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making
arrangements

Lesson 44

Notes

Allons au cinéma!

Using the present tense to make arrangements

Programme Notes

Welcome to Coffee Break French, the podcast aimed at independent learners of French. Our regular podcasts will introduce you to the French language in easy steps. In this week's notes we'll look at making arrangements using the present tense.

So far, we have been looking at 2 ways of using the present tense: 1) to talk about what you are doing "at the moment" and 2) to talk about what you "normally" do. Below are examples of both situations. Notice that exactly the same forms are used in French to convey different meanings, eg. *je regarde la télé* can mean "I am watching television at the moment" or "I watch television" eg. in the evening.

1) talking about what you are doing at the moment

Mark	Qu'est-ce que tu fais en ce moment?	What are you doing at the moment?
Anna	Je parle français.	I'm speaking French.
	Je regarde la télé.	I'm watching television.
	Je mange un croissant.	I'm eating a croissant.

2) talking about what you normally do

Mark	À quelle heure est-ce que tu arrives à l'université?	At what time do you (normally) arrive at university?
Anna	J'arrive à l'université à neuf heures.	I (normally) arrive at university at nine o'clock.

Let's conjugate the regular *-er* verb, *écouter*, meaning "to listen to." For example, *j'écoute la radio* means "I'm listening to the radio." There is no need for any additional word for "to" as this is contained in the verb, *écouter*. For the *ils* and *elles* parts, the *-s* is pronounced as it is followed by a vowel.

écouter (to listen to) - present tense	
j'écoute	nous écoutons
tu écoutes	vous écoutez
il / elle écoute	ils / elles écoutent

So far, particularly when doing the actions for each part of the verb, we have been thinking of *vous* as meaning “you (plural)” ie. *vous écoutez* would mean “you (all) listen.” However, as you will likely be aware, *vous* can also mean “you (formal).” So in a formal situation, you would use the *vous* form as opposed to the *tu* form of the verb.

tu = informal singular

vous = informal plural; formal singular/plural

Let’s now conjugate a reflexive verb in all 6 parts. We’ll take a verb we’ve come across before, *se maquiller*, meaning “to put on make-up.”

se maquiller (to put on make-up) - present tense	
je me maquille	nous nous maquillons
tu te maquilles	vous vous maquillez
il / elle se maquille	ils / elles se maquillent

If you are putting on make-up you may well be going out! Mark talks about making arrangements in Lesson 44. In French there is one very simple way to make arrangements by using what we have learned so far. Simply take the *nous* form of the verb, eg. *nous écoutons* (“we listen”) and take off the *nous* so you are left with *écoutons*, which can be translated as “let’s listen.”

You can repeat this procedure with any verb to say “let’s do something” in French. A minister or priest would often say *prions ensemble*, meaning “let us pray together.” Equally, another very common word used in many situation is *allons*, which comes from *aller* meaning “to go”. Although *aller* is an irregular verb in the present tense, the *nous* form is regular, ie. *nous allons*. Note that *allons* is often combined with the word *là* meaning “there”, so *allons-y* means “let’s go (there)”.

écouter (to listen)	écoutons	let’s listen
chanter (to sing)	chantons	let’s sing
prier (to pray)	prions (ensemble)	let’s pray / let us pray (together)
aller (to go)	allons	let’s go
aller au cinéma (to go to the cinema)	allons au cinéma	let’s go to the cinema
écouter la radio (to listen to the radio)	écoutons la radio	let’s listen to the radio
danser (to dance)	dansons	let’s dance

Below is a typical conversation using this construction to make an arrangement. Note that although we are talking about a future event, the present tense is used in this situation.

Conversation		
Mark	Qu'est-ce qu'on fait ce soir?	What are we doing tonight? / What will we do tonight?
Anna	Allons au cinéma.	Let's go to the cinema.
Mark	À quelle heure?	At what time?
Anna	À sept heures.	At seven o'clock.

As well as asking *qu'est-ce qu'on fait ce soir?*, we can ask, *où est-ce qu'on se voit?* which means "Where will we meet?" (literally "where do we see each other?") Here are some example conversations between Mark and Anna using the two phrases we have learned.

Conversation 1		
Mark	Qu'est-ce qu'on fait ce soir?	What are we doing tonight? / What will we do tonight?
Anna	Allons au cinéma.	Let's go to the cinema.
Mark	D'accord, où est-ce qu'on se voit?	Ok, where will we meet?
Anna	Devant le cinéma.	In front of / outside the cinema.
Mark	Très bien.	Ok. / Sounds good.

Conversation 2		
Anna	Qu'est-ce qu'on fait ce soir?	What are we doing tonight? / What will we do tonight?
Mark	Alors... allons au théâtre.	Em... let's go to the theatre.
Anna	Et où est-ce qu'on se voit?	And where will we meet?
Mark	On se voit à la gare?	Will we meet at the station?
Anna	Très bien.	Ok. / Sounds good.

Conversation 3		
Anna	Qu'est-ce qu'on fait ce soir?	What are we doing tonight? / What will we do tonight?
Mark	Je suis fatigué. Regardons la télé.	I am tired. Let's watch television.
Anna	Et où est-ce qu'on se voit?	And where will we meet?
Mark	Chez moi.	At my house.
Anna	Très bien.	Ok. / Sounds good.

Although we have been looking at simplified conversations, you can now build on this using what you already know so the same construction can be adapted to say lots of different things. So if you were asked *qu'est-ce qu'on fait ce soir?*, you could construct your own answer, eg. *jouons au tennis*, "let's play tennis."

The verb *visiter* means “to visit” but it can only be used when talking about visiting places, not people. “To visit someone” would be *rendre visite à quelqu’un*. However if you wanted to say “let’s visit the museum,” you could say *visitons le musée*.

The question can also be adapted depending on what you want to say. For example, *qu’est-ce qu’on fait demain?* means “what are we doing tomorrow?” or “what will we do tomorrow?”

Perhaps the most useful French verb when talking about making arrangements is *aller*, “to go.” Below are some phrases using *aller* to make suggestions in the same way as we have been doing. As we mentioned earlier, the phrase *allons-y!* is very common in French. *Y* means “there” so *allons-y* literally means “let’s go there” but it is used in the sense of “let’s go” or “let’s get going.”

allons au restaurant
let’s go to the restaurant

allons à la plage
let’s go to the beach

allons-y!
let’s go! / let’s get to it!

At the start of the lesson, Mark used the word *commençons*, meaning “let’s begin.” This of course comes from the verb *commencer*. Note that when *commençons* is written, a cedilla is added to the second -c- to give it a soft sound. In French, when a *c* is followed by an -a-, -o- or -u- it has a hard sound, like c- in the English word “cat”. Sometimes, for grammatical reasons, the sound needs to be soft, like c- in English “centre”, as is the case with *commençons*, so the cedilla *ç* is added to the *c*, making it *ç*.

The formula we have been looking at can be used for any French verb to say “let’s do something.” Simply take the *nous* form of the verb in the present tense and drop the *nous*. For those of you who have studied Spanish, the “let’s do something” form is much more complicated in Spanish than it is in French. In Spanish the subjunctive is required in this situation so the French version is much simpler in comparison.

Note that the information listed below is part of the test in the bonus podcast. We would advise you to listen to the podcast before you read the content below.

Bonus episode test

1	Qu’est-ce qu’on fait ce soir?	What are we doing this evening?
2	Allons au cinéma.	Let’s go to the cinema.
3	Regardons la télé.	Let’s watch the tv.
4	Dansons ensemble.	Let’s dance together.
5	Jouons au tennis.	Let’s play tennis.
6	Où est-ce qu’on se voit?	Where will we meet? / Where will we see each other?
7	Devant la gare.	In front of the station.
8	À côté de la cathédrale.	Beside the cathedral.
9	En face de la pharmacie.	Opposite the pharmacy / chemist.
10	Chez moi à vingt heures.	At my place at 8 o’clock.