

Le passé composé

I. Construction

A. The passé composé has two components to its construction.

Verbe Auxiliaire + participe passé

The auxiliary verb has two choices,
though these choices are not arbitrary.

Regular past participles follow the
rules of removing the final two
letters of the verb and adding
back...

AVOIR ETRE

-ER > -é

-IR > -i

-RE > -u

B. How do I know which auxiliary to use ?

Verbs that take être generally have the meaning of personally and physically

coming or going

Example:

Aller = to go. Is it an être verb? Yes! Why? It has the meaning of going.

Parler = to speak/talk. Is it an être verb? No! Why? It does have the meaning of physically coming or going.

Arriver = to arrive. Is it an être verb? Yes! Why? To arrive has the sense “to come.”

Boire = to drink. Etre verb? No! Why? To drink does not have the physical meaning of coming or going.

One special exception!

Rester = to stay. “Rester” is an être verb despite not meaning coming or going.

So if “Rester” is an exception, is there another way to figure out if it’s an être verb?

- Your previous year's teacher may have taught you the acronym:

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This device is all well and good to memorize, but it doesn't tend to help students remember to use être when actually using the language to communicate. Honestly, mastery comes over time with active listening to comprehensible input and using the language. Those two active components will achieve the best results.

Also don't forget, as the acronym shows, very few verbs use être. The vast majority use avoir, so if you must guess, use avoir.

C. So what does this tense look like when put together?

DONNER

J'ai donné

Nous avons donné

Tu as donné

Vous avez donné

Il a donné

Ils ont donné

Elle a donné

Elles ont donné

FINIR

J'ai fini	Nous avons fini
Tu as fini	Vous avez fini
Il a fini	Ils ont fini
Elle a fini	Elles ont fini

VENDRE

J'ai vendu	Nous avons vendu
Tu as vendu	Vous avez vendu
Il a vendu	Ils ont vendu
Elle a vendu	Elles ont vendu

I've heard the verbs that take être will be the death of me, is this true?

No, but you have to remember that because they take être, the past participles act like adjectives and follow the same rules as adjectives.

ALLER

Je suis allé (e)	Nous sommes allés (es)
Tu es allé (e)	Vous êtes allé (e, s, es)
Il est allé	Ils sont allés
Elle est allée	Elles sont allées

Ugh! I think you've lied to me about être verbs not killing me! Why do you have parenthesis at the end of some of those conjugations?

- Because some of the pronouns above can be feminine and even plural! Context is everything, and sometimes they change the pronunciation of the past participle!

Are there any other times I have to use être?

Why, yes! So glad you asked!

D. Reflexive verbs

ALL reflexive verbs are être verbs !

Reflexive ? My brain aches! How do I know if a verb is reflexive ?

Easy! It has a SE in front of it in the infinitive form: Se réveiller, se brosser, se coucher, etc.

Or you can recognize them from the reflexive combinations...

Je me Nous nous

Tu te Vous vous

Il se Ils se

Elle se Elles se

Nous nous, vous vous! LoL they don't really say that!

Um, yeah, they do, actually !

So what does that look like in the passé composé ?

SE REVEILLER

Je me suis réveillé (e)

Tu t'es réveillé (e)

Il s'est réveillé

Elle s'est réveillée

Nous nous sommes réveillés (es)

Vous vous êtes réveillé (e, s, es)

Ils se sont réveillés

Elles se sont réveillées

NOOOO !!! Not those parenthesis again !

Yuppers !

E. Are there any other surprises ?

Of course! Learning any language is full of surprises !

Irregular verbs

OMD ! I forgot about those ! 🤔 🤦

You can find a list of them on mycsas.com under Mr. Morgan's file manager. But one thing to remember about them! If the verb contains a root verb (a prefix added to a basic verb, yes, some verbs are just sooo basic) they will act the same way and take the same auxiliary verbs.

Examples:

PRENDRE - pris (avoir)

Comprendre compris

Surprendre – surpris

METTRE – mis (avoir)

Compromettre - compromis

Promettre – promis

VENIR – venu (être)

Revenir - revenu

Se Souvenir – se souvenu

Devenir – devenu

