In spite of my advice, she got married

13.19 **depuis**

**depuis longtemps**  
for a long time  
**depuis toujours**  
from time immemorial  
**Elle joue du piano depuis un très jeune âge**  
She has been playing the piano since she was very young  
**Je suis là depuis trois jours**  
I have been here for three days  
**Je ne l’ai pas vu depuis trois jours**  
I haven’t seen him for three days  

(For tenses with depuis see Chapter 10.4.4.)

**depuis . . . (jusqu’à)** can be used as an alternative to **de . . . à** when distance is being emphasized:

Il a marché depuis le port jusqu’au parc  
He walked right from the harbour to the park  
Elle a crié depuis le jardin  
She shouted from the garden  
Le bruit nous arrivait depuis la terrasse  
The noise reached us from the terrace  
**depuis le haut jusqu’en bas**  
from the top to the very bottom  
Je vous parle depuis Poitiers  
I’m speaking to you from Poitiers  
(only on the radio and television)
§13.20 derrière

- une rue derrière la grande place: a street behind the main square
- derrière chez lui: behind his house
- Allez vous mettre par-derrière la cloison: Go and stand behind the partition (par-derrière implies movement)

NB: ‘behind’ in the sense of ‘not keeping up with’ is en retard: Il est en retard par rapport aux autres enfants de sa classe ‘He is behind the other children in his class’.

§13.21 dès

- dès la nuit tombée, dès l’aube: from nightfall, from dawn
- dès son arrivée: as soon as he arrived
- Dès que je suis entré, j’ai compris que quelque chose ne tournait pas rond: As soon as I came in, I knew that something was wrong
- dès maintenant: from now on
- dès lors: from then on
- dès l’enfance: from childhood

§13.22 dessous: au-dessous de/par-dessous

- Au-dessous de la salle à manger il y a une piscine: Below the dining room there is a swimming-pool
- La température est tombée au-dessous de zéro: The temperature fell below zero
- Il a rampé par-dessous la barrière: He crawled under the gate (par-dessous implies movement)

§13.23 dessus: au-dessus de/par-dessus

- J’ai regardé le ciel au-dessus du village: I looked at the sky above the village
- Au-dessus de la porte d’entrée il y avait un panneau: Above the entrance there was a sign
- porter un manteau par-dessus sa veste: to wear a coat over one’s jacket
- sauter par-dessus une barrière: to jump over a gate

§13.24 devant

- devant l’église: in front of the church
- devant chez lui: in front of his house
- mettre un pied devant l’autre: to put one foot in front of the other
- Je l’ai laissé devant un chemin obscur: I left him at the beginning of a dark track
- marcher devant qn: to walk in front of sb
- comparaître devant le tribunal: to appear before the court
13.25 

**durant**

durant la nuit, durant l’été  
during the night, during the summer

NB: *durant* is an equivalent of *pendant*, but typically restricted to written French. Unlike *pendant*, it can follow the noun it modifies: *Elle s’est reposée la semaine durant* ‘She rested throughout the week’.

13.26 *en*

13.26.1 *en* = ‘in’

*en*, rather than *dans*, is used where there is no definite or indefinite article:

- en plein air  
in the open air
- en bonne santé  
in good health
- en terminale  
in the upper sixth year
- une région riche en forêts  
a region rich in forests
- une thèse pauvre en idées  
a thesis poor in ideas
- en cas d’urgence  
in an emergency
- avoir confiance en quelqu’un  
to have confidence in somebody

Il est sorti en tenue de soirée, en maillot de bain, en bras de chemise  
*He went out in evening dress, in his swimming costume, in shirt sleeves*

Elle est en ville, en prison, en province  
*She is in town, in prison, out of town* (i.e. ‘in the provinces’)

BUT where an article is used, *dans* is usual:

- être transporté dans une prison lointaine  
to be taken to a distant prison

Months

- en janvier, en février, en mars, . . . en novembre, en décembre  
in January, in February, in March, . . . in November, in December

Seasons

- en automne, en été, en hiver . . . BUT *au* printemps  
in autumn, in summer, in winter . . . in spring

Years

- en 1992, en 1485, etc.  
in the year 1992, in the year 1485, etc.
- en l’an 1992, en l’an 1485, etc.  
in the year 1992, in the year 1485, etc.

BUT: *dans* les années 90  
in the 90s
- au 20e siècle  
in the 20th century

Languages

- en allemand, en anglais, en français, en espagnol, en flamand, etc.  
in German, in English, in French, in Spanish, in Flemish, etc.
Prepositions §13.26

*en* is used for ‘in’ or ‘to’ countries and continents of feminine gender:

- en France  en Afrique
- en Espagne  en Amérique
- en Italie  en Europe
- en Allemagne  en Australie
- en Grèce  en Asie
- en Turquie  en Chine

*en* is also used for ‘in’ or ‘to’ countries of masculine gender which begin with a vowel:

- en Afghanistan
- en Israël
- en Iran

‘in’ or ‘to’ masculine countries not beginning with a vowel is usually *au* or *aux*:

- au Japon  au Canada
- au Portugal  au Danemark

NB: *aux* Etats-Unis, *aux* USA. See 13.2.3.

*en* is used for ‘in’ or ‘to’ French regions of feminine gender:

- en Normandie
- en Bretagne
- en Provence
- en Touraine

BUT *dans* is normally used with French regions of masculine gender:

- dans le Berry
- dans le Périgord
- dans le Forez

*dans* is normal for ‘in’ or ‘to’ with French départements, British counties and American states. (See 13.14.1.)

*en* is used for ‘in’ or ‘to’ large islands:

- en Sicile  en Crète
- en Sardaigne  en Nouvelle-Zélande

See also 13.2.3.

13.26.2 *en* = ‘in’ used with articles in fixed expressions

- regarder en l’air  to look up
- des idées en l’air  unrealistic ideas
- en la circonstance  in the circumstances
- en l’occurrence  as it turns out
- en l’espèce  in this particular case
- en ce cas  in this case
- en son for intérieur  in his heart of hearts
13.26.3 *en* = ‘in’ (within a certain period of time)

Il a fait des progrès en deux ans  He has made progress in two years
Je l’aurai lu en une heure  I’ll have read it in an hour
Ça se fait en un instant  It’s done in a second
le tour du monde en 80 jours  around the world in 80 days

This contrasts with *dans* = ‘in’ (after a certain period of time has elapsed):

Il peut le faire dans quinze jours  He can do it in two weeks’ time
Je l’attends dans deux jours  I expect him in two days
Je le ferai dans un instant  I’ll do it in a minute

13.26.4 *en* = ‘made from’

une statue en bronze  a bronze statue
une robe en velours rouge  a red velvet dress
une montre en or  a gold watch
une robe en soie  a silk dress
un pont en ciment  a concrete bridge

13.26.5 *en* = modes of transport

The following are common in informal French:

voyager en taxi, en vélo  to travel by taxi, by bike
en bicyclette, en moto  by bicycle, on a motorbike
en avion, en car  by plane, on a coach
en train, en voiture  by train, by car
en ambulance  in an ambulance
en skis  on skis
en bateau  by boat

The expressions you are more likely to encounter in formal French are: *dans un taxi, à vélo, à bicyclette, dans l’avion, par avion, dans le car, dans le train, avec la voiture, dans une ambulance, par bateau.*

13.26.6 *en* = ‘on’

en vacances, en congé  on holiday, on leave
en vente  on sale
en route  on the way
en voyage  on a trip
en moyenne  on average
en feu  on fire

13.26.7 *en* = ‘with’

une maison en briques  a house built with bricks
alimenter un restaurant en vin  to supply a restaurant with wine
ravitailler des terroristes en armes  to supply terrorists with arms
13.26.8 **en = ‘at’**

en fin de semaine  
"at the end of the week"

en haut de page  
"at the top of the page"

en mer  
"at sea"

en plein sommet  
"right at the summit"

en même temps  
"at the same time"

Les deux pays étaient en guerre  
"The two countries were at war"

Sa vie est en jeu  
"Her life is at stake"

être fort en langues, en maths  
"to be good at languages, maths"

en vitesse (informal)  
"at speed"

13.26.9 **en = ‘from’**

aujourd’hui en huit  
"a week from today"

lundi en quinze  
"two weeks from Monday"

13.26.10 **en = ‘as’**

parler en spécialiste  
"to speak as an expert"

s’habiller en marin  
"to dress as a sailor"

recevoir qc en cadeau  
"to receive something as a present"

agir en lâche  
"to act as a coward"

en signe de deuil  
"as a sign of mourning"

13.26.11 **en = ‘into’**

transformer la maison en hôtel  
"to transform the house into a hotel"

changer une défaite en victoire  
"to change a defeat into victory"

traduire un texte en allemand  
"to translate a text into German"

13.26.12 **en = no preposition**

se mettre en colère  
"to become angry"

une télévision en couleur  
"a colour television"

un film en noir et blanc  
"a black and white film"

13.27 **entre/d’entre**

la distance entre deux points  
"the distance between two points"

une dispute entre eux  
"a dispute between them"

J’ai le rapport entre les mains  
"I have the report in my hands"

la frontière entre deux pays  
"the border between two countries"

la plupart d’entre eux  
"most of them"

beaucoup d’entre mes amis  
"many of my friends"

une dizaine d’entre les serveurs  
"ten or so of the waiters"

le moins beau d’entre nous  
"the least handsome among us"

Lequel d’entre vous le fera?  
"Which of you will do it?"

chacun d’entre eux or chacun d’eux  
"each of them"

personne d’entre les invités or personne des invités  
"no-one among the guests"

aucun d’entre les spectateurs or aucun des spectateurs  
"none of the spectators"
13.28 **envers**

- ressentir de la haine envers qn
- être bien disposé envers qn
- ma gratitude envers votre oncle

**to feel hatred towards sb**
**to be well disposed towards sb**
**my gratitude to your uncle**

13.29 **excepté**

Excepté les grand-parents, tous étaient partis

*Apart from the grandparents, everyone had left*

NB: *hormis* ‘with the exception of’ is also possible, but rather formal.

13.30 **face: en face de**

Le parc est en face du bureau de poste

*The park is opposite the post office*

13.31 **faute de**

Faute d’argent, l’entreprise a fait faillite

*Through lack of money, the company went bankrupt*

J’accepterai le poste, faute de mieux

*I’ll accept the job, for want of anything better*

13.32 **force: à force de**

A force de travail, il a réussi

*Through working, he succeeded*

13.33 **grâce à**

Grâce à ton aide, je pourrai l’acheter

*C’est grâce à toi que j’ai pu le faire

*Thanks to your help, I will be able to buy it*
**It’s thanks to you that I could do it**

NB: *grâce à* is always positive, so cannot be used to translate sentences like: ‘Thanks to you we lost the contract’. Here *à cause de* is required: *À cause de toi nous avons perdu le contrat.*

13.34 **haut: du haut de**

- sauter du haut de la falaise

*to jump from the cliff*

NB: ‘from’ tall objects like cliffs, towers, buildings is usually *du haut de*, rather than *de* alone.

13.35 **hors de**

- hors de danger
- hors de saison
- hors de lui
- hors d’haleine
- sauter hors de son lit
- une randonnée hors de la ville

*out of danger*
*out of season*
*beside himself with anger*
*out of breath*
*to jump out of one’s bed*
*a hike outside the town*
13.36 **jusqu'à**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>until tomorrow</td>
<td>jusqu'à demain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right to the end</td>
<td>jusqu'au bout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Paris to the Channel</td>
<td>depuis Paris jusqu'à la Manche</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: ‘not . . . until’ is *pas . . . avant*: *Je ne viendrai pas avant demain* ‘I won’t come until tomorrow’.

(For the conjunction *jusqu'à ce que* see Chapter 17.3.8.)

13.37 **lieu: au lieu de**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>instead of his brother</td>
<td>au lieu de son frère</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13.38 **long: le long de**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to travel along the river bank (as in Paris or London)</td>
<td>rouler le long du quai</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tout au long du boulevard il y avait des marchands forains*  
*All along the boulevard there were market traders*

13.39 **lors de**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at the time of my stay in France</td>
<td>lors de mon séjour en France</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13.40 **malgré**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in spite of his enthusiasm, his faults, the bad weather, his promise</td>
<td>malgré son enthousiasme, ses défauts, le mauvais temps, sa promesse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13.41 **par**

13.41.1 **par** = ‘through’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to look through the window</td>
<td>regarder par la fenêtre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go through the forest</td>
<td>passer par la forêt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to breathe through the mouth</td>
<td>aspirer l’air par la bouche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got it through a baker from Tours</td>
<td>Je l’ai eu par un boulanger de Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order something on line</td>
<td>commander qc par Internet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13.41.2 **par** = ‘by’, ‘per’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The village was cut off by the snow</td>
<td>Le village était coupé par la neige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By good fortune, he escaped</td>
<td>Par bonheur, il s’est évadé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He held his son by the hand</td>
<td>Il tenait son fils par la main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to catch sb by surprise</td>
<td>prendre qn par surprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to work in groups of four</td>
<td>travailler par groupes de quatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hour by hour</td>
<td>heure par heure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They came out one by one</td>
<td>Ils sortaient un par un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The room is 80 euros per person</td>
<td>La chambre coûte 80 € par personne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per night</td>
<td>par nuit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*L’Etranger*, par Albert Camus, est l’un des romans français les plus étudiés
‘The Outsider’, by Albert Camus, is one of the most widely studied French novels

NB: *par* is used after a pause, *de* otherwise:

un roman d’Albert Camus  
*a novel by Albert Camus*

When ‘by’ introduces an agent, *par* is usually used:

Il a été effrayé par l’orage  
*He was frightened by the storm*

Jean a été mordu par mon chien  
*Jean was bitten by my dog*

But when a passive can be understood as a state, rather than an event, *de* may also be used:

Quand il est arrivé au commissariat, il était accompagné de sa femme  
*When he arrived at the police station, his wife was with him*

(See also 13.15.5.)

**13.41.3 par = ‘on’**

*se rouler par terre*  
*to roll oneself on the ground*

*se jeter par terre*  
*to throw oneself on the ground*

*par une belle journée de printemps*  
*on a fine day in spring*

**13.41.4 par = ‘from’, ‘out of’**

*faire qc par crainte*  
*to do sth out of fear*

*par orgueil, par respect de qn*  
*from pride, from respect for sb*

*par amitié, par honte*  
*out offrom friendship, from shame*

*par jalousie, par pudeur*  
*from jealousy, from modesty*

*par ignorance*  
*out offrom ignorance*

**13.41.5 par = ‘in(to)’**

*par temps de pluie*  
*in wet weather*

*sortir par beau temps*  
*to go out in fair weather*

*par milliers*  
*in (their) thousands*

*par ordre alphabétique*  
*in alphabetical order*

*par endroits*  
*in places*

*par écrit*  
*in writing*

**13.42 parmi**

*parmi les spectateurs*  
*among the spectators*

*parmi la foule*  
*among the crowd*

Une rumeur courait parmi les gens de la ville  
*A rumour was spreading among the townspeople*

*parmi mes papiers*  
*among my papers*

(See also 13.14.7.)
13.43 **part: de la part de**

parler de la part des étudiants  
C’est de la part de qui?  

*to speak on behalf of the students*  
*Who’s calling? Who’s it from?*

13.44 **partir: à partir de**

à partir de demain  

*from tomorrow*

13.45 **passé**

Passé le pont, on s’est arrêté un instant  
Passé minuit il n’y a plus de taxis  

*Once passed the bridge, we stopped a minute*  
*After midnight there are no more taxis*

13.46 **pendant**

pendant la guerre  
Nous avons dansé pendant une éternité  
Je t’écrirai pendant la semaine  

*during the war*  
*We danced for ages*  
*I’ll write to you during the week*

13.47 **pour**

Pour ma part, je suis heureux  

*For my part, I’m happy*

Elle le faisait exprès pour attirer l’attention  

*She did it on purpose (in order) to attract attention*

donner un cadeau à qn pour son anniversaire  

*to give a present to sb for his/her birthday*

elle se prend pour une star  

*She considers herself to be a star*

s’en aller pour de bon  

*to go away for good*

passer pour intelligent  

*to be considered intelligent*

être bon pour qn, dur pour qn, gentil pour qn, (in)juste pour qn, sévère pour qn  

*to be good to (or for) sb, hard on sb, kind to sb, (un)just to sb, severe on sb*

**NB:** The verb *payer* ‘to pay for’ is not usually followed by *pour:*

payer la tournée  

*to pay for a round (of drinks)*

On ne voulait pas que je paie ma place  

*They didn’t want me to pay for my seat*

Unless money is involved, or a person is being paid for:

payer 600 euros pour un micro-ondes  

*to pay 600 euros for a microwave oven*

Je ne paie pas pour toi!  

*I’m not paying for you!*
NB: Expressions such as: ‘for two days’, ‘for three weeks’, ‘for several years’ are usually translated by the time expression alone (i.e. without pour) when they refer to events in the past:

Elle est restée deux jours
Il est resté trois semaines

She stayed for two days
He stayed for three weeks

When the time expression refers to a period in the future in relation to the time of speaking, pour is used:

Elle partira pour deux jours
Il voulait s’absenter pour trois semaines

She’ll be away for two days
He wanted to be away for three weeks

When the events that take place during the time period are stressed, pendant is the usual form:

Il a été malade pendant la nuit
Elle va travailler pendant deux jours

He was ill during the night
She is going to work for two days

13.48 près de
Il s’est assis près de moi
Je l’ai aperçu près du pont

He sat down next to me
I spied him near the bridge

13.49 quant à
Quant à moi, je suis heureux
Quant à son roman, il est loin de l’avoir fini
For my part, I’m happy
As for his novel, he is a long way from finishing it

13.50 sans
sans moi
sans sel
sans rien dire
sans me regarder

without me
without salt
without saying anything
without looking at me

13.51 sauf
Sauf ma mère, toute la famille était là
With the exception of my mother, all the family was there

13.52 selon
selon l’opinion générale
selon la loi

according to the common view
by law, under the law
13.53 **sous**

sous la table  
s’avoir sous un arbre  
nager sous l’eau  
sous l’ancien régime  
sous clef  
sous les verrous  
sous le règne de Louis XIV  
sous la chaleur, sous la pluie, sous le soleil

*under the table*  
to shelter under a tree  
to swim under the water  
to swim under the ‘ancien régime’  
under lock and key  
under lock and key  
in the reign of Louis XIV  
in the heat, in the rain, in the sun

sous Word, sous Excel  
*in Word, in Excel*

Sous prétexte de se renseigner pour les trains, elle a vite téléphoné à sa copine  
*On the pretext of finding out about trains, she quickly got on the phone to her friend*

promettre sous serment  
interdire qc sous peine d’amende  
vendre qc sous conditions  
J’ai un annuaire sous la main  
passer l’affaire sous silence  
manifeste sous les fenêtres de la mairie

*to promise on oath*  
to prohibit sth on pain of a fine  
to sell sth on condition  
*I have a phone directory to hand*  
to keep quiet about the matter  
to demonstrate in front of the town hall

13.54 **suite: par suite de**

par suite d’un accident  
*following an accident*

13.55 **suivant**

suivant son habitude  
*as was his custom*

13.56 **sur**

J’ai mis ma main sur son épaule  
Il me regardait, appuyé sur les coudes  
Elle était assise sur un vieux tronc d’arbre  
sur le seuil  
Elle attendait sur les marches de la mairie  
lire qc sur une affiche  
chercher sur Google, sur You Tube, sur l’Internet  
Je l’ai vu sur la place  
sur la route, sur le chemin  
sur le boulevard, sur la chaussée  
sur le trottoir  
Il a laissé la clef sur la porte  
Les garçons étaient assis sur trois rangées de fauteuils

*I put my hand on his shoulder*  
*He watched me, leaning on his elbows*  
*She was sitting on an old tree trunk*  
on the threshold, on the doorstep  
*She was waiting on the steps of the town hall*  
to read sth on a poster  
search on Google, on You Tube, on the internet  
*I saw him in the square*  
on the road, on the track  
on the boulevard, in the road  
on the pavement  
*He left the key in the door*  
The boys were sitting in three rows of seats
marcher sur les pas de quelqu’un
aller sur le terrain de football
sur la patinoire
revenir sur ses pas
un salon qui donne sur la rivière
Elle va sur ses vingt-six ans
deux sur trois
Sur dix, trois étaient partis
Sur mon salaire, il ne restait que 50 euros
Quatre chats sur cinq le préfèrent
Sur la fin, j’étais fatigué
to follow in somebody’s footsteps
to go onto the football pitch
onto the ice-rink
to retrace one’s steps
a sitting-room which overlooks the river
She is nearly 26
two out of three
Of ten, three had left
Of my salary, only 50 euros remained
Four out of five cats prefer it
Towards the end, I was tired

13.57 travers: à travers/au travers de/en travers de
Il me parla à travers la porte fermée
He talked to me through the closed door
L’arbre était tombé en travers de la route
The tree had fallen across the road
Ils y sont finalement arrivés au travers d’un champ labouré
They finally got there across a ploughed field

13.58 vers
se diriger vers la maison
vers le haut du col
vers 10 heures
vers la fin de mars
Il avait vers 26 ans
to head for the house
towards the top of the pass
around 10 o’clock
Towards the end of March
He was around 26 years old

13.59 French translations for common English prepositions
Figures refer to the sections where the French prepositions are dealt with.

Across: de l’autre côté de; en travers de; au-dessus de
across the room
de l’autre côté de la pièce
The barricade had been erected across the street
La barricade avait été érigée en travers de la rue
They will have to build a bridge across the motorway
Ils devront construire un pont au-dessus de l’autoroute

After: après; derrière
after the meal
after arriving
to ask after sb
to come after sb (e.g. in a race)
to clean up after sb
après le repas
après être arrivé
demander après qn
arriver derrière qn
nettoyer derrière qn
Among: dans; parmi; entre; d’entre; chez

to disappear among the firs disparaître dans les sapins (13.14.7)
to search among one’s papers chercher dans/parmi ses papiers (13.42)
among the spectators parmi la foule (13.42)
among the crowd entre amis (13.27)
several among you plusieurs d’entre vous (13.10)
among the English chez les Anglais (13.10)

Around (approximately): dans; vers; environ, autour de

He was around 26 years old il avait vers 26 ans, il avait 26 ans environ (13.58)
Also: Il avait dans les 26 ans (informal), il avait autour de 26 ans gagner dans les 1,000 euros (13.14.6)
to win around 1,000 euros

As: en; en tant que; comme

to speak as an expert parler en spécialiste
to dress as a sailor s’habiller en marin
to receive sth as a present recevoir qc en cadeau
to act as the representative of agir en tant que représentant de
to act as an intermediary servir comme intermédiaire

At: à; en; par; chez

to slow down at every bend ralentir à chaque virage (13.2.1)
to be at school être à l’école
at the cinema, at church au cinéma, à l’église
at 3 o’clock à 3 heures
at the beginning, at the end au début, à la fin
one thing at a time une chose à la fois
at the same time en même temps (13.26.8)
at odd moments par instant(s)
at his house, at my house chez lui, chez moi (13.10)
at the weekend en fin de semaine (13.26.8)
at the top of the page en haut de page
at sea en mer
right at the summit en plein sommet
at war en guerre
at stake en jeu
at speed en vitesse
to be good at languages être bon en langues

By: de; par; à; avant; selon

to know sb by sight connaître qn de vue (13.15.5)
to be known by everyone être connu de tous
a film by François Truffaut un film de François Truffaut
to be accompanied by one’s wife être accompagné de sa femme

to be frightened by the storm être effrayé par l’orage

to be bitten by a dog être mordu par un chien

to recognize sb by his/her voice reconnaître qn à sa voix (13.2.5)
to move forward step by step s’avancer pas à pas
§13.59 French translations for common English prepositions

- to leave one by one: partir un à un (or un par un)
- to work by the light of a candle: travailler à la lumière d’une bougie
- to hold sb by the hand: tenir qn par la main
- to work in groups: travailler par groupes
- hour by hour: heure par heure
- by night: par nuit
- cut off by the snow: coupé par la neige
- by the weekend: avant le weekend
- by the rules: selon les règles
- by law: selon la loi

**by taxi, by bicycle, by train, by plane, by car, by ambulance, by boat, by bus:**

- en taxi (or dans un taxi), en vélo (or à vélo)
- en train (or dans le train), en avion (or par avion)
- en voiture (or avec la voiture), en ambulance (or dans une ambulance)
- en bateau (or par bateau), en bus (or dans le bus)

**During:** dans, pendant, durant, au cours de

- I’ll do it during the week: Je le ferai dans (or pendant or au cours de) la semaine

**From:** de; depuis; du haut de; à; dans; en; d’après; sur

- to watch sb from above: regarder qn d’en haut
- to cite sth from memory: citer qc de mémoire
- from afar: de loin
- from close by: de près
- to go from London to Paris: aller de Londres à Paris

- He complained all the way from London to Paris: Il s’est plaint depuis Londres jusqu’à Paris

- to jump from the cliff: sauter du haut de la falaise
- to borrow sth from sb: emprunter qc à qn
- to drink from the bottle: boire à la bouteille

- to take a wallet from the drawer: prendre un portefeuille dans le tiroir
- to cut photos from the newspaper: découper des photos dans le journal

- a week from today: aujourd’hui en huit
- a fortnight from Monday: lundi en quinze

- to do sth from fear, from shame, from ignorance: faire qc par (or de) crainte, par (or de) honte, par (or d’)ignorance

- from what I’m told: d’après ce qu’on me dit
- from the look on his face: d’après son expression
- d’après la tête qu’il faisait

- They selected five from ten: Ils en ont sélectionné cinq sur dix
In: *de; à; en; dans; par; sur; sous; no preposition used in French*

dressed in black vêtu, or habillé de noir (13.15.3)
to go out in evening dress sortir en tenue de soirée (13.26.1)
in a swimming costume en maillot de bain
in shirt sleeves en bras de chemise

the first, last, only time in my life la première, dernière, seule fois de ma vie (13.15.3)

the fastest train in Europe le train le plus rapide d’Europe
two Sundays in a row trois dimanches de suite
paralysed in the arms, legs paralysé des bras, des jambes
large d’épaules, court de jambes

to live in Paris vivre à Paris (13.2.3)
in the shade à l’ombre
in the back, in one’s hand, in paradise à l’arrière, à la main, au paradis
in the garden, in the cinema au jardin, au cinéma
in the restaurant, in school au restaurant, à l’école
in the village, in the park au village, au parc

BUT

in town en ville (13.26.1)
in hell en enfer

in Japan, in Denmark, in the United States, in Malta, in Jersey au Japon, au Danemark, aux Etats-Unis, à Malte, à Jersey (13.2.3)
in France, in Spain en France, en Espagne (13.26.1)
in the evening, in the morning au soir, au matin (13.2.3)
in the 21st century au 21e siècle
in the interval à l’entracte

to glimpse sth in the valley apercevoir qc dans la vallée (13.14.1)
to meet sb in the rue de Rivoli, on the boulevard Montparnasse rencontrer qn rue de Rivoli, boulevard Montparnasse

to meet sb in Yorkshire, to meet sb in Nevada, in the Calvados region rencontrer qn dans le Yorkshire, dans le Calvados

I’ll come back after an hour Je reviendrai dans une heure (13.14.4)
I’m expecting him in two days Je l’attends dans deux jours

I’ll have read it within an hour Je l’aurai lu en une heure (13.26.3)
He can do it in (under) two weeks Il peut le faire en quinze jours

in January, in February en janvier, en février
in the autumn, in the summer, in the winter en automne, en été, en hiver (13.26.1)
in the spring au printemps

in the 50s dans les années 50
### §13.59 French translations for common English prepositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Preposition</th>
<th>French Translation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in German, in Spanish</td>
<td>en allemand, en espagnol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in wet weather</td>
<td>par temps de pluie</td>
<td>(13.41.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in their thousands</td>
<td>par milliers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in alphabetical order</td>
<td>par ordre alphabétique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in places</td>
<td>par endroits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to see sb in the square</td>
<td>voir qn sur la place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be sitting in three rows of seats</td>
<td>être assis sur trois rangées de fauteuils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the reign of Louis XIV</td>
<td>sous le règne de Louis XIV</td>
<td>(13.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Word, in Excel</td>
<td>sous Word, sous Excel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Into: dans; en; à

- to go into the yard: aller dans la cour
- to turn the house into a hotel: transformer la maison en hotel
- to burst into tears: éclater en larmes (13.26.11)
- to go into the office: aller au bureau
- to get into bed: se mettre au lit

#### Of: de; à; sur; d’entre

- a cup of tea: une tasse de thé (13.15.1)
- half of the spectators: la moitié des spectateurs (13.2.8)
- It’s kind of you, nice of you: C’est gentil à vous, aimable à vous
- one of my uncles: un oncle à moi (un de mes oncles)
- Of ten, three had left: Sur dix, trois étaient partis (13.56)
- most of them: la plupart d’entre eux (13.27)
- each of them: chacun d’entre eux

#### On: de; à; dans; en; par; sur; sous; no preposition

- I live just on potatoes: Je ne me nourris que de pommes de terre (13.15.9)
- to be on duty or on call: être de permanence
- to look on the bright side: voir les choses du bon côté (13.2.4)
- on several occasions: à plusieurs reprises
- on page 2: à la page 2
- on the television/on the radio: à la télévision/à la radio
- to knock on the door: frapper à la porte
- to be on the ground: être à terre
- on one’s return: au retour
- on a bicycle, on foot, on horseback: à bicyclette, à pied, à cheval
- on military service: au service militaire
- to meet sb on the stairs: rencontrer qn dans l’escalier (13.14.8)
- to do odd jobs on farms: bricoler dans des fermes
- on fire: en feu (13.26.6)
- on holiday: en vacances
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>(Section)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on leave</td>
<td>en congé</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on sale</td>
<td>en vente</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the way</td>
<td>en route</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a trip</td>
<td>en voyage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on average</td>
<td>en moyenne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to throw things on the ground</td>
<td>jeter des choses par terre</td>
<td>(13.41.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a fine spring day</td>
<td>par une belle journée de printemps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order something on line</td>
<td>commander qc par Internet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to put one’s hand on his shoulder</td>
<td>mettre la main sur son épaule</td>
<td>(13.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leaning on one’s elbows</td>
<td>appuyé sur les coudes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to sit on a chair, a bench, a seat</td>
<td>s’asseoir sur une chaise, un banc, un siège</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the road, on the pavement</td>
<td>sur la route, sur le trottoir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to promise on oath</td>
<td>promettre sous serment</td>
<td>(13.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to sell sth on condition</td>
<td>vendre qc sous conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Mondays</td>
<td>le lundi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’re on me!</td>
<td>C’est ma tournée!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Out of:** de; en dehors de; hors de; sur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>(Section)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to pull a rabbit out of a hat</td>
<td>sortir un lapin d’un chapeau</td>
<td>(13.15.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get out of here!</td>
<td>Sortez d’ici!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the town</td>
<td>en dehors de la ville</td>
<td>(13.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the question</td>
<td>hors de question</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five out of ten</td>
<td>cinq sur dix</td>
<td>(13.56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Than:** de; que

- She earns more than 3,000 euros a month
  - Elle gagne plus de 3 000 euros par mois

- She earns more than me/than I do
  - Elle gagne plus que moi

- He works less than 2 hours a day
  - Il travaille moins de 2 heures par jour

**Through:** par; à travers; au travers de; par moyen de

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>(Section)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to look through the window</td>
<td>regarder par la fenêtre</td>
<td>(13.41.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go through the forest</td>
<td>passer par la forêt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to breathe through the mouth</td>
<td>aspirer l’air par la bouche</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go through fields</td>
<td>passer à travers champs</td>
<td>(13.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go through difficulties</td>
<td>passer au travers des problèmes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through an advert</td>
<td>par moyen d’une annonce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**To:** à; en; dans; sous; jusqu’à; pour; avec

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>(Section)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to the north, to the south</td>
<td>au nord, au sud</td>
<td>(13.2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go to school, to the cinema, to the café</td>
<td>aller à l’école, au cinéma, au café</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go up to one’s room</td>
<td>monter à sa chambre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the right, to the left</td>
<td>à droite, à gauche</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Japan, to Denmark</td>
<td>au Japon, au Danemark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Malta, to Jersey</td>
<td>à Malte, à Jersey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Paris, to London</td>
<td>à Paris, à Londres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§13.59 French translations for common English prepositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to Sicily, to New Zealand</td>
<td>en Sicile, en Nouvelle-Zélande</td>
<td>13.26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to France, to Spain</td>
<td>en France, en Espagne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Europe, to Africa</td>
<td>en Europe, en Afrique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Normandy, to Brittany</td>
<td>en Normandie, en Bretagne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Essex, to Massachusetts</td>
<td>dans l’Essex, dans le Massachusetts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to have a phone directory to hand</td>
<td>avoir un annuaire sous la main</td>
<td>13.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go up to 2,000 euros</td>
<td>aller jusqu’à 2 000 euros</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a cheque to the value of . . .</td>
<td>un chèque de la valeur de . . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to keep something to oneself</td>
<td>garder quelque chose pour soi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be kind to sb</td>
<td>être gentil avec qn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under: sous; moins de; inférieur à; selon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under the table, under the water</td>
<td>sous la table, sous l’eau</td>
<td>13.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under twenty euros</td>
<td>moins de vingt euros</td>
<td>13.15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a price under a thousand euros</td>
<td>un prix inférieur à mille euros</td>
<td>13.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under the law</td>
<td>selon la loi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With: de; à; avec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a street lined with plane trees</td>
<td>une rue bordée de platanes</td>
<td>13.15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to fill with water</td>
<td>remplir d’eau (or avec de l’eau)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to cover with posters</td>
<td>courir d’affiches (or avec des affiches)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go red with shame</td>
<td>rougir de honte</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to tremble with cold</td>
<td>trembler de froid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a man with a grey beard</td>
<td>un homme à la barbe grise</td>
<td>13.2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to water the garden with a watering can</td>
<td>arroser le jardin avec un arrosoir</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to speak with sb</td>
<td>parler avec qn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to arrive with sb</td>
<td>arriver avec qn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14 Question formation

14.1 Introduction

There are two main types of question: yes/no questions, to which it is possible to answer simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’:

Aimez-vous la musique pop? Oui
Est-ce que tu as fait tes devoirs? Non

Do you like pop music? Yes
Have you done your homework? No

and information questions, to which it is impossible to answer simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’, but which require a piece of information in response:

Quand partira Jean? Demain
Qui a-t-il rencontré? Jeanette

When will Jean leave? Tomorrow
Who did he meet? Jeanette

Information questions involve the use of a question word or phrase like qui, que, quand, comment, où, pourquoi, pour quelle raison, avec quel ami, de quoi, and so on.

14.2 Yes/no questions

There are three ways in which yes/no questions can be asked in French. Each is characteristic of a particular style of French, ranging from the informal to the formal.

14.2.1 Yes/no questions formed with rising intonation

The simplest way to form a yes/no question in French is to add rising intonation to the final syllables of a declarative sentence:

Tu as quelque chose à dire?
Elle va rester ici?
Pierre est venu?
Je peux mettre mes photos au mur?

Do you have anything to say?
Is she going to stay here?
Has Pierre come?
Can I put my photos on the wall?

This kind of yes/no question is very common in informal spoken French, but less common in more formal spoken French and not normally used in written French (unless direct speech is being recorded, or an informal style is being imitated).

14.2.2 Yes/no questions formed with est-ce que

Yes/no questions may also be formed by placing the question formula est-ce que at the beginning of a declarative sentence:

Est-ce que tu as quelque chose à dire?
Est-ce qu’elle va rester ici?
Est-ce que Pierre est venu?
Est-ce que je peux mettre mes photos au mur?

Do you have anything to say?
Is she going to stay here?
Has Pierre come?
Can I put my photos on the wall?

Yes/no questions formed with est-ce que can be used in all styles of French, informal and formal, spoken and written.
14.2.3 Yes/no questions formed by inverting the verb and subject

Yes/no questions may be formed by inverting the subject and the verb which agrees with it. Such inversion takes two forms, depending on whether the subject is an unstressed pronoun or not.

Subject is an unstressed pronoun

If the subject is an unstressed pronoun, it changes places with the verb which agrees with it:

- **Es-tu content?** **Are you happy?**
- **Est-ce le facteur?** **Is it the postman?**
- **Avez-vous bien compris?** **Have you really understood?**
- **Peut-on se changer dans les vestiaires?** **Can you change in the changing rooms?**
- **Avaient-ils reçu de ses nouvelles?** **Have they had news of him?**
- **Avait-il pu réunir les actionnaires**? **Had he been able to assemble the shareholders?**

Such subject-verb inversion is possible with all verbs in French, whereas in English it is only possible with ‘auxiliary’ verbs like ‘have’, ‘be’, ‘can’, ‘will’, ‘do’, etc.:

- **Aime-t-il le Roquefort?** **Does he like Roquefort?**
- **Descend-elle en ville?** **Is she going down into town?**
- **Fumez-vous depuis longtemps?** **Have you smoked for long?**
- **Prennent-ils le train?** **Are they taking the train?**

Subject is not an unstressed pronoun

If the subject is anything other than an unstressed pronoun, i.e. a proper noun, noun phrase or stressed pronoun, then the subject is placed first, followed by the verb and an unstressed subject pronoun agreeing with the subject is inserted to the right of the verb:

- **Pierre est-il content?** **Is Pierre happy?**
- **Les joueurs peuvent-ils se changer dans les vestiaires?** **Can the players change in the changing rooms?**
- **Cela est-il vrai?** **Is that true?**
- **Personne ne veut-il m’accompagner?** **Doesn’t anyone want to come with me?**
- **Les élèves avaient-ils reçu les résultats?** **Had the pupils received the results?**
- **Julie viendra-t-elle demain?** **Will Julie come tomorrow?**

NB: It is impossible to invert a subject which is not an unstressed pronoun with an agreeing verb:

- NOT *Viendra Julie demain?*
- NOT *Est cela vrai?*
- NOT *Peuvent les joueurs se changer dans les vestiaires?*
- NOT *Est Pierre content?*

Yes/no questions formed with inversion are typically used in more formal spoken and in written French.
14.2.4 Insertion of -t- between inverted verb and subject

When the inversion of subject and verb results in two vowels becoming adjacent, the consonant -t- is inserted between them:

A-t-il 17 ans?  
Aurait-elle faim?  

Is he 17?  
Will she be hungry?

This rule also applies where the verb ends in -e, even though in the spoken language the -e is not pronounced:

Epouse-t-il Marie?  
Dine-t-elle au palais ce soir?  

Is he marrying Marie?  
Is she dining at the palace this evening?

Where a verb already ends in a -t or a -d in the written language, it is pronounced as ‘t’ in questions:

Est-elle contente?  
Boivent-ils du cidre?  
Vos amis sont-ils partis?  
David vend-il sa voiture?  
Le voyage te rend-il malade?

Is she happy?  
Are they drinking cider?  
Have your friends left?  
Is David selling his car?  
Is the journey making you feel ill?

14.2.5 Inversion of the verb and je in yes/no questions

Inversion of the verb with first person je to form a yes/no question is characteristic of only the most formal French. Many speakers and writers these days would avoid it and use est-ce que. Furthermore, there are idiosyncratic restrictions on its use.

In the present tense, inversion between je and some very common verbs of one syllable is frequent:

Ai-je le droit? (avoir)  
Dois-je vous téléphoner? (devoir)  
Puis-je vous déranger? (pouvoir)  
Suis-je heureux? (être)  
Vais-je me laisser tromper? (aller)  
Ne dis-je pas la vérité? (dire)

Am I allowed to?  
Should I phone you?  
May I disturb you?  
Am I happy?  
Am I going to let myself be deceived?  
Am I not telling the truth?

but with most other verbs such inversion is impossible:

NOT *Mens-je?  
NOT *Prends-je le bus?

Am I lying?  
Am I taking the bus?

In future and conditional tenses, however, inversion with these same verbs is more acceptable (but again only in the most formal styles):

Mentirais-je?  
Prendrai-je le bus?

Would I lie?  
Shall I take the bus?

Some grammars suggest that where a verb ends in -e and it is inverted with je, the -e becomes -é:

Demandé-je?

Am I asking?

This, however, is extremely rare in modern French.
14.2.6 *n’est-ce pas?*

*n’est-ce pas?* is the invariable French equivalent of English ‘tag’ question forms like ‘doesn’t he?’, ‘haven’t you?’, ‘mustn’t I?’, etc.:

Il habite à Paris, *n’est-ce pas?*  
He lives in Paris, doesn’t he?

Vous avez vendu le terrain, *n’est-ce pas?*  
You’ve sold the land, haven’t you?

Je dois m’adresser au sous-directeur, *n’est-ce pas?*  
I must speak to the assistant director, mustn’t I?

14.2.7 Use of *jamais, rien, aucun, personne* in yes/no questions

In questions, *jamais, rien, aucun* and *personne* may mean ‘ever’, ‘anything’, ‘any’ and ‘anyone’:

Est-ce que vous avez *jamais* visité le Louvre?  
Have you ever been to the Louvre?

A-t-il rien fait de meilleur?  
Has he done anything better?

A-t-elle eu *aucune* réponse?  
Has she received any reply?

Est-ce que vous avez vu *personne*?  
Have you seen anyone?

NB: *qui que ce soit* ‘anyone’ is used more than *personne*:

Est-ce qu’il confie à *quien que ce soit* ce qu’il fait?  
Does he tell anyone what he is doing?

14.2.8 *oui, si, non* and *merci* as responses to yes/no questions

*non* is the normal way of saying ‘no’ to yes/no questions, both affirmative and negative:

Tu viens? - Non

Tu ne viens pas? - Non

*oui* is used to say ‘yes’ to affirmative yes/no questions, but *si* is used to say ‘yes’ to negative questions:

Tu viens? - Oui

Tu ne viens pas? - Si

In each case the force of the response may be increased by adding *mais, or bien sûr que*:

Tu viens? - Mais oui  
- Mais non  
- Bien sûr que oui  
- Bien sûr que non

Tu ne viens pas? - Mais si  
- Mais non  
- Bien sûr que si  
- Bien sûr que non

*merci* ‘thank you’ used alone as a response to a yes/no question is normally treated as a response of ‘No, thank you’:

Voulez-vous du fromage? - Merci

Would you like some cheese? - No, thank you

To reply ‘Yes, please’ one can say *(Oui), je veux bien, S’il vous (te) plaît or Volontiers*:

Voulez-vous du fromage? - Je veux bien

- S’il vous plaît

- Volontiers

Would you like some cheese? - Yes, please
14.3 Information questions

There are four ways of asking information questions in French. Each is appropriate to a particular level of formality of style.

14.3.1 Information questions formed with rising intonation

The simplest way to form an information question is to replace an item in a declarative sentence by a question word or phrase, and add rising intonation to the final syllables of the sentence. (For question words and phrases see 14.6.) For example, taking a declarative sentence such as:

L'étudiant téléphonera à son député demain
The student will telephone his MP tomorrow

information questions can be formed related to demain, à son député or l’étudiant simply by replacing the relevant words with a question word:

L’étudiant téléphonera à son député quand?
When will the student telephone his MP?

L’étudiant téléphonera à qui demain?
Who will the student telephone tomorrow?

Qui téléphonera à son député demain?
Who will telephone his MP tomorrow?

This kind of information question is very common in informal spoken French. The last example above involving qui? (where the subject is questioned) is also normal in formal styles (see 14.3.6). But the other types are less common in formal spoken and in written styles (unless direct speech is being reported, or an informal style is being imitated).

The full range of question words and phrases (see 14.6) may be used in this way, except que? ‘what’. Instead, the stressed form of que? – quoi? – is used:

Vous avez vu quoi?
What did you see?

Elle a dit quoi?
What did she say?

Marcel a écrit à qui?
Who did Marcel write to?

Elle parle de quoi?
What is she talking about?

Tu recommanderais quel film?
Which film would you recommend?

Ils ont invité combien de gens?
How many people did they invite?

Vous l’avez vu où?
Where did you see it?

Bernard reviendra quand?
When will Bernard come back?

14.3.2 Information questions formed by ‘fronting’ a question word or phrase

Another common way of forming information questions in very informal spoken styles of French involves replacing an item in a declarative sentence by a question word or phrase, and then moving the question word or phrase to the front of the sentence, without making any other changes:

Qui vous avez vu?
Who did you see?

Qui c’est, celui là?
Who’s he?

A qui Marcel a écrit?
Who did Marcel write to?
§14.3 Information questions

Quel film tu recommanderais? Which film would you recommend?
Combien de gens ils ont invités? How many people did they invite?
De quoi tu voulais me parler? What did you want to speak to me about?
Où vous l’avez vu? Where did you see it?
Pourquoi la police l’a arrêté? Why did the police arrest him?

Nearly all question words can be used in this way except direct object que?, quoi? ‘what?’ Instead qu’est-ce que? is used (see 14.3.3):

Qu’est-ce qu’elle a dit? What did she say?
Qu’est-ce que tu faisais dans ma chambre? What were you doing in my room?

14.3.3 Information questions formed with est-ce que?

Information questions may be formed by ‘fronting’ a question word or phrase, as described in 14.3.2, and in addition inserting est-ce que? between the question word or phrase and the rest of the sentence. Questions of this type may be used in all styles of French, formal and informal. The full range of question words and phrases (see 14.6) may be used in this construction except quoi? ‘what?’ – the unstressed variant que? is required instead:

Qui est-ce que vous avez vu? Who did you see?
Qui est-ce qu’elle a dit? What did she say?
Quel film est-ce que tu recommanderais? Which film would you recommend?
A qui est-ce que Marcel a écrit? To whom did Marcel write?
Combien de gens est-ce qu’ils ont invités? How many people did they invite?
Où est-ce que vous l’avez vu? Where did you see it?
Quand est-ce que Bernard reviendra? When will Bernard come back?
Pourquoi est-ce que la police l’a arrêté? Why did the police arrest him?

14.3.4 qui est-ce qui?, qui est-ce que?, qu’est-ce qui?, and qu’est-ce que?

qui est-ce qui? is used to form questions dealing with animate subjects:

Qui est-ce qui a pris mon crayon? Who took my pencil?
Qui est-ce qui va avoir le prix? Who will get the prize?

qu’est-ce qui? is used to form questions dealing with non-animate subjects:

Qu’est ce qui a abîmé mon pneu? What punctured my tyre?
Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé? What happened?
Qu’est-ce qui a effrayé le facteur? What frightened the postman?
Qu’est-ce qui lui est arrivé, à Paul? What happened to Paul?

qui est-ce que? is used to form questions dealing with animate direct objects:

Qui est-ce que vous avez vu? Who did you see?
Qui est-ce qu’ils ont invité à la fête? Who did they invite to the party?

qu’est-ce que? is used to form questions dealing with non-animate direct objects:

Qu’est-ce que vous avez dit? What did you say?
Qu’est-ce que Marie va acheter? What is Marie going to buy?
Qu’est-ce qu’elle a pris dans la grange? What did she take from the barn?
Qu’est-ce que c’était, ce bruit, dehors? What was that noise, outside?
Compare the following uses of *qu’est-ce?, qu’est-ce que? and qu’est-ce que c’est?:

- Qu’est-ce? (very formal) What is it?
- Qu’est-ce que c’est? What is it?
- Qu’est-ce que c’est que ça? What on earth is that?
- Qu’est-ce qu’une ‘jonque’? What’s a ‘jonque’?
- Qu’est-ce que c’est qu’une ‘jonque’? What on earth is a ‘jonque’?
- Qu’est-ce que ça veut dire ‘jonque’? What does ‘jonque’ mean?

14.3.5 Information questions formed by the inversion of verb and subject

Information questions may be formed by ‘fronting’ a question word or phrase (as described in 14.3.2), and in addition inverting the subject and the verb which agrees with the subject. This kind of question is usually found in formal spoken and in written French. It takes two forms depending on whether the subject is an unstressed pronoun or not.

Subject is an unstressed pronoun

If the subject is an unstressed pronoun, it changes places with the verb which agrees with it:

- Qui avez-vous vu? Who did you see?
- Qui est-ce? Who is it?
- A qui a-t-elle écrit? To whom did she write?
- Quel film recommanderais-tu? Which film would you recommend?
- Combien de personnes ont-ils invitées? How many people have they invited?
- Où l’avez-vous vu? Where did you see it?
- Quand reviendra-t-il? When will he come back?
- Pourquoi l’ont-ils arrêté? Why have they arrested him?

(For inversion with *je* see 14.2.5.)

Subject is not an unstressed pronoun

If the subject is not an unstressed pronoun, i.e. if it is a proper noun, noun phrase or stressed pronoun, then the subject is placed first after the question word, followed by the verb and an unstressed subject pronoun agreeing with the subject is inserted to the right of the verb:

- Qui Robert a-t-il rencontré? Who did Robert meet?
- A qui Jean donnera-t-il l’argent? To whom will Jean give the money?
- Quelle robe Madame préfère-t-elle? Which dress does madam prefer?
- Combien de romans Camus a-t-il écrits? How many novels did Camus write?
- Où Marie va-t-elle faire ses courses? Where is Marie going to do her shopping?
- Quand le train arrivera-t-il à Limoges? When will the train arrive at Limoges?

Pourquoi les examens ont-ils toujours lieu en juin? Why do the exams always take place in June?

(For insertion of *-t-* see 14.2.4.)
14.3.6 Exceptional behaviour of subject qui? and subject and object que? in information questions

When the subject is animate and questioned by qui? ‘who’, there is no inversion with the verb:

Qui parle?                     Who is speaking?
Qui a tourné ce film?          Who made this film?
NOT *Qui parle-t-il?
NOT *Qui a-t-il tourné ce film?

que? ‘what’ can never be used directly as non-animate subject ‘what’, and nor can its stressed form quoi?. Instead, qu’est-ce qui? must be used:

Qu’est-ce qui brille dans le ciel?     What’s shining in the sky?
Qu’est-ce qui a grignoté les gâteaux dans le placard?    What has eaten the cakes in the cupboard?
Qu’est-ce qui plait à Pierre?         What does Pierre like?
Qu’est-ce qui a été donné à Marie?    What was given to Marie?

and

NOT *Que brille dans le ciel?
NOT *Qu’a grignoté les gâteaux?
NOT *Quoi plait à Pierre?
NOT *Quoi a été donné à Marie?

When que? ‘what’ is a direct object, it may be used with verb and subject inversion, providing that the subject is a pronoun:

Que dit-il?                     What does he say?
Que pense-t-elle?               What does she think?
Qu’ont-ils décidé?              What have they decided?

But it may not be used with inversion when the subject is a proper noun, noun phrase or stressed pronoun:

NOT *Que le docteur dit-il?      What does the doctor say?
NOT *Que Marie pense-t-elle?     What does Marie think?
NOT *Que le conseil municipal a-t-il décidé?           What has the council decided?

Instead, either qu’est-ce que? must be used:

Qu’est-ce que le docteur dit?       What does the doctor say?
Qu’est-ce que Marie pense?         What does Marie think?
Qu’est-ce que le conseil municipal a décidé?   What has the council decided?

Or a different kind of inversion must be used involving the subject and the whole verb group, but without the insertion of an unstressed pronoun:

Que dit le docteur?               What does the doctor say?
Que pense Marie?                  What does Marie think?
Qu’a décidé le conseil municipal? What has the council decided?
Que va faire Marie?               What is Marie going to do?
Qu’aurait dû déclarer le ministre? What should the minister have declared?

This kind of inversion is known by linguists as ‘stylistic inversion’.
14.3.7 ‘Stylistic inversion’ in information questions

In formal spoken and in written French, as an alternative to subject-verb inversion of the kind: *Où Christine est-elle allée?* ‘Where did Christine go?’, it is also possible (with many question words and phrases) to invert the subject with the whole verb group, but without insertion of an unstressed pronoun:

**Où est allée Christine?**

Notice that *Christine* and *est allée* have inverted, but without insertion of an agreeing unstressed pronoun. Stylistic inversion of this kind is possible with:

**Object que?**
- Qu’avait dit le docteur? What had the doctor said?
- Qu’a décidé le conseil municipal? What has the council decided?

**Prepositional object qui (à qui?, de qui?, avec qui?, etc.)**
- À qui s’est adressé Jacques? To whom did Jacques go and speak?
- De qui aura parlé le professeur? Who will the professor have spoken about?

**Prepositional object quoi (à quoi?, de quoi?, avec quoi?, etc.)**
- À quoi aurait dû penser Marie? What ought Marie to have thought about?
- De quoi dépend la décision? What does the decision depend on?

**Object and prepositional object quel?, quand?, combien?**

**quel**
- Quel plat a commandé Pierre? Which dish did Pierre order?
- À quelle heure partira Thomas? At what time will Thomas leave?
- Par quelle porte est sortie l’acteur? Which door did the actor come out of?

**quand**
- Quand est entré François? When did François come in?
- Depuis quand travaille Pierre? How long has Pierre been working?

**combien**
- Combien de kilos a perdu Philippe? How many kilos has Philippe lost?
- Combien de cidre produit ce verger? How much cider does this orchard produce?

Stylistic inversion is not possible with *pourquoi*:

- NOT *Pourquoi travaille Pierre? Why does Pierre work?
- NOT *Pourquoi est partie Marie? Why did Marie leave?

Stylistic inversion is also quite restricted by the type of verb with which it can be used. It occurs fairly freely with intransitive verbs which do not have complements:

- Depuis quand travaille Pierre? How long has Pierre been working?

And when the questioned phrase is itself a direct object:

- Quel vin recommande le patron? Which wine does the patron recommend?

But it is not acceptable when an intransitive verb has an adverbial complement:

- NOT *Depuis quand travaille Pierre dans la cuisine? How long has Pierre been working in the kitchen?
or with transitive verbs when the direct object is present:

NOT *Depuis quand connaît Pierre Marie?  How long has Pierre known Marie?
NOT *Où va manger Pierre des escargots?  Where is Pierre going to eat snails?
NOT *A qui a donné Paul ce livre?  To whom did Paul give this book?

### 14.4 Order of object pronouns in questions involving inversion

The order of unstressed object pronouns is unaffected by the inversion of the subject and verb in questions:

- **Elle en a parlé à Charley**  *She spoke of it to Charley*  
  **En a-t-elle parlé à Charley?**  *Did she speak of it to Charley?*

- **Il le lui avait prêté**  *He lent it to her*  
  **Le lui avait-il prêté?**  *Did he lend it to her?*

- **Jean te le dira**  *Jean will tell you so*  
  **Jean te le dira-t-il?**  *Will Jean tell you so?*

- **Ils me l’ont donné**  *They gave it to me*  
  **Pourquoi me l’ont-ils donné?**  *Why did they give it to me?*

### 14.5 Order of negative particles in questions involving inversion

The position of negative particles is unaffected by the inversion of the subject and verb in questions:

- **Tu n’as jamais fait cela**  *You have never done that*  
  **N’as-tu jamais fait cela?**  *Have you never done that?*

- **Vous n’avez pas vu cet homme**  *You haven’t seen this man*  
  **Qui n’avez-vous pas vu?**  *Who haven’t you seen?*

- **Ils ne leur écrivent plus**  *They don’t write to them any more*  
  **Pourquoi ne leur écrivent-ils plus?**  *Why don’t they write to them any more?*

### 14.6 Use of question words and phrases: qui?, que?, quoi?, quel?, de qui?, avec combien de? etc.

#### 14.6.1 qui?

*qui?* typically translates English ‘who?’, ‘whom?’ whether subject, direct object or object of a preposition:

- **Subject**
  - **Qui a pris le tire-bouchon?**  *Who took the corkscrew?*
- **Direct object**
  - **Qui Robert invite-t-il à dîner?**  *Who is Robert inviting to dinner?*
Object of a preposition

A qui la journaliste a-t-elle posé la question? Who did the reporter put the question to?
De qui parlez-vous? Who are you talking about?
Contre qui avait-il joué? Who had he played against?
Sur qui peut-on compter? Who can one count on?

14.6.2 que?, quoi?

*que?, quoi? typically translate English ‘what?’. Que? is used to question direct objects which are moved to the front of the sentence:

Que dit-il? What does he say?
Qu’est-il arrivé? What happened?
Que sont-ils devenus? What’s become of them?
Que boiront les invités? What will the guests drink?

que? cannot be used to question subjects, rather qu’est-ce qui? is used (see 14.3.6):

Qu’est-ce qui lui est arrivé? NOT *Que lui est arrivé?
What happened to him?

Qu’est-ce qui a taché le mur? NOT *Qu’a taché le mur?
What made that stain on the wall?

quoi? is used to question direct objects which are not moved to the front of the sentence. It is also used to form questions related to the objects of prepositions; in this use it can be moved to the front of the sentence:

Direct object

Elles cherchent quoi? What are they looking for?
Ça ouvre quoi, ça? What does that thing open?
Tu seras quoi dans un an? What will you be a year from now?

Object of a preposition

A quoi pensent-elles? What are they thinking about?
Avec quoi a-t-il coupé le pain? What did he cut the bread with?
On peut miser sur quoi? What can one bank on?
Contre quoi est-ce que les gens manifestent? What are people demonstrating against?

De quoi elle a parlé si longtemps? What did she speak about for such a long time?

que? and quoi? can both be used with infinitives to form questions. Que? is used at the front of main clauses:

Que faire? What is to be done?
Que faire de ces valises? What shall we do with these suitcases?
Que dire? What can I say?
§14.6 Use of question words and phrases

quoi? is used in subordinate clauses, and in main clauses where the question word is not fronted:

Elle a demandé quoi faire de ses valises
She asked what she should do with her suitcases

Je rentre tout de suite - Faire quoi?
I’m going home immediately - To do what?

NB: Quoi de neuf? ‘What’s new?’

14.6.3 quel?, quelle?, quels?, quelles?

quel?, quelle?, etc are used to form questions based on nouns and noun phrases: quel livre?, quelle page?, quels manuscrits?, quelles jolies fleurs? Notice that quel? agrees in gender and number with the noun. Question phrases involving quel? can be subjects, direct objects or objects of prepositions:

Subject

Quelle écrivaine n’a pas rêvé d’être célèbre?
What writer hasn’t dreamt of being famous?

Quel bruit a effrayé les oiseaux?
What noise frightened the birds?

NB: When a quel phrase is a subject it is not possible to invert subject and verb or use est-ce que?:

NOT *Quelle écrivaine n’a-t-elle pas rêvé d’être célèbre?
NOT *Quelle écrivaine est-ce qu’elle n’a pas rêvé d’être célèbre?

Object

Quel film tu recommanderais?
Which film would you recommend?

Quel film est-ce que tu recommanderais?
Which film would you recommend?

Quel film recommanderais-tu?
Which film would you recommend?

Quelles fleurs Josette a-t-elle cueillies?
Which flowers did Josette pick?

Object of a preposition

A quelle heure part Pierre?
What time does Pierre leave?

De quelle ville est-ce que vous parlez?
Which town are you talking about?

Il était arrivé dans quel train?
Which train did he arrive on?

Sous quel arbre vous avez planté les jonquilles?
Which tree did you plant the daffodils under?

Par quelle route les cyclistes sont-ils partis?
By which road did the cyclists leave?

With the verb être, quel? is separated from the noun phrase with which it agrees:

Quels sont les atouts de votre équipe?
What are the strengths of your team?

Quels sont vos favoris?
Which are your favourites?

Quelle est la région que tu préfères?
Which is the region you prefer?

NB: Quel est cet homme? ‘Who is this man?’, Quelle est cette femme? ‘Who is this woman?’ are alternatives to Qui est cet homme?, Qui est cette femme?
14.6.4 *lequel?*, *laquelle?*, *lesquels?*, *lesquelles?*

*lequel?*, *laquelle?* . . . etc. ask ‘which’ noun or noun phrase when there is a choice of more than one. The form used agrees in gender and number with the noun or noun phrase it questions, whether this is present in the same sentence, or is understood from the context:

- Laquelle de ces couleurs préférez-vous? Which of these colours do you prefer?
- Laquelle préférez-vous? Which do you prefer?
- Lesquels des élèves avez-vous choisis pour l’équipe? Which of the pupils have you chosen for the team?
- Lesquels avez-vous choisis? Which have you chosen?
- Elle a enfin décidé quelle robe elle va acheter. She has finally decided which dress she is going to buy.
- Laquelle? Which one?

When the phrase involving *lequel?* is the direct object, and sometimes when it is the subject of an intransitive verb, it is possible to separate *lequel?* from the noun phrase it modifies:

- Laquelle préférez-vous de ces couleurs? Which of these colours do you prefer?
- Lequel chante le mieux de ces deux solistes? Which of these two soloists sings the best?

NB: When a *lequel?* phrase is the subject of a sentence, it is not possible to use *est-ce que?* or to invert subject and verb:

- NOT *Lequel des deux solistes est-ce qu’il chante le mieux?*
- NOT *Lequel des deux solistes chante-t-il le mieux?*

14.6.5 *combien?*

*combien?* ‘how much?’, ‘how many?’ may be used on its own:

- Combien est-ce que ça coûte? How much does that cost?
- Combien sont déjà arrivés? How many have already arrived?

Or it may be used with a following prepositional phrase:

- Combien de pain nous reste-t-il? How much bread do we have left?
- Combien de spectateurs assistaient au match? How many spectators were there at the match?

*combien (de)?* can be used to question subjects, direct objects and objects of prepositions:

**Subject**
- Combien d’invités sont déjà arrivés? How many guests have already arrived?

**Direct object**
- Combien d’enfants ont-ils? How many children do they have?

**Object of a preposition**
- Avec combien d’argent est-il parti à l’étranger? How much money did he go abroad with?
When *combien?* is used alone and functions as a direct object, the pronoun *en* is required:

Combien *en* as-tu vu?  How many did you see?
Combien est-ce qu’ils *en* ont tués?  How many did they kill?

NB: When *combien?* is the subject of the sentence, it is not possible to use *est-ce que* or invert the subject and the verb:

NOT *Combien de joueurs est-ce qu’ils ont participé au concours?*
NOT *Combien de joueurs ont-ils participé au concours?*

Although *combien?* translates ‘how much’, ‘how many’, it cannot be used to translate English ‘how + adjective/adverb’ like ‘how big?’, ‘how tall?’, ‘how often?’, etc. (For these see 14.6.8.)

### 14.6.6 *comment?*

*comment?* usually translates English ‘how?’ when it is not followed by an adjective or adverb (i.e. not ‘how big?’, ‘how often?’, etc.):

Comment allez-vous?  How are you?
Comment va votre mère?  How is your mother?
Comment est-ce qu’elle va?  How is she?
Comment s’étaient-ils comportés?  How had they behaved?
Comment allez-vous réparer le moteur?  How are you going to repair the engine?
Comment cela se prononce-t-il?  How is this pronounced?

*comment?* also translates ‘what?’ with the verb *appeler*:

Comment tu t’appelles?  What’s your name?
Comment appelez-vous ce monument? or  What is this monument called?
Comment ce monument s’appelle-t-il?

### 14.6.7 *où?, quand?, pourquoi?*

*où?* and *quand?* translate English ‘where?’ and ‘when?’ respectively, and are used in the same range of information question constructions as the other question words:

Où vous habitez?  Where do you live?
Où habitez-vous?  Where do you live?
Où est-ce que vous habitez?  Where do you live?
Où Pierre habite-t-il?  Where does Pierre live?

Quand vous partez?  When are you leaving?
Quand partez-vous?  When are you leaving?
Quand est-ce que vous partez?  When are you leaving?
Quand Pierre partira-t-il?  When will Pierre leave?

When the verb is *être*, ‘stylistic inversion’ of the subject is normal with *où?* and *quand?* (see 14.3.7):

Où est le portefeuille?  Where’s the wallet?
Quand est son anniversaire?  When’s his birthday?
pourquoi? ‘why?’ is used in the same way as the other two question words except that it cannot be used with stylistic inversion:

- **Pourquoi il a déménagé?** Why has he moved?
- **Pourquoi a-t-il déménagé?** Why has he moved?
- **Pourquoi est-ce qu’il a déménagé?** Why has he moved?
- **Pourquoi Pierre a-t-il déménagé?** Why has Pierre moved?

but NOT *Pourquoi a déménagé Pierre?*

### 14.6.8 Translating ‘how big?’, ‘how fast?’, ‘how often?’, etc.

Whereas English ‘how?’ can question adjectives and adverbs directly, in French there is no simple equivalent. For ‘How big is the table?’ you CANNOT say things like:

- *Comment grande est la table?*
- *Combien grande est la table?*

Instead, alternative expressions have to be found:

- **De quelle taille est la table?** How big is the table?
- **Avec quelle fréquence y allez-vous?** How often do you go there?
- **Est-ce souvent que vous y allez?** How often do you go there?
- **Dans quelle mesure en êtes-vous certain?** How certain are you?
- **Dans quelle mesure accepteriez-vous de faire cela?** How happy would you be to do that?

### 14.7 Indirect questions

Indirect questions are questions which are reported as having already been asked. They are introduced by verbs like *comprendre, demander, se demander, dire, expliquer, savoir*:

- **Qui est venu?** (direct question)
- **Elle a demandé qui était venu** (indirect question)
  *She asked who came*

- **Quel piège est-ce qu’on lui tend?** (direct question)
- **Il n’arrive pas à comprendre quel piège on lui tend** (indirect question)
  *He hasn’t grasped what kind of trap they are setting for him*

- **Quand arrivera-t-il?** (direct question)
- **Dites-moi quand il arrivera** (indirect question)
  *Tell me when he will arrive*

### 14.7.1 Word order in indirect questions

There is no subject-verb inversion in indirect questions:

- **Où sont-ils?** I don’t know where they are
- **Je ne sais pas où ils sont**
- **NOT *Je ne sais pas où sont-ils*
Pourquoi Marie est-elle revenue?
Dites-moi pourquoi Marie est revenue
Tell me why Marie came back

NOT *Dites-moi pourquoi Marie est-elle revenue

14.7.2 si in indirect questions

Direct yes/no questions are introduced by *si* ‘if, whether’ when they become indirect questions:

Est-ce que Julie viendra demain?
Je me demande si Julie viendra demain
I wonder if Julie will come tomorrow

A-t-il bien compris?
On ne sait jamais s’il a bien compris
One never knows whether he has understood properly

NB: This use of *si* should not be confused with *si* used to introduce hypothetical clauses like: *Si elle m’aimait, elle m’écrirait* ‘If she loved me, she would write to me’. In hypothetical *si* clauses the verb cannot appear in future or conditional tenses (see Chapter 10.8). In indirect questions introduced by *si* it may do so.

14.7.3 ce qui and ce que in indirect questions

*qu’est-ce qui?* in a direct question becomes *ce qui* in an indirect question; *que?* or *qu’est-ce que?* becomes *ce que* in an indirect question:

Qu’est-ce qui a ravagé les champs des Dupont?
On ne sait pas ce qui a ravagé les champs des Dupont
They don’t know what ruined the Duponts’ fields

Qu’est-ce qui est arrivé?
Elle se demande ce qui est arrivé
She wonders what happened

Que dit-il?
Je ne comprends pas ce qu’il dit
I don’t understand what he’s saying

Qu’est-ce que Pierre fera?
Il a expliqué ce que Pierre ferait
He explained what Pierre would do

All other question words remain the same:

Elle lui demande à qui il écrivait
She is asking him who he was writing to
Je ne sais plus de quoi elle parlait
I no longer know what she was talking about
Je ne sais pas laquelle lui plaît le plus
I don’t know which he likes more
14.7.4 Tense in indirect questions

The tense of a verb in a direct question may change if it becomes an indirect question (see Chapter 10.7). This depends on the tense of the verb which introduces the indirect question (i.e. the tense of comprendre, demander, dire, etc.). If the introducing verb is in the present, future or conditional, the tense of the verb in the indirect question remains the same as in the direct question:

- **Chante-t-il?** Is he singing?
- **Quand a-t-il chanté?** When did he sing?
- **Qui avait chanté?** Who had sung?

Elle ne sait pas s’il chante/quand il a chanté/qui avait chanté
She doesn’t know if he sings/when he sang/who sang

When the introducing verb is in the past, however, the verb in the indirect question becomes imperfect or pluperfect if in the direct question it is in the present or past:

- **Elle ne savait pas s’il chantait/quand il avait chanté/qui avait chanté**
  She didn’t know if he sang/when he had sung/who had sung

and it becomes conditional in the indirect question if it is in the future or conditional in the direct question:

- **Chantera-t-il?** Will he sing?
- **Qui chanterait?** Who would sing?

- **Elle ne savait pas s’il chanterait/qui chanterait**
  She didn’t know if he would sing/who would sing
15 Relative clauses

15.1 Introduction

Clauses within a sentence which modify noun phrases or pronouns are known as ‘relative clauses’. The noun phrases/pronouns in italics in the following examples are modified by relative clauses in bold:

Il y avait deux hommes qui sortaient une armoire à glace du camion
Two men were getting a wardrobe out of the lorry

C’est lui qui me l’a donné
He is the one who gave it to me

La clef qu’il a utilisée pour ouvrir la porte est un vieux double
The key he used to open the door is an old spare

C’est là qu’on creusera le trou
There’s where we will dig the hole

Elle a acheté une vieille boutique dont il ne restait plus que les quatre murs
She bought an old shop of which only the four walls remained

C’est le moment où la locomotive se remet en marche
It’s the moment when the train starts off again

Il y a plusieurs arbres sur lesquels on a cloué des pancartes
There are several trees on which notices have been nailed

Relative clauses are introduced by relative pronouns such as qui, que, dont, où, sur lesquels, . . .

To choose the right relative pronoun you need to know the implied grammatical role played by the ‘head’ noun phrase/pronoun (those in italics above) in the relative clause.

In La clef qu’il a utilisée pour ouvrir la porte est un vieux double the noun phrase la clef is understood as the object of utiliser in the relative clause: il a utilisé la clef pour ouvrir la porte. This determines the choice of que as the linking relative pronoun. In C’est lui qui me l’a donné the pronoun lui is understood as the subject of donner in the relative clause: il me l’a donné. This determines the choice of qui as the linking relative pronoun.

Noun phrases/pronouns have a range of implied grammatical roles in the relative clause, each requiring a different form of relative pronoun:

Understood as subject
On l’entend ouvrir la porte d’entrée qui se referme en claquant
(la porte d’entrée se referme)
He can be heard opening the front door which closes behind him with a bang

Understood as direct object
Elle découpe la tarte qu’elle a sortie du four
(elle a sorti la tarte du four)
She is cutting up the pie which she got out of the oven
Relative clauses §15.2

Understood as object of a preposition

L’acteur à qui j’ai écrit ne m’a jamais répondu
(j’ai écrit à l’acteur)
The actor to whom I wrote has never replied to me

J’ai acheté le texte auquel il a fait référence
(il a fait référence au texte)
I bought the text he was referring to

Ils habitaient un appartement derrière lequel il y avait un abattoir
(il y avait un abattoir derrière l’appartement)
They lived in a flat behind which there was an abattoir

Voici l’hôtel dans lequel il a passé les dernières années de sa vie
(il a passé les dernières années de sa vie dans l’hôtel)
This is the hotel where he spent the last years of his life

15.2 Use of relative qui

qui is the relative pronoun used when the noun phrase or pronoun heading a relative clause is the implied subject of that relative clause, whether animate or inanimate:

Il y avait deux hommes qui sortaient une armoire à glace du camion
(deux hommes sortaient une armoire . . .)
Two men were getting a wardrobe out of the lorry

Quand on voit quelqu’un qui se noie il faut essayer de le sauver
(quelqu’un se noie)
When you see someone drowning you should try to save them

Je l’ai croisé dans l’escalier qui mène à la cave
(l’escalier mène à la cave)
I passed him on the stairs which lead to the cellar

C’est un ouvrage qui allie histoire, suspense et qualité
(l’ouvrage allie histoire, suspense et qualité)
It’s a book which marries history, suspense and quality

NB: voilà and voici may also head subject relative clauses:

Voilà/voici qui complique les choses
That’s something which complicates matters

15.2.1 Je l’ai vu qui . . .

With perception verbs like voir, regarder, entendre, apercevoir, etc., a construction involving relative qui can translate an English present participle construction:

Je l’ai vu qui sortait
I saw him leaving

Elle l’a entendu qui chantait dans son bain
She heard him singing in his bath
15.2.2 Use of relative *qui* for *celui qui*, *celle qui*, *ceux qui*, *celles qui*

Sometimes relative *qui* may be used alone with the same meaning as *celui qui/que*, *celle qui/que*, *ceux qui/que*, *celles qui/que*. Such constructions are known as ‘free’ relative clauses (see also 15.9):

> Tout est possible à qui sait ménager son effort  
> Everything is possible for he who knows how to harness his energies

> J’ai invité qui vous savez  
> I invited you know who

15.3 Use of relative *que*

*que* is the relative pronoun used when the noun phrase or pronoun heading the relative clause is the implied direct **object** of the relative clause, whether animate or inanimate:

> L’homme qu’on vient d’appeler Rossi se lève  
> (on appelle l’homme Rossi)  
> The man who has just been called Rossi gets up

> Elle est née dans le village qu’on a détruit pour faire le barrage  
> (on a détruit le village)  
> She was born in the village which they destroyed to build the dam

> Elle découpe la tarte qu’elle a sortie du four  
> (elle a sorti la tarte du four)  
> She is cutting up the pie which she got out of the oven

> J’ai toujours souffert du nom que je porte  
> (je porte ce nom)  
> I have always suffered because of my name

> C’est un poste que j’aurais aimé avoir  
> (j’aurais aimé avoir ce poste)  
> It’s a job that I would have liked to have had

Unlike English, the relative pronoun in French may never be omitted:

NOT *C’est un poste j’aurais aimé  
NOT *Elle est née dans le village on a détruit pour faire le barrage etc.

NB: The past participle agrees with feminine and plural noun phrases or pronouns which head object relative clauses, as in:

> . . . la tarte qu’elle a sortie du four

This is because *la tarte* is an instance of a preceding direct object, and past participles agree with preceding direct objects (see Chapter 9.3.4).
15.4 Preposition plus qui

When the noun phrase or pronoun heading a relative clause is the implied object of a preposition in that relative clause, and is furthermore animate, the normal relative pronoun to use is *qui* (except when the preposition is *de* – see 15.6 below):

- **à**
  - Le touriste à *qui* j’ai parlé vient du Québec
  - *The tourist I spoke to comes from Quebec*

- **en**
  - C’est un commerçant en *qui* on peut avoir confiance
  - *He’s a shopkeeper in whom one can have confidence*

- **sur**
  - L’intermédiaire sur *qui* on comptait s’est avéré malhonnête
  - *The go-between we were counting on turned out to be dishonest*

- **par**
  - Je recommanderais le garagiste par *qui* j’ai eu cette voiture
  - *I would recommend the garage I got this car from*

- **avec**
  - Il n’a jamais revu le camarade avec *qui* il jouait quand ils étaient petits
  - *He has never again seen the friend he used to play with when they were little*

- **pour**
  - Elle a invité son professeur, pour *qui* elle a beaucoup de respect, à dîner
  - *She has invited her teacher, for whom she has a great deal of respect, to dinner*

- **près de**
  - Le jeune homme près de *qui* il est assis le reconnaît
  - *The young man next to whom he’s sitting recognizes him*

NB: When objects of the prepositions *parmi* and *entre* are animate, the normal relative pronoun to use is *lesquels* or *lesquelles* (see 15.5), and not *qui*:

- Un groupe d’universitaires *parmi* lesquels on compte des Américains
  - A group of academics amongst whom there are Americans

- Des collègues *entre* lesquelles il n’y avait aucune rivalité
  - Colleagues between whom there was no rivalry

15.5 Use of *lequel* in relative clauses

When the noun phrase or pronoun heading a relative clause is the implied object of a preposition, and is inanimate, the normal relative pronoun to use is one of the forms of *lequel* (except in the case of *de*: see 15.6).

*Lequel* has the following forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>lequel</td>
<td>lesquels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>laquelle</td>
<td>lesquelles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, the le-, la- etc. components combine with a preceding à or de to form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>auquel</td>
<td>auxquels</td>
<td>duquel</td>
<td>desquels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>à laquelle</td>
<td>auxquelles</td>
<td>de laquelle</td>
<td>desquelles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- à Le texte auquel il a fait référence . . .
  The text he referred to . . .
- La conférence à laquelle je vais participer . . .
  The conference in which I shall be taking part . . .
- dans Cela illustre les contradictions dans lesquelles s’enferme la Grande-Bretagne
  That illustrates the contradictions within which Great Britain is locked
- autour Elle habite une maison autour de laquelle il y a une haie de lauriers
  She lives in a house around which there is a laurel hedge
- durant Des weekends interminables, durant lesquels je ne savais quoi faire
  Interminable weekends during which I didn’t know what to do

NB: English ‘The reason why . . .’ is translated in French by La raison pour laquelle . . . and NOT *La raison pourquoi . . .

The prepositions parmi and entre are followed by lesquels/lesquelles whether the implied object is animate or inanimate:

- Un groupe d’universitaires parmi lesquels on compte des Américains
  A group of academics amongst whom there are Americans
- Des collègues entre lesquelles il n’y avait aucune rivalité
  Colleagues between whom there was no rivalry
- Des papiers parmi lesquels j’ai trouvé notre arbre généalogique
  Papers among which I found our family tree
- Des haies entre lesquelles il avait planté des rosiers
  Hedges between which he had planted rose bushes

15.5.1 Use of lequel as a subject and object relative pronoun

The use of lequel as a relative pronoun where the head of the relative clause is an implied subject or object is literary and extremely rare (it is also used in French legal texts). It is usually said that lequel is used in this way either to avoid ambiguity, or to avoid the repetition of qui:

- Il allait se marier avec la sœur d’un collègue de travail, laquelle avait fait ses études en Autriche
  He was going to marry the sister of a colleague from work who had studied in Austria

laquelle is used here to make it clear that the person who had studied in Austria is the sœur, rather than the collègue – laquelle can only refer to sœur, whereas qui could refer to either sœur or collègue.
15.6 Use of *dont, de qui, duquel/de laquelle/desquels/desquelles*

15.6.1 *dont*

When the noun phrase or pronoun heading a relative clause is the implied object of *de* in that relative clause, *dont* is the normal relative pronoun to use, whether the object of the preposition is animate or inanimate:

*Cela représente un effort dont je suis parfaitement capable*
(je suis capable de l’effort)
*That is an effort I am capable of*

*La maladie dont il est mort*
(il est mort de cette maladie)
*The illness from which he died*

The *de* phrase which is turned into *dont* may itself be the complement of another noun phrase:

*Une collègue dont le frère est en Amérique du Sud*  
(le frère de ma collègue est en Amérique du Sud)
*A colleague whose brother is in South America*

*Une maison dont les volets étaient fermés*  
(les volets de la maison étaient fermés)
*A house whose shutters were closed*

When the *de* phrase which turns into *dont* is the complement of an object, *dont* is separated from the object, unlike in English:

*Une collègue dont j’ai rencontré le frère pendant mes vacances*  
(j’ai rencontré le frère de cette collègue . . .)
*A colleague whose brother I met on holiday*

*Une maison dont on avait fermé les volets*  
(on avait fermé les volets de cette maison)
*A house whose shutters had been closed*

NB: *dont* can be used to translate English ‘including’ and ‘of which’ in sentences like:

*Il y a 30 moulins dans la région, dont 28 désaffectés*  
*There are 30 mills in the region, including 28 out of commission*

*Trois personnes sont arrivées, dont Pierre*  
*Three people arrived, including Pierre*

*Ils en ont acheté presque une centaine, dont plusieurs valaient très cher*  
*They bought almost a hundred of them, some of which were worth a lot of money*

*J’en ai vu trois hier, dont une verte*  
*I saw three of them yesterday, one of which was green*
15.6.2 Cases where *dont* may not be used

Where a *de* phrase is itself the complement of a prepositional phrase – as in *il s’intéresse à la vie de cet écrivain* – *dont* may not be used. Nor may *dont* be used after a complex preposition which ends in *de* such as *à l’intérieur de, au bout de, auprès de, autour de, à côté de, en face de, en dehors de, au delà de, en dépit de, près de*. Instead either *de qui* (for animates) or *duquel*, etc. (for both animates and inanimates) must be used. Speakers have a strong preference for using *duquel* etc.:

- un écrivain à la vie *duquel* (or, possibly, *de qui*) il s’intéresse (a writer in whose life he is interested)
- une voiture sur le capot *de laquelle* était assis un mannequin (a car on whose bonnet was sitting a model)
- Elle portait un blazer dans la poche *duquel* il y avait une lettre (She was wearing a blazer in whose pocket there was a letter)
- Nous avons dû vendre la maison à l’intérieur *de laquelle* se trouvaient nos plus belles moquettes (We had to sell the house in which were our most beautiful carpets)
- Le cheval blanc se trouve dans le champ à côté *duquel* nous avons pique-niqué (The white horse is in the field near which we had a picnic)

NB: *duquel*, etc. agrees with the head of the relative clause in gender and number: *une voiture sur le capot de laquelle* (de laquelle agrees with voiture and not capot), *un blazer dans la poche duquel* (duquel agrees with blazer and not poche).

15.7 The use of *ou* as a relative pronoun

15.7.1 To refer to place

*ou* is used as a relative pronoun where the noun phrase or pronoun heading a relative clause is understood to be a place adverb in that relative clause:

- La station balnéaire *ou* j’ai passé mes vacances
  (j’ai passé mes vacances *dans cette station balnéaire*)
  (The seaside resort where I spent my holidays)
- Un ponton *ou* des bateaux sont amarrés
  (des bateaux sont amarrés *au ponton*)
  (A pier to which boats are moored)
- Là *ou* j’ai rangé ma voiture
  (j’ai rangé ma voiture là)
  (The place where I’ve parked my car)

Since many prepositional phrases describing a place also function as place adverbs (see Chapter 5.6.16) relative clauses involving *ou* may be interchangeable with relative clauses involving a preposition plus a form of *lequel*:

- La station balnéaire *dans laquelle* j’ai passé mes vacances
- Un ponton *auquel* des bateaux sont amarrés

However, *ou* is by far the more frequent in modern French.
Relative clauses §15.8

Où may itself be preceded by prepositions like de, par:

- Le pays d’où il vient
  The country he comes from
- La porte par où elle est entrée
  The door she came through

15.7.2 To refer to time

Où is also used where the noun phrase or pronoun heading a relative clause is an implied time adverbial in that relative clause, and is definite. This use is usually translated in English by ‘when’:

- C’est le moment où la locomotive se remet en marche
  It’s the moment when the train restarts
- A l’époque où elle était encore étudiante
  At the time when she was still a student

Similar expressions are:

- Le jour où . . . the day when . . .
- À l’heure où . . . at the time (of day) when . . .
- Au temps où . . . in the days when . . .
- À la saison où . . . during the season when . . .

This use of où with definite noun phrases contrasts with the case where the head noun phrase or pronoun is indefinite. Here que is used:

- Un jour que je sortais
  One day when I was going out
- Une fois qu’elle rendait visite à sa tante
  Once when she was visiting her aunt

In modern spoken French, que is often also used where the head is definite (rather than où):

- A l’heure qu’il est, on ne sait toujours pas s’il va se rétablir
  At the time of speaking, we still don’t know if he is going to recover

NB: Although English uses ‘when’ in constructions like these, quand cannot be used in French:

- NOT *C’est le moment quand la locomotive se remet en marche
- NOT *Un jour quand je sortais

15.8 Use of relative quoi

Quoi is found as a relative pronoun mainly in written French. Where the head of the relative clause is rien, quelque chose, ce or a clause, and is understood as the object of a preposition in the relative clause, quoi is used:

- Il n’y a rien sur quoi on puisse se baser
  (on ne peut se baser sur rien)
  There is nothing on which one can rely
C'est quelque chose à quoi on peut s’intéresser
(s’intéresser à quelque chose)
It’s something you can get interested in

Ce à quoi tu fais référence
(tu fais référence à quelque chose)
The thing you are referring to

Finissez votre travail, après quoi on peut dîner
(on peut dîner après que vous avez fini votre travail)
Finish your work, after which we can have dinner

de quoi followed by an infinitive means ‘something’:

On a ramené de quoi boire
We brought back something to drink

15.9 Free relative clauses and the use of ce qui, ce que, ce dont, ce à quoi, ce sur quoi, etc.

Ordinary relative clauses are headed by noun phrases or pronouns present in the main clause:

Elle a vu les congressistes (head) qui assistaient à la réunion (relative clause)
She saw the delegates who were present at the meeting

In ‘free’ relative clauses the head is non-specific:

Elle a vu ceux qui assistaient à la réunion
She saw who was present at the meeting

Ils avaient remarqué celui que Jo préférait
They had noticed who Jo preferred

When the non-specific head is understood to be animate, celui qui/que, celle qui/que, etc., are the appropriate relative pronouns, as in the above examples. When the non-specific head is understood to be inanimate, ce qui and ce que are used: ce qui where the non-specific head is understood as the subject of the relative clause; ce que where the non-specific head is understood as the object:

Subject
On a réparé ce qui était cassé
(quelque chose était cassé)
They repaired what was broken

Je ferai ce qui me plaira
(quelque chose me plaira)
I’ll do what I please

Direct object
Je crois ce qu’il dit
(il dit quelque chose)
I believe what he says
376 Relative clauses §15.9

On a vu ce que cela a produit
(cela a produit quelque chose)
We saw what that produced

Both ce qui and ce que may be preceded by tout ‘all’:

Il s’est mis à détruire tout ce qui était à sa portée
He began to destroy everything that was within his reach

On a vu tout ce que cela a produit
We saw all that that produced

NB: ce is obligatory in these cases: NOT *... tout qu’était à sa portée; NOT *... tout que cela a produit.

Where the non-specific head is inanimate and is understood as the object of a preposition in the relative clause, ce + preposition + quoi is used:

Dis-moi ce à quoi tu penses
Tell me what you are thinking

Ne jette pas ce sur quoi j’écrivais
Don’t throw out what I was writing on

Je vais te dire ce en quoi j’ai confiance
I’ll tell you what I have confidence in

When ‘what’ or ‘which’ are understood as the object of de, ce dont is used:

Elle a envoyé ce dont on avait besoin
She sent what we needed

15.9.1 Use of ce qui, ce que, ce dont, ce à quoi, etc., to refer to events

Compare the following:

On a volé les deux ordinateurs qui étaient dans l’amphithéâtre
Someone has stolen the two computers which were in the lecture hall

On a volé ce qui était dans l’amphithéâtre
Someone has stolen what was in the lecture hall

On a volé les deux ordinateurs, ce qui va interrompre les cours
Someone has stolen the two computers, which will disrupt classes

In the first sentence the relative clause qui étaient dans l’amphithéâtre modifies the noun phrase les deux ordinateurs. In the second sentence there is a ‘free relative’ where the head is non-specific. In the third sentence the relative clause modifies the whole preceding clause: on a volé les deux ordinateurs.

ce qui, ce que, ce dont, ce à quoi, etc. are used not only to introduce free relatives, but also to introduce relative clauses which modify preceding clauses:

Il a manqué le train, ce qui l’a mis en colère
He missed the train, which made him angry
(the missing of the train made him angry, not the train itself)
On craint un durcissement dans l’attitude officielle, ce qui pourrait accroître les difficultés
A hardening of the official attitude is feared, which could increase the difficulties

Elle a réussi à le persuader, ce que je n’aurais jamais cru possible
She succeeded in persuading him, which I would never have thought possible

NB: Where a relative clause modifies an event, qui and que alone cannot be used:
NOT *Il a manqué le train, qui l’a mis en colère
NOT *Elle a réussi à le persuader, que je n’aurais jamais cru possible

Where the verb is indirectly transitive and ends in de, two constructions may be possible:
one using ce dont and one using de ce que. ce dont is used when the head word is present, de
ce que is used when there is no head word. ce dont is normally rendered into English in these
constructions by ‘which’; de ce que is normally rendered by ‘what’ or ‘that’. This concerns
verbs such as: féliciter qn de qc, excuser qn de qc, s’inquiéter de qc, s’irriter de qc, profiter de qc, souff-
frir de qc, and adjectival constructions such as être reconnaissant de qc, être stupéfait de qc.

Vous avez réalisé votre projet. Je vous félicite (de qc).
You have succeeded in your project. I congratulate you (on something)

Vous avez réalisé votre projet, ce dont je vous félicite
You have succeeded in your project, on which I congratulate you

Je vous félicite de ce que vous avez réalisé
I congratulate you on what you have achieved

Ils ont fait des bêtises. Ils devront s’excuser (de qc)
They did some silly things. They will have to apologize (for sth)

Ils ont fait des bêtises, ce dont ils devront s’excuser
They did some silly things, for which they will have to apologize

Ils devront s’excuser de ce qu’ils ont fait
They will have to apologize for what they did

Vous avez fait énormément de choses pour nous. Je suis très reconnaissant (de qc)
You have done a great deal for us. I am very grateful (for sth)

Vous avez fait énormément de choses pour nous, ce dont je suis très reconnaissant
You have done a great deal for us, for which I am very grateful

Je suis très reconnaissant de ce que vous avez fait pour nous
I am very grateful for what you have done for us

Vous êtes venu. Je suis stupéfait (de qc)
You came. I am astonished (about sth)

Vous êtes venu, ce dont je suis stupéfait
You came, which astonishes me

Je suis stupéfait de ce que vous soyez venu
I am astonished that you should have come

‘whoever’

‘whoever’, understood as the subject of a relative clause, is *quiconque*, and the verb in the relative clause is in the indicative:

> Ils accueillent quiconque arrive
> They welcome whoever comes

‘whoever’, understood as the direct object of a relative clause, is *qui que*, and the verb in the relative clause is in the subjunctive:

> Qui que vous nommiez, je lui mènerai la vie dure
> Whoever you appoint, I’ll make his life a misery

NB: *quel que* may also mean ‘whoever’ when used with être:

> Quel qu’il soit, je l’accueillerai
> Whovever he is, I’ll let him in

‘whatever’

‘whatever’, understood as the subject of a relative clause, is *quoi qui*. When it is understood as the object it is *quoi que*. In both cases the verb in the relative clause is in the subjunctive:

> Quoi qui puisse arriver
> Whatever may happen

> Quoi qu’il fasse
> Whatever he does

NB: *quoi que*, meaning ‘whatever’, should be distinguished from the conjunction *quoique* ‘although’, which is written as a single word.

‘whatever X’ understood as the subject of a relative clause is translated as in the following examples:

> Quel que soit le prix, je l’achèterai
> Whatever the price may be, I’ll buy it

> Quelles que soient ses intentions, méfie-toi
> Whatever his intentions are, don’t trust him

Note that *quel* and *que* are separate words, and that *quel* agrees with the noun which is the subject of the relative clause.

‘whatever X’, ‘whichever X’ understood as the object of a relative clause is *quelque(s)*, and the verb in the relative clause is in the subjunctive:

> Quelque livre que vous choisissiez, vous bénéficierez d’un rabais
> (vous allez choisir un livre)
> Whatever/whichever book you choose, we’ll give you a discount

> Quelques efforts que vous fassiez, on ne vous en accordera aucun crédit
> (vous allez faire des efforts)
> Whatever efforts you make won’t be recognized
One way of distinguishing between the ‘quelque + noun’ construction and the ‘quel que + être + noun’ construction is to see if the verb in the relative clause can be omitted in English. If it can, use quel que, if it cannot use quelque(s):

Quel que soit le prix, je l’achèterai
Quelque livre que vous choisissez, vous bénéficierez d’un rabais

Whatever the price (may be), I’ll buy it
Whatever book you (‘choose’ cannot be omitted), we will give you a discount

NB: être can never be omitted from the quel que constructions in French, even though ‘be’ can be omitted in English.

‘wherever’
‘wherever’ is où que, with the verb in the relative clause in the subjunctive:

Où qu’il aille, nous le suivrons
Wherever he goes, we’ll follow him

‘whenever’
‘whenever’ is toutes les fois que, à chaque fois que, or simply quand, with the verb in the indicative:

Toutes les fois qu’elle a un moment de libre, elle révise son vocabulaire
Whenever she has a free moment she looks over her vocabulary

‘however’
‘however’ + an adjective heading a relative clause can be translated in five ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>quelque</th>
<th>+ adjective</th>
<th>+ verb in the subjunctive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>si</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aussi</td>
<td>+ adjective</td>
<td>+ verb in the indicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tout</td>
<td>+ adjective</td>
<td>+ verb in the indicative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However demanding they may be, we still have to respect our customers’ needs

Quelque (invariable) exigeants qu’ils soient, nous devons pourtant satisfaire nos clients
Si exigeants qu’ils soient, nous devons pourtant satisfaire nos clients
Aussi exigeants qu’ils soient, nous devons pourtant satisfaire nos clients
Pour exigeants qu’ils soient, nous devons pourtant satisfaire nos clients
Tout (invariable) exigeants qu’ils soient, nous devons pourtant satisfaire nos clients

NB: the verb and subject may be inverted after si and aussi as an alternative to the que construction, providing that the subject is a pronoun:

Si exigeants soient-ils, . . .
Aussi exigeants soient-ils, . . .
15.11 Indicative and subjunctive in relative clauses

The verb in relative clauses usually takes the indicative form, but there are some kinds of relative clause where the verb is in the subjunctive.

15.11.1 qui que, quoi que, quel que, etc.

*qui que, quoi qui, quoi que, quel que, quelque, où que and si/aussi/pour* are followed by a verb in the subjunctive (see 15.10 and also Chapter 11.1.12):

- Qui que vous *nommez*  
  Whoever you appoint
- Quoi qui *puisse* arriver  
  Whatever may happen
- Quoi qu’il *fasse*  
  Whatever he does
- Quelque livre que vous *choisissez*  
  Whichever book you choose
- Quelle que *soit* la réponse  
  Whatever the response
- Quelque *Si*  
  However big he is
- Aussi  
- Pour

**NB:** *quiconque* ‘whoever’ is followed by verbs in the indicative:

- Quiconque *connaît* une langue étrangère aura le poste  
  Whoever can speak a foreign language will get the job

15.11.2 Relative clauses expressing hypothetical states of affairs

Relative clauses which modify indefinite noun phrases and express a hypothetical, rather than real, state of affairs, usually have a verb in the subjunctive (see Chapter 11.1.12):

- Elle veut acheter *une maison qui ait* une piscine  
  *She wants to buy a house which has a swimming pool*

The subjunctive here suggests that she has no particular house in mind – her hypothetically ideal house would be one with a swimming pool. By contrast, a sentence like:

- Elle veut acheter *une maison qui a* une piscine  
  *She wants to buy a house which has a swimming pool*

suggests that she knows of a particular house with a swimming pool which she would like to buy.
15.11.3 Relative clauses modifying *le premier, le dernier, le seul* and superlatives

Where a relative clause modifies noun phrases involving *le premier, le dernier, le seul* or a superlative, which can be interpreted as ‘the first ever’, ‘the last one ever’, ‘the only one ever’, etc., then the verb in the relative clause is in the subjunctive (see Chapter 11.1.8):

- *C'était le premier film qui ait traité de ce sujet*  
  *It was the first (ever) film that dealt with the topic*

- *Le dernier roman qu'il ait écrit avant de mourir*  
  *The last (ever) novel he wrote before he died*

- *Le seul portrait que j'aie vu d'elle*  
  *The only (ever) portrait I saw of her*

- *La femme la plus riche que nous ayons photographiée*  
  *The richest (ever) woman whom we have photographed*

Where the verb in the relative clause is in the indicative, however, the modified noun phrase is interpreted as just one of a set (‘the first (of a set)’, ‘the last (of a set)’, ‘the biggest (of a set)’, etc.):

- *C'est le premier film que j'ai vu, et le plus beau de toute ma vie*  
  *It's the first film (of the set of those I've seen) that I saw, and the finest one I've seen*

- *C'est le plus grand qui a gagné le prix*  
  *It’s the tallest of (the set of) them who won the prize*

15.11.4 Relative clauses in *si* clauses, questions, after negation and in other subjunctive clauses

When relative clauses modify indefinite noun phrases or pronouns in *si* clauses or in questions, or modify noun phrases in negative clauses or clauses which themselves have subjunctive verbs, the verb in the relative clause is usually in the subjunctive:

- *S'il connaissait un endroit qui convienne il le dirait*  
  *If he knew of a place which would be suitable he would say so*

- *Connaîsez-vous un endroit qui convienne?*  
  *Do you know of a place which would be suitable?*

- *Je ne connais personne qui puisse m'aider*  
  *I know no-one who can help me*

- *Quelles que soient les circonstances qui puissent expliquer son erreur, je ne peux pas la lui pardonner*  
  *Whatever the circumstances which might explain his mistake, I can’t forgive him*
### TABLE 15.4 Summary of major relative clause types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head of clause</th>
<th>Function in clause</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>See section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>l’homme</td>
<td>subject (± animate)</td>
<td>qui</td>
<td>l’homme qui conduit</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l’autobus</td>
<td>direct object (± animate)</td>
<td>que</td>
<td>l’autobus que je conduis</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une maladie</td>
<td>object of de (± animate)</td>
<td>dont</td>
<td>une maladie dont il est mort</td>
<td>15.6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une maison</td>
<td>same (± animate)</td>
<td>dont</td>
<td>une maison dont la porte est fermée</td>
<td>15.6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le touriste</td>
<td>object (+ animate) of a preposition</td>
<td>à qui</td>
<td>le touriste à qui j’ai parlé</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le texte</td>
<td>object (– animate) of a preposition</td>
<td>auquel</td>
<td>le texte auquel il fait référence</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un écrivain</td>
<td>object (+ animate) of a preposition in a prepositional phrase</td>
<td>à la vie duquel</td>
<td>un écrivain à la vie duquel il s’intéresse</td>
<td>15.6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un blazer</td>
<td>object (– animate) of a preposition in a prepositional phrase</td>
<td>dans la poche duquel</td>
<td>un blazer dans la poche duquel il y a une lettre</td>
<td>15.6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la ville</td>
<td>place adverb</td>
<td>où</td>
<td>la ville où je vis</td>
<td>15.7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le jour</td>
<td>time adverb (definite)</td>
<td>où</td>
<td>le jour où elle est partie</td>
<td>15.7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un jour</td>
<td>time adverb (indefinite)</td>
<td>que</td>
<td>un jour que je sortais</td>
<td>15.7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rien, ce, quelque chose, clause</td>
<td>object of a preposition</td>
<td>sur quoi</td>
<td>rien, ce, quelque chose sur quoi on peut compter</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific head</td>
<td>subject or object (+ animate)</td>
<td>celui qui/que</td>
<td>j’ai vu celui qui est sorti</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific head</td>
<td>subject (– animate)</td>
<td>ce qui</td>
<td>je ferai ce qui me plaît</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific head</td>
<td>object (– animate)</td>
<td>ce que</td>
<td>je crois ce qu’elle dit</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific head</td>
<td>object of a preposition</td>
<td>ce preposition quoi</td>
<td>il se moque de ce en quoi j’ai confiance</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16 Negation

16.1 Introduction

French sentences can be negated by using one of the following expressions:

- ne . . . aucun
- ne . . . guère
- ne . . . jamais
- ne . . ni . . ni
- ne . . nul
- ne . . pas
- ne . . personne
- ne . . plus
- ne . . que
- ne . . rien

Although ne . . . guère and ne . . . que are not strictly negators – they are adverbs – they have similar distributional properties to the other negators, and so we include them in this chapter.

NB: the expression ne . . . point ‘not’ is no longer used productively in modern French. It is used only in written French by writers who want to create an archaic or regional tone.

Individual words and phrases can be negated by placing the particles pas, aucun, jamais, rien, personne (without ne) in front of them. For example: un après-midi pas comme les autres ‘an afternoon unlike others’; jamais de ma vie ‘never in my life’; rien d’intéressant ‘nothing interesting’; and so on.

16.2 Location of sentence negators

16.2.1 With verbs marked for tense

In all cases where sentences are negated, the element ne (if it is present: see 16.4) comes before the verb which is marked for tense in that sentence, and before any unstressed object pronouns which are in front of the verb:

- Je ne dors pas chez moi ce soir  I’m not sleeping at my place tonight
- Je n’ai pas dormi chez moi hier soir  I didn’t sleep at my place last night
- Je ne l’entendais pas  I didn’t hear him
- Il ne le lui a jamais envoyé  He didn’t ever send it to her
- Elle n’a rien voulu me raconter  She didn’t want to tell me anything

The location of the second element – pas, jamais, rien, personne, etc. – varies, however. While all these negative particles immediately follow a main verb when no auxiliary is present:

- Il ne me regardait pas  He wasn’t watching me
- La boîte ne contenait que des bonbons  There were only sweets in the box
- Ça ne donne aucun plaisir  That’s not at all enjoyable
- Il ne mangeait jamais le soir  He never used to eat in the evenings
in compound tenses (i.e. when the auxiliary avoir or être is present), guère, jamais, pas, plus, rien immediately follow the auxiliary verb:

- **Il n’en a pas voulu**
- **Je n’ai jamais vu la mer**
- **Elle n’a plus voulu continuer**
- **Je ne l’ai guère connue**
- **On ne m’a rien pris**

He didn’t want any of it

I have never seen the sea

She didn’t want to continue

I hardly knew her

They didn’t take anything from me

By contrast, personne behaves just like an object, an indirect object or the object of a preposition:

- **Je n’ai vu personne**
- **Il n’a parlé à personne**
- **Elle n’est sortie avec personne**

I didn’t see anyone

He didn’t speak to anyone

She didn’t go out with anyone

and aucun precedes an object, an indirect object or the object of a preposition:

- **Ils n’ont vendu aucun tableau**
- **Je ne le vendrais à aucun prix**
- **Il n’a confiance en aucun autre que lui-même**

They didn’t sell a single picture

I wouldn’t sell it at any price

He doesn’t trust anyone else but himself

NB: nul is only used in formal French. (See 16.8.)

The location of que and ni varies depending on the intended meaning:

- **Il ne se permet un whisky qu’après avoir fini son travail**
- **Il ne se permet qu’un whisky après avoir fini son travail**

He only allows himself a whisky after he has finished his work

He only allows himself one whisky after he has finished his work

- **Elle ne m’a ni vu ni entendu**
- **Elle n’a vu ni lui ni sa femme**

She neither saw me nor heard me

She saw neither him nor his wife

- **Je n’ai écrit de lettre ni à sa mère ni à son notaire**

I wrote a letter neither to her mother nor to her solicitor

NB: Je ne fais que, tu ne fais que, il ne fait que, etc. mean ‘I do nothing but, you do nothing but’ etc.: Il ne fait que mentir/travailler/se plaindre, etc. ‘He does nothing but lie/work/complain’, etc.

16.2.2 With infinitives

Where the verb in a negated sentence is an infinitive, ne and guère, jamais, pas, plus, rien normally both precede the infinitive:

- **J’ai dormi au bureau, de manière à ne pas perdre de temps**

I slept at the office so as not to waste any time

- **J’étais le seul à ne jamais boire d’alcool**

I was the only one never to drink alcohol

- **Il pense ne plus croire en Dieu**

He thinks he doesn’t believe in God any more
Elle donnait l’impression de ne guère s’intéresser à mes activités
She gave the impression of hardly being interested in my activities

Il a envie de ne rien faire de la journée
He feels like doing nothing all day

Both elements of the negation also usually precede an infinitive auxiliary verb (avoir or être):

J’étais certain de ne pas avoir laissé de linge à sécher sur le radiateur
I was certain I hadn’t left any underwear drying on the radiator

J’espère ne rien avoir oublié
I hope I haven’t forgotten anything

For some speakers, however, the second element of the negation in these cases can optionally follow the auxiliary, without any change in the meaning:

J’étais certain de n’avoir pas laissé de linge . . .
J’espère n’avoir rien oublié

In the case of ne . . . aucun, ne . . . nul, ne . . . personne, the second component follows the verbal elements:

Je voudrais ne voir personne
I would like to see no-one

Elle me reprochait de n’avoir écrit à personne
She blamed me for not having written to anyone

Ils ont déclaré n’avoir eu aucune intention de le faire
They declared that they had no intention of doing it

Il s’étonnait de n’avoir ressenti nul désir de le faire
He was surprised not to have felt any desire to do it

que and ni . . . ni also follow the verb in infinitives, but their location varies depending on the intended meaning:

Je voudrais ne voir que Jean deux ou trois fois par semaine
I would like to see only Jean two or three times a week

Je voudrais ne voir Jean que deux ou trois fois par semaine
I would like to see Jean only two or three times a week

Elle espère ne rencontrer ni lui ni sa sœur
She hopes to meet neither him nor his sister

Elle espère ne rencontrer son voisin ni au marché ni au café
She hopes to meet her neighbour neither at the market nor in the café

NB: Verbs in clauses dependent on negated clauses take the subjunctive:

Ce n’est pas que je sois particulièrement timide
It’s not that I’m particularly shy

Je ne connais personne qui mette autant d’acharnement à réussir
I don’t know anyone (else) who puts so much energy into succeeding

(See Chapter 11.1.8.)
### 16.3 Order of negators in multiple negation

Two or more of *jamais, pas, personne, plus, rien*, and so on, may be combined quite acceptably in French to produce a multiple negation. The normal ordering of these elements is as indicated in the following tables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ne. . .</th>
<th>pas</th>
<th>past participle or infinitive</th>
<th>que</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Il n’y a pas que des héros dans l’armée</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il n’a pas écrit que des contes de fees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ne. . .</th>
<th>jamais</th>
<th>guère</th>
<th>plus</th>
<th>rien</th>
<th>past participle or infinitive</th>
<th>personne</th>
<th>que</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On ne le verra jamais plus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On n’en verra jamais rien</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On n’en verra plus rien</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>On n’en verra jamais plus rien</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elle n’a jamais plus écrit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elle n’a jamais rien écrit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elle n’a plus rien écrit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elle n’a jamais plus rien écrit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elle n’a jamais plus rien écrit qu’une brochure de publicité</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ça n’impressionnera jamais personne</td>
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<td>Ça n’impressionnera plus personne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ça n’impressionnera jamais plus personne</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Il n’a jamais critiqué personne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Il n’a plus critiqué personne</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il n’a jamais plus critiqué personne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elle n’a guère plus écrit après son deuil</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: The order . . . plus jamais . . . is also quite common: *On ne le verra plus jamais* ‘We’ll never see him again’, *Plus jamais ça!* ‘Never again!’

### 16.4 Omission of *ne* in sentence negation

It is very common in modern spoken French for speakers to omit the *ne* of *ne . . . pas*, and to a lesser extent the *ne* of other negative expressions, except in the most formal of styles:

- C’est pas vrai | It’s not true
- J’ai pas eu le temps de le faire | I didn’t have time to do it
- Je sais pas | I don’t know
- Elle l’avait pas lu | She hadn’t read it
16.5 Order of negative elements in questions and imperatives

The location and ordering of negative elements in questions and imperatives are the same as in declaratives:

Tu ne dors pas chez toi ce soir
Ne dors-tu pas chez toi ce soir?    Aren’t you sleeping at your house tonight?

Il n’a jamais vu la mer
N’a-t-il jamais vu la mer?    Hasn’t he ever seen the sea?

On ne lui avait rien appris
Ne lui avait-on rien appris?    Had they taught him nothing?

Elle n’avait vu personne
N’avait-elle vu personne?    Had she seen no-one?

Taquine-le!
Ne le taquine pas!    Don’t tease him!

Fais ça!
Ne fais jamais ça!    Never do that!

Touchez quelque chose!
Ne touchez rien!    Don’t touch anything!

Présentez-lui quelqu’un!
Ne lui présentez personne!    Don’t introduce anyone to him!

(For the ordering of pronouns in affirmative and negative imperatives see Chapter 3.2.31.)

16.6 ne . . . pas

16.6.1 Negating sentences

ne . . . pas translates English ‘not’ (for the omission of ne see 16.4):

Ce n’est pas vrai
It’s not true

Je ne me rappelle pas les circonstances
I don’t remember the circumstances

Je n’ai pas eu le temps de comprendre
I didn’t have time to understand

Ça fait/Voilà longtemps qu’on ne s’est pas vu
It’s been a long time since we saw each other

NB: ne . . . point ‘not’ is an archaic form which is still found in some regional varieties of French as an equivalent of ne . . . pas. Some writers use it to give a regional or archaic flavour to their writing.

After ne . . . pas, any indefinite article (i.e. one of un(e), du, de la, des) preceding a direct object becomes de:

Elle a écrit une lettre
She wrote a letter

Elle n’a pas écrit de lettre
She didn’t write a letter

On lui a fait du mal
They did him harm

On ne lui a pas fait de mal
They didn’t do him any harm

Il cultive des fraises
He grows strawberries

Il ne cultive pas de fraises
He doesn’t grow strawberries
Negation §16.6

Where *un(e)* appears before a direct object after *ne . . . pas* it means ‘not one’, (rather than ‘not a’):

> On n’entendait pas *un* bruit dehors
>  
> *We couldn’t hear a single noise outside*

(See Chapter 2.5.)

*Pas un* followed by a noun can function as the subject of a negative sentence. Note the presence of *ne*:

> Pas *un* brin d’herbe *ne* bougeait dans la prairie
>  
> *Not a blade of grass stirred on the plain*

Where *du, de la, des* appear before a direct object after *ne . . . pas*, they are instances of *de* + definite article (and not indefinite articles):

> Elle n’a pas parlé *du* mal qu’on lui a fait
>  
> *She didn’t speak of the harm they did him*
>  
> (versus: *On ne lui a pas fait de mal* ‘They didn’t do him any harm’)

> Il ne s’occupe pas *des* fraises à présent
>  
> *He isn’t busy with the strawberries at the moment*
>  
> (versus *Il ne cultive pas de fraises cette année* ‘He’s not growing strawberries this year’)

(See Chapter 2.5.)

When adverbs are located sentence-internally in sentences negated by *ne . . . pas*, they usually appear immediately before *pas*:

> Il ne savait *visiblement pas* que faire de son grand corps
>  
> *You could see that he didn’t know what to do with his big frame*

> Je ne l’entendais *même pas*
>  
> *I didn’t even hear him*

> Je ne l’ai *toujours pas* compris
>  
> *I still don’t understand him*

NB: *davantage* ‘more’ used in conjunction with *ne . . . pas* has a similar meaning to *ne . . . plus*:

> J’ai fait un effort pour *ne pas* dépenser *davantage*
>  
> *I made an effort not to spend any more*

16.6.2 Omission of *pas*

In written French the *pas* of *ne . . . pas* may be omitted with a small number of verbs.

**With cesser *de* + infinitive**

> Elle *ne* cessait de répéter que c’était de sa faute
>  
> *She went on repeating that it was her fault*

**With savoir followed by a question word like *quoi, comment***

> Je *ne* sais comment ils se débrouillent
>  
> *I don’t know how they manage*
Il y avait un je ne sais quoi de douceur dans l’air
*There was a hint of mildness in the air*

NB: *ne + savoir* in the conditional means ‘wouldn’t know how to’, ‘couldn’t’: *On ne saurait trop vous remercier* ‘We wouldn’t know how to thank you’, *Il ne saurait vous expliquer pourquoi* ‘He couldn’t explain why to you’.

**With *oser* + infinitive**

*Il n’osa refuser de le faire*
*He didn’t dare refuse to do it*

*Elle n’osa demander un second cognac*
*She dared not ask for a second brandy*

**With *pouvoir* + infinitive**

*Elle ne pouvait se l’expliquer*
*She couldn’t explain it to herself*

*Je ne puis accepter cette décision*
*I can’t accept this decision*

*pas* is sometimes also omitted after interrogative *qui, que, quel,* after hypothetical *si,* after some sentence initial adverbs, and in the expressions *n’importe qui, n’importe quoi*:

*Qui ne serait ému dans ces circonstances?*  
*Who wouldn’t be moved in these circumstances?*

*Que ne donnerait-il pour une bière?*  
*What wouldn’t he give for a beer?*

*Quel homme n’en serait fier?*  
*What man wouldn’t be proud of it?*

*C’est Pierre, si je ne me trompe*  
*It’s Pierre, unless I’m mistaken*

*N’importe qui pourrait le faire*  
*Anyone could do it*

*J’inventerai n’importe quoi pour faire plus vrai*  
*I’ll make up anything to make it sound more realistic*

### §16.6.3 Negating words and phrases

*pas* alone is used to negate words or phrases which do not contain verbs.

**Nouns**

*Je ne garde rien d’elle. Même pas une mèche de cheveux*
*I keep nothing of hers. Not even a lock of hair*

*Il lui posa une question. Pas de réponse*
*He asked her a question. No reply*

*Je le ferai. Pas de problème*
*I’ll do it. No problem*

**Adjectives**

*Les autres la considéraient comme une fille pas bavarde*
*The others considered her to be a quiet girl*

*Il avait une intonation chantante pas déplaisante*
*He spoke in a singsong voice, not unpleasant*
Adverbs

J’habite pas loin de la mer
I live not far from the sea

C’était un bel après-midi. Un après-midi pas tout à fait comme les autres
It was a fine afternoon. An afternoon not entirely like the others

Conjunctions

Il me regardait; pas comme un frère, plutôt comme un juge
He watched me; not as a brother, more as a judge

16.6.4 Use of non and non pas to negate words and phrases

non can be an equivalent for pas for negating adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions in formal French (although pas is more often used even in formal styles):

- un supplément non compris
  something extra which is not included
- habiter non loin de la mer
  to live not far from the sea
- non comme un frère
  not as a brother

NB: non or pas are equally likely in formal French in expressions like: Prêt ou non, je pars/Prêt ou pas, je pars, ‘Ready or not, I’m leaving’. But if the negated item is repeated, pas is more usual: Prêt ou pas prêt, je pars.

non is often used when it is combined with mais in the expression non X . . . mais (aussi):

- Je l’ai fait non (pas) pour arranger quelqu’un d’autre mais pour ma propre convenance
  I did it not to suit someone else, but to suit myself
- Elle aimerait visiter non seulement le château mais aussi le parc
  She would like to visit not only the chateau but also the park
- On entendait non plus la mer, mais le chuchotement du vent dans les arbres
  One no longer heard the sea, but the rustling in the trees

non or non pas may negate an infinitive which is contrasted with an affirmative infinitive:

- Il faut travailler pour vivre, et non (pas) vivre pour travailler
  One has to work to live and not live to work

non (pas) que is a conjunction which introduces subordinate clauses in which the verb is in the subjunctive:

- Il a parlé de Besançon; non (pas) qu’il veuille y aller
  He spoke about Besançon; not that he wants to go there

(See also Chapter 17.3.8.)

non, pas and non pas are interchangeable in formal French when a contrast is drawn between a positive and negative statement:

Il est Gallois et non pas Anglais
16.7 *ne . . . que*

*ne . . . que* translates English ‘only’ (for the omission of *ne* see 16.4):

- Ce *n’est qu’*après qu’il l’a remarqué
  *He only noticed it afterwards*
- Je *ne le vois qu’*une fois par semaine
  *I only see him once a week*
- Il *n’y avait qu’*une explication
  *There was only one explanation*
- Les autres *n’étaient là que* pour lui fournir ce dont il avait besoin
  *The others were only there to provide him with what he needed*

In combination with other negators like *pas, jamais, plus, personne, ne . . . que* can take on various meanings:

- Il *n’y a pas que* des héros dans l’armée
  *There aren’t just heroes in the army*
- Elle *n’avait jamais parlé à un agent de police que* pour demander le chemin
  *She had never spoken to a policeman except to ask for directions*
- Il *ne me reste plus que* trois traites à payer
  *I’ve only got three more instalments to pay*

16.8 *ne . . . aucun(e), ne . . . nul(le)*

*ne . . . aucun(e), ne . . . nul(le)* translate English ‘no’, ‘none’ (for the omission of *ne* see 16.4):

- Il *n’a eu aucune (nulle) hésitation à proposer son aide*
  *He had no hesitation in offering to help*

Except for the expression *ne . . . nulle part* ‘nowhere’, *ne . . . nul(le)* is very formal. *ne . . . aucun(e)* is found in both written and spoken French, but tends to be replaced by *pas* in informal spoken French:

- Il *n’a pas eu d’hésitation à proposer son aide*

Only *aucun(e)* and not *nul(le)* may be followed by a prepositional complement:

- Je *ne connais aucune de ses amies*
  *I know none of her friends*
- Je *n’en connais aucune*
  *(NOT *Je ne connais nulle de ses amies/Je n’en connais nulle)*

Both *aucun(e)* and *nul(le)* are rare in the plural. Instead one would use *pas de* or *sans*:

- Il *n’a pas d’amis/Il est sans amis*
  *He has no friends*

*aucun(e)* can negate direct objects, indirect objects, objects of prepositions and subjects:

- Ça *n’avait aucun sens*
  *That made no sense*
- Il *n’a parlé à aucun des trois*
  *He didn’t speak to any of the three*
- Aucune voiture américaine *n’était signalée dans les environs*
  *No American car had been reported in the area*
Aucun de nous n’est entré là-bas
Aucun n’est entré

None of us entered there
None went in

*aucun(e)* may be used alone as a response to a question:

Combien reste-t-il d’oranges sanguines? Aucune
How many blood oranges are left? None

The adverbs *aucunement, nullement* are formal equivalents of the expression common in spoken French: *pas du tout* ‘not at all’:

Elle n’en est aucunement/nullement/pas du tout fière
She is not at all proud of it

NB: *null(le)* is also an adjective with the meaning ‘zero’, ‘nil’. In this use it is found in all styles of French:

Les risques sont nuls
Nuls points
Elle est nulle en orthographe
Match nul

*Nul* is also used in formal, legal texts, etc.:

Nul n’est censé ignorer la loi
Ignorance of the law is no excuse

### 16.9 *ne . . . jamais*

*ne . . . jamais* translates English ‘not ever’, ‘never’ (for the omission of *ne* see 16.4):

Il ne mangeait jamais le soir
Je n’ai jamais vu la mer

He never ate in the evenings
I have never seen the sea

Like English ‘never’, *jamais* may sometimes be located at the beginning of the sentence, but without the subject-verb inversion of English:

Jamais je n’ai vu autant d’algues
Never have I seen so much seaweed

Jamais plus elle ne serait tout à fait elle-même
Never again would she be quite herself

*After *ne . . . jamais* any indefinite article (i.e. one of *un(e), du, de la, des*) preceding a direct object becomes *de*

J’ai de la monnaie
I have change

Elle porte un casque
She wears a helmet

(See Chapter 2.5.)

*jamais* can be used without *ne* with the meaning ‘never’:

C’est maintenant ou jamais
Es-tu allé à Rennes? Jamais

It’s now or never
Have you been to Rennes? Never
In formal French it can also be interpreted as ‘ever’ in questions, hypothetical sentences or comparisons:

As-tu jamais envisagé le suicide?
Have you ever thought of suicide?

Si une malle s’était jamais trouvée dans le grenier, elle n’y était plus
If there had ever been a trunk in the attic, it was no longer there

Elle chante mieux que jamais
She is singing better than ever

When adverbs are located sentence-internally in sentences negated by ne . . . jamais, they usually appear immediately before jamais:

Je n’ai d’ailleurs jamais parlé à personne
What’s more, I’ve never spoken to anyone

Je ne la vois pratiquement jamais
I hardly ever see her

16.10 ne . . . plus

ne . . . plus translates English ‘no longer’, ‘not any more’ (for the omission of ne see 16.4):

Elle ne savait plus pourquoi elle était sur cette route
She no longer knew why she was on this road

Soudain, je n’en peux plus
Suddenly I can’t take any more

Elle n’a plus travaillé après la naissance de sa fille
She didn’t work again after the birth of her daughter

NB: ne . . . pas plus is NOT the French for ‘not any more’. ne . . . pas plus means ‘not more than’. Compare:

Elle ne semblait pas avoir plus de vingt ans
She didn’t appear to be more than 20

Elle ne semblait plus avoir vingt ans
She didn’t seem to be 20 any more

After ne . . . plus, any indefinite article (i.e. one of un(e), du, de la, des) preceding a direct object becomes de:

J’ai un crayon
I have a pencil

Je n’ai plus de crayon
I don’t have a pencil any more

Elle vend du lait
She sells milk

Elle ne vend plus de lait
She doesn’t sell milk any more

When adverbs are located sentence-internally in sentences negated by ne . . . plus, they usually appear immediately before plus:

Je ne me rappelle même plus ce qu’il racontait
I don’t even remember what he was saying
plus de + noun can mean ‘no more’:

plus de pain, merci
no more bread, thanks
going without

plus de place!
no (more) room

Je me suis retournée: plus de valise
I turned round: my suitcase had disappeared

non plus is typically used in conjunction with one of the other negators to translate English ‘either’, ‘neither’ or ‘nor’:

Il ne mangeait jamais le soir, ni sa femme non plus
He never ate in the evenings, and neither did his wife

Ce n’est pas non plus que je sois particulièrement timide
It’s not that I’m particularly shy either

Il ne pouvait pas non plus reporter son rendez-vous avec ce client-là
Nor could he postpone his meeting with that particular customer

Il n’avait jamais non plus levé la main sur qui que ce soit
Neither had he ever raised his hand to anyone

Elle fouilla dans la boîte à gants. Rien non plus
She rummaged in the glove compartment. Nothing there either

Pour son fils non plus, ça n’allait pas fort
Things weren’t going well for his son either

16.11 ne . . . guère

ne . . . guère translates English ‘hardly’, and is an equivalent of the adverb à peine, which is used without a preceding ne:

On ne parlait guère
We hardly spoke

Cette histoire n’avait guère semblé croyable
This story had hardly seemed credible

After ne . . . guère any indefinite article (i.e. one of un(e), du, de la, des) preceding a direct object becomes de:

Il y a des visiteurs
There are visitors

Il n’y a guère de visiteurs
There are hardly any visitors

NB: à peine cannot be followed by a plural noun phrase: NOT *il y a à peine des visiteurs.

guère may stand alone as a response to a question:

Combien en avez-vous acheté?
How many did you buy?

Guère (à peine quelques-uns)
Hardly any
16.12 ne . . . rien

*ne . . . rien* translates English ‘nothing’, ‘not anything’ (for the omission of *ne* see 16.4). *rien* itself may be a direct object, the object of a preposition, or the subject of the sentence. When it is a direct object it is located immediately after the verb marked for tense:

On *ne* m’a *rien* pris  
*Nothing was taken from me*

Je *ne* sais *rien* prévoir  
*I am incapable of planning anything*

When it is the object of a preposition it is located in the normal position for prepositional phrases:

*Cela n’a abouti à rien*  
*That led to nothing*

Je *n’avais besoin de rien*  
*I needed nothing*

Je *ne* serais retourné chez moi pour *rien* au monde  
*I wouldn’t have gone back for anything*

When it is a subject it appears in subject position:

*Rien ne* lui faisait mal  
*Nothing did him any harm*

*Rien ne* différenciait ce jour des autres  
*Nothing distinguished that day from the others*

*Rien ne* m’avait échappé  
*Nothing had escaped me*

**NB:** *Je n’en sais rien* means ‘I haven’t a clue’.

Expressions such as ‘nothing interesting’, ‘nothing else’ are rendered in French by *rien* + de + adjective:

Il n’y a là *rien* d’important  
*It’s nothing important*

When *rien* + de + adjective functions as a direct object with a verb in a compound tense, *rien* follows the verb marked for tense:

Il ne dit *rien* d’intéressant  
*He doesn’t say anything interesting*

Je n’ai *rien* trouvé d’intéressant  
*I found nothing interesting*

Il ne m’a *rien* dit de surprenant  
*He said nothing surprising to me*

However, when the *rien* + de + adjective functions as anything other than a direct object, it is not split in this way:

Je n’ai pensé à *rien* d’intéressant à faire  
*I didn’t think of anything interesting to do*

*Rien d’autre* n’est arrivé  
*Nothing else happened*

**NB:** the adjective remains invariably masculine in these constructions.

When adverbs are located sentence-internally in sentences negated by *ne . . . rien*, and where *rien* is the direct object, they usually appear immediately in front of *rien*:

Il n’y aura *probablement* rien pour moi à la maison  
*There would probably be nothing for me at home*
rien can stand alone (without ne) with the meaning ‘nothing’:

Qu’est-ce que vous voyez? Rien
C’est mieux que rien
C’est un rien

What do you see? Nothing
It’s better than nothing
It’s nothing

In formal French it can also be interpreted as ‘anything’ in questions or hypothetical sentences:

Avez-vous rien d’intéressant à lire? Have you anything interesting to read?
Elle est partie avant que j’aie rien dit She left before I said anything

16.13 ne . . . personne

ne . . . personne translates English ‘no one’, ‘not anybody’ (for omission of ne see 16.4). Like rien, personne can function as a direct object, the object of a preposition or the subject of the sentence. Unlike rien, when it is a direct object it appears in the normal position for direct objects:

Elle ne rencontre personne en dehors du bureau
She doesn’t meet anyone outside the office

Je n’ai vu personne
I saw no one

Ça, vous ne pourrez le faire croire à personne
As far as that goes, you won’t be able to make anyone believe it

Ils ne l’ont fait avec personne
They didn’t do it with anyone

Personne n’était en vacances, sauf moi
Nobody was on holiday except me

personne may take an adjective complement preceded by de:

Je n’ai vu personne de louche
I saw nobody suspicious

Personne d’étranger ne s’était présenté au bureau
Nobody foreign had come to the office

NB: the adjective is invariably masculine in these constructions.

personne can stand alone (without ne) with the meaning ‘no one’, ‘nobody’:

Qui a frappé? Personne
Who knocked? Nobody

In formal French it can also be interpreted as ‘anyone’ in questions, hypothetical sentences or comparisons:

As-tu rencontré personne?
Did you meet anyone?

Je le sais mieux que personne
I know it better than anyone
16.14 *ne . . . ni . . . ni*

*ne . . . ni . . . ni* translates English ‘neither . . . nor’. The *ni . . . ni* elements can range over subjects:

**Ni le cafetier ni sa femme n’étaient au courant**
*Neither the café owner nor his wife knew about it*

*over direct objects:*

**Elle n’a apporté ni bloc-notes ni stylo**
*She brought neither note pad nor pen*

*over prepositional phrases:*

**Il n’avait posé de question ni à son père ni à sa mère**
*He had asked neither his mother nor his father a question*

**Elle n’a répondu ni d’un mot ni d’un signe**
*She replied neither verbally nor with a gesture*

*over participles and adjectives:*

**Je n’ai ni vu ni entendu la querelle**
*I neither saw nor heard the argument*

**Elle n’est ni heureuse ni malheureuse**
*She is neither happy nor unhappy*

Where two verbs marked for tense are involved, the phrase *ne . . . ni ne . . .* is used:

**Je ne comprends ni n’accepte un tel comportement**
*I neither understand nor accept such behaviour*

Where, in English, a negation is followed by ‘or’, or ‘nor’, or ‘and’, *ni* is used in French:

**Ils ne voulaient accepter ni chèque, ni carte, ni liquide**
*They wouldn’t take a cheque, a credit card or cash*

**Il ne mangeait jamais le soir, ni sa femme**
*He never ate in the evenings, nor did his wife*

**Rien ni personne n’était encore trahi**
*Nothing and no one had yet been betrayed*

*ni* is similarly used with the meaning ‘or’ or ‘nor’ after *sans:*

**Le voyage aurait été impossible sans carte ni boussole**
*The journey would have been impossible without a map or a compass*

**Je fais ce qu’elle faisait mais sans son talent, ni sa chance**
*I do what she did but without her talent or her good luck*
16.15 *sans* used with other negators

Negators like *aucun(e)*, *jamais*, *plus*, *rien*, *personne* take on the meanings ‘any’, ‘ever’, ‘again’, ‘anything’, ‘anyone’ when used in conjunction with *sans*:

- sans aucune hésitation: without any hesitation
- sans jamais reculer: without ever retreating
- sans plus se mettre en colère: without getting angry again
- sans rien dire: without saying anything
- sans déranger personne: without disturbing anyone

16.16 *ne* used alone

There are a number of contexts in which *ne* can be used alone. All of them are found in only the most formal of written styles. In less formal styles the *ne* is simply absent:

**In fixed expressions (found only in formal styles)**

- à Dieu *ne* plaise!: God forbid!
- Il *n’a* eu garde de se montrer: He carefully refrained from showing his face

**In clauses dependent on comparatives**

- Il se porte moins bien que je *(ne)* pensais: His health is less good than I thought
- Il est tout autre qu’on *(ne)* croit: He is quite different from what one imagines
- La vie est plus chère qu’elle *(n’)était il y a un an*: The cost of living is higher than it was a year ago

**In clauses dependent on verbs which express fear, such as *craindre*, *avoir peur que*, *redouter que*, *appréhender que***

- Je crains qu’il *(ne)* vienne: I’m afraid that he will come

**NB:** when the verb of fearing is itself negated, *ne* is possible in the dependent clause only if the main clause is a question: *Je ne crains pas qu’il vienne* ‘I’m not afraid that he’ll come’; *Ne craindez-vous pas qu’il *(ne)* vienne?* ‘Aren’t you afraid that he will come?’

**In clauses dependent on verbs which express some kind of prevention, such as *empêcher que*, *éviter que*, *prendre garde que***

- Mets-lui un bonnet pour éviter qu’il *(ne)* prenne froid: Put a hat on him to stop him catching cold

**After the conjunctions *à moins que*, *avant que*, *sans que***

- Sans qu’ils *(ne)* sachent: Without them knowing
In clauses dependent on some verbs expressing doubt or denial which are themselves negated or questioned, such as douter que, ignorer que, nier que

Je ne doute pas qu’il (ne) soit intelligent
I don’t doubt that he’s intelligent

Personne n’ignore qu’elle (n’)ait été la cause de ses malheurs
Nobody is unaware that she has been the cause of her own misfortunes

Niera-t-on qu’il (n’)ait commis une faute?
Will it be denied that he has made a mistake?

In clauses dependent on the expressions il s’en faut que, peu s’en faut que

Il s’en faut de beaucoup qu’il (n’)ait réussi
He is far from having succeeded
17 Conjunctions and other linking constructions

17.1 Introduction

All languages have devices for linking words, phrases and clauses into more complex structures. This chapter deals with the linking function of conjunctions, past participles, present participles and gerunds.

17.2 Coordinating conjunctions

TABLE 17.A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>et</td>
<td>and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>et . . . et</td>
<td>both . . . and</td>
<td>Where coordinating conjunctions link two clauses, the verb in the second clause is always in the indicative, e.g. <em>il y avait des bals, mais on ne pouvait pas danser</em> ‘There were dances, but we weren’t able to dance’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mais</td>
<td>but</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ou</td>
<td>or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ou . . . ou</td>
<td>either . . . or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soit . . . soit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puis</td>
<td>then</td>
<td>means ‘(first) X then Y’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>car</td>
<td>for (because)</td>
<td>mainly used in written French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>now</td>
<td>a logical connector (mainly used in written and formal spoken French) – see 17.2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coordinating conjunctions link words, phrases or clauses into more complex structures:

Le concours est ouvert aux garçons et aux filles
*The competition is open to boys and girls*

J’inviterai et lui et sa sœur
*I’ll invite both him and his sister*

Il y avait des bals, mais on ne pouvait pas danser
*There were dances, but we weren’t able to dance*

Laisse-moi tranquille ou je te reprends ton argent de poche
*Give me some peace or I’ll take your pocket money back*

Il arrivera soit demain soit après-demain
*He will arrive either tomorrow, or the day after*

J’ai allumé une cigarette, puis je suis descendu à l’étage du dessous
*I lit a cigarette, then went down to the floor below*

Je ne comprenais pas sa question, car cela ne correspondait guère à sa personnalité
*I did not understand his question, for it was hardly in keeping with his character*
Subordinating conjunctions differ from subordinating conjunctions (see 17.3) in that they, and the word, phrase or clause they introduce, normally cannot be placed at the front of the sentence, whereas subordinating conjunctions usually can. Compare car ‘for’ (a coordinating conjunction) with parce que ‘because’ (a subordinating conjunction close in meaning):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Il est heureux, car il est riche} & \quad \text{NOT} \quad *\text{Car il est riche, il est heureux} \\
\text{He is happy, for he is rich} & \quad \text{For he is rich, he is happy}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Il est heureux, parce qu’il est riche} \\
\text{He is happy because he is rich}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Parce qu’il est riche, il est heureux} \\
\text{Because he is rich, he is happy}
\end{align*}
\]

Coordinating conjunctions never introduce clauses in which the verb is in the subjunctive, whereas a number of subordinating conjunctions do (see 17.3.8).

17.2.1 or

*‘now’* is a conjunction which marks the next step in a narrative or a logical argument:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Or, Jean était déjà marié lorsqu’il a rencontré Suzanne} \\
\text{Now, Jean was already married when he met Suzanne}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tous les hommes sont mortels; or, le Roi est un homme; donc le Roi est mortel} \\
\text{All men are mortal; (now,) the King is a man; therefore the King is mortal}
\end{align*}
\]

‘now’ in English can function as a coordinating conjunction (as above), a subordinating conjunction of time, and a time adverb. The subordinating conjunction of time function is fulfilled in French by maintenant que (see 17.3.1). The time adverb function is translated in French by maintenant (or alors if ‘now’ refers to an event in the past):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jean est maintenant marié} \\
\text{Jean is now married}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jean était alors marié} \\
\text{Jean was now (= then) married}
\end{align*}
\]

17.3 Subordinating conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions introduce an item (usually a clause) which is dependent on another clause (for the use of subordinating conjunctions with infinitives see 17.6):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Il est heureux, parce qu’il est riche} \\
\text{He is happy because he is rich}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Je continue à dire ‘chez nous’, bien que la maison ne nous appartienne plus} \\
\text{I continue to say ‘at our house’, although the house no longer belongs to us}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Comme il n’arrête pas de se plaindre, je l’évite le plus possible} \\
\text{As he does nothing but complain, I avoid him as much as possible}
\end{align*}
\]

Some introduce clauses in which the verb is in the indicative (as parce que and comme above). Others introduce verbs in which the subjunctive (like bien que).
17.3.1 Subordinating conjunctions of time followed by the indicative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>après que</td>
<td>after</td>
<td>après que may sometimes be heard followed by a verb in the subjunctive, by analogy with avant que (see 17.3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aussitôt que</td>
<td>as soon as</td>
<td>Substitute another adverb for longtemps to create similar conjunctions: aussi vite que, aussi peu que</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dès que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>sitôt que</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dès lors que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aussi longtemps que</td>
<td>as long as</td>
<td>Substitute another adverb for longtemps to create similar conjunctions: aussi vite que, aussi peu que</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chaque fois que</td>
<td>every time</td>
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<tr>
<td>toutes les fois que</td>
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<tr>
<td>depuis que</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>Understood as ‘from the time when’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintenant que</td>
<td>now</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>pendant que</td>
<td>while, as</td>
<td>Understood as ‘during the time when’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quand lorsque</td>
<td>when</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tant que</td>
<td>while, as</td>
<td>Understood as ‘the whole time while’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une fois que</td>
<td>once</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Après que sa femme est morte, il a déménagé  
*After his wife died, he moved house*

Sitôt que je serai rentré, je te téléphonerai  
*As soon as I get home, I will phone you*

On jouera aussi longtemps que tu veux  
*We’ll play as long as you wish*

Toutes les fois que nous lui téléphonons, elle est sortie  
*Every time we phone her, she’s out*

Depuis qu’il est chez nous, il est de plus en plus épanoui  
*Since he has been at our house, he seems more and more fulfilled*

Maintenant que je suis installé, je peux me mettre au travail  
*Now I have settled in, I can start work*

On a eu le temps de prendre un café pendant que les autres se préparaient  
*We had time for a coffee while the others were getting ready*

Elle était déjà malade quand je l’ai connue  
*She was already ill when I first knew her*

Tant qu’on n’aurait pas touché les dividendes de la paix, rien ne sera acquis  
*For as long as we haven’t tasted the fruits of peace, nothing will have been achieved*  
*(For the use of aurait touché in this context, see 17.3.2.)*

Une fois qu’il a eu fait ses valises, il est descendu au bar boire une bière  
*Once he had packed his bags, he went down to the bar for a beer*
§17.3 Subordinating conjunctions

17.3.2 Future and conditional tenses in clauses introduced by quand, lorsque, aussitôt que, dès que, sitôt que, dès lors que, tant que, après que

When subordinate clauses introduced by quand, lorsque, aussitôt que, dès que, sitôt que, dès lors que, tant que or après que are linked to main clauses in which the verb is in a future or conditional tense, the verb in the quand, lorsque, etc. clause is also in the future or conditional. This is different from English where the verb in a ‘when’, ‘as soon as’, etc. clause is usually in the present or past:

Est-ce que tu me téléphoneras quand il arrivera?
Will you telephone me when he arrives?

Dès qu’elle reviendra, j’ allumerai le feu
As soon as she comes back, I will light the fire

Si on partait à midi, il ferait encore jour quand on arriverait
If we left at midday, it would still be daylight when we arrived

Where the event in the quand, lorsque, etc. clause would be translated by the perfect or pluperfect tense in English, French has the compound future or compound conditional:

Il arrivera quand je serai parti
He will arrive when I have left

S’il ne prenait pas l’avion avant mardi, il arriverait après que je serais parti
If he didn’t catch the plane until Tuesday, he would arrive after I had left

Je remplirai le formulaire, aussitôt que je l’aurai reçu
I will fill in the form as soon as I have received it

J’aurais rempli le formulaire aussitôt que je l’aurais reçu
I would have filled in the form as soon as I had received it

More generally, when an event described in a quand, lorsque, etc. clause has not yet taken place, the verb is in a future or conditional tense:

Dès qu’il aura dit ‘oui’, faites-le signer
As soon as he says ‘yes’, get him to sign

17.3.3 Double compound past and compound pluperfect tenses in clauses introduced by quand, lorsque, aussitôt que, dès que, sitôt que, dès lors que, tant que, après que

When clauses introduced by quand, lorsque, etc. describe an event which takes place prior to an event described by a past-tense verb in the main clause, French can use the double compound past or the compound pluperfect in the quand, lorsque, etc. clause (although it is not obligatory to do so – see Chapter 10.5.3):

avoir eu + past participle
avoir été + past participle

Aussitôt que j’ai eu fini le livre, j’ai commencé à rédiger le rapport
As soon as I finished the book I began to draft the report
(My reading of the book took place prior to my writing the report)

Quand elle a été revenue, il lui a présenté ses excuses
When she came back, he offered her his apologies
Conjunctions and other linking constructions §17.3

When the verb in the main clause is in the compound past tense, the verb in the *quand*, *lorsque*, etc. clause is in the double compound past tense (as in the above examples); when the verb in the main clause is in the pluperfect, the verb in the *quand*, *lorsque*, etc. clause is in the compound pluperfect:

\[
\text{Aussitôt que j'avais eu fini le livre, j'avais commencé à rédiger le rapport}
\]

*As soon as I had finished the book I began to draft the report*

Alternatively, one can simply use the ordinary compound past and pluperfect tenses in the *quand*, *lorsque*, etc. clause:

\[
\text{Aussitôt que j'avais fini le livre, j'ai commencé . . . , Quand elle est revenue, il lui a présenté . . .}
\]

**NB:** The double compound past can also be used in main clauses when adverbs expressing urgency or speed accompany a past event:

\[
\begin{align*}
Theuseofthetwincompoundsentemphasizestheideathattheeventisoveranddonewith.\\
\text{J'ai eu vite fini le livre} & \quad \text{I quickly finished the book} \\
\text{Il a eu bientôt fait de lui dire ce qu'il pensait d'elle} & \quad \text{He had soon told her what he thought of her}
\end{align*}
\]

In formal styles of written French where the dominant tense is the simple past (see Chapter 10.5.2), a form of the verb called the 'past anterior' is used in the contexts described above. The past anterior consists of the simple past forms of *avoir* or *être* and the past participle:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Aussitôt que j'eus fini le livre, je commençai à rédiger le rapport} & \quad \text{As soon as I had finished the book I began to draft the report} \\
\text{Après qu'elle fut sortie, il emballa son cadeau d'anniversaire} & \quad \text{After she went out he wrapped her birthday present} \\
\text{J'eus vite fini le livre} & \quad \text{I had quickly finished the book}
\end{align*}
\]

### 17.3.4 Tenses with *depuis que*, *voilà/voici . . . que*, *il y a . . . que*

When *depuis que* 'since', ‘for’ introduces a clause describing an event whose consequences are ongoing at the time it is being reported, the tense of the verb in that clause differs systematically from English as follows:

**English perfect:** French present
**English pluperfect:** French imperfect

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Depuis que nous vivons ensemble, je la vois travailler tard le soir} & \quad \textit{Ever since we have been living together, I have seen her working late into the evening} \\
& \quad (\text{We are still living together at the time I am reporting that she works late into the evening}) \\
\text{Depuis que nous vivions ensemble, je la voyais travailler tard le soir} & \quad \textit{Ever since we had been living together, I saw her working late into the evening} \\
& \quad (\text{We were still living together at the time I was reporting that she worked late into the evening})
\end{align*}
\]
§17.3 Subordinating conjunctions

But when *depuis que* introduces a clause describing an event which has been completed by the time it is reported, without ongoing consequences, the tenses are the same as in English:

Depuis qu’il **a fini** ses études, je le vois beaucoup plus  
*Since he has finished his studies, I see a lot more of him*

(His studies are over at the time I am reporting seeing a lot more of him)

Depuis qu’il **avait fini** ses études, je le voyais beaucoup plus  
*Since he had finished his studies, I saw a lot more of him*

(His studies were over at the time I was reporting that I was seeing a lot more of him)

*voilà/voici . . . que* and *il y a . . . que* which also mean ‘since’, ‘for’ when used with time expressions – *voilà plusieurs années que . . . ‘it’s been several years since . . .’, il y a/avait un mois que . . . ‘it has/had been a month since . . .’ – behave just like *depuis que*. When the clause introduced by these expressions describes an event whose consequences are ongoing at the time it is being reported, either the present tense or the imperfect tense is used in French where English uses, respectively, the perfect and the pluperfect:

*Voilà/voici plusieurs années qu’elle travaile tard le soir*  
*For several years now she has been working late into the evening*

Il y avait un mois que je la **connaissais**  
*I had known her for a month/It was a month since I had known her*

But when the clause describes an event which has been completed at the time it is reported, the compound past tense or the pluperfect is used:

*Voilà/voici deux ans qu’elle a arrêté de fumer*  
*It’s been two years since she stopped smoking*

Il y avait un mois qu’il **avait disparu**  
*It was a month since he had disappeared*

For tenses with *depuis* as a preposition see Chapter 10.4.4.

17.3.5 **Non-time subordinating conjunctions normally followed by the indicative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ainsi de même que</td>
<td>just as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(au fur et) à mesure que à proportion que</td>
<td>as</td>
<td>With the meaning: ‘all the while’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attendu que vu que étant donné que dès lors que</td>
<td>seeing that, given that, since</td>
<td>dès lors que also has a time meaning: Dès lors qu’elle a su la vérité, elle a cessé de lui faire confiance ‘As soon as she knew the truth, she lost confidence in him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pour) autant que</td>
<td>as far as</td>
<td>Is sometimes followed by the subjunctive to express uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plutôt que</td>
<td>rather than, more than</td>
<td><em>ne</em> can be optionally inserted in front of the subordinate verb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Je regardais la lune de même qu’elle devait la regarder
I looked at the moon just as she must have been looking at it

A mesure qu’il parlait, il s’animait
As he spoke he became more animated

Vu qu’il est déjà midi, je propose qu’on reprenne après le déjeuner
Seeing that it is already midday, I propose that we restart after lunch

Je délègue autant que je peux
I delegate as much as I can

Pour autant que je sache, ils sont partis lundi
As far as I know, they left on Monday
(My knowledge is uncertain, and so a subjunctive is used)

Il sommeille plutôt qu’il ne dort
He is dozing rather than sleeping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>comme</td>
<td>as, like</td>
<td>Also has a time meaning: Il arrivait comme midi sonnait ‘He arrived as midday was chiming’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comme si</td>
<td>as if</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puisque</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>Not to be confused with depuis que – see 17.4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excepté que</td>
<td>except that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sinon que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outre que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sauf que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parce que</td>
<td>because</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comme il n’arrête pas de se plaindre, je l’évite le plus possible
As he does nothing but complain, I avoid him as much as possible

On a eu un été comme on n’en a jamais vu
We had a summer like we have never seen before

Elle a baissé la tête comme si elle avait honte
She lowered her head as if she was ashamed of something

Elle parle français puisque sa mère est Française
She speaks French since her mother is a Frenchwoman

Elle n’avait rien à dire, sinon qu’elle avait faim
She had nothing to say except that she was hungry

Il est resté ici parce qu’il n’avait pas l’argent du billet
He stayed here because he didn’t have the money for a ticket
17.3 Subordinating conjunctions

Je prends le bus ou j’y vais en vélo, selon qu’il pleut ou qu’il fait beau
I take the bus or go on my bike, depending on whether it is raining or is fine

Si on le branche là-dessus, on peut tenir jusqu’à demain matin
If you get him going on that subject, we’ll be here until tomorrow morning

Même s’il était arrivé, je n’aurais pas pu lui parler
Even if he had arrived, I couldn’t have spoken to him

Quand même il m’aurait dit le contraire, ça n’aurait rien changé
Even if he had said the exact opposite, it wouldn’t have changed anything

Il est blond, alors que nous deux, nous sommes bruns
He is blond, while the two of us are dark-haired

17.3.6 *si* and the tense to use in *si* clauses

There are two *si’s* in French which function like conjunctions. One introduces indirect questions, and can always be translated by ‘whether’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>selon que</td>
<td>depending on whether</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suivant que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>si</em></td>
<td><em>if, even if</em></td>
<td>For tenses with <em>si</em> see 17.3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>même si</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quand même</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tandis que</td>
<td><em>while, whereas</em></td>
<td><em>alors que</em> also has a time meaning: Alors qu’il se promenait dans le parc, il a rencontré un vieil ami. ‘While he was walking in the park, he met an old friend’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alors que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Indirect questions are introduced by verbs such as *comprendre, demander, se demander, dire, expliquer, savoir* – see Chapter 14.7). In this usage the verb in the *si* clause can appear in all the tenses, including future and conditional tenses:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Je ne sais pas</em></td>
<td><em>Je ne savais pas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>si elle viendra</em></td>
<td><em>elle était venue</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I don’t know if/whether she will come</em></td>
<td><em>I didn’t know if/whether she had come</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other *si* introduces hypothetical clauses:

Je n’aurais pas écrit *si* j’avais pu la joindre par téléphone
I wouldn’t have written if I had been able to reach her by phone

Here *si* cannot be translated by ‘whether’, and describes what might have happened but didn’t.
The verb in hypothetical *si* clauses can never appear in future or conditional tenses. Typical sequences of tenses are illustrated in Table 17.D:

**TABLE 17.D Sequence of tenses in *si* clauses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main clause</th>
<th><em>si</em> clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present, future, conditional</strong></td>
<td><strong>Present, imperfect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je le fais</td>
<td><em>I do it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je le ferai</td>
<td><em>I’ll do it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je le ferais</td>
<td><em>I would do it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imperfect, compound conditional</strong></td>
<td><strong>Imperfect, pluperfect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je le faisais</td>
<td><em>I used to do it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je l’aurais fait</td>
<td><em>I would have done it</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**17.3.7 Alternatives to (*mêmes*) *si* in written French for constructing hypothetical clauses**

One alternative to hypothetical *si* clauses in very formal written French is a verb in the conditional tense or in the past subjunctive tense inverted with the subject:

- **Devrait-il** en mourir, il n’y consentirait jamais
- **Dût-il** en mourir, il n’y consentirait jamais

Both mean: ‘Even if he were to die as a result, he would never consent to doing it’.

Another is to use *quand* (*mêmes*) followed by a verb in the conditional:

- **Quand (mêmes) il me le jurerait sur l’honneur, je ne le croirais pas**
  *(Even) if he were to swear to me on his honour that it was so, I wouldn’t believe him*

or a conditional clause followed by *que*:

- **Il me le jurerait sur l’honneur que** je ne le croirais pas
  *(Same meaning as the sentence above)*

**17.3.8 Subordinating conjunctions normally followed by the subjunctive**

**TABLE 17.E Time conjunctions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>avant que</td>
<td><em>before</em></td>
<td><em>ne</em> can be optionally inserted in front of the subordinate verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en attendant que</td>
<td><em>waiting for</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jusqu’à ce que</td>
<td><em>until</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§17.3 Subordinating conjunctions

Avant que personne (n’)ait pu lui demander d’explication, il a dit ‘C’est moi le coupable’
Before anyone could ask him to explain himself, he said ‘I am the guilty one’

En attendant que le beau temps revienne, on passait les soirées à lire au coin du feu
Waiting for the fine weather to return, we spent the evenings reading by the fireside

Attendez pour prendre la photo jusqu’à ce que le soleil soit plus bas dans le ciel
Wait to take the photo until the sun is lower in the sky

NB: ‘not until’, where it means ‘not before’, is translated by pas avant que:

Je ne partirai pas avant que vous (ne) me payiez
I won’t leave until you pay me

TABLE 17.F Non-time conjunctions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bien que</td>
<td>although</td>
<td>encore que is found only in formal written French malgré que is found in informal spoken French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quoique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encore que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malgré que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afin que</td>
<td>in order that, so that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pour que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Je continue à dire ‘chez moi’, bien que la maison ne nous appartienne plus
I continue to say ‘at our house’ although the house no longer belongs to us

Il promenait la poussette le long du lac, pour que le bébé prenne l’air
He was pushing the push-chair along beside the lake for the baby to get some fresh air

Qu’est-ce qu’elle t’a dit pour que tu sois si malheureux?
What did she say to you to make you so unhappy?

TABLE 17.F (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>de façon que</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td>Followed by the indicative these describe something which has happened Followed by the subjunctive they express a wish that something might happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de manière que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de sorte que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si bien que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tel que</td>
<td>such as</td>
<td>tel en tel que agrees with the noun it refers to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elle riait de telle façon qu’on remarquait ses jolies dents blanches
She laughed so that her beautiful white teeth could be seen
(Her teeth were seen, so the verb introduced by de telle façon que is in the indicative)

Elle parlait de façon que tout le monde la comprenne
She spoke so that everyone might understand her
(Her wish was that everyone might understand her)
Conjunctions and other linking constructions §17.3

Telle que vous l’avez décrite, la statue sera trop grande pour la galerie du rez-de-chaussée
Such as you have described it, the statue will be too big for the ground floor gallery

Et s’il avait créé un scandale tel que vous ayez été obligé de céder, vous auriez perdu beaucoup d’argent
And if he had created such a scandal that you had been obliged to give in, you would have lost a lot of money

TABLE 17.F (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(soit/ou) que . . . (soit/ou) que</td>
<td>whether . . . or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à moins que</td>
<td>unless</td>
<td>ne can be optionally inserted in front of the subordinate verb – it is most likely in formal French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pour peu que</td>
<td>however little</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si peu que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pourvu que</td>
<td>providing that</td>
<td>Conditional and future are possible in informal spoken French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à condition que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à supposer que</td>
<td>supposing that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supposé que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en supposant que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en admettant que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non que</td>
<td>not that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n’est pas que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sans que</td>
<td>without</td>
<td>ne can be optionally inserted in front of the subordinate verb in formal French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de peur que</td>
<td>for fear that</td>
<td>ne can be optionally inserted in front of the subordinate verb in formal French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de crainte que</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qu’elle ait perdu l’argent ou qu’elle l’ait dépensé, la caisse est vide
Whether she lost the money or whether she spent it, the coffers are empty

A moins qu’elle ne vende la maison de son vivant, en principe c’est nous qui héritons
Unless she sells the house in her lifetime, in principle we will inherit

Pour peu qu’on habite dans une zone où la réception est bonne, on peut capter une cinquantaine de chaînes
You just have to live in an area where the reception is good and you can pick up fifty TV stations

Pourvu que tout le monde soit d’accord, je commence tout de suite
Providing that everyone agrees, I’ll start straight away

TABLE 17.F (continued)
**17.4 Conjunctions sometimes confused by English speakers**

Some conjunctions have several functions which only partially overlap between English and French.

**17.4.1 *since***

(a) meaning ‘from the time when’ = depuis que

> Depuis qu’elle habite la même rue que moi, on ne se voit presque plus  
Since she has lived in the same street as me, we hardly see each other any more

(b) meaning ‘given that’ = puisque, comme, vu que, étant donné que

> Puisqu’elle a de l’expérience dans la matière, je pense qu’il serait bon de la consulter  
Since she has experience in this area, I think it would be a good idea to consult her

> Comme mes frères l’énervent, elle les évite le plus possible  
Since my brothers annoy her, she avoids them as much as possible

**17.4.2 *while***

(a) meaning ‘during the time that’ = pendant que

> J’ai téléphoné à ma mère pendant qu’il préparait du thé  
I telephoned my mother while he made some tea

(b) meaning ‘for as long as’ = tant que

> Tant qu’elle faisait tout ce qu’il voulait, son frère était satisfait  
While she did everything he wanted, her brother was satisfied

(c) meaning ‘whereas’ = alors que, tandis que

> Il est blond alors que nous deux, nous sommes bruns  
He is blond whereas the two of us are brown-haired

> Elle s’occupe du bébé tandis que, moi, je fais tout le travail  
She looks after the baby while I do all the work

NB: *alors que* can sometimes mean ‘while’ in the sense of ‘during the time that’: *Alors qu’il se promenait dans le parc, il a rencontré un vieil ami* ‘While he was walking in the park, he met an old friend’.
17.4.3 ‘as’

(a) meaning ‘all the while’ = à mesure que

\( \text{À mesure qu’} \) il parlait, une idée se formait dans mon esprit
As he spoke, an idea formed in my mind

(b) meaning ‘at the same time as’ = comme

Il arrivait \( \text{comme} \) midi sonnait
He arrived as midday was striking

(c) meaning ‘in the manner of’ = comme

Les footballeurs s’embrassaient \( \text{comme} \) ils l’avaient vu faire à la télévision
The footballers kissed each other as they had seen it done on the television

17.4.4 ‘when’

(a) meaning ‘at the time when’ = quand, lorsque

\( \text{Quand} \) sa femme est morte, il a déménagé
When his wife died, he moved house

(b) meaning ‘whereas’ = alors que, tandis que

Je me demandais pourquoi il venait chez nous, \( \text{alors qu’} \) il habitait de l’autre côté de la frontière
I wondered why he was coming our way when he lived on the other side of the border

17.5 Repeated subordinating conjunctions

When clauses introduced by subordinating conjunctions are themselves linked together, \( \text{que} \) replaces the first conjunction (and is obligatory in French, while the repeated conjunction in English is often omitted):

\( \text{Quand} \) je suis pressé et \( \text{que} \) je sors la voiture du garage, elle cale
When I’m in a hurry and (when) I get the car out of the garage, it stalls

The form of the verb in the clause introduced by \( \text{que} \) is in most cases the same as that of the verb in the first clause (indicative or subjunctive):

\( \text{Même quand} \) j’étais gosse, et \( \text{que} \) je vivais à la campagne, je ne jouais pas dehors
Even when I was a child, and (when) I lived in the country, I didn’t play outside

\( \text{Bien qu’} \) il plaisante et \( \text{qu’} \) il feigne l’indifférence, en réalité il est très touché
Although he is joking and pretending it doesn’t matter, in fact he is really moved

However, when \( \text{si} \) is repeated by \( \text{que} \), the verb in the clause introduced by \( \text{que} \) is in the subjunctive:

\( \text{S’il fait beau demain, et \text{que} nous ayons le temps, nous pourrions aller à la plage} \)
If it is fine tomorrow, and (if) we have time, we could go to the beach

(See also Chapter 11.1.10.)
17.6 Subordinating conjunctions used with infinitive clauses

A number of the conjunctions which introduce clauses with finite verbs can also be used without *que* to link infinitive clauses to a main clause as shown in Table 17.G.

**TABLE 17.G Subordinating conjunctions without *que***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Followed by <em>de</em></th>
<th>Followed by <em>à</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>afin de (finir le premier) avant de (monter à l’étage) de crainte de/de peur de (déranger les voisins) à condition de (faire des bénéfices) à moins d’(avoir une augmentation)</td>
<td>in order to (finish first) before (going upstairs) for fear of (disturbing the neighbours) subject to (making a profit) unless (I/you/we etc. get a pay rise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aller) jusqu’à (déclarer le contraire) de manière à/de façon à/de sorte à (assurer la victoire)</td>
<td>(to go) as far as (stating the opposite) so as to (be certain of victory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not followed by another preposition</td>
<td>in order to (finish first) without (making a noise)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Je m’étais arrêté afin de/pour vérifier le niveau de l’huile
*I had stopped to check the oil level*

Avant de payer j’ai passé l’addition au peigne fin
*Before paying I scrutinized the bill*

Il ne peut pas rencontrer quelqu’un sans lui parler de ses problèmes sentimentaux
*He can’t say hallo to someone without talking about his emotional problems*

NB: plutôt que ‘rather than’, ‘more than’ exceptionally keeps the *que*, but also adds *de* when it introduces an infinitive: Plutôt que de chercher partout, on devrait commencer par les tiroirs du bureau ‘Rather than searching everywhere, we should start with the desk drawers’.

Where the subject of a main clause is the same as the subject of a subordinate clause linked to it, it is more natural in French to use an infinitive than a finite clause:

Il a sorti le paquet de café avant d’allumer le chauffe-eau
*He took out his packet of coffee before he switched on the water-heater (the subject both of a sorti and allumer)*

rather than: Il a sorti le paquet de café avant qu’il (n’)ait allumé le chauffe-eau.

Je n’irai pas à moins d’être certain d’avoir une place
*I won’t go unless I’m certain of getting a seat (the subject both of irai and être certain)*

rather than: Je n’irai pas à moins que je (ne) sois certain d’avoir une place.
A number of other conjunctions which are not capable of introducing finite clauses in modern French can introduce infinitive clauses:

- faute d’(avoir assez d’argent)
  through lack of (having enough money)
- à force de (s’entraîner)
  by dint of (training)
- au lieu de (dormir)
  instead of (sleeping)
- loin de (chercher à vous tromper)
  far from (seeking to cheat you)
- près de (renoncer)
  close to (giving up)
- quant à (proposer de vous accompagner)
  as for (proposing to go with you)

17.7 après avoir/être + past participle linking an infinitive clause to a main clause

A frequently used construction translating English ‘having V-ed’, ‘after V-ing’ is après + the infinitive form of avoir or être and a past participle:

- Après avoir mangé sa glace à la fraise, elle s’est essuyé la bouche sur sa manche
  Having eaten/after eating her strawberry ice-cream, she wiped her mouth on her sleeve
- Après avoir expliqué à ses hôtes comment arriver au centre ville, elle s’est retirée dans sa chambre
  After having explained to her guests how to get into the centre of town, she retired to her bedroom
- Après être allée consulter son médecin, elle a constaté qu’elle avait moins mal
  Having gone/after going to see her doctor, she found that it didn’t hurt so much

17.8 Past participle phrases used as linkers

The past participles of verbs which are conjugated with être in compound tenses (see Chapter 8.2.2) can be used without après to link subordinate clauses to main clauses, where English usually uses ‘having V-ed’:

- Arrivé à la gare, il a acheté un journal
  Having arrived at the station he bought a paper
- Couché de bonne heure, j’ai lu
  Having gone to bed early, I read
- Partie pour de bon, elle n’a plus l’intention de revenir
  Having left for good, she no longer intends to return
The past participles of verbs referring to bodily posture are used where English uses ‘V-ing’: 

assis ‘sitting’, appuyé ‘leaning’, agenouillé ‘kneeling’, couché ‘lying’, etc.:

Je suis resté debout toute la séance, appuyé contre le mur
I remained standing throughout the showing, leaning against the wall

Assis sur un banc, on a parlé longtemps
Sitting there on a bench, we talked for a long time

17.9 Present participles and gerunds

This section concerns French verb forms ending in -ant. They are formed from the stem of the first person plural (nous) of the present tense by deleting -ons and replacing it with -ant: donnons/donnant, finissons/finissant, dormons/dormant. They can also have a compound form composed of the -ant form of the auxiliary and the past participle of the verb: ayant donné, ayant fini, ayant dormi, étant devenu.

-ant forms have three main roles: they can function as adjectives, in which case they agree with the noun to which they refer, they can function as present participles, in which case they do not agree with any noun, and they can function as gerunds with the added form en (en donnant, en finissant, en dormant).

17.9.1 -ant forms as adjectives

Like all adjectives, -ant forms can occur close to a noun or be linked to it by a verb such as être, devenir, paraître (see Chapter 4.1.1). In both cases they agree with the noun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>une histoire passionnante</td>
<td>a fascinating story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cette histoire est passionnante</td>
<td>This story is fascinating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une eau de toilette séduisante</td>
<td>a seductive perfume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cette eau de toilette est séduisante</td>
<td>This perfume is seductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une femme plaisante</td>
<td>an agreeable woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cette femme est plaisante</td>
<td>This woman is agreeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une chaise roulante</td>
<td>a wheelchair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une ferme avoisinante</td>
<td>a neighbouring farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>une injustice criante</td>
<td>a flagrant injustice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17.9.2 -ant forms as present participles

-ant forms can be used to form subordinate clauses. When they do so, they are called present participles. Used in this way, they are invariable (i.e. they do not agree with any noun):

Les circonstances aidant, ils ont terminé le projet à la date prévue
Given the favourable conditions, they finished the project on the agreed date

Voyant arriver sa sœur, elle s’est éloignée
Seeing her sister arrive, she left

Sachant qu’ils allaient perdre, ils ont néanmoins fait de leur mieux
Knowing they were going to lose, they nonetheless did their best

Il était heureux d’y aller, reconnaissant ce qu’il devait à son ancien collège
He was pleased to go there recognizing what he owed to his old school
Attracting an international audience, the exhibition reached a million visitors.

This barn, adjoining the main buildings, could be converted into living accommodation.

The stories of Roald Dahl, fascinating the children of every nation, have been translated into several languages.

Driving at seventy kilometres an hour, the driver was unable to avoid a pedestrian.

In some cases, where the present participle follows a noun, it may be difficult to decide whether it is an adjective or a present participle. In the following examples, the -ant forms are all present participles, and hence invariable:

- un éditorial ridiculisant le gouvernement
  - an editorial poking fun at the government

- une voiture roulant lentement est moins dangereuse
  - a car driving slowly is less dangerous

- des manifestants hurlant des slogans passaient sous ses fenêtres
  - demonstrators shouting slogans passed below his windows

- un éditorial passionnant
  - an interesting editorial

- un éditorial ennuyeux
  - a boring editorial (OK – adjective)

- une chaise roulante
  - a wheelchair (OK – adjective)

- des manifestants délicats des slogans
  - *demonstrators delicate slogans (not OK – present participle)

You can usually tell if an -ant form is an adjective (and hence must agree with a noun) if you can replace it by an ordinary adjective and still have a grammatical phrase. Compare:

- un éditorial passionnant
  - a fascinating editorial

- un éditorial ennuyeux
  - a boring editorial (OK – adjective)

- une chaise roulante
  - a wheelchair (OK – adjective)

- une voiture haute lentement
  - *a car driving slowly (not OK – present participle)

- des manifestants hurlant des slogans
  - *demonstrators shouting slogans (not OK – present participle)

The decision depends on whether the action described by the -ant form is seen mainly as a state (=adjective) or as an action (=verb).
NB: Where English has a simple -ing form, French may require a compound present participle:

**Etant partis** à l’aube, nous sommes arrivés avant la nuit  
*Having left at dawn, we arrived before nightfall*

**Ayant ramassé** ses vêtements en hâte, il sauta par la fenêtre  
*Having picked up his clothes in a hurry, he jumped out of the window*

**Ayant repéré** un gendarme plus loin dans la rue, elle a pris la fuite  
*Spotting a policeman further up the street, she ran away*

17.9.3 Set expressions with invariable present participles

- argent comptant  
  *They want to be paid in cash*

- ne pas avoir un sou vaillant  
  *not to have a red cent*

- ce disant  
  *In so saying*

- chemin faisant  
  *We sang songs on the way*

- donnant donnant  
  *We agree as long as it’s a fair exchange*

- strictement parlant  
  *Strictly speaking I should not say this to you*

- tambour battant  
  *The right led a thoroughly energetic campaign from the beginning to the end*

17.9.4 -ant forms used as gerunds with *en*

Where present participles are preceded by *en* they are known as ‘gerunds’. By using *en*, a speaker or a writer may be emphasizing the fact that the event described in the main clause and the event described in the gerundive clause take place simultaneously. This is often translated into English by ‘while’ or ‘as’:

- **En attendant** Philippe, je me suis installé au café d’en face  
  *While waiting for Philippe, I took up position in the café opposite*

- Je l’avais vue dans la semaine, **en rentrant** de l’école  
  *I had seen her during the week, as I came back from school*

- Il est passé **en faisant** un appel de phares  
  *He passed by, as he did so flashing his lights*
Comment est-ce que tu arrives à tant bavarder **en conduisant**?
How do you manage to talk so much when you are driving?

Alternatively, the use of *en* with a gerund may emphasize a link of cause and effect between the gerundive clause and the main clause; this is translated by ‘in’ or ‘by’ in English:

- **En déclarant** que vous étiez sur place vous vous êtes incriminé
  In admitting that you were there you have incriminated yourself

- **En gérant** une boutique comme si c’était un supermarché, on s’expose à l’échec
  In managing a small shop as if it were a supermarket, you are running the risk of failure

Marianne a indiqué qu’elle ne voulait plus sortir avec lui **en refusant** son invitation
Marianne showed that she no longer wanted to go out with him by refusing his invitation

- **En augmentant** le prix de vente vous risquez de voir chuter le nombre d’acheteurs
  By increasing the retail price you run the risk of reducing the number of buyers

On a décoré la pièce **en mettant** des fleurs partout
We fixed up the room by putting flowers everywhere

When a gerund is preceded by **tout en**, it suggests that the event described in the gerundive clause is going on all the while the event described in the main clause takes place:

- **Tout en me parlant**, elle nettoyait les vitres
  All the while she was speaking, she wiped the windows

- **Tout en discutant** de la pluie et du beau temps, il regardait discrètement dans le rétroviseur
  Whilst chatting about this and that, he was keeping a discreet eye on the rear-view mirror

Les deux sœurs se sont quittées **tout en sachant** qu’elles avaient peu de chances de se revoir
The two sisters took leave of one another knowing that there was little possibility of them seeing each other again

When present participles are used without *en*, they can refer to any of the participants in the main clause: subject, direct object, object of a preposition:

Je l’avais vue dans la semaine, **rentrant** de l’école
I had seen her during the week as I (or she) came back from school

When *en* is present, however, the gerund can only refer to the subject of the main clause:

Je l’avais vue dans la semaine, **en rentrant** de l’école
I had seen her during the week as I (NOT *she*) came back from school

NB: Gerunds may also be formed from compound present participles. These are frequently translated into English by a simple ‘-ing’ form:

- **En ayant refusé** de poursuivre des études supérieures, elle s’est privée de bien des possibilités
  By refusing to undertake higher education, she cut herself off from a number of possibilities

- **En ayant contesté** nos méthodes, il s’est exclu de notre groupe
  By questioning our methods, he has excluded himself from our group
Appendix

Capital letters, lower-case letters and representing speech in written French

We note here briefly some of the differences between written English and written French in the conventions relating to the use of capital and lower-case letters, and in representing direct speech.

Small letters for days of the week, months, seasons

English uses capital letters, French uses lower-case letters:

Il arrive lundi (mardi, mercredi, . . .)  
*He arrives on Monday (Tuesday, Wednesday, . . .)*

Nous partirons en janvier (en février, en mars, . . .)  
*We shall leave in January (February, March, . . .)*

English can optionally use capital or lower-case letters with seasons, French always uses lower-case letters:

Elle travaille dix-huit heures par jour en été (au printemps, . . .)  
*She works eighteen hours a day in Summer (in Spring, . . .)*

Small letters for streets, roads, avenues, etc.

English uses capitals, French uses lower-case letters:

11, place de la République  
*11 Russell Square*

Je l’ai vue rue de Rivoli  
*I saw her in Regent Street*

Small letters for titles

English uses capitals, French uses lower-case letters:

Le professeur Bouvier  
*Professor Bouvier*

Le docteur Picot  
*Doctor Picot*

Small letters for adjectives indicating origin, but capital letters for nouns

English always uses capital letters to introduce adjectives and nouns describing the origin or religious affiliation of a person or entity. French uses lower-case letters to introduce adjectives describing origin, lower-case letters to introduce adjectives and nouns describing religious affiliation, but capital letters to introduce nouns describing origin:

un touristé français (adj)  
*a French tourist*

un Français de ma connaissance (noun)  
*a Frenchman I know*
un livre américain (adj) un Américain célèbre (noun)
an American book a famous American

un prêtre catholique (adj) un catholique célèbre (noun)
a Catholic priest a famous Catholic

Small letters for languages
English always uses capital letters to introduce adjectives and nouns describing languages, French always uses lower-case letters:

la langue française (adj)
the French language

Elle parle bien le français (noun)
She speaks French well

Capitals and lower-case letters in citing book titles
Although there are different conventions for the use of capitals and lower-case letters in citing book titles, one common convention in French is to capitalize every word up to and including the first noun:

L’Étranger
L’Art de vivre
Le Grand Meaulnes
Les Petits Enfants du siècle

In English common conventions are to capitalize the first letter of every word, or to capitalize the first word and the ‘content’ words (and not the function words), or to treat the title like an ordinary sentence:

The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire
The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
The decline and fall of the Roman empire

Representing direct speech
Direct speech can be opened and closed by guillemets. Unlike English, where speech marks enclose only the speech itself, in French guillemets enclose dialogues, and are only closed when the whole dialogue is at an end:

«Et voilà, dit le père, filant sur la route. En voilà encore une de tirée.
-Eh, oui», répliqua la mère.
(From Christiane Rochefort, Les Petits Enfants du siècle)

‘Well,’ said our father, belting along the road. ‘That’s another one [holiday] over with.’
‘Yes,’ our mother replied.

Alternatively, speech can be introduced by dashes (‘tirets’) in both languages:

- Etes-vous prêt?
- Pas encore.

- Are you ready?
- Not yet.
Verbs reporting who said what are always inverted with the subject in French:

«C’est plus fort en goût», précise Vincent
«C’est plus fort en goût», précise-t-il
'It has a stronger taste,' Vincent adds/he adds

«Le moulin, clef de l’économie», annonce un panneau
'Mills are the key to economic success,' a sign announces

«Ce n’est pas vrai», répondirent les autres tranquillement
'It’s not true,' the others replied calmly
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