

The **passé composé** is the most common French past tense, often used in conjunction with the [imperfect](#). The *passé composé* can express any of the following:

I. An action completed in the past

As-tu étudié ce weekend ?
Did you study this weekend?

Ils ont déjà mangé. They have already eaten.

II. An action repeated a number of times in the past

Oui, j'ai mangé cinq fois hier.
Yes, I did eat five times yesterday.

Nous avons visité Paris plusieurs fois.
We've visited Paris several times.

III. A series of actions completed in the past

Quand je suis arrivé, j'ai vu les fleurs.
When I arrived, I saw the flowers.

Samedi, il a vu sa mère, a parlé au médecin et a trouvé un chat.
Saturday he saw his mother, talked to the doctor, and found a cat.

Related lesson: [Repeating auxiliary verbs](#)

The *passé composé* has three possible English equivalents. For example, *j'ai dansé* can mean

1. I danced (simple past)
2. I have danced (present perfect)
3. I did dance (past emphatic)

The *passé composé* is a [compound conjugation](#), which means it has two parts:

1. [present tense](#) of the [auxiliary verb](#) (either [avoir](#) or [être](#))
2. [past participle](#) of the main verb

Note: Like all compound conjugations, the *passé composé* may be subject to grammatical [agreement](#):

- When the auxiliary verb is *être*, the past participle must agree with the subject
- When the auxiliary verb is *avoir*, the past participle may have to agree with its direct object

French passé composé conjugations

AIMER (auxiliary verb is [avoir](#))

j'	ai aimé	nous	avons aimé
tu	as aimé	vous	avez aimé
il, elle	a aimé	ils, elles	ont aimé

DEVENIR ([être verb](#))

je	suis devenu(e)	nous	sommes devenu(e)s
tu	es devenu(e)	vous	êtes devenu(e)(s)
il	est devenu	ils	sont devenus
elle	est devenue	elles	sont devenues

SE LAVER ([pronominal verb](#))

je	me suis lavé(e)	nous	nous sommes lavé(e)s
tu	t'es lavé(e)	vous	vous êtes lavé(e)(s)
il	s'est lavé	ils	se sont lavés
elle	s'est lavée	elles	se sont lavée

The French **imperfect (imparfait)** is a descriptive past tense which indicates an ongoing state of being or a repeated or incomplete action. The beginning and end of the state of being or action are not indicated, and the imperfect is very often translated in English as "was" or "was ____-ing." The imperfect can indicate any of the following:

I. Habitual actions or states of being

Quand j'étais petit, nous allions à la plage chaque semaine.
When I was young, we used to go to the beach every week.

L'année dernière, je travaillais avec mon père.
I worked with my father last year.

II. Physical and emotional descriptions: time, weather, age, feelings

Il était midi et il faisait beau.
It was noon and the weather was nice.

Quand il avait 5 ans, il avait toujours faim.
When he was five, he was always hungry.

III. Actions or states of an unspecified duration

Je faisais la queue parce que j'avais besoin de billets.
I stood in line because I needed tickets.

Il espérait te voir avant ton départ.
He was hoping to see you before you left.

IV. Background information in conjunction with the passé composé

J'étais au marché et j'ai acheté des pommes.
I was at the market and I bought some apples.

Il était à la banque quand il l'a trouvé.
He was at the bank when he found it.

V. Wishes or suggestions

Ah ! Si j'étais riche !
Oh, if only I were rich!

Si nous sortions ce soir ?
How about going out tonight?

VI. Conditions in si clauses

Si j'avais de l'argent, j'irais avec toi.
If I had some money, I would go with you.

S'il voulait venir, il trouverait le moyen.
If he wanted to come, he would find a way.

VII. The expressions *être en train de* and *venir de* in the past

J'étais en train de faire la vaisselle.
I was (in the process of) doing the dishes.

Il venait d'arriver.
He had just arrived.

French imperfect conjugations are very easy, as the imperfect of virtually all verbs—regular and irregular—is formed the same way: drop the *-ons* ending from the present indicative *nous* form of the verb and adding the imperfect endings.

Être is the only irregular verb in the imperfect, because the present tense *nous sommes* has no *-ons* to drop. So it has the irregular stem **ét-** and uses the same endings as all other verbs.

As in many other tenses, [spelling change verbs](#), that is, verb which end in *-cer* and *-ger*, have minor spelling changes in the imperfect.

Verbs that end in *-ier* have an imperfect root that ends in *i*, so end with double *i* in the *nous* and *vous* form of the imperfect. This isn't irregular, but it looks kind of weird.

French imperfect conjugations

Here are the imperfect endings and conjugations for the regular verbs *parler* (to speak) and *finir* (to finish), the *-ier* verb *étudier* (to study), the spelling change verb *manger* (to eat), and the irregular verb *être* (to be):

<u>Pronoun</u>	Ending	<u>parler</u> > <i>parl-</i>	<u>finir</u> > <i>finiss-</i>	<u>étudier</u> > <i>étudi-</i>	<u>manger</u> > <i>mange-</i>	<u>être</u> > <i>ét-</i>
je (j')	-ais	parlais	finissais	étudiais	mangeais	étais
tu	-ais	parlais	finissais	étudiais	mangeais	étais
il	-ait	parlait	finissait	étudiait	mangeait	était
nous	-ions	parlions	finissions	étudiions	mangions	étions
vous	-iez	parliez	finissiez	étudiiez	mangiez	étiez
ils	-aient	parlaient	finissaient	étudiaient	mangeaient	étaient