

In this edition:
the verb *aller*
and
constructing
questions

Lesson 45

Notes

Où est-ce que tu vas?

Looking at the verb *aller* in the present tense and constructing questions

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 how to ask questions in French and we'll also look at the present tense of the verb *aller*.

In last week's lesson, we learned the word *allons*, meaning "let's go." It comes from the verb *aller*, "to go." Remember to take the *nous* form of the verb in the present tense (ie. *nous allons*) and drop the *nous*. Notice that the only difference in the following two phrases is the presence or absence of *nous*, but this gives the phrase a totally different meaning.

nous allons au cinéma

we go to the cinema / we are going to the cinema

allons au cinéma

let's go to the cinema

We are going to look at the verb *aller* in more detail. As we mentioned last week, it does not follow the same patterns as the verbs we have been learning so far. The verbs we have looked at are all "regular" verbs, meaning they all follow exactly the same pattern. The verb *laver* ("to wash") is an example of a regular *-er* verb.

laver (to wash) - present tense	
je lave	nous lavons
tu laves	vous lavez
il / elle lave	ils / elles lavent

The verb *aller* belongs to a group of what are known as “irregular” verbs. This means it has a different pattern to what you would expect. Although irregular verbs do not follow the pattern of regular verbs, they do tend to follow some kind of pattern. Let’s look at the conjugation of *aller* in the present tense.

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

You have the choice whether to pronounce the *-s* at the end of *vais* when it is followed by a vowel sound, as is the case in the following phrases.

je vais au cinéma
I go to the cinema

je vais au marché
I go to the market

je vais à la piscine
I go to the swimming pool

Remember that in French, the same construction is used to say “I do something” as “I am doing something.” So *je vais à l’université* can mean “I go to university” or “I am going to (the) university.”

The *tu* form of *aller* can be used in questions, for example:

où est-ce que tu vas?
where are you going?

The following conversations between Mark and Anna include the phrases *je vais* and *tu vas*. Notice the difference between *je vais* (“I’m going”) and *j’aime bien aller* (“I really like to go.”) In the latter phrase, *aller* is in its infinitive form and the verb *aimer* (“to like”) is conjugated in the present tense: *j’aime*.

Conversation		
Mark	Alors Anna, où est-ce que tu vas aujourd’hui?	So Anna, where are you going today?
Anna	Je vais à la piscine.	I’m going to the swimming pool.
Mark	Ah tu vas à la piscine? Moi j’aime bien aller à la piscine.	Ah you’re going to the swimming pool? I really like going to the swimming pool.

Conversation		
Anna	Mark, où est-ce que tu vas aujourd’hui?	Mark, where are you going today?
Mark	Aujourd’hui je vais au marché.	Today I’m going to the market.

Let's now take a closer look at the phrase *où est-ce que tu vas?* We can split this up into different components. As we already know, *où* means "where." *Est-ce que* shows that the phrase is a question and it literally means "is it that." We have now learned that *tu vas* means "you go" or "you are going." So the question literally means "where is it that you are going?" but it is better translated as "where are you going?"

We can use this same construction to form different questions by changing the "question word" and the verb. Let's try replacing *où* with *que*. When you put *que* in front of *est-ce que*, the *que* is shortened to become *qu'* which makes the phrase *qu'est-ce que*. We can change *tu vas* to *tu fais* ("you do" or "you are doing.") This gives us the question we learned a couple of lessons ago, *qu'est-ce que tu fais?* ("what are you doing?") Although the question is completely different from *où est-ce que tu vas?* it follows exactly the same pattern. This time the "question word" is *que* which is shortened to *qu'*. The "question identifier" is still *est-ce que* and the conjugated verb is *tu fais* from the verb *faire*. (*Faire*, meaning "to do" is another irregular verb. We will look at the conjugation of *faire* in a future lesson.)

Below is a conversation between Mark and Anna using the question we have learned how to construct: *qu'est-ce que tu fais?*

Conversation		
Mark	Anna, qu'est-ce que tu fais?	Anna, what are you doing?
Anna	J'apprends le français.	I'm learning French.

Don't worry about *j'apprends* for the time being. We'll cover this in a future lesson too.

Let's look at another question using the same format: *à quelle heure est-ce que tu arrives?* ("at what time do you arrive?" or "what time do you arrive at?") This time we have a "question phrase" instead of a "question word." *À quelle heure* literally means "at what hour." The more questions we learn how to ask, the longer our conversations can be and the more information we can extract from the other person!

Conversation		
Mark	Alors Anna, tu vas à la piscine aujourd'hui, n'est-ce pas?	So Anna, you are going to the swimming pool today, aren't you?
Anna	Oui.	Yes.
Mark	À quelle heure est-ce que tu vas à la piscine?	At what time are you going to the swimming pool?
Anna	Je vais à la piscine à trois heures / à quinze heures.	I'm going to the swimming pool at three o'clock (in the afternoon).

We can change the "question word" or "question phrase" to *pourquoi* meaning "why." So we could ask the question *pourquoi est-ce que tu vas à la piscine?* ("why are you going to the swimming pool?") To answer this question you need to use the phrase *parce que*, which means "because." Mark asks Anna why she is going to the swimming pool and Anna gives some possible answers. Notice that you could simply answer by saying *parce que* meaning "just because" although it may come across as slightly cheeky!

Conversation		
Mark	Pourquoi est-ce que tu vas à la piscine?	Why are you going to the swimming pool?
Anna	Parce que j'aime le sport.	Because I like sport.
	Parce que j'aime aller à la piscine.	Because I like going to the swimming pool.
	Parce que.	Just because.

Conversation

Mark	Anna, où est-ce que tu vas?	Anna, where are you going?
Anna	Je vais à l'université.	I'm going to university.
Mark	Et pourquoi est-ce que tu vas à l'université?	And why are you going to university?
Anna	Parce que j'apprends l'allemand à l'université.	Because I'm learning German at university.
Mark	Très bien, et normalement à quelle heure est-ce que tu arrives à l'université?	Very good, and what time do you normally arrive at university?
Anna	Normalement j'arrive à l'université à neuf heures.	I normally arrive at university at nine o'clock.

Conversation

Mark	Anna, qu'est-ce que tu fais?	Anna, what are you doing?
Anna	Je dîne avec ma famille.	I'm eating dinner with my family.
Mark	Pourquoi est-ce que tu dînes avec ta famille?	Why are you eating dinner with your family?
Anna	Parce que j'ai faim.	Because I'm hungry.
Mark	Normalement à quelle heure est-ce que tu dînes avec ta famille?	What time do you normally have dinner with your family?
Anna	Je dîne avec ma famille à sept heures.	I eat dinner with my family at seven o'clock.

Let's take another look at the conjugation of the verb *aller*.



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

We have already looked in more detail at *je vais* and *tu vas*. Based on the pattern of regular French verbs, it makes sense that we drop the *-s* at the end of *vas* to get the 3rd person form, *va*. So *il/elle va* means "he/she goes."

The *nous* and *vous* parts of the verb are, in fact, regular. We simply take off the *-er* ending and add *-ons* and *-ez*. However the *ils/elles* parts of *aller* are irregular, so it becomes *ils/elles vont* ("they go.") This pattern of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person singular and 3rd person plural forms being irregular and the 1st and 2nd person plural forms being regular is very common in French verbs.

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	Tu vas au marché aujourd'hui.	You are going to the market today.
2	Je vais au cinéma avec ma copine.	I'm going to the cinema with my friend (f).
3	Nous allons en France.	We're going to France.
4	Elle va au supermarché avec David.	She's going to the supermarket with David.
5	Est-ce que nous allons à l'église?	Are we going to the church?
6	Où est-ce qu'ils vont?	Where are they going?
7	Pourquoi est-ce que tu vas avec Manou?	Why are you going with Manou?
8	Quand est-ce que je vais à Montréal?	When am I going to Montreal?
9	Ce soir je vais à la pharmacie.	This evening I'm going to the pharmacy.
10	Nous allons au restaurant français parce que nous aimons la nourriture française.	We're going to the French restaurant because we like French food.



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