

The 7 Most Common French Tenses Made Easy (Recipes)

The secret !

The secret is to simply and only* learn the following:

1. **The present tense** (which is actually called “indicatif présent”/”indicative present” in your dictionary, but is often referred to as “present” by default). There are ways to learn how to conjugate verbs in the present rather easily.
2. **The past participles** (used to make the past tense, such as “fini”, “lu”, “connu”, “pris”, etc.
3. **The irregular forms of future tense** (“futur simple”)

*Of course, French grammar wouldn't be French grammar without its exceptions, for example “être” in the imparfait (imperfect) tense. Nothing is perfect indeed!

For the following recipes, you will also need to use:

- the **infinitive** (“infinitif”).
Refresher: in French, the infinitives are easily identifiable as they end in –ER (aller, parler...), -IR (finir, partir,...) or –RE (prendre, lire,...)
- the **stem/root** (“radical”) is the part of the verb that doesn't change (for regular verbs) and that allows you to recognize the verb in spite of the alterations you make to it when conjugating it:

Ex.1: I walk, he walks, we have been walking → these are different forms of the verb “to walk”

Ex.2: je regarde, tu regardes, nous regardons → « regarder » is a verb with one unique stem (regard-) in the present tense.

je prends, il prend, nous prenons, ils prennent → « prendre » has 3 different stems in the present tense : prend-, pren-, prenn-

- the **ending** (“terminaison”) is the part that you attach to the stem of the verb. With each person and each tense goes a specific ending, which you need to learn.

Recipe #1 : Passé composé (perfect, eg. *I did, I have done*)

You'll need:

"être"* or "avoir" in the present tense + the past participle of your verb
(*Generally use « avoir ». For a reminder of which verbs take "être", see [here](#))

- *regarder* → *j'ai regardé*
- *finir* → *j'ai fini*
- *aller* → *je suis allé*

Exercise 1: Your turn! Conjugate the following in passé composé : (answers at the end)

1. manger : tu _____
2. venir : il _____
3. lire : nous _____

Recipe #2 : Imparfait (imperfect, eg. *I was doing / I used to do*)

You'll need:

The stem of the "nous" form in present tense (= remove the "ons" ending)
+ characteristic endings of the imperfect tense : -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient

- *finir* → *nous finissons* (present tense) → *je finissais, tu finissais, il finissait, etc.* (imperfect)
- *apprendre* → *nous apprenons* (present tense) → *j'apprenais, tu apprenais, il apprenait, etc.* (imperfect)

Exercise 2:

Your turn! Conjugate the following in imparfait:

1. manger : tu _____
2. venir : il _____
3. lire : nous _____

Recipe #3 : Passé récent (recent past, eg. *I just did, I've just done*)

You'll need:

"venir" in the present tense + de + infinitive

- *finir* → *je viens de finir*
- *partir* → *vous venez de partir*

Exercise 3:

Your turn! Conjugate the following in passé récent :

1. manger : tu _____
2. venir : il _____
3. lire : nous _____

Recipe #4 : Futur proche
(near future, eg. *I'm going to do*)

You'll need:

"aller" in the present tense + infinitive

- *faire* → je *vais faire*
- *aller* → vous *allez aller*
- *commencer* → ils *vont commencer*

Exercise 4:

Your turn! Conjugate the following in futur proche:

1. manger : tu _____
2. venir : il _____
3. lire : nous _____

Recipe #5 : Futur simple
(future simple, eg. *I will do*)

You'll need :

- For regular verbs : the infinitive (drop the final "e" for infinitives ending in -RE)

OR

- For irregular verbs: the irregular stem (list [here](#))

+ characteristic endings of the future tense (= the same forms as verb "avoir" in the present tense !) : -ai, -as, -a, -ons, -ez, -ont

(regular verbs)

- *regarder* → je *regarderai*
 - *finir* → tu *finiras*
 - *comprendre* → il *comprendra*
- (irregular verbs)
- *aller* → j'*irai*
 - *être* → tu *seras*

Exercise 5:

Your turn! Conjugate the following in futur simple:

1. manger : tu _____
2. venir : il _____
3. lire : nous _____

Recipe #6 : Conditionnel présent
(conditional present, eg. *I would do*)

You'll need :

The stem of the future tense (infinitive or irregular form) + imperfect endings

- *regarder* → je *regarderais*
- *être* → nous *serions*

Exercise 6:

Your turn! Conjugate the following in conditionnel présent:

1. manger : tu _____
2. venir : il _____
3. lire : nous _____

Recipe #7 : Subjonctif présent (subjunctive present – rare in English, *that he do*)

You'll need:

- For the “je”, “tu”, “il/elle/on”, “ils/elles” forms:
the stem of the “ils” form in present tense (remove the “-ent” ending)
+ characteristic endings of the subjunctive tense (the same as –ER verbs in indicative present tense) : -e (je), -es (tu), -e (il), -ent (ils)

&

- For the “nous” and “vous” forms:
the same form as the imparfait !

*There are a few irregular verbs in subjunctive tense, check them [here](#)

- *finir* --> ils *finissent* (indicative present) → que je *finisse*, que nous *finissions* (subjunctive present)
- *boire* → ils *boivent* (indicative present) → que je *boive*, que nous *buvions* (subjunctive present)

Exercise 7:

Your turn! Conjugate the following in subjonctif présent:

1. manger : tu _____
2. venir : il _____
3. lire : nous _____

Answers

Exercise 1: passé composé

Tu *as mangé*, il *est venu* (« venir » takes « être » in passé composé), nous *avons lu*

Exercise 2: imparfait

manger → nous *mangeons* (present tense) → tu *mangeais* (imperfect)

venir → nous *venons* (present tense) → il *venait* (imperfect)

lire → nous *lisons* (present tense) → nous *lisions* (imperfect)

Exercise 3: passé récent

manger → tu *viens de manger*

venir → il *vient de venir*

lire → nous *venons de lire*

Exercise 4: Futur proche

manger → tu *vas manger*

venir → il *va venir*

lire → nous *allons lire*

Exercise 5: futur simple

manger → tu *mangeras*

venir (irregular) → il *viendra*

lire → nous *lirons*

Exercise 6: conditionnel présent

manger → tu *mangerais*

venir → il *viendrait*

lire → nous *lirions*

Exercise 7: subjonctif présent

manger --> ils *mangent* (indicative present) → que tu *manges* (subjunctive present)

venir → ils *viennent* (indicative present) → qu'il *vienne*, que nous *buvions* (subjunctive present)

lire --> nous *lisions* (imperfect) → que nous *lisions* (subjunctive present)