

THE PERFECT TENSE

The perfect tense (*passé composé*) is the main tense used for talking about the past. In English it translates as 'I played' or 'I have played'.

1. The Perfect Tense With *Avoir*

The perfect tense is formed by using the auxiliary verb *avoir* and a past participle, for example:

j'ai mangé I ate, I have eaten
j'ai fini I finished, I have finished

The past participle is formed by removing the *-er*, *-re* or *-ir* from the infinitive and adding *é*, *u* or *i* as follows:

- for 'er' verbs, add **é** to the stem *donner* → *donné* (given)
- for 're' verbs, add **u** to the stem *attendre* → *attendu* (waited)
- for 'ir' verbs, add **i** to the stem *finir* → *fini* (finished)

Infinitive : parler	Infinitive : vendre	Infinitive: finir
Past participle: parlé	Past participle: vendu	Past participle: fini
j'ai parlé tu as parlé il / elle / on a parlé	j'ai vendu tu as vendu il / elle / on a vendu	j'ai fini tu as fini il / elle / on a fini
nous avons parlé vous avez parlé ils ont parlé elles ont parlé	nous avons vendu vous avez vendu ils ont vendu elles ont vendu	nous avons fini vous avez fini ils ont fini elles ont fini

Exercise 1

Below are some common regular verbs. Using these, translate the verbs in the exercise below into French.

manger	to eat	vendre	to sell
écouter	to listen	attendre	to wait for
demander	to ask	répondre	to answer
travailler	to work	perdre	to lose
réserver	to reserve	finir	to finish
préparer	to prepare	dormir	to sleep
porter	to wear, carry	choisir	to choose
oublier	to forget	remplir	to fill

- 1.** we have eaten
- 2.** I wore
- 3.** he finished
- 4.** they (fem) slept
- 5.** she filled
- 6.** they prepared
- 7.** you (informal, singular) sold
- 8.** you (polite) forgot
- 9.** I waited
- 10.** he answered
- 11.** she worked
- 12.** they (feminine) chose
- 13.** we listened
- 14.** you (informal, singular) ate
- 15.** they lost

2. Irregular Past Participles

Many verbs have an irregular past participle and these unfortunately just have to be learnt! Some common verbs with irregular past participles are given below.

VERB	MEANING	PAST PARTICIPLE
avoir	to have	eu
boire	to drink	bu
conduire	to drive	conduit
connaître	to know (person, place)	connu
devoir	to have to	dû
dire	to say/tell	dit
être	to be	été
écrire	to write	écrit
faire	to do, make	fait
lire	to read	lu
mettre	to put	mis
ouvrir	to open	ouvert
pouvoir	to be able to	pu
prendre	to take	pris
recevoir	to receive	reçu
savoir	to know (fact)	su
voir	to see	vu
vouloir	to want	voulu

Exercise 2

Translate the following verbs into French.

1. we wanted
2. you (polite) took
3. I made
4. he saw
5. they put
6. she drove
7. you (informal, singular) wrote
8. they (f.) said
9. you (formal) drunk
10. I have had

Exercise 3

Translate the following sentences into French.

- 1.** I spoke French in Belgium.

- 2.** He worked on Sunday.

- 3.** She drove to the station.

- 4.** He finished the project.

- 5.** The secretary reserved a room for 3 nights.

- 6.** You (singular, informal) wrote a letter.

- 7.** He took the train to the airport.

- 8.** She wanted to play tennis on Saturday.

9. I chose the chicken.

10. You (formal) put the pen on the table.

11. I waited for my customers.

12. They made a cake.

13. We drank a bottle of red wine.

14. I saw the factory.

15. You (informal, singular) sold the computer.

Exercise 4

Answer the following questions in French.

1. Qu'est-ce que vous avez mangé ce soir?

2. Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait hier?

3. Qu'est-ce que tu as fait ce matin?

4. Avez-vous lu le journal pendant le weekend?

5. Combien d'heures avez-vous travaillé aujourd'hui?

6. Avez-vous fini vos devoirs?

7. Est-ce que vous avez vu votre chef ce matin?

8. Vous avez reçu combien d'emails aujourd'hui?

3. The Perfect Tense With *Être*

There are 13 verbs which use the verb *être* to form their perfect tense. These are:

aller	to go	je suis allé(e)
venir	to come	je suis venu(e)
entrer	to enter	je suis entré(e)
sortir	to leave, go out	je suis sorti(e)
arriver	to arrive	je suis arrivé(e)
partir	to leave	je suis parti(e)
monter	to go up	je suis monté(e)
descendre	to go down	je suis descendu(e)
retourner	to go back	je suis retourné(e)
rester	to stay	je suis resté(e)
tomber	to fall	je suis tombé(e)
naître	to be born	je suis né(e)
mourir	to die	il est mort

All compounds of the 13 verbs above also use *être* to form their perfect tense.

e.g. *revenir* (to come back) → *je suis revenu(e)*
devenir (to become) → *je suis devenu(e)*
rentrer (to return, go home) → *je suis rentré(e)*

Agreement Of The Past Participle

With verbs which use *être* in the perfect tense, the past participle must agree in number and gender with the subject e.g. *je suis allé* (masculine speaker); *je suis allée* (feminine speaker).

e.g. je suis allé(e) nous sommes allé(e)s
 tu es allé(e) vous êtes allé(e)(s)(es)
 il est allé ils sont allés
 elle est allée elles sont allées

Exercise 5

Translate the following verbs into French.

- I went
- you (singular, informal, m.) entered
- the women arrived

4. he died
5. she was born
6. the men went out
7. you (polite, singular, f.) left
8. I became
9. she went up
10. we (m.) stayed
11. I returned
12. you (polite, sing, m.) fell
13. he went down
14. you (informal, f.) came
15. they (f.) went

Exercise 6

Translate the following sentences into French.

1. He left at 6.15.

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2. We went from the hotel to the airport.

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3. They went out this evening.

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4. She went to France the day before yesterday.

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5. You (informal, f.) arrived at the station.

6. You (formal, plural, m.) came to England.

7. We stayed for a week.

8. They (f.) came back on 10 June.

9. I returned on Tuesday.

10. She left in the spring.

11. You came back from the office late.

12. He died yesterday.

Exercise 7

Answer the following questions in French.

- 1.** A quelle heure êtes-vous rentré(e) hier soir?

- 2.** Combien de temps êtes-vous resté(e) en France lors de votre dernière visite?

- 3.** Est-ce que vous êtes allé(e) en Belgique la semaine dernière?

- 4.** Votre mari/femme/compagnon/ami(e), où est-ce qu'il/elle est allé(e) pendant le weekend?

- 5.** Est-ce que vos clients sont venus vous voir la semaine dernière?

- 6.** A quelle heure êtes-vous arrivé(e) au travail ce matin?

4. Reflexive Verbs In The Perfect Tense

Reflexive verbs also form their perfect tense with *être*.

se lever – to get up	
je me suis levé(e)	nous nous sommes levé(e)s
tu t'es levé(e)	vous vous êtes levé(e)(s)(es)
il s'est levé	ils se sont levés
elle s'est levée	elles se sont levées

Below are some common reflexive verbs.

s'appeler	to be called
se laver	to wash
se raser	to shave
se réveiller	to wake up
s'habiller	to get dressed
s'amuser	to enjoy oneself
se reposer	to rest
s'endormir	to go to sleep
se détendre	to relax
s'engager à	to commit to

Exercise 8

Translate the following verbs into French.

1. he got up
2. I committed to
3. I got dressed
4. we (m.) enjoyed ourselves
5. she went to sleep
6. they (f.) woke up
7. you (informal, singular) shaved
8. you (formal, plural, f.) rested
9. they (f.) got washed
10. he committed to
11. I woke up

12. we relaxed

Exercise 9

Answer the following questions in French.

1. A quelle heure vous êtes-vous levé(e) ce matin?

2. A quelle heure vos enfants se sont-ils réveillés ce matin?

3. Tu t'es bien amusé(e) le weekend dernier?

4. Est-ce que vous vous êtes endormi(e) toute de suite hier?

5. Est-ce que tu t'es reposé(e) hier soir?

Exercise 10

Qu'est-ce que tu as fait la semaine dernière au travail?

Qu'est-ce que tu as fait le weekend dernier?