

A Level French Study Guide



Active Learning + Verb Guide

Introduction

Knowing what you know

This is the key thing if you are going to feel confident about your learning. Ask yourself “do I really know what I have learnt?”

Passive Knowledge is okay – but you only know it if someone helps you;

What is the name of second biggest city in France?

- a. Lyon
- b. Marseille
- c. Grenoble

Active Knowledge is vital for language – you have met, learnt and can remember the information;

What is the name of second biggest city in France?

Answer = _____

In lessons we design activities to help you to practise and use words and grammar in a number of contexts. What we can't do is do your learning for you! We can't **force** you to learn; only you can do your own active learning.

Knowing how to learn

It is best to learn in chunks: **little but often**.

We can suggest ways to learn but you can also experiment and come up with your own ideas. There is no avoiding the fact that learning vocabulary and grammar takes time and dedication. There is no magic wand to wave to get the words into your head. Experiment with the ideas in this booklet and decide what works for you.

Knowing what to learn

There is a lot to learn. It takes time. You can't rush it. **This booklet concentrates on verbs as a priority**. Getting verbs right is more than half the battle – remember that every (full) sentence contains a verb. You also have your own vocabulary booklets and need to learn nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc.

Discipline

You will need to do active learning each week **in addition** to your homework. Use your log books to record how much you do.

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How to Learn – Low Tech

1. Look, Cover, Say

Do five words at a time.

Step 1: Cover the English. Say the French word. Say the English word. Check any you couldn't remember. Do this until you no longer hesitate before you answer.

Step 2: Cover the French. Say the English word. Say the French word. Check any you couldn't remember. Do this until you no longer hesitate before you answer.

Step 3: When you have done the whole list of words, test yourself in writing. French to English first and then English to French.

2. Make Vocab Cards

Preparation: write the French word or phrase on one side of a piece of paper or card and the English on the other.

Put your cards in a pile. Look at the French. Say the English.

Check as you go. Put any you can do on a left hand side pile. Any you can't do go on the right. Go back through the ones you don't get. Do this several times.

Now do the same again, but this time work from English to French.

3. The 5 Envelope Trick

Preparation: get 5 envelopes and number them 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Put all your words on card or paper into envelope 1.

Now test yourself. Any words you can do go into envelope 2. Any you can't do stay in envelope 1.

The aim is to get all words into the 5th envelope, by which time you should know them all very well.

How to Learn – High Tech

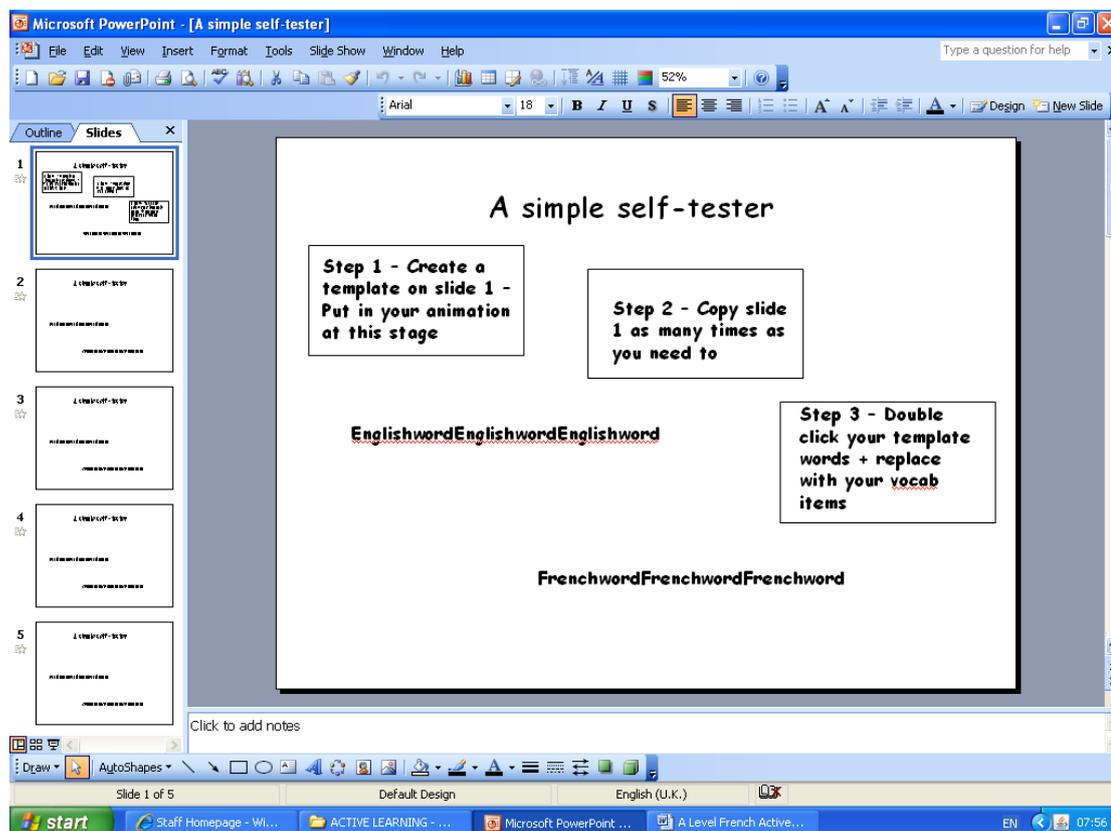
Use Powerpoint

Create slides which contain a vocab question and its answer.

Either: operate your slide show on a mouse click

Or: put in timings to force yourself to remember quickly.

Find an example powerpoint to experiment with in **Shared Documents, Languages, French, A Level, Active Learning**. The file name is “A simple self-tester”



Don't forget to use all the “speedy powerpoints” I email to you after lessons too. You can easily adapt these to create your own vocabulary tests.

How to use Excel for Vocabulary Learning

Why use Excel?

1. You can make vocabulary lists for printing out
2. You can focus on particular things you need to work on more
3. You can keep records of how much you can remember
4. You can identify categories (e.g noun, verb, adjective) and topic areas (e.g health / environment / education) and then test yourself randomly or within a category.

Find an example spreadsheet to experiment with in **Shared Documents, Languages, French, A Level, Active Learning**. The file name is "Excel Vocab Sheet Example"

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet titled "Excel Vocab sheet example - How to use Excel". The spreadsheet contains a list of French words and their English translations, parts of speech, and a column for "Free time". The cells in the "Free time" column are color-coded: Red (Don't know), Amber (Sort of know it), and Green (Learnt). The words are sorted by topic, with "Free time" words at the top. Callouts explain the color coding and filtering options.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1												
2												
3	un intérêt	interest	Noun	Free time	3							
4	une émission	programme	Noun		2							
5	poireauter	to laze about	Verb		1							
6	sortir	to go out	Verb		2							
7	se reposer	to relax	Verb		2							
8	un membre	member	Noun		3							
9	le déplacement	movement	Noun		1							
10	dangereux	dangerous	Adjective									
11	raisonable	sensible	Adjective									
12	une personne	person	Noun									
13	les gens	people	Noun									
14	le temps	weather	Noun									
15	l'environnement (m)	environment	Noun									
16	participer à	to take part	Verb									
17	important	important	Adjective									
18	s'intéresser à	to be interested in	Verb									
19	le parti	political party	Noun									
20	plein	full	Adjective									
21												
22												
23												
24												
25												
26												
27												
28												
29												
30												
31												
32												
33												
34												
35												

Traffic light system
Red - Don't know
Amber - Sort of know it
Green - Learnt

Use a filter to sort by topic, Free time etc.

Use a filter to sort by noun, verb, adjective etc.

What to Learn: Verbs

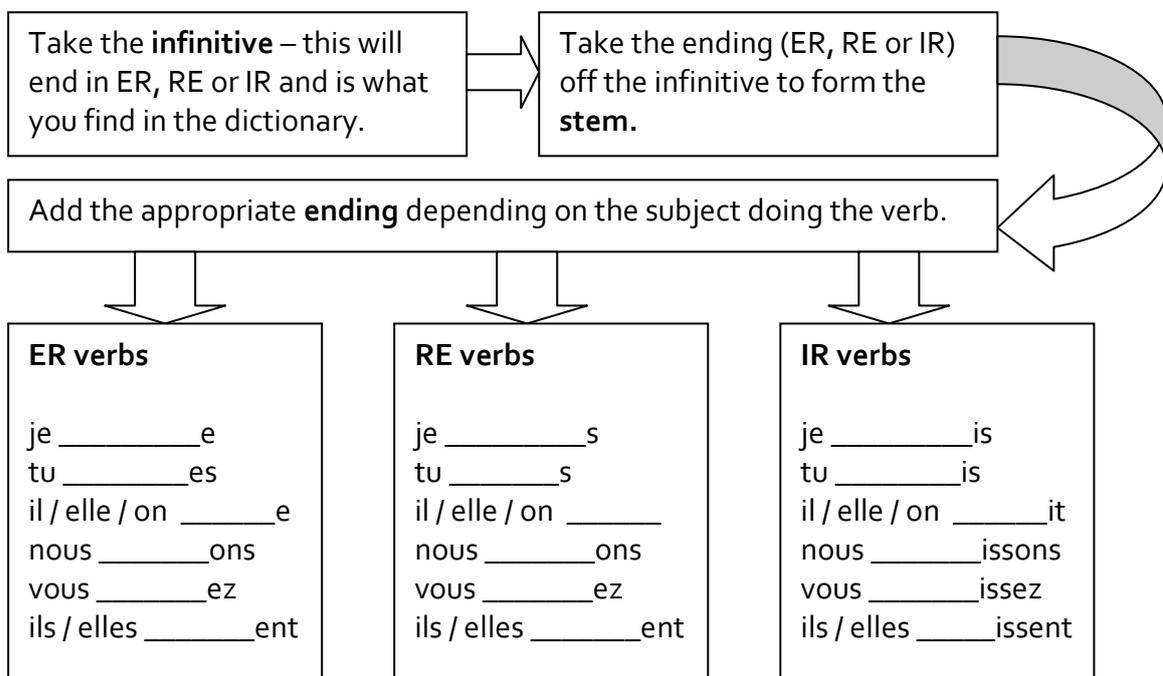
Present Tense

Meaning

"Je joue" means "I play" AND "I am playing" AND "I do play"

What to I have to learn?

You need to learn that the endings of the verb (the letters that are added on to the stem) are different depending on who is doing the action (the subject). YOU MUST KNOW THESE ENDINGS.



What about the IRREGULAR verbs which don't follow these rules?

You will need to learn these off by heart. There are a fair number of them and they are common verbs which you will use frequently.

Make sure you can conjugate these as a priority (see table on next page):

Etre	Avoir	Aller	Faire
Vouloir	Savoir	Pouvoir	Devoir
Dire	Prendre	Voir	Venir

Common Irregular Verbs

Infinitive	Je (J')	Tu	Il/Elle/On	Nous	Vous	Ils/Elles
avoir	ai	as	a	avons	avez	ont
être	suis	es	est	sommes	êtes	sont
aller	vais	vas	va	allons	allez	vont
faire	fais	fais	fait	faisons	faites	font
pouvoir	peux	peux	peut	pouvons	pouvez	peuvent
savoir	sais	sais	sait	savons	savez	savent
vouloir	veux	veux	veut	voulons	voulez	veulent
devoir	dois	dois	doit	devons	devez	doivent
dire	dis	dis	dit	disons	dites	disent
prendre	prends	prends	prend	prenons	prenez	prennent
voir	vois	vois	voit	voyons	voyez	voient
venir	viens	viens	vient	venons	venez	viennent

There are lots of other irregular verbs.

- Remember that some are 1-2-3-6 verbs (or boot verbs).
- Use a verb table to check all verbs, whenever you write them. Do not just guess. By actively looking up the verbs you are more likely to remember them.

The Second Verb Infinitive Rule

One of the most common mistakes made by students is to mistranslate the following types of sentence:

I like going *He hates working*
I must listen *They prefer writing*

These English sentences could also be expressed as:

I like to go *He hates to work*
I have to listen *They prefer to write*

And when you see these examples you can see why the rule is called "the second verb infinitive rule".

In French the second verb when placed directly after the first verb is always the infinitive. There is no equivalent to the "...ing" examples above.

Subject + verb 1	verb 2	rest of sentence
J'aime	aller	au cinéma
Il déteste	travailler	à l'extérieur
Je dois	écouter	pendant les cours
Ils préfèrent	écrire	en silence

This rule works in different tenses too:

Subject + verb 1	verb 2	rest of sentence
Je suis allé I went	parler to talk	avec les profs with the teachers
Je voudrais I would like	travailler to work	à l'étranger abroad
J'ai voulu I wanted	partir to leave	avant midi before midday
Ils auraient préféré They would have preferred	parler to speak	en français in French

The Perfect Tense

English Meanings

J'ai joué au football = I played football
I have played football

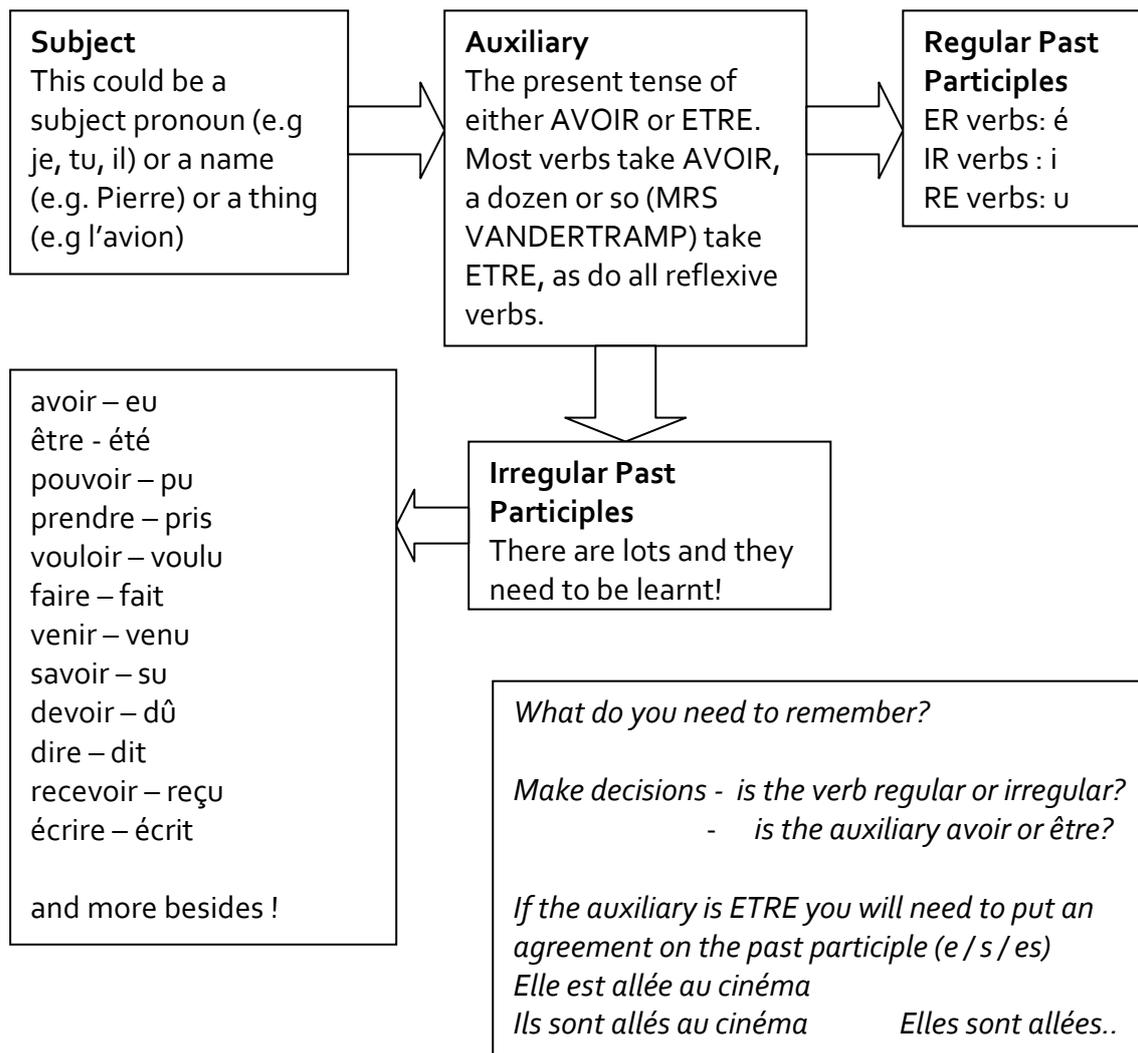
Je suis allé au cinéma= I went to the cinema
I have gone to the cinema

Some grammatical terms

Subject	Auxiliary	Past Participle
J'	ai	joué
Je	suis	allé

Auxiliary = part of the verb AVOIR or ETRE.

Past Participle = the "bit" of the verb which shows you what the activity was and that it was in the past (think about the é being like -ed in English)



The Imperfect Tense

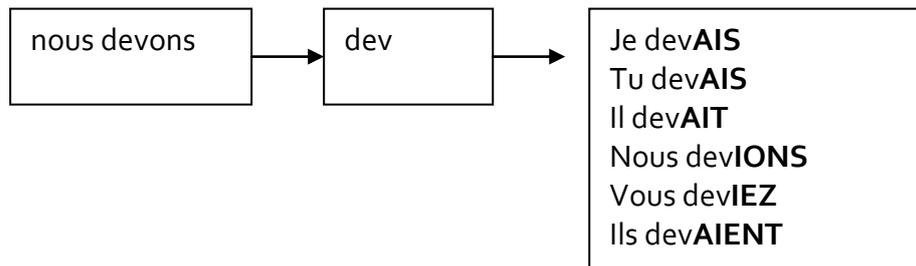
Meaning

Whereas the perfect tense is used for completed actions in the past, the imperfect tense is used for:

- incomplete actions in the past
(I was doing my homework but didn't finish because...)
- repeated actions in the past
(I used to do my homework every single night)
- setting the scene
(It was a cold night, I was feeling a bit scared...)

Formation

- take the NOUS form of the present tense of the verb you are going to use
- take off the ONS
- add the imperfect endings



Note there are some irregulars, including:

Etre - j'étais..

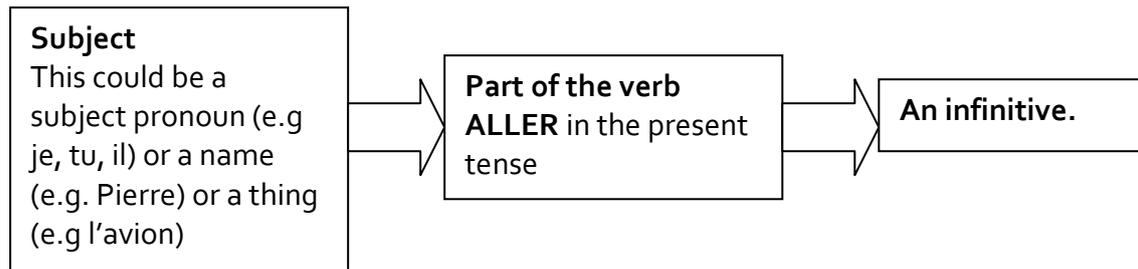
The Near Future Tense

Meaning

Je vais faire = I am going to do

(Notice the 2nd verb is an infinitive!)

Formation

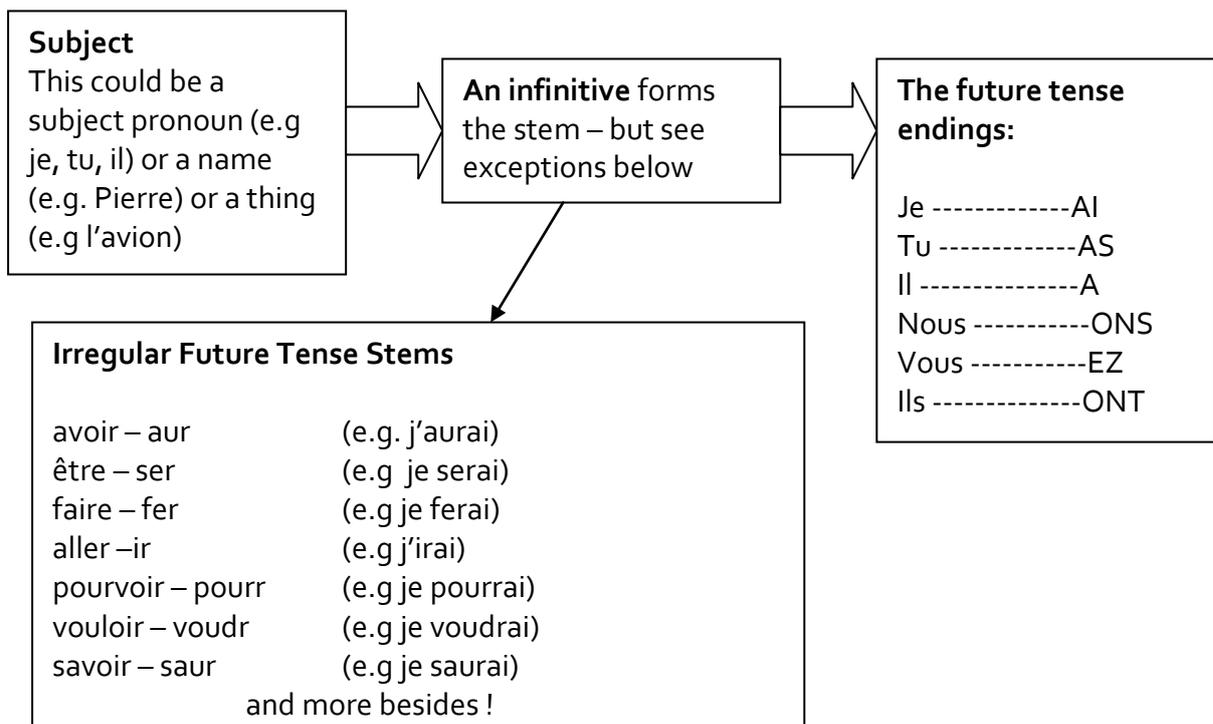


The Simple Future Tense

Meaning

Je ferai = I will do

Formation



The Conditional Tense

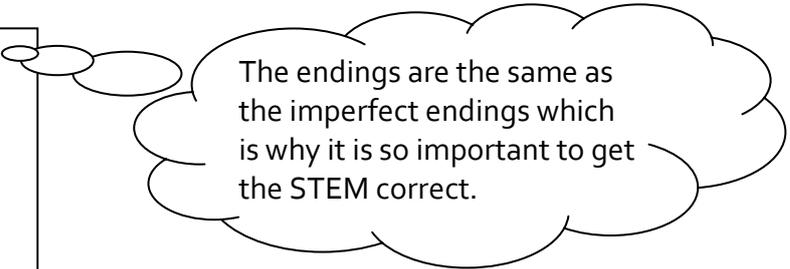
Meaning

Je ferais = I would do

Formation

As the future tense (with the same list of irregular stems) but with slightly different endings; sometimes the future and the conditional sound the same when you say them.

The conditional tense endings:
Je -----AIS
Tu -----AIS
Il -----AIT
Nous -----IONS
Vous -----IEZ
Ils -----AIENT



The endings are the same as the imperfect endings which is why it is so important to get the STEM correct.

The Pluperfect Tense

Meaning

J'avais fait = I had done

The pluperfect tense is a step further into the past than the past:

The teacher arrived (past tense) to see if I had done (pluperfect) the work.

Formation

As the perfect tense but for the auxiliary use the IMPERFECT of either AVOIR or ETRE, not the present tense.

J'avais + past participle	J'étais + past participle
Tu avais...	Tu étais...
Il avait...	Il était...
Nous avions..	Nous étions...
Vous aviez...	Vous étiez...
Ils avaient....	Ils étaient...

Complex Verb Tenses

The Future Perfect

Meaning

J'aurai fait = I will have done

e.g. By the time the bell rings I will have done my work.

Formation

Simple future tense + a past participle

The Conditional Perfect

Meaning

J'aurais fait = I would have done

e.g. I told the teacher I would have done the work if I'd had more time

Formation

Conditional tense + a past participle

Reflexive Verbs

These are verbs where the activity is done by the subject to the subject. Some are obvious (je me lave = I wash myself) but others are not (je m'appelle = I call myself / je m'inquiète = I worry).

Some non-reflexive verbs can be made into reflexives:

demander = to ask

je me demande = I wonder / I ask myself

Reflexive verbs follow this pattern:

Subject	Reflexive Pronoun	Verb (in whatever tense)
Je	me	lave
Tu	te	laves
Il	se	lave
Nous	nous	lavons
Vous	vous	lavez
Ils	se	lavent

Reflexive verbs tend to be ER verbs. They always take the auxiliary ETRE and so have agreements in the past tense.

Je me suis lavé = I washed

Elle s'est lavée = She washed

Ils se sont demandés = They wondered

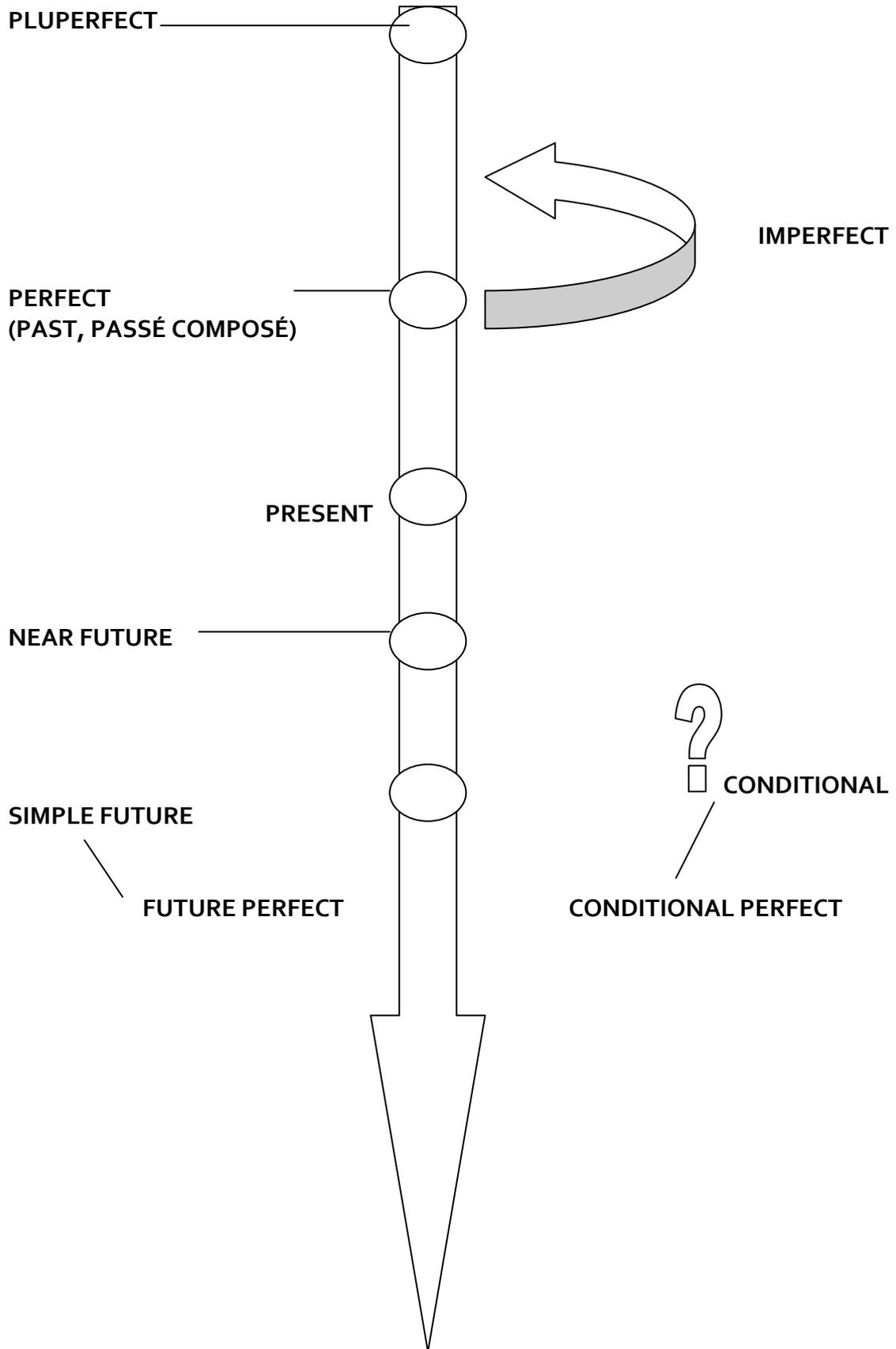
Vous vous êtes réveillés tôt ? = Did you wake up early?

Reflexive verbs can exist in all tenses.

Il s'était levé avant leur arrivée = he'd got up before their arrival

Nous nous coucherons de bonne heure = we will go to bed early

Verb Time Line



Learning Your Verbs: Priority List 1

Meaning	Infinitive	Present Tense Je / On	Past Participle * takes être
to be	être	je suis / on est	été
to have	avoir	j'ai / on a	eu
to go	aller	je vais / on va	allé *
to do	faire	je fais / on fait	fait
to listen	écouter	j'écoute / on écoute	écouté
to say	dire	je dis / on dit	dit
to write	écrire	j'écris / on écrit	écrit
to read	lire	je lis / on lit	lu
to drink	boire	je bois / on boit	bu

Learning Your Verbs: Priority List 2

Meaning	Infinitive	Present Tense Je / On	Past Participle * takes être
to take	prendre	je prends / on prend	pris
to put	mettre	je mets / on met	mis
to forget	oublier	j'oublie / on oublie	oublié
to be able	pouvoir	je peux / on peut	pu
to know (a fact, or how to do st)	savoir	je sais / on sait	su
to know (a person or place)	connaître	je connais / on connait	connu
to want to	vouloir	je veux / on veut	voulu
to receive	recevoir	je reçois / on reçoit	reçu
to give, offer	offrir	j'offre / on offre	offert

Learning Your Verbs: Priority List 3

Meaning	Infinitive	Present Tense Je / On	Past Participle * takes être
to sleep	dormir	je dors / on dort	dormi
to come	venir	je viens / on vient	venu *
to understand	comprendre	je comprends / on comprend	compris
to leave	partir	je pars / on part	parti *
to believe	croire	je crois / on croit	cru
to open	ouvrir	j'ouvre / on ouvre	ouvert
to laugh	rire	je ris / on rit	ri
to fall	tomber	je tombe / on tombe	tombé *
to lose	perdre	je perds / on perd	perdu

The Passive Mood

All the verb tenses mentioned on the previous pages are “active”: the verb is done by the subject and the subject is clear in the sentence. Example of active sentences are:

- He eats a lot of cake (who eats a lot of cake? he does)
- They are selling their old car (who is selling their old car? they are)

In these active sentences we have a subject (he) a verb (eats) and an object (a lot of cake).

A **Passive** sentence doesn't need to have a subject in it.

- The cake has been eaten
- The car has been sold

In these two sentences we don't know who has done the activity (although we could add it on: The cake has been eaten by my greedy auntie, The car has been sold by my parents). In the passive sentences we have an object (the cake) and a verb (has been eaten).

Formation

Just like the English:

Object	part of the verb ETRE, in whatever tense	a PAST PARTICIPLE
The girl La fille	has been a été	bitten mordue <i>(note passive agreement)</i>
The work Le travail	will be sera	finished fini
The windows Les fenêtres	have been ont été	broken cassées <i>(note passive agreement)</i>

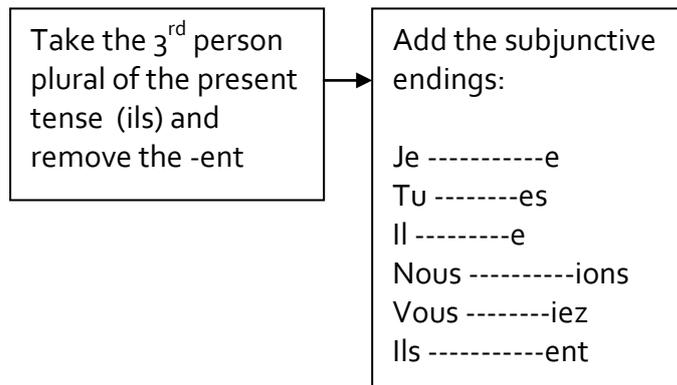
The Subjunctive Mood

This is used less and less in spoken French but you should be aware of it and understand what it means. In your written work you may need to use it.

The subjunctive mood is nearly always triggered by a phrase which has QUE at the end. But that does NOT mean that every time you write QUE you need a subjunctive!

- **Expressing wish or desire**
E.g. avoir peur que / vouloir que / préférer que
- **Expressing necessity**
E.g. il faut que / il est nécessaire que
- **After particular conjunctions**
E.g. bien que / afin que / avant que / sans que / jusqu'à ce que
- **Superlative, negative and indefinite expressions**
E.g. c'est le roman le plus intéressant que j'aie jamais lu

Formation of Present Tense Subjunctive (there is an imperfect subjunctive but you won't need it at A Level)



A lot of the time the subjunctive will look like the "normal" (indicative) present tense, particularly in the JE and IL form:

Je joue, tu joues, il joue, nous jouions, vous jouiez, ils jouent

But there are lots of irregulars and as always these include the most important verbs:

ETRE - je sois, tu sois, il soit, nous soyons, vous soyez, ils soient

AVOIR - j'aie, tu aies, il aie, nous ayons, vous ayez, ils aient

ALLER - j'aie, tu ailles, il aille, nous allions, vous alliez, ils aillent

FAIRE - je fasse, tu fasses, il fasse, nous fassions, vous fassiez, ils fassent

Use a verb table to identify other irregular subjunctive forms

Check List

Knowing what you know: Basic Checklist

I know what a verb is	
I know what a subject is	
I know what the subject pronouns are in French	
I can give an example of an English infinitive	
I can give an example of a French infinitive	
I understand that I have to conjugate verbs	

Knowing what you know: Present Tense Checklist

I know the different meanings of the present tense	
I can name all the ER verb endings	
I know how to pronounce the ER endings	
I know how to add the endings on to a stem	
I know which common verbs are irregular	
I know where to check if a verb is irregular	
I know the verb AVOIR by heart	
I know the verb ETRE by heart	

Knowing what you know: Perfect Tense Checklist

I know the different meanings of the perfect tense	
I know what an auxiliary is	
I know what a past participle is	
I know what regular ER, IR and RE past participles look like	
I know what some irregular past participles look like	
I know where to check for irregular past participles	
I know which verbs take ETRE as the auxiliary	
I know when to add agreements on to the past participle	
I know the verbs AVOIR and ETRE by heart	

Knowing what you know: Imperfect Tense Checklist

I know the three uses of the imperfect tense	
I know the verb endings	
I know how to form the stem which I add the endings on to	
I know how to pronounce the imperfect verb endings	
I know where to check for irregular imperfect verbs	

Knowing what you know: Future Tense Checklist

I know the translation of the Near Future and Simple Future tenses	
I know the verb ALLER in the present tense for the Near Future	
I know the endings for the Simple Future	
I know which verbs take irregular stems for the Simple Future	
I know the most common irregular stems for the Simple Future	

Knowing what you know: Conditional Tense Checklist

I know the translation for the conditional tense	
I know how to form the stem for the conditional tense	
I know the conditional tense endings	

Knowing what you know: Pluperfect Tense Checklist

I know the translation for the pluperfect tense	
I know the parts of the verbs AVOIR and ETRE in the imperfect tense	
I know how to form past participles	
I know which past participles are irregular	
I know where to check for irregular past participles	

Knowing what you know: The Passive Mood

I understand what is meant by an active and a passive sentence	
I can explain what the subject and objects of a sentence are	
I know the parts of ETRE needed for the passive	
I know when to add an E or S or ES onto the past participle in the passive	

Knowing what you know: The Subjunctive Mood

I know when the subjunctive is used	
I know that it is used more in writing than speaking	
I know how to form the present tense subjunctive: the stem and the endings	
I know the subjunctive forms of ETRE, AVOIR, ALLER and FAIRE	
I know where to check for other subjunctive forms	

Record of Active Learning

You will use your Log Books to keep a record of the extra work you do out of class and your independent learning.

Use this page to note down any questions or comments, plus any other examples of verb use / things to learn.