# ***Le passé composé:* the past tense in French**

* [When to use the *passé composé* in French](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-passe-compose#a-when-to-use-the-in-french)
* [How to conjugate the *passé composé* in French](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-passe-compose#a-how-to-conjugate-the-in-french)
* [Participe passé: the French past participle](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-passe-compose#a-participe-passe-the-french-past)
* [Avoir or être?](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-passe-compose#a-avoir-or-etre)
* [Agreement of the participe passé](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-passe-compose#a-agreement-of-the-participe-passe)
* [Online exercises to improve your French](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-passe-compose#a-online-exercises-to-improve-your)

## What is the *passé composé*?

The passé composé is the most important past tense in French. It corresponds to the [English simple past](https://english.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/simple-past) or sometimes the [present perfect](https://english.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/present-perfect-simple). The *passé composé* talks about actions that were completed in the past and emphasises their results or consequences in the present. In spoken language, the *passé composé* is always used instead of the [*passé simple*](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-passe-simple). We form the *passé composé* using the auxiliary verbs [avoir or être](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/avoir-etre) followed by the [past participle](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/participe-gerondif) *(le participe passé*) of the verb.

Learn everything you need to know about the French *passé composé* with Lingolia’s quick and easy examples, then put your knowledge to the test in the free exercises.

## Example



Hier, Michel a rangé son bureau.

Il a décidé de ranger son bureau chaque semaine.

## When to use the *passé composé* in French

We use the *passé composé* to talk about one-time, completed actions that took place in the past. This tense places the emphasis on the result or consequences of the action.

*Example:*

Hier, Michel a rangé son bureau.

one-time action in the past

Il a décidé de ranger son bureau chaque semaine.

one-time past action with a connection to the present: He doesn’t want to be so untidy anymore.

Learners of French often find it difficult to know when to use the *passé composé* and when to use the [imperfect tense](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/imparfait). Go to our page dedicated to the [difference between the *imparfait* and *passé composé*](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/imparfait-passe-compose) to learn when to use which tense, then test yourself in the free exercises.

## How to conjugate the *passé composé* in French

To [conjugate](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/conjugator) the *passé composé* we use the [present tense](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/le-present) of [*avoir* or *être*](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/avoir-etre) as an auxiliary verb, followed by the [past participle](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/participe-gerondif) *(participe passé)* of the main verb.

| Person | *avoir* | Participle | *être* | Participle |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1st person singular *(I)* | j’ai | aimé  fini  vendu | je suis | parti  partie  partis  parties |
| 2nd person singular *(you)* | tu as | tu es |
| 3rd person singular *(he/she/it)* | il/elle/on a | il/elle/on est |
| 1st person plural *(we)* | nous avons | nous sommes |
| 2nd person plural *(you)* | vous avez | vous êtes |
| 3rd person plural *(they)* | ils/elles ont | ils/elles sont |

In [negative sentences](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/sentence-structure/negation), the past participle comes after the second part of the negation *(pas)*.

*Example:*

J’ai rigolé. → Je *n’*ai *pas* rigolé.

Je suis parti.→ Je *ne* suis *pas* parti.

For [reflexive verbs](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/verbes-pronominaux), the reflexive [pronoun](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/pronouns/reflexive-pronouns) comes after the first part of the negation *(ne)* and before the auxiliary verb *(avoir/être)*.

*Example:*

Je *ne* me *suis* *pas* trompé dans mon calcul.

To see the conjugation of any French [verb](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs) in the *passé composé* go to our [verb conjugator](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/conjugator).

### *Participe passé*: the French past participle

For regular *er/ir/re*-verbs, the [past participle](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/participe-gerondif/participe-passe) is formed as follows:

* If the infinitive ends in *-er*, the participle ends in é  
  *Example:*aimer – aimé
* If the infinitive ends in *-ir*, the participle ends in i  
  *Example:*finir – fini
* If the infinitive ends in *-re*, the participle ends in u  
    
  *Example:*vendre - vendu

For the irregular verbs, however, we have to look up the past participle form in the [list of irregular verbs](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/tenses/irregular-verbs) or check the [verb conjugator](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/conjugator) — or simply learn the forms by heart.

## *Avoir* or *être?*

Most verbs construct the *passé composé* with *avoir,* however *être* is used as the auxiliary verb in the following cases:

* with [reflexive verbs](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/verbes-pronominaux)

*Example:*

Je *me* suis *trompé* dans mon calcul.

* with the following verbs of movement: *naître/mourir*, *aller/venir*, *monter/descendre*, *arriver/partir*, *entrer/sortir*, *apparaître*, *rester*, *retourner*, *tomber* and their related forms such as: *revenir*, *rentrer*, *remonter*, *redescendre*, *repartir*.

*Example:*

Je suis arrivé à la gare.

Note: we use *avoir* when descendre, (*r)entrer, (re)monter, retourner* and *sortir* are followed by a direct object. In this case, the meaning of the verb often changes.

*Example:*

À quelle heure es-tu sorti ce matin?

*sortir* = leave

*but:* As-tu sorti les carottes du frigo hier soir?

*sortir* = take out

### Info

Need a handy trick to remember which verbs take *être* as their auxiliary in the *passé composé?* Check out our page on [the difference between avoir and être.](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/avoir-etre)

### Agreement of the *participe passé*

For some verbs, the *participe passé* has to agree in [gender](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/nouns-and-articles/gender) and [number](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/nouns-and-articles/plural) with either the subject or the object of the sentence. This agreement is necessary in the following situations:

* When a verb takes *être* as an auxiliary, the participle agrees in gender and number with the subject.  
  *Example:  
  Il* est allé dans son bureau.  
  *Elle* est allée dans son bureau.  
  *Ils* sont allés dans leurs bureaux.  
  *Elles* sont allées dans leurs bureaux.
* For verbs that take *avoir* in the *passé composé*, the participle only agrees in gender and number with a direct object that comes before the verb. This direct object can take three possible forms: a [personal pronoun](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/pronouns/personal-pronouns) *(me, te, le, la, nous, vous, les)*, the [relative pronoun](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/pronouns/relative-pronouns) *que*, or a [noun](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/nouns-and-articles) placed before the verb (usually in [questions](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/sentence-structure/questions) and exclamations).  
  *Example:*Il a rangé *son bureau*. → Il l'a rangé.  
  Il a rangé *sa chambre*. → Il l'a rangée.  
  Il a rangé *ses dossiers*. → Il les a rangés.  
  Il a rangé *ses cartes de visite*. → Il les a rangées.
* In the case of [reflexive verbs](https://francais.lingolia.com/en/grammar/verbs/verbes-pronominaux) (which always take *être* as their auxiliary in the *passé composé*), the participle generally agrees with the subject.  
  *Example:*Nous nous sommes levés très tôt.  
  The exception is when the direct object comes after the reflexive verb. In this case, the past participle does not agree.  
    
  *Example:*Elle s’est lavé les mains.  
  → *but:* Elle s’est lavée.  
  Remember: the *participe passé* never agrees with an indirect object.  
    
  *Example:*Marie et Laurent se sont téléphoné.  
  → *se* = indirect object  
  The *participe passé* does not agree with the subject of the following verbs: *se* *téléphoner*, *se* *parler*, *se* *mentir*, *se plaire* *(complaire/déplaire)*, *se* *sourire*, *se* *rire*, *se* *nuire*, *se* *succéder*, *se* *suffire*, *se* *ressembler*, *s’en* *vouloir*