

In this edition:
immediate
future tense
(*aller* + infinitive)

Lesson 51

Notes

Je vais me coucher à dix heures

Talking about “going to do something”

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 Lesson 51, Mark talks about how to say “going to do something” in French, referring to the future. This way of talking about the future usually indicates that the action is going to happen in the fairly immediate future, eg. “I am going to have a coffee” or “tomorrow I am going to visit my grandmother.” It can, however, refer to a more distant future, just as in English, eg. “I am going to spend next year in France”.

In English we would use a present continuous or present progressive tense, ie. “I am going...” followed by an infinitive. In French we construct this type of phrase in a similar way. We take the present tense of the verb “to go” (*aller*) and follow it with an infinitive.

Let's begin by reminding ourselves of the formation of the present tense of *aller*.

aller (to go) - present tense	
je vais	nous allons
tu vas	vous allez
il / elle va	ils / elles vont

Now we are going to add an infinitive to part of the verb. For example, to say “I am going to speak French” we would say *je vais parler français*. In this case, the infinitive is *parler français* (“to speak French”). *Je vais* can mean “I go” or “I am going” but in this situation it means “I am going.”

To test this new construction, Mark gave Anna some phrases in English and she translated them into French using the present tense of *aller* plus an infinitive.

Note that “to listen to music” is translated as *écouter de la musique* when we are referring to “some music.” *De la* means “some” when the noun (eg. *la musique*) is feminine. If the noun is masculine, eg. *le café* (“coffee”) we would say *du café*, meaning “some coffee” (*de + le = du*). If we are referring to particular music that we have already chosen or talked about, we could say *nous allons écouter la musique ce soir*, meaning “we are going to listen to the music this evening.” This is called the partitive article and we’ll come back to it in a future lesson.

The verb *écouter* means “to listen to.” We do not require any extra word for “to.” So “to listen to the radio” would be *écouter la radio*.

nous allons écouter de la musique ce soir
we are going to listen to (some) music this evening

In the phrase *ils vont écouter la radio demain*, the *-t* of *vont* is pronounced as it is followed by *écouter* which starts with a vowel.

ils vont écouter la radio demain
they are going to listen to the radio tomorrow

The question below is slightly more complicated as it contains two forms of the verb *aller*: *tu vas* and *aller* itself. The same thing happens with the English version: “are you going” and “to go.”

est-ce que tu vas aller au marché demain?
are you (singular, informal) going to go to the market tomorrow?

If we put this question into the formal form, it becomes:

est-ce que vous allez aller au marché demain?
are you (singular, formal) going to go to the market tomorrow?

Note that *allez* and *aller* sound exactly the same but *allez* is the *vous* form of the verb and *aller* is the infinitive.

In fact, this construction does sound a little unnatural in French as it does in English. It is very useful to learn as an example and it is used sometimes. However, just as we would use the present tense in English to imply the future, we can do the same thing in French. So rather than say “I am going to eat in the restaurant this evening” (*je vais manger au restaurant ce soir*) you could say “I’m eating in the restaurant this evening” (*je mange au restaurant ce soir*).

It is important to understand the construction, *aller* + infinitive, as it is an easy way of expressing something that is going to happen in the future. There are of course other ways of talking about the future in French, just as there are in English, but we will cover these in a future lesson.

Let’s now make things a little more complicated by introducing reflexive verbs. We have already looked at reflexive verbs as part of our daily routine, eg. *se lever* (“to get up”), *se doucher* (“to have a shower”), *se coucher* (“to go to bed”), *se réveiller* (“to wake up”). We now want to put these reflexive verbs into the immediate future tense. Depending on who is “doing” the verb, the reflexive pronoun changes, eg. *se doucher* becomes *me doucher*.

je vais me doucher
I am going to have a shower

je vais me coucher
I am going to go to bed

ce soir je vais me coucher à dix heures
this evening I am going to go to bed at ten o’clock

demain je vais me lever à neuf heures
tomorrow I am going to get up at nine o’clock

demain je vais me brosser les dents à dix heures
tomorrow I am going to brush my teeth at ten o’clock

To say “to brush one’s teeth” in French, you say *se brosser les dents*. Therefore, to say “to brush my teeth” the only part that changes is the *se*, which becomes *me*.

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	Michel va parler avec sa mère	Michel is going to speak to his mother.
2	Je vais finir avant minuit.	I am going to finish before midnight.
3	Les enfants vont acheter le livre.	The children are going to buy the book.
4	Je vais habiter dans un château.	I am going to live in a castle.
5	Elle va louer une petite voiture	She is going to hire a little car.
6	Nous allons acheter une grande table.	We are going to buy a large table.
7	Are you going to visit the old port?	Vous allez visiter le vieux port?
8	I am going to learn French with you.	Je vais apprendre le français avec toi.
9	You are going to find the church next to the market.	Tu vas trouver l'église à côté du marché.
10	They are going to dance all night.	Ils vont danser toute la nuit.



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