

Unit 8: Talking About the Past (Parler du Passé)

You've learned to talk about what's happening now and what's going to happen soon. But what about everything that's already happened? This unit introduces the most common way to talk about the past in French: the **Passé Composé**!

Lesson 22: The Passé Composé with avoir

Thoughts: The **Passé Composé** (pah-SAY kohm-POH-zay) is how French speakers talk about completed actions in the past (like "I ate," "She went," "They finished"). It's a two-part verb tense, which is different from how we form the past in English or Czech.

Casual Introduction: In English, we just add "-ed" to many verbs (walked, talked). In Czech, you change the verb ending (*dělal, šel*). In French, for the *Passé Composé*, you need two words for most verbs: a helper verb (called an **auxiliary verb**) and the **past participle** of your main verb. For most verbs, the helper verb is **AVOIR** (to have).

Grammar Spotlight: Forming the Passé Composé with AVOIR

The formula for the *Passé Composé* with *avoir* is:

Conjugated AVOIR (in present tense) + Past Participle of the main verb

Let's break it down:

1. **The Auxiliary Verb AVOIR:** You already know how to conjugate *avoir* in the present tense from Unit 3. This is the first part of your *Passé Composé* verb!

- **J'ai** (I have)
- **Tu as** (You have)
- **Il/Elle/On a** (He/She/One has)
- **Nous avons** (We have)
- **Vous avez** (You have)
- **Ils/Elles ont** (They have)

2. **The Past Participle (Participe Passé):** This is the "action" part of your verb. For regular verbs, they are formed very predictably:

- **For -ER verbs (like *parler* - to speak):** Drop the **-er** and add **-é**.
 - parler -> parlé (par-LAY)
 - manger -> mangé (mahn-ZHAY)
 - travailler -> travaillé (trah-vai-YAY)
- **For -IR verbs (like *finir* - to finish):** Drop the **-ir** and add **-i**.
 - finir -> fini (fee-NEE)
 - choisir -> choisi (shwah-ZEE)

- réussir -> réussi (ray-oo-SEE)
- **For -RE verbs (like *vendre* - to sell):** Drop the **-re** and add **-u**.
 - vendre -> vendu (vahn-DOO)
 - attendre -> attendu (ah-tahn-DOO)
 - répondre -> répondu (ray-pohn-DOO)

Combining AVOIR and the Past Participle

Let's see it in action:

Subject	AVOIR	Past Participle of <i>parler</i>	Passé Composé	English Translation
Je	ai	parlé	J'ai parlé.	I spoke / I have spoken.
Tu	as	parlé	Tu as parlé.	You spoke / You have spoken.
Il/Elle/On	a	parlé	Il a parlé.	He spoke / He has spoken.
Nous	avons	parlé	Nous avons parlé.	We spoke / We have spoken.
Vous	avez	parlé	Vous avez parlé.	You spoke / You have spoken.
Ils/Elles	ont	parlé	Ils ont parlé.	They spoke / They have spoken.

Important Note: When using *avoir* as the auxiliary verb, the past participle **DOES NOT AGREE** in gender or number with the subject. It stays in its basic form (e.g., *parlé* is always *parlé*).

Negation in the Passé Composé

To make a *Passé Composé* sentence negative, the **ne...pas** wraps around the **auxiliary verb (avoir)**.

- **Positive:** J'ai mangé. (I ate.)
- **Negative:** Je **n'ai pas** mangé. (I didn't eat.)
- **Positive:** Nous avons fini. (We finished.)
- **Negative:** Nous **n'avons pas** fini. (We didn't finish.)

Common Time Expressions for the Past

- **hier** (yair) - yesterday
- **hier soir** (yair swar) - last night / yesterday evening
- **la semaine dernière** (lah suh-MEN dehr-NYEHR) - last week
- **le mois dernier** (luh mwah dehr-NYEHR) - last month
- **l'année dernière** (lah-NAY dehr-NYEHR) - last year

Example Sentences:

- J'**ai regardé** la télé hier soir. (I watched TV last night.)
- Tu **as étudié** hier ? (Did you study yesterday?)
- Elle **a vendu** sa maison. (She sold her house.)
- Nous **avons choisi** un film. (We chose a film.)
- Vous **avez attendu** longtemps ? (Did you wait long?)

- Ils **n'ont pas fini** le travail. (They didn't finish the work.)

Vocabulary Box:

French Verb (Infinitive)	Past Participle	English Translation
parler	parlé	to speak / spoke
manger	mangé	to eat / ate
travailler	travaillé	to work / worked
regarder	regardé	to watch / watched
étudier	étudié	to study / studied
finir	fini	to finish / finished
choisir	choisi	to choose / chose
réussir	réussi	to succeed / succeeded
vendre	vendu	to sell / sold
attendre	attendu	to wait / waited
répondre	répondu	to answer / answered

Exercises/Quiz:

1. Form the past participle for these regular verbs:

- a) écouter (to listen) -> __
- b) grandir (to grow) -> __
- c) perdre (to lose) -> __

2. Conjugate the verb in *Passé Composé* with *avoir*:

- a) Je (travailler) hier.
- b) Nous (manger) au restaurant.
- c) Elle (finir) ses devoirs (homework).
- d) Ils (vendre) leur voiture.

3. Make these sentences negative:

- a) Tu as regardé le film.
- b) Vous avez répondu à la question.

Solutions:

1. a) écouté, b) grandi, c) perdu
2. a) J'ai travaillé hier. b) Nous avons mangé au restaurant. c) Elle a fini ses devoirs. d) Ils ont vendu leur voiture.
3. a) Tu n'as pas regardé le film. b) Vous n'avez pas répondu à la question.

Lesson 23: The Passé Composé with être

Thoughts: While most verbs use *avoir* in the *Passé Composé*, a special group of verbs (mostly about movement and changes of state) uses **être** (to be) as their auxiliary verb. And there's an important extra rule with *être*!

Casual Introduction: Imagine the *Passé Composé* as a fancy party. Most verbs arrive with their friend *avoir*. But a special, exclusive club of verbs arrives with their friend *être*. And when you're with *être*, you have to match outfits – the past participle has to agree with the subject, just like adjectives agree with nouns!

Grammar Spotlight: Forming the *Passé Composé* with ÊTRE

The formula for the *Passé Composé* with *être* is:

Conjugated ÊTRE (in present tense) + Past Participle of the main verb

1. **The Auxiliary Verb ÊTRE:** You already know how to conjugate *être* in the present tense from Unit 2.

- **Je suis** (I am)
- **Tu es** (You are)
- **Il/Elle/On est** (He/She/One is)
- **Nous sommes** (We are)
- **Vous êtes** (You are)
- **Ils/Elles sont** (They are)

2. **The Special Group of Verbs (The "ÊTRE House" Verbs):** These verbs (and their compounds like *revenir* from *venir*) almost exclusively describe movement or a change of state. A common mnemonic to remember them is **DR & MRS VANDERTRAMP** (or just the first letter of each verb):

- **D**evenir (to become) -> devenu
- **R**evenir (to come back) -> revenu
- **M**onter (to go up, to climb) -> monté
- **R**ester (to stay) -> resté
- **S**ortir (to go out) -> sorti
- **V**enir (to come) -> venu
- **A**ller (to go) -> allé
- **N**âître (to be born) -> né
- **D**escendre (to go down, to descend) -> descendu
- **E**nter (to enter) -> entré
- **R**entrer (to return home) -> rentré
- **T**omber (to fall) -> tombé
- **R**etourner (to return) -> retourné
- **A**rriver (to arrive) -> arrivé
- **M**ourir (to die) -> mort (irregular past participle!)
- **P**artir (to leave) -> parti

Note: Passer (to pass) uses être when it means "to pass by" (e.g., Il est passé devant la maison). Otherwise, it uses avoir (e.g., Il a passé un examen - he took an exam).

3. **Past Participle Agreement with ÊTRE:** This is the most important rule for *être* verbs! The past participle **MUST AGREE** in gender and number with the **subject** of the sentence.

- **Masculine Singular:** Past participle stays as is (e.g., *allé*)
 - Il est allé. (He went.)
- **Feminine Singular:** Add an **-e** to the past participle (e.g., *allée*)
 - Elle est allée. (She went.)
- **Masculine Plural:** Add an **-s** to the past participle (e.g., *allés*)
 - Ils sont allés. (They went - masculine group.)
- **Feminine Plural:** Add an **-es** to the past participle (e.g., *allées*)
 - Elles sont allées. (They went - feminine group.)

Let's see it in action with ALLER (to go):

Subject	ÊTRE	Past Participle of <i>aller</i>	Passé Composé	English Translation
Je (m.)	suis	allé	Je suis allé.	I went. (if speaker is male)
Je (f.)	suis	allée	Je suis allée.	I went. (if speaker is female)
Tu (m.)	es	allé	Tu es allé.	You went. (if listener is male)
Tu (f.)	es	allée	Tu es allée.	You went. (if listener is female)
Il	est	allé	Il est allé.	He went.
Elle	est	allée	Elle est allée.	She went.
On	est	allé	On est allé.	One went / We went (informal, if 'on' refers to male/mixed group)
On	est	allée	On est allée.	One went / We went (informal, if 'on' refers to female group)
Nous (m.pl)	sommes	allés	Nous sommes allés.	We went. (if group is male/mixed)
Nous (f.pl)	sommes	allées	Nous sommes allées.	We went. (if group is female)
Vous (m.pl)	êtes	allés	Vous êtes allés.	You went. (if group is male/mixed)
Vous (f.pl)	êtes	allées	Vous êtes allées.	You went. (if group is female)
Ils	sont	allés	Ils sont allés.	They went. (male/mixed group)
Elles	sont	allées	Elles sont allées.	They went. (female group)

Pronunciation Note: While the added **-e** or **-s** affects spelling for agreement, they are often silent in pronunciation. You'll primarily hear the difference when the feminine form adds a pronounced consonant (e.g., *Il est parti* vs. *Elle est partie*).

Negation in the Passé Composé with ÊTRE

Just like with *avoir*, the **ne...pas** wraps around the **auxiliary verb (être)**.

- **Positive:** Je suis allé. (I went.)
- **Negative:** Je **ne suis pas** allé. (I didn't go.)
- **Positive:** Elles sont arrivées. (They arrived.)
- **Negative:** Elles **ne sont pas** arrivées. (They didn't arrive.)

Example Sentences:

- Il **est arrivé** hier soir. (He arrived last night.)
- Elle **est partie** ce matin. (She left this morning.)
- Nous **sommes allés** au cinéma. (We went to the cinema.)
- Vous **êtes rentrés** tard ? (Did you (all) return late?)
- Ils **sont montés** dans le train. (They went up into/boarded the train.)
- Elles **ne sont pas sorties**. (They didn't go out.)

Vocabulary Box: The Main ÊTRE Verbs (Past Participles)

French Verb (Infinitive)	Past Participle	English Translation
aller	allé	to go
venir	venu	to come
arriver	arrivé	to arrive
partir	parti	to leave
entrer	entré	to enter
sortir	sorti	to go out
monter	monté	to go up / climb
descendre	descendu	to go down / descend
retourner	retourné	to return
tomber	tombé	to fall
rester	resté	to stay
naître	né	to be born
mourir	mort	to die
(passer)	passé	(to pass by)

Exercises/Quiz:

1. Form the **Passé Composé** with **être** for the following verbs and subjects, paying attention to agreement:
 - a) Il (arriver) hier.
 - b) Elle (partir) ce matin.
 - c) Nous (aller) au parc. (You are a mixed group)

- d) Elles (rester) à la maison.
- e) Je (entrer) dans le magasin. (You are a female speaker)

2. **Make these sentences negative:**

- a) Tu es sorti avec tes amis. (You went out with your friends.)
- b) Ils sont tombés. (They fell.)

3. **Translate into French:**

- a) She went to school.
- b) We (feminine group) arrived yesterday.
- c) He didn't come.

Solutions:

1. a) Il est arrivé hier. b) Elle est partie ce matin. c) Nous sommes allés au parc. d) Elles sont restées à la maison. e) Je suis entrée dans le magasin.
2. a) Tu n'es pas sorti avec tes amis. b) Ils ne sont pas tombés.
3. a) Elle est allée à l'école. b) Nous sommes arrivées hier. c) Il n'est pas venu.

Key Takeaways for Unit 8: Talking About the Past

- **Passé Composé Structure:** This is the main past tense for completed actions. It has two parts:
 - **Auxiliary Verb** (either *avoir* or *être* conjugated in the present tense).
 - **Past Participle** of the main verb.
- **Past Participle Formation (Regular Verbs):**
 - -ER verbs -> **-é** (e.g., *parler* -> *parlé*)
 - -IR verbs -> **-i** (e.g., *finir* -> *fini*)
 - -RE verbs -> **-u** (e.g., *vendre* -> *vendu*)
- **Passé Composé with AVOIR:**
 - Most verbs use *avoir*.
 - The past participle **does NOT agree** with the subject.
 - Negation: **ne + avoir + pas + past participle** (e.g., *Je n'ai pas mangé.*)
- **Passé Composé with ÊTRE:**
 - A special group of verbs (mostly movement/change of state, like DR & MRS VANDERTRAMP verbs) use *être*.
 - The past participle **MUST AGREE** in gender and number with the subject (like an adjective).
 - Add **-e** for feminine singular.
 - Add **-s** for masculine plural.
 - Add **-es** for feminine plural.
 - Negation: **ne + être + pas + past participle** (e.g., *Elle n'est pas allée.*)

Mastering the *Passé Composé* is a huge step in French! It allows you to tell stories, share experiences, and truly communicate about your life. Keep practicing which auxiliary to use and how to form those past participles, especially the agreement with *être*!