

In this edition:  
introducing the  
perfect tense

# Lesson 53

## Notes

## Nous avons regardé la télé

### The perfect tense

#### 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.

This week we are going to start thinking about the past, starting with the perfect tense. The perfect tense, or the present perfect tense as it is sometimes called, is used in French to talk about what you “have done.”

For example, at the start of the lesson Anna said: “**I have had** lots to do for uni; **I have prepared** a presentation on German culture; **I have joined** a gym and **I have worked out** every day.”

Mark said: “**I have taken** some time off this week; **I have spent** some time with my family; **I have had** lots of content to prepare.”

In order to learn how to form this construction in French, we are going to begin by looking at the ‘past participle.’ This is the part of the phrase that comes after “have” in the examples above, eg. “prepared”, “joined”, “taken” etc. We will firstly look at four examples of common verbs that we have used many times before. To form the past participle of regular *-er* verbs, we simply take off the *-er* and add *-é*.

1) *chanter* - “to sing”

Take off *-er* to give *chant-* and add *-é... chanté* (“sung”)

2) *danser* - “to dance”

Take off *-er* to give *dans-* and add *-é... dansé* (“danced”)

3) *manger* - “to eat”

Take off *-er* to give *mang-* and add *-é... mangé* (“eaten”)

4) *parler* - “to speak”

Take off *-er* to give *parl-* and add *-é... parlé* (“spoken”)

We can put each of these past participles together with the phrase “I have” which we know already: *j’ai*. This forms the perfect tense.

1) *j’ai chanté* - “I have sung”

2) *j’ai dansé* - “I have danced”

3) *j’ai mangé* - “I have eaten”

4) *j’ai parlé* - “I have spoken”

Let's revise the present tense of *avoir* ("to have") as we need this to form the perfect tense.

avoir (to have) - present tense	
j'ai	nous avons
tu as	vous avez
il / elle a	ils / elles ont

So to form the perfect tense, we take the present tense of *avoir* and add the past participle of the verb.

**Perfect tense = present tense of *avoir* + past participle**

Let's look at two of the phrases Anna and Mark said earlier and translate them into French using the perfect tense.

I have prepared a presentation	j'ai préparé une présentation
I have spent some time with my family	j'ai passé du temps avec ma famille

Mark tested Anna on the perfect tense by giving her some phrases to translate into French.

I have listened to some music	j'ai écouté de la musique
we have watched the television	nous avons regardé la télé
they have sung the song	ils ont chanté la chanson
she has danced with Fred Astaire	elle a dansé avec Fred Astaire

Note that the verbs we have looked at so far are regular *-er* verbs. Next week we will be looking at regular *-ir* and *-re* verbs which work slightly differently.

We also need to think about how we form the negative version of the perfect tense. Remember that to form the negative of a verb, we put *ne* and *pas* around the conjugated verb, eg. *je ne comprends pas* ("I don't understand") and *je ne sais pas* ("I don't know").

In the last lesson, we were looking at the negative of the immediate future tense, eg. *je ne vais pas manger au restaurant ce soir* ("I am not going to eat in the restaurant this evening"). Notice that the *ne* and *pas* still go around the conjugated verb in this case. Exactly the same thing happens when we form the negative of the perfect tense. For example, to say "I have not sung the song" we put *ne* and *pas* around the conjugated verb, which in this case is *avoir*, so the phrase becomes *je n'ai pas chanté la chanson*.

In a sense, the verb *avoir* "helps" us to form the perfect tense. In this case, *avoir* is therefore referred to as an 'auxiliary verb' or a 'helping verb.'

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	<b>Il n'a pas mangé les fraises.</b>	He didn't eat / hasn't eaten the strawberries.
2	<b>Nous n'avons pas regardé la télé.</b>	We haven't watched / didn't watch tv.
3	<b>J'ai écouté de la musique.</b>	I have listened / listened to music.
4	<b>Tu as chanté avec elle?</b>	Have you sung / Did you sing with her?
5	<b>Ils ont parlé avec mon père.</b>	They have spoken / They spoke to my father.
6	<b>Have you played at basketball?</b>	Tu as joué au basket? / Vous avez joué au basket?
7	<b>I have bought the book.</b>	J'ai acheté le livre.
8	<b>He has eaten some bread</b>	Il a mangé du pain.
9	<b>I have given the film to my friend.</b>	J'ai donné le film à mon ami.
10	<b>She chatted with Marie-Claire.</b>	Elle a bavardé avec Marie-Claire.



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