A Student Grammar of French

MALCOLM OFFORD

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A Student Grammar of French is a concise introduction to French grammar, designed specifically for English-speaking undergraduates. Keeping technical detail to a minimum, it explains the fundamentals of the grammar in accessible and simple terms, and helps students to put their learning into practice through a range of fun and engaging exercises. All the essential topics are covered, with chapters on verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, determiners, prepositions, adverbs, negation, numerals, sentences and clauses. Every grammatical point is illustrated with a range of authentic examples drawn from magazines and newspapers, covering many areas of contemporary life such as fashion, health issues, relationships and sport. It is clearly organised into a user-friendly, numbered indexing system, allowing the learner to locate any grammatical topic quickly and easily.

Functioning as both an indispensable reference guide and a comprehensive workbook, this grammar will become the perfect accompaniment to any first- or second-year undergraduate course.

Malcolm Offord was formerly Lecturer and Reader in the Department of French, University of Nottingham. He is author of *Varieties of French* (1990), *French Sociolinguistics* (1996), *French Words, Past, Present and Future* (2001), *Francophone Literatures: A Literary and Linguistic Companion* (2001), *Using French: A Guide to Contemporary Usage* (with Ronald Batchelor, Cambridge University Press, 3rd edition 2000) and *Using French Synonyms* (with Ronald Batchelor, Cambridge University Press, 1993).

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Introduction

Grammar is a word that all too often strikes terror and a sense of panic into the breasts of modern language students. Grammar presents a cold, clinical, unemotional exterior – not exciting, straightforward and vibrant like vocabulary, especially when the latter tends towards the informal and slang. The mortar of language (grammar) is never so interesting as the bricks (vocabulary). Grammar is often seen as an obstacle to free expression – it makes you linger and dither over whether to use one preposition rather than another, whether an agreement is required or not – whereas you would rather press on, get your meaning across, communicate. Anything that impedes or slows down that expression is annoying and needs to be dealt with as soon as possible, or even ignored. But bricks without mortar are ugly and lack style, are in danger of collapsing and not fulfilling the purpose for which they were erected in the first place. What can we do about it?

First of all, there's no avoiding it – we need a grammar book. It's no good sticking your head in the sand – mortar is essential, the right consistency, the right thickness for maximum effect and to perform its job efficiently and discreetly. Secondly, we need a grammar book that is easy to use, that helps us identify our problems, that has a very clear and easily accessible index, that guides us to the right solution for us and explains what we need to know, expressed in language we can understand. Thirdly, when we get to the point where the explanation is, we need illustrations that are drawn from the world we live in – not taken from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not taken from the greatest authors, whose French we cannot ever hope to emulate; not boring examples that have been concocted to illustrate the point but don't connect with our world. We need examples that make us want to read on, that entertain us, that make us smile, that might even inform us on issues that are of interest to us, that make us look seriously at the way in which they are expressed – because they're cool. We don't want fuddy-duddy examples about the price of oranges (at least not too many), about who will bring the suitcases down, about (not) doing your homework, examples that suck. We want real, living examples – examples that are authentic, that express our reality – about relationships, sport, contemporary entertainment, fashion, social behaviour, weight-control and – another word that strikes terror into the breast of students, but not just the breast of students, it must be said – sex, and related matters: in short about daily living in the twenty-first century. Fourthly, we need a means of making sure that we have assimilated the grammatical points being illustrated.

This *Student Grammar of French* is aimed at meeting all those needs. It is conceived in such a way that no section is overwhelmingly long, that excessively technical language is avoided, that the index is straightforward and contains references to all the points contained in the book, and that the illustrative examples are worth a read in their own right and may inspire you to imitate their phraseology as well as take note of the grammatical point being illustrated. Since the vocabulary used in the examples is completely up-to-date, it's worth learning the contemporary words as well as noting how the examples work. It has to be admitted that some of the translations have been held back from being completely free, and thus more typically English, in order to allow the grammatical point under

consideration to be seized more clearly – a more fluent translation might obscure the grammatical point.

A simple but effective way of helping to ensure that the grammatical point is understood and is becoming part of your personal grammatical apparatus is to test yourself with the exercises provided at the end of each chapter, exercises that use similar material to that contained in the examples in the text itself. These exercises are designed to consolidate your grammatical knowledge and perhaps increase your sociological and cultural awareness.

Mortar can be fun and the result of using it effectively and skilfully very satisfying – ask a bricklayer!

This grammar book has been designed according to the following plan. The first four chapters are devoted to verbs – verbs are absolutely essential to self-expression, they are the motors of speech; consequently it seems logical to place examination of them at the beginning of the book. The first chapter provides the forms that need to be acquired in order to be able to manipulate the verbs effectively. The second chapter shows how the verbs are used, especially the different tenses, and the third chapter introduces a large number of tables giving the full conjugations of the major verb groups, followed in the next chapter by a list of verbs that do not belong to the first, most common group of verbs (those ending in ***–er***), and showing how these verbs relate to verbs illustrated previously. The fifth chapter deals with nouns and adjectives and concentrates upon the themes of gender and number (how to form plurals in particular). The sixth chapter examines the area of pronouns – personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, possessive pronouns and indefinite and quantifying pronouns. The next chapter examines the tricky area of determiners – the definite, indefinite, partitive and zero (what?!) articles, and demonstrative and possessive adjectives. Even more tricky is the topic of prepositions and these are fully treated in chapter 8 – though they are often extremely small words and you often glide over them without thinking about them, prepositions as linking words have a very important role to play in the unrolling of speech; this is a long chapter which attempts to cover all those environments where prepositions occur. The ninth chapter is devoted to adverbs and adverbial expressions – these lend more detail and precision to our speech and require skilful handling. Everything has been positive up to this stage – with the tenth chapter we enter the realm of negation, how to deny, refuse, cancel – very important in an age where science and technology are creating products which replace and supersede previously current products. The next chapter, the shortest, looks at numerals, which the speaker needs to be able to handle accurately – otherwise misunderstandings and more serious problems may ensue. The last chapter on sentences and clauses shows how all that has been learnt and hopefully assimilated in earlier chapters builds up into sophisticated language, making communication exciting, rewarding and challenging. The purpose of this chapter – and indeed of the book as a whole – is to allow us to express our thoughts, hopes and ideals in appropriate, well-formed, clear sentences, showing us to be intelligent and valuable members of society.

Just as there are many varieties of English, of which you are no doubt fully aware, so there are many varieties of French. Some are geographically based – the French of Paris differs in some ways from the French of the north-east of the country and from that of the south-west, and more so from the French of Belgium, Canada and francophone Africa. Others are based on age – youth-speak and wrinkly-speak differ considerably – still others on gender – males and females have different speech habits from time to time. However, the most important area of variety is that of formality – we speak formally, very

formally, in certain circumstances, much less so in others. This grammar book takes as its basis the variety of French that oscillates between standard French – the French used for news broadcasts and in good-quality newspapers and magazines – and the upper end of informal French – that is to say French that is dynamic, fairly but not excessively relaxed, used amongst reasonably well-educated speakers, and at the cutting edge of linguistic development. The book avoids on the one hand the more starchy realms of literary, highly intellectual French, and on the other the cruder, often-grammar-disregarding depths of slang and vulgar French. The variety selected is one which is current among educated French-speakers, one with which it is hoped you will feel comfortable and which will serve your needs in an appropriate way.

Chapter 1 *Verbs: 1*

1 Introduction

In this first chapter, devoted to verbs, we examine the ways in which verbs are formed in French and the factors that have to be borne in mind when we are considering our choice of form.

The forms are chosen according to the role that the verbs play as they fit into sentences. We shall see that the form has to be adjusted according to who or what is the subject of the verb (known as the person), the time when the event or state indicated by the meaning of the verb occurs (the tense) and the syntactic circumstances in which the verb occurs.

To provide us with some technical terminology and a general framework in which to work, the following questions are answered – what is a **verb**? (see 2), what do the terms **infinitive** (see 4), **mood** (see 6), **person** (see 5), **tense** (see 7) mean?

2 Verbs

The verb is often the pivotal element of a sentence. Indeed mention of a verb is regularly included in the definition of a sentence or clause – but see 445, 449. The typical purpose of a verb is to indicate how a state, action or process takes place during time and to provide information about it.

3 Treatment of verbs

Verbs are so vital to communication – they provide information especially about the subject (whether it is a question of singular or plural, first, second or third person), about the time when the speech-event takes place (past, present, future) – that they need to be given extensive treatment.

The verbs are discussed from three perspectives –

1 a discursive treatment, showing how verbs may be grouped together and the relations that exist between them: see 4–165;
2 a tabular treatment showing how individual verbs and their derivatives (related verbs) are conjugated – that is how the verbs' endings are adjusted or how other modifications are made to the verbs in order to indicate their role in sentences: see 166–174;
3 a list of verbs, provided after the tabular treatment – this contains 1: the verbs discussed in the two preceding groupings; and 2: the most frequently encountered verbs not discussed in those sections – see 175–176; it does not include what are known as perfectly regular verbs ending in ***–er*** – see 15.

DISCURSIVE TREATMENT OF VERBS

Infinitives

4 Infinitives

When we learn a new verb, we usually learn it in the **infinitive** form. This form is the one dictionaries use to record verbs: the dictionary uses the infinitive as the headword for the verb.

An infinitive consists of two parts, the **stem**, which tells us the meaning of the verb, and the **ending** – see 11.

When a verb is conjugated, the stem remains more or less constant, but the ending varies according to how it is used in the sentence, depending upon the person it refers to, the time the event takes place and the syntactic circumstances involved. The expression 'syntactic circumstances' refers to whether the verb occurs in a main or a subordinate clause and what type of conjunction introduces the subordinate clause. These matters are discussed in 10, 11, 115–165.

Infinitives are discussed in more detail in 10 and 11.

Person

5 Person

Six persons are available for selection as subject of the verb –

je = *I*	first person singular
tu = *you*	second person singular
il = *he/it* ***elle*** = *she* ***on*** = *one*	third person singular
nous = *we*	first person plural
vous = *you*	second person plural (also used to indicate a single person in a polite manner)
ils = *they* ***elles*** = *they*	third person plural

The pronouns are discussed in more detail in 206–236.

Mood

6 Mood

Although there is controversy amongst grammar books as to what to include under the heading 'mood', it is generally agreed that **mood** indicates the degree of certainty with which something is said, and that there are at least three moods in French –

the **indicative**, which is the mood used in normal circumstances
the **imperative**, used to express a command

the **subjunctive**, often dependent upon particular syntactic circumstances and normally used to express something which is lacking in certainty.

The imperative mood is discussed in 115–123, 212.

As far as the other two moods are concerned, the choice as to which to use in a given circumstance is usually quite straightforward. However, as will be seen in 156–158, there are occasions where the choice is not so easy to make.

What is certain is that in the vast majority of cases, it is the indicative mood that is used; the indicative can be called the 'default' mood.

However, at times syntactic circumstances dictate that the subjunctive mood be used.

The simplest way of determining which mood to use is to list those circumstances in which the subjunctive mood is required, since they are much fewer in number than those requiring the indicative, and to assume that in all other circumstances the indicative is to be used.

These circumstances are listed in 144–158.

The situation in French is different from that in English, since in English the subjunctive is so rare as to be virtually non-existent in ordinary speech and writing; when used, it tends to sound somewhat pompous, eg

The judge insisted that the accused leave the courtroom.

The tenses associated with each mood are listed in 15–102.

Tense

7 Tense

It is the role of the **tense** of the verb to tell us the time when an event takes place in relation to the present moment. Some events take place in the past, others in the present; others are projected into the future.

The various uses of verb tenses are discussed in 125–147.

8 Tenses

To create some tenses the form of the verb itself is adjusted.

Using the verb ***donner*** = *to give* as a template, the following tenses fall under this heading –

the present tense – ***je donne*** = *I give*
the imperfect – ***je donnais*** = *I was giving*
the past historic – ***je donnai*** = *I gave*
the future – ***je donnerai*** = *I will give*
the conditional – ***je donnerais*** = *I would give*

To create other tenses, what is called an auxiliary verb – ***avoir*** = *to have* or ***être*** = *to be* – is added to the past participle –

the perfect – ***j'ai donné*** = *I have given*
the pluperfect – ***j'avais donné*** = *I had given*

the future perfect – ***j'aurai donné*** = *I will have given*
the conditional perfect – ***j'aurais donné*** = *I would have given*

All this will be explained in full detail below.

9 Presentation of tenses

A word of warning – although many French verbs are regular in their conjugations, we still have to learn them. Others are renowned for their irregularities, and we have to make even more of an effort to memorise them. Life is made somewhat easier if we remember that the verbs often belong to groups and subgroups; that is to say, verbs that are conjugated in similar ways may be grouped together for convenience of learning. So, if we can remember which verbs are in which groups and subgroups, there is slightly less learning to do!

A list of other verbs belonging to the various subgroups discussed here is provided in Chapter 4.

10 Infinitives and conjugations

Verbs are organised into four major groups or **conjugations** according to the ending of the infinitive. All verbs belong to one of these, and it is of vital importance that we are able to recognise which group or conjugation the verb concerned belongs to, and how to form correctly the various parts of its **paradigm** – the collection of forms which a particular verb can adopt in any circumstances.

11 Infinitive endings for the four groups

Group 1 verbs end in ***–er –***
eg ***aller*** = *to go*, ***danser*** = *to dance*, ***penser*** = *to think*, ***sembler*** = *to seem*

Group 2 verbs end in ***–ir –***
eg ***courir*** = *to run*, ***finir*** = *to finish*, ***jouir*** = *to enjoy*, ***partir*** = *to leave*

Group 3 verbs end in ***–re –***
eg ***faire*** = *to do*, ***mettre*** = *to put*, ***plaire*** = *to please*, ***vendre*** = *to sell*

Group 4 verbs end in ***–oir –***
eg ***devoir*** = *to have to*, ***pouvoir*** = *to be able to*, ***recevoir*** = *to receive*, ***voir*** = *to see*

12 Subgroups

For each group of verbs, there are subgroups (in other grammar books often called 'exceptions' or 'irregular verbs'). These will be recorded after the standard conjugations have been presented.

It should be noted that, as a general rule, in these subgroups, as far as the present tense is concerned, the first two persons of the plural tend to maintain the stem of the infinitive, whereas the three persons of the singular and the third person plural have distinctive but related forms. Taking ***pouvoir*** as an example –

pouvoir

nous pouvons, vous pouvez but ***je peux, tu peux, il / elle peut, ils / elles peuvent***

13 Group 1 –*er* verbs, Group 2 –*ir* verbs, Group 3 –*re* verbs, Group 4 –*oir* verbs

Group 1 –er verbs

This is the most numerous conjugation, and all newly created verbs belong to this group. Most of the verbs belonging to this group form their tenses regularly. A few show minor irregularities and may be gathered together into subgroups. One verb – ***aller*** = *to go* – shows major departures from the norm.

Group 2 –ir verbs

The verbs belonging to this group may be divided into a number of subgroups. A major distinction is to be made between those verbs which add ***–iss–*** between the stem and the ending in certain tenses and persons – subgroup 1 – and those which do not – subgroup 2 –

subgroup 1

finir = *to finish* – ***nous finissons***
jouir = *to enjoy* – ***je jouissais***

subgroup 2 –

courir = *to run* – ***je courais***
partir = *to leave* – ***nous partons***

Group 3 –re verbs and Group 4 –oir verbs

The verbs in these groups often form small subgroups, but there are also a number of verbs which are complete one-offs, especially in Group 4.

14 The formation of tenses – simple and compound tenses

Normally, certain endings need to be added to the stem of the verb. Very occasionally the ending is subsumed into the stem, eg

il part – third person singular of ***partir***

The stem is the element preceding the ***–er/–ir/–re*** ending of the infinitive of Groups 1 to 3 –

eg ***port*** – from ***porter***, ***fin*** – from ***finir***, ***vend*** – from ***vendre***

Identifying the stem is more of a problem with Group 4 verbs.

Simple and compound tenses

Tenses are of two types – **simple** and **compound**.
Simple tenses – here it is the form of the verb itself that varies –

eg for ***donner*** present tense ***je donne***, imperfect tense ***je donnais***, future tense ***je donnerai***

Compound tenses – here an auxiliary verb, either ***avoir*** or ***être***, is combined with the past participle of the verb –

eg perfect tense ***j'ai donné***, pluperfect tense ***j'étais venu***

The tenses will be treated in the following order –

Simple tenses: present, imperfect, future, conditional;
Compound tenses: perfect, pluperfect, future perfect, conditional perfect. The past historic (simple) and past anterior (compound) are treated last as they are relatively rare.

It should be pointed out that, on a number of occasions, it is the spelling rather than the pronunciation that is affected. Precision and accuracy of spelling are very important in written French; spoken French does not need to reveal how certain forms are spelt! – so more latitude is permissible there. However, this grammar book is designed to promote orthographical accuracy.

INDICATIVE MOOD

Present tense

15 Group 1 –*er* Verbs

16 Present tense of Group 1 –*er* verbs

The endings for the typical Group 1 ***–er*** verb ***porter*** = *to carry* are added to the stem ***port–***

	singular	plural
first person	*port*–***e***	*port*–***ons***
second person	*port*–***es***	*port*–***ez***
third person	*port*–***e***	*port*–***ent***

17 Subgroups

There are a few verbs that show slight changes in their stems in the three persons of the singular and the third person plural.

This also applies to the future and conditional tenses of those verbs in all persons, singular and plural.

Aller is an ***–er*** verb that shows major deviations from the norm.

For further details see the appropriate sections below.

18 –*er* verbs Subgroup 1

Verbs ending in ***–eler*** and ***–eter***: there are two possibilities –

1 some verbs double the final consonant of the stem in the persons mentioned above;
2 others change the unstressed ***e*** of the stem to ***è***.

Examples of Subgroup 1
1 doubling the final consonant of the stem in singular and third person plural –

appeler = *to call*

j'appelle, tu appelles, il/elle/on appelle, ils/elles appellent

but ***nous appelons, vous appelez***

jeter = *to throw*

je jette, tu jettes, il/elle/on jette, ils/elles jettent
but ***nous jetons, vous jetez***

2 changing ***–e–*** of stem to ***–è–***

acheter = *to buy*

j'achète, tu achètes, il/elle/on achète, ils/elles achètent
but ***nous achetons, vous achetez***

19 *–er* verbs Subgroup 2

Verbs, with ***–e–*** (apart from those in Subgroup 1) or ***–é–*** as the final vowel of the stem –

the ***–e–*** or ***–é–*** is changed to ***–è–*** in the persons mentioned above.

Examples of Subgroup 2

mener = *to lead*

je mène, tu mènes, il/elle/on mène, ils/elles mènent
but ***nous menons, vous menez***

espérer = *to hope*

j'espère, tu espères, il/elle/on espère, ils/elles espèrent
but ***nous espérons, vous espérez***

20 *–er* verbs Subgroup 3

Verbs with ***–c–, –g–*** occurring immediately before the ending – the /s/, /ʒ/ sounds are retained by changing ***–c–*** to ***–ç–*** or adding an ***–e–*** after the ***–g–*** respectively in the first person plural of the present tense (and also in other tenses before ***a*** (in imperfect and past historic) or ***u*** (in past historic) with certain subgroups); ***–ç–*** (= ***s***-sound rather than a ***k***-sound) is used in the spelling of these words to reflect the fact that the pronunciation of the ***–c–*** remains the same.

For further details see 44, 76.

Examples of Subgroup 3

commencer = *to begin*

je commence but ***nous commençons*** (also ***je commençai, commençais***)

manger = *to eat*

je mange but ***nous mangeons*** (also ***je mangeai, mangeais***)

21 *–er* verbs Subgroup 4

Aller = *to go* constitutes a major departure from the norms of the ***–er*** conjugation, not only in the present tense but also in the future and conditional. The same forms are affected as for subgroups 1 and 2.

aller

je vais, tu vas, il/elle/on va, ils/elles vont
but ***nous allons, vous allez***

s'en aller = *to go away* is conjugated in the same way.

22 Group 2 *–ir* Verbs

23 Present tense of Group 2 *–ir* verbs

We need to draw a distinction between those ***–ir*** verbs that insert ***–iss–*** between stem and ending with certain persons – Subgroup 1, by far the most numerous subgroup – and those that do not – the other subgroups.

24 *–ir* verbs Subgroup 1

The endings for the typical ***–ir*** verb ***finir*** = *to finish* are added to the stem ***fin–*** for the three persons singular, and to the stem plus ***–iss–*** for the three persons plural –

	singular	plural
first person	*fin–**is***	*fin–**issons***
second person	*fin–**is***	*fin–**issez***
third person	*fin–**it***	*fin–**issent***

25 *–ir* verbs Subgroup 2

The endings for a typical ***–ir*** verb, without ***–iss–*** in the plural, are added to the stem. The treatment of the final consonant of the stem should be noted –

1 when the stem ends in ***–r–***, the ***–r–*** is retained throughout the paradigm
2 when the stem ends in ***–t–***, the ***–t–*** does not appear in the written form of the first two persons singular
3 when the stem ends in another consonant, the consonant does not appear in the singular but reappears in the plural.

Examples of Subgroup 2

1 ***courir*** = *to run*

	singular	plural
first person	*cour–**s***	*cour–**ons***
second person	*cour–**s***	*cour–**ez***
third person	*cour–**t***	*cour–**ent***

2 ***partir*** = *to leave*

je pars, tu pars, il/elle/on part
nous partons, vous partez, ils/elles partent

3 ***dormir*** = *to sleep*

je dors, tu dors, il/elle/on dort
nous dormons, vous dormez, ils/elles dorment

26 *–ir* verbs Subgroup 3

Certain verbs whose infinitive ends in ***–ir*** are in fact conjugated like Group 1 ***–er*** verbs.

Example of Subgroup 3

cueillir = *to gather*

je cueille, tu cueilles, il/elle/on cueille, nous cueillons, vous cueillez, ils/elles cueillent

27 *–ir* verbs Subgroup 4

Tenir = *to hold* and ***venir*** = *to come* and their derivatives form a subgroup with an irregular present tense.

The two persons of the plural are formed like Subgroup 2 ***–ir*** verbs, but it is the other persons that give this subgroup its particularity.

Example of Subgroup 4

venir

je viens, tu viens, il/elle/on vient, ils/elles viennent

but ***nous venons, vous venez***

28 *–ir* verb *mourir* = *to die*

Mourir is the most irregular of the ***–ir*** verbs.

je meurs, tu meurs, il/elle/on meurt, nous mourons, vous mourez, ils/elles meurent

29 Group 3 *–re* Verbs

30 Present tense of Group 3 *–re* verbs

Group 3 ***–re*** verbs involve a number of subgroups, some of which differ only slightly from each other, others of which are much more radical in their deviations.

The endings for the present tense of most ***–re*** verbs follow a regular pattern for most persons except the third person singular, where either the stem only occurs or a final ***-t*** is added.

	singular	plural
first person	***–s***	***–ons***
second person	***–s***	***–ez***
third person	stem only or ***–t***	***–ent***

31 *–re* verbs Subgroup 1

Subgroup 1 involves the use of the stem only in the third person singular. This subgroup includes verbs ending in ***–andre, –endre*** (except ***prendre*** = *to take* and derivatives), ***–erdre, –ondre, –ordre***.

Examples of Subgroup 1

vendre = *to sell*

je vends, tu vends, il/elle/on vend, nous vendons, vous vendez, ils/elles vendent

perdre = *to lose*

je perds, tu perds, il/elle/on perd, nous perdons, vous perdez, ils/elles perdent

répondre = *to reply*

je réponds, tu réponds, il/elle/on répond, nous répondons, vous répondez, ils/elles répondent

32 –*re* verbs Subgroup 2

The only difference between this subgroup and Subgroup 1 is that ***–t*** is added to the stem of the verb for the third person singular.

This subgroup includes verbs ending in ***–ompre***, and ***conclure*** = *to conclude*, ***rire*** = *to laugh* and derivatives.

Examples of Subgroup 2

rompre = *to break*

je romps, tu romps, il/elle/on rompt, nous rompons, vous rompez, ils/elles rompent

rire

je ris, tu ris, il/elle/on rit, nous rions, vous riez, ils/elles rient

conclure

je conclus, tu conclus, il/elle/on conclut, nous concluons, vous concluez, ils/elles concluent

33 –*re* verbs Subgroup 3

Battre = *to beat*, ***mettre*** = *to put* and derivatives subgroup: this subgroup is distinctive in that a single ***–t–*** (instead of the double ***–tt–*** that might be supposed) occurs in the singular.

Examples of Subgroup 3

battre

je bats, tu bats, il/elle/on bat, nous battons, vous battez, ils/elles battent

mettre

je mets, tu mets, il/elle/on met, nous mettons, vous mettez, ils/elles mettent

34 *–re* verbs Subgroup 4

Croire = *to believe* subgroup: this subgroup involves the addition of a ***–t*** for the third person singular, and ***–i–*** becomes ***–y–*** in the first and second persons plural.

Example of Subgroup 4

croire

je crois, tu crois, il/elle/on croit, nous croyons, vous croyez, ils croient

35 *–re* verbs Subgroup 5

Lire = *to read* and ***conduire*** = *to drive* subgroup: this subgroup involves the addition of a ***–t*** for the third person singular and of an ***–s–*** to the stem in all three persons of the plural.

Examples of Subgroup 5

lire

je lis, tu lis, il/elle/on lit, nous lisons, vous lisez, ils/elles lisent

conduire

je conduis, tu conduis, il/elle/on conduit, nous conduisons, vous conduisez, il/elles conduisent

36 *–re* verbs Subgroup 6

Écrire = *to write* subgroup: this subgroup involves the addition of a ***–t*** for the third person singular and of a ***–v–*** to the stem in all three persons of the plural.

Example of Subgroup 6

écrire

j'écris, tu écris, il/elle/on écrit, nous écrivons, vous écrivez, ils/elles écrivent

37 *–re* verbs Subgroup 7

This subgroup contains a series of common verbs which are very irregular in formation, and each of which has a distinctive conjugation for the present tense.

Examples of Subgroup 7

boire = *to drink*

je bois, tu bois, il/elle/on boit, nous buvons, vous buvez, ils/elles boivent

craindre = *to fear*

je crains, tu crains, il/elle/on craint, nous craignons, vous craignez, ils/elles craignent

dire = *to say*

je dis, tu dis, il/elle/on dit, nous disons, vous dites, ils/elles disent

faire = *to do*

je fais, tu fais, il/elle/on fait, nous faisons, vous faites, ils/elles font

prendre = *to take*

je prends, tu prends, il/elle/on prend, nous prenons, vous prenez, ils/elles prennent

vivre = *to live*

je vis, tu vis, il/elle/on vit, nous vivons, vous vivez, ils/elles vivent

and the supreme irregular ***–re*** verb
être = *to be*

je suis, tu es, il/elle/on est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils/elles sont

38 Group 4 *–oir* Verbs

39 Present tense of Group 4 *–oir* verbs

Even more so than with Group 3 ***–re*** verbs, stem alterations and the existence of small subgroups are extremely common in this group.

Normally the first and second persons plural forms reflect the infinitive; the other forms are more distant from the original stem.

40 *–oir* verbs Subgroup 1

–cevoir subgroup: a number of stem alterations occur and ***–c–*** becomes ***–ç–*** before ***–o–*** (compare 20, 44, 75).

Example of Subgroup 1

recevoir = *to receive*

je reçois, tu reçois, il/elle/on reçoit, nous recevons, vous recevez, ils/elles reçoivent

41 *–oir* verbs Subgroup 2

Voir = *to see* and its derivatives subgroup: ***–i–*** becomes ***–y–*** in first and second persons plural. For other verbs in ***–voir*** see Subgroups 1 and 3.

Example of Subgroup 2

voir

je vois, tu vois, il/elle/on voit, nous voyons, vous voyez, ils/elles voient

42 *–oir* verbs Subgroup 3

As with Subgroup 7 of ***–re*** verbs, this subgroup contains a series of verbs that are very irregular in formation, and each of which has a distinctive conjugation for the present tense. The majority are very common.

Examples of Subgroup 3

asseoir = *to sit* – this verb (normally pronominal) has two conjugations for the present tense, the first of which is the more commonly used –

1 ***je m'assieds, tu t'assieds, il/elle/on s'assied, nous nous asseyons, vous vous asseyez, ils/elles s'asseyent***
2 ***je m'assois, tu t'assois, il/elle/on s'assoit, nous nous assoyons, vous vous assoyez, ils/elles s'assoient***

avoir = *to have*

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

devoir = *to have to*

je dois, tu dois, il/elle/on doit, nous devons, vous devez, ils/elles doivent

falloir = *to be necessary* – an impersonal verb used only in the third person singular –

il faut

pleuvoir = *to rain* – an impersonal verb used only in the third person singular –

il pleut

pouvoir = *to be able to*

je peux (***puis-je*** is used in the interrogative – see 161), ***tu peux, il/elle/on peut, nous pouvons, vous pouvez, ils/elles peuvent***

savoir = *to know*

je sais, tu sais, il/elle/on sait, nous savons, vous savez, ils/elles savent

valoir = *to be worth*

je vaux, tu vaux, il/elle/on vaut, nous valons, vous valez, ils/elles valent

vouloir = *to want*

je veux, tu veux, il/elle/on veut, nous voulons, vous voulez, ils/elles veulent

Imperfect tense

43 Using and forming the imperfect tense

Usage

As will be explained in 129, the imperfect tense has a number of functions – mainly to indicate the passage of time or the repetition of an action or event in the past.

In all cases, except ***être***, the imperfect tense is formed by taking the first person plural form of the verb, and replacing the ***–ons*** ending by the appropriate imperfect ending.

Endings

The endings for all verbs without exception are

singular	plural
–ais	***–ions***
–ais	***–iez***
–ait	***–aient***

44 Examples of the imperfect tense Groups 1–4

Group 1
porter

je portais, tu portais, il/elle/on portait, nous portions, vous portiez, ils/elles portaient

commencer

je commençais, tu commençais, il/elle/on commençait, nous commencions, vous commenciez, ils/elles commençaient

manger

je mangeais, tu mangeais, il/elle/on mangeait, nous mangions, vous mangiez, ils/elles mangeaient

aller

j'allais, tu allais, il/elle/on allait, nous allions, vous alliez, ils/elles allaient

Group 2
finir

je finissais, tu finissais, il/elle/on finissait, nous finissions, vous finissiez, ils/elles finissaient

partir

je partais, tu partais, il/elle/on partait, nous partions, vous partiez, ils/elles partaient

Group 3
vendre

je vendais, tu vendais, il/elle/on vendait, nous vendions, vous vendiez, ils/elles vendaient

être

j'étais, tu étais, il/elle/on était, nous étions, vous étiez, ils/elles étaient

Group 4
recevoir

je recevais, tu recevais, il/elle/on recevait, nous recevions, vous receviez, ils/elles recevaient

voir

je voyais, tu voyais, il/elle/on voyait, nous voyions, vous voyiez, ils/elles voyaient

pouvoir

je pouvais, tu pouvais, il/elle/on pouvait, nous pouvions, vous pouviez, ils/elles pouvaient

avoir

j'avais, tu avais, il/elle/on avait, nous avions, vous aviez, ils/elles avaient

Future and conditional tenses

45 Using the future and conditional tenses

Because these two tenses are formed in a very similar way, it is convenient to treat them together.

Usage

As will be explained in 135, 138, the future tense refers to events that have yet to take place, the conditional to 'the future in the past' and to express doubt or probability.

46 Endings of future and conditional tenses

In the majority of cases, forming the future and conditional tenses is a relatively simple matter.

For all Group 1 ***–er*** verbs (except ***aller*** and ***envoyer*** – see 49), the following endings are added to the stem. However, the stem undergoes variation in a few cases – see 48.

Future tense		**Conditional tense**	
singular	plural	singular	plural
–erai	***–erons***	***–erais***	***–erions***
–eras	***–erez***	***–erais***	***–eriez***
–era	***–eront***	***–erait***	***–eraient***

For all Group 2 ***–ir*** verbs (except ***cueillir*** – see 51), the following endings are added to the stem –

Future tense		**Conditional tense**	
singular	plural	singular	plural
–irai	***–irons***	***–irais***	***–irions***
–iras	***–irez***	***–irais***	***–iriez***
–ira	***–iront***	***–irait***	***–iraient***

For Group 3 ***–re*** verbs, the following endings are added to the stem. All the subgroups form their future and conditional tenses in the same way, with the exception of ***être*** and ***faire*** – see 54.

Future tense		**Conditional tense**	
singular	plural	singular	plural
–rai	***–rons***	***–rais***	***–rions***
–ras	***–rez***	***–rais***	***–riez***
–ra	***–ront***	***–rait***	***–raient***

For Group 4 ***–oir*** verbs, the situation is, inevitably, more complex. The endings are the same as for Group 3 ***–re*** verbs, but it is the stem that needs to be noted.

47 Examples of future and conditional tenses of Group 1 *–er* verbs

Future tense		**Conditional tense**	
singular	plural	singular	plural
je porterai	***nous porterons***	***je porterais***	***nous porterions***
tu porteras	***vous porterez***	***tu porterais***	***vous porteriez***
il / elle / on portera	***ils / elles porteront***	***il / elle / on porterait***	***ils / elles porteraient***

48 Stem changes of Group 1 *–er* verbs

Subgroup 1
Verbs ending in ***–eler*** and ***–eter***

1 some double the final consonant of the stem in all persons of the singular and the plural;
2 others change the unstressed ***e*** of the stem to ***è***.

Examples

appeler

future
j'appellerai, tu appelleras, il / elle / on appellera, nous appellerons, vous appellerez, ils / elles appelleront

conditional

j'appellerais, tu appellerais, il / elle / on appellerait, nous appellerions, vous appelleriez, ils / elles appelleraient

jeter

future
je jetterai, tu jetteras, il / elle / on jettera, nous jetterons, vous jetterez, ils / elles jetteront

conditional

je jetterais, tu jetterais, il / elle / on jetterait, nous jetterions, vous jetteriez, ils / elles jetteraient

acheter

future
j'achèterai*, *tu achèteras*, *il/elle/on achètera*, *nous achèterons*, *vous achèterez*, *ils/elles achèteront

conditional

j'achèterais*, *tu achèterais*, *il/elle/on achèterait*, *nous achèterions*, *vous achèteriez*, *ils/elles achèteraient

Subgroup 2
Verbs with ***–e–*** as final vowel of stem – the ***–e–*** becomes ***–è–*** throughout both tenses.

Example

mener

future
je mènerai*, *tu mèneras*, *il/elle/on mènera*, *nous mènerons*, *vous mènerez*, *ils/elles mèneront

conditional

je mènerais*, *tu mènerais*, *il/elle/on mènerait*, *nous mènerions*, *vous mèneriez*, *ils/elles mèneraient

However, verbs with ***–é–*** as final vowel of stem retain ***–é–***:
espérer

future
j'espérerai*, *tu espéreras*, *il/elle/on espérera*, *nous espérerons*, *vous espérerez*, *ils/elles espéreront

conditional

j'espérerais*, *tu espérerais*, *il/elle/on espérerait*, *nous espérerions*, *vous espéreriez*, *ils/elles espéreraient

49 Group 1 *–er* verbs with radical stem variation

Aller and ***envoyer*** both have highly irregular stems.
aller

future
j'irai*, *tu iras*, *il/elle/on ira*, *nous irons*, *vous irez*, *ils/elles iront

conditional

j'irais*, *tu irais*, *il/elle/on irait*, *nous irions*, *vous iriez*, *ils/elles iraient

envoyer

future
j'enverrai*, *tu enverras*, *il/elle/on enverra*, *nous enverrons*, *vous enverrez*, *ils/elles enverront

conditional

j'enverrais*, *tu enverrais*, *il / elle / on enverrait*, *nous enverrions*, *vous enverriez*, *ils / elles enverraient

50 Examples of future and conditional tenses of Group 2 –*ir* verbs

finir

future
je finirai*, *tu finiras*, *il / elle / on finira*, *nous finirons*, *vous finirez*, *ils / elles finiront

conditional

je finirais*, *tu finirais*, *il / elle / on finirait*, *nous finirions*, *vous finiriez*, *ils / elles finiraient

dormir

future
je dormirai*, *tu dormiras*, *il / elle / on dormira*, *nous dormirons*, *vous dormirez*, *ils / elles dormiront

conditional

je dormirais*, *tu dormirais*, *il / elle / on dormirait*, *nous dormirions*, *vous dormiriez*, *ils / elles dormiraient

51 –*ir* verbs Subgroup 3

***Cueillir*,** etc
Just as the present tense of these verbs is formed differently from the norm, so are the future and conditional. Here and in the following sections the stems and endings for the first person singular and first person plural only for both tenses are given.

je cueillerai*, *nous cueillerons*, *je cueillerais*, *nous cueillerions

52 Group 2 –*ir* verbs with radical stem variation

A number of verbs have highly irregular stems.
tenir

je tiendrai*, *nous tiendrons*, *je tiendrais*, *nous tiendrions

venir

je viendrai*, *nous viendrons*, *je viendrais*, *nous viendrions

courir

je courrai*, *nous courrons*, *je courrais*, *nous courrions

mourir

je mourrai*, *nous mourrons*, *je mourrais*, *nous mourrions

53 Future and conditional tenses of Group 3 *–re* verbs

Future tense		**Conditional tense**	
singular	plural	singular	plural
je vendrai	***nous vendrons***	***je vendrais***	***nous vendrions***
tu vendras	***vous vendrez***	***tu vendrais***	***vous vendriez***
il / elle / on vendra	***ils / elles vendront***	***il / elle / on vendrait***	***ils / elles vendraient***

54 The exceptions *être* and *faire*

être

future

je serai, tu seras, il / elle / on sera, nous serons, vous serez, ils / elles seront

conditional

je serais, tu serais, il / elle / on serait, nous serions, vous seriez, ils / elles seraient

faire

future

je ferai, tu feras, il / elle / on fera, nous ferons, vous ferez, ils / elles feront

conditional

je ferais, tu ferais, il / elle / on ferait, nous ferions, vous feriez, ils / elles feraient

55 Future and conditional tenses of Group 4 *–oir* verbs

Some of these verbs undergo radical stem alteration.

Subgroup 1 – verbs in ***–cevoir***

Future tense		**Conditional tense**	
singular	plural	singular	plural
je recevrai	***nous recevrons***	***je recevrais***	***nous recevrions***
tu recevras	***vous recevrez***	***tu recevrais***	***vous recevriez***
il / elle / on recevra	***ils / elles recevront***	***il / elle / on recevrait***	***ils / elles recevraient***

Subgroup 2 – ***voir***

Future tense		**Conditional tense**	
singular	plural	singular	plural
je verrai	***nous verrons***	***je verrais***	***nous verrions***
tu verras	***vous verrez***	***tu verrais***	***vous verriez***
il / elle / on verra	***ils / elles verront***	***il / elle / on verrait***	***ils / elles verraient***

Other Group 4 verbs

avoir

j'aurai, nous aurons, j'aurais, nous aurions

devoir

je devrai, nous devrons, je devrais, nous devrions

falloir

il faudra, il faudrait

pleuvoir

il pleuvra, il pleuvrait

pouvoir

je pourrai, nous pourrons, je pourrais, nous pourrions

savoir

je saurai, nous saurons, je saurais, nous saurions

valoir

je vaudrai, nous vaudrons, je vaudrais, nous vaudrions

vouloir

je voudrai, nous voudrons, je voudrais, nous voudrions

Participles

There are two participles: the present participle and the past participle.

56 Present participles

These are normally formed by adding the ending ***–ant*** to the stem of the first person plural of the verb.

Examples

Group 1 –er verbs
porter

portant

Subgroups
appeler – ***appelant***; *acheter* – ***achetant***; *mener* – ***menant***; *espérer* – ***espérant***; *commencer* – ***commençant***; *manger* – ***mangeant***; *aller* – ***allant***

Group 2 –ir verbs
Subgroups

finir