

passé composé

The passé composé is a compound tense formed with the present tense of the auxiliary (avoir or être) and the past participle. The passé composé is used to describe actions that occurred in the past. They may be single events or series.

We use the passé composé to talk about one-time, completed actions that took place in the past. This tense places the emphasis on the result or consequences of the action.

Le passé composé is the equivalent of:

The simple past (j'ai fait, I did)

The present perfect (j'ai fait, I have done)

For regular er/ir/re-verbs, the past participle is formed as follows:

If the infinitive ends in -er, the participle ends in é

If the infinitive ends in -ir, the participle ends in i

If the infinitive ends in -re, the participle ends in u

Most verbs construct the passé composé with avoir, however être is used as the auxiliary verb in the following cases:
with reflexive verbs

with the following verbs of movement: naître/mourir, aller/venir, monter/descendre, arriver/partir, entrer/sortir, apparaître, rester, retourner, tomber and their related forms such as: revenir, rentrer, remonter, redescendre, repartir.

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Note: we use avoir when descendre, (r)entrer, (re)monter, retourner and sortir are followed by a direct object. In this case, the meaning of the verb often changes.

For some verbs, the participe passé has to agree in gender and number with either the subject or the object of the sentence. This agreement is necessary in the following situations:

When a verb takes être as an auxiliary, the participle agrees in gender and number with the subject.

For verbs that take avoir in the passé composé, the participle only agrees in gender and number with a direct object that comes before the verb. This direct object can take three possible forms: a personal pronoun (me, te, le, la, nous, vous, les), the relative pronoun que, or a noun placed before the verb (usually in questions and exclamations).

In the case of reflexive verbs (which always take être as their auxiliary in the passé composé), the participle generally agrees with the subject.

The exception is when the direct object comes after the reflexive verb. In this case, the past participle does not agree.

Remember: the participe passé never agrees with an indirect object.

The participe passé does not agree with the subject of the following verbs: se téléphoner, se parler, se mentir, se plaire (complaire/déplaire), se sourire, se rire, se nuire, se succéder, se suffire, se ressembler, s'en vouloir. This is because the reflexive pronoun is an indirect object. It is used in the sense of "each other" for these verbs.

DR & MRS VANDERTRAMP / ADVENT

D ... devenir	A → arriver - partir
R ... rester	D → descendre - monter
& ... apparaître	V → venir - aller
M ... monter	E → entrer - sortir
R ... revenir	N → naître - mourir
S ... sortir	T → tomber - retourner
V ... venir	Qu'est ce qui reste? → rester
A ... aller	
N ... naître	
D ... descendre	
E ... entrer	
R ... rester	
T ... tomber	
A ... arriver	
M ... mourir	
P ... partir	

These verbs take être as their auxiliary. These are all intransitive verbs that communicate a certain kind of movement.

note that passer is missing

La Maison d'être

First, someone arrives at the house (arriver). He has come (venir) to the house. Then he enters (entrer) the house and goes up the stairs (monter). Then he goes downstairs (descendre). Then he returns upstairs (retourner) and falls down the stairs (tomber). He remains in the house for a bit (rester) before deciding to leave (partir). He tries the door, but sees that it's locked, so he goes out (sortir) the window. And then he goes (aller) on his way.

This mnemonic also includes one verb that doesn't feature in the Vandertramp mnemonic, passer par.

When passer (to pass) is used without the preposition par (by), it uses avoir.

The Hiker



step 1: choose your helping verb / auxiliary verb

avoir	être
j'ai	je suis
tu as	tu es
il a	il est
nous avons	nous sommes
vous avez	vous êtes
ils ont	ils sont

step 2: add the past participle

Regular ER verbs => é

Regular IR verbs => i

Regular RE verbs => u

verbs in ire => it

verbs in aître => u

verbs in enir => enu

verbs in -endre => pris

Irregular verbs: aller, avoir, être, pouvoir,

step 3: Make the verb agree in number and gender

Verbs using être as a helping verb to form their passé composé agree in gender and number with the subject.

Je suis arrivé(e) => you add a e if the subject is female.

Ils sont arrivé(s) (you add a "s" if the subject is plural).

Elles sont arrivé(es) (you add a e plus a s if the subject is plural and female.)

If the subject is a group of 10 women and 1 man, you are supposed to act as if the entire group was male because French grammar considers that male always wins.

Verbs using avoir in the passé composé only need to agree with preceding direct objects.

A simple way to know whether a verb has a preceding direct object is to ask what? after the verb.

La tarte qu'elle a mangée était excellente.

The tart she ate was excellent.

Here you can say, she ate what? The tart. Since tart comes before the verb and is female, you need to agree in number and add a "e" to mangée.

When to use the passé composé

Generally speaking, the passé composé corresponds to the English simple past (did, worked, went ...).

It talks about completed, sequential or one-time actions that took place on a specific occasion.

Use the passé composé to:

answer the question que s'est-il passé? - what happened?

When to use the passé composé (cont)

Example: J'ai reçu un appel.

express a past action that happened on a specific occasion (usually with a specific time marker)

Example: L'année dernière, je suis allé au bord de la Loire pour les vacances.

express a one-time past action

Example: J'ai fait une randonnée à vélo.

list sequential past actions that happened one after another

Example: J'ai raccroché et j'ai ri.

introduce a new past action that interrupted another that was already in progress (expressed in the imparfait)

Example: Mais un jour, pendant que je parlais avec un agriculteur, j'ai reçu un appel.

signal words: soudain, tout à coup, à ce moment-là, en 1998, hier, l'année dernière, ensuite, puis, après, alors

IRREGULAR past participle (passe compose)

Aller: allé(s)

Avoir: eu

Être: été

Pouvoir: pu

Only ALLER is plural/agreement

Other Irregular Verbs (passe compose)

Venir = venu

Tenir = tenu

Devoir = dû

Pouvoir = pu

Vouloir = voulu

Lire = lu

Boire = bu

Attendre = attendu

Entendre = entendu

Courir = couru

Répondre = répondu

//

Faire = fait

Dire = dit

Ecrire – écrit

Conduire – conduit

l'imparfait

L'imparfait (the imperfect) is a French past tense. It describes states and actions that were ongoing or repeated in the past. The imperfect can correspond to the English simple past tense, but also to structures such as used to and would and even the past progressive. L'imparfait is used to tell stories and report on past actions, mostly in written contexts. We conjugate the imperfect by adding the endings -ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez and -aient to the root of the present tense nous form of the verb..

When to use the imperfect tense in French

We use the imperfect tense in the following situations:

to describe a situation in the past

to describe a person, a property, a comment or an explanation in the past

to talk about a repeated action in the past

to talk about simultaneously occurring actions in the past

to emphasise the duration of an action

How to conjugate the imperfect tense in French

To conjugate the imperfect tense in French, we take the present-tense stem of the 1st person plural form of the verb (the nous form), and add the following endings (identical for verbs of all groups):

J + (nous) stem + ais

Tu + (nous) stem + ais

Il + (nous) stem + ait

Nous + (nous) stem + ions

Vous + (nous) stem + iez

Ils + (nous) stem + aient

* Most ir-verbs are conjugated like finir. Choisir, réagir, réfléchir and réussir belong to this group. Here we add an -iss- to the word stem in the plural forms.

** The ir-verbs that are not conjugated like finir, are conjugated like dormir. Mentir, partir and sentir are part of this group. We do not add -iss- to form the plural.

Irregular in Imparfait: Only être

j'étais

tu étais

il était

nous étions

vous étiez

ils étaient

Imparfait conjugation exceptions:

Exceptions to the conjugation rules:

For verbs that end in -cer, the present form in the 1st person plural is constructed with ç (in order to preserve the soft c sound). This ç remains unchanged in the imparfait (except in the 1st and 2nd person plural forms).

For verbs that end in -ger, the present form in the 1st person plural is constructed with e (in order to preserve the soft g sound). This e remains unchanged in the imparfait (except in the 1st and 2nd person plural forms).

The verbs falloir and pleuvoir, which are only used in the 3rd person singular, are conjugated as follows in the imparfait:

Example:

falloir → il fallait

pleuvoir → il pleuvait

When to use l'imparfait

The imparfait is similar to the English past progressive (was doing, were working ...) or the structures used to and would. It sets the scene, gives background description and expresses past actions that were repeated over time.

Use the imparfait to:

answer the question qu'est-ce que /comment c'était? – what was something like? (e.g., weather, landscape, person).

Example: Le temps était horrible à la mer.

express a repeated past action (used to, would)

Example: Souvent, je m'arrêtais pour parler avec les villageois.

talk about a past action whose beginning and end is unknown

Example: Ils passaient leurs journées à l'intérieur.

express simultaneously occurring past actions (while)

Example: Donc, pendant que je pédalais, ils étaient sûrement assis sur le sable.

describe a continuous past action that were already in progress

when another action (usually in the passé composé) interrupted

Example: Mais un jour, pendant que je parlais avec un agriculteur, j'ai reçu un appel.

Signal words: tous les jours, chaque fois, toujours, ne ... jamais, souvent, le mardi, d'habitude, quelquefois

le plus-que-parfait

The plus-que-parfait (the pluperfect) indicates that an action had taken place and had been completed before another past action took place. The plus-que-parfait is the compound form of the imperfect and is formed by using the imperfect of the appropriate helping verb (avoir or être) + the past participle of the verb. Its English equivalent is "had" + past participle.

le plus-que-parfait (cont)

Remember that the past participle must agree in number and gender with a preceding direct-object noun or pronoun.

It would equate to "had happened" in English.

For verbs conjugated avoir (to have) in the passé composé, it's formed by combining avoir in the imparfait with the past participle.

For verbs formed with être in the passé composé, use the imparfait of être.

In affirmative sentences in French, it is often, but not always, accompanied by the adverb déjà (already). Remember that the opposite of déjà is the negative expression pas encore, just as 'already' is replaced by 'yet' in English.

avoir + être imparfait

avoir	être
j'avais	j'étais
tu avais	tu étais
il avait	il était
Nous avions	nous étions
vous aviez	vous étiez
il avaient	ils étaient

+ past participle