

## Online French courses

level A1 to C1

### How to use the *imparfait* in French

#### Formation

Stem = the "*nous*" form of the present tense, minus "-*ons*"

Endings: -*ais*, -*ais*, -*ait*, -*ions*, -*iez*, -*aient*

Example (*arriver* - to arrive): *nous arrivons* → *j'arrivais*, *tu arrivais*, *il arrivait*, *nous arrivions*, *vous arriviez*, *ils arrivaient*

This rule applies to all 3 verb groups. The only exception is *être* (to be) → *j'étais*, *tu étais*, *il était*, *nous étions*, *vous étiez*, *ils étaient*

#### Special cases

- Verbs in -*cer* (*avancer* - to move forward): the stem is *avanç* → just *c* before *nous/vous* → *nous avançons* (not *avanç-*)

- Verbs in -*ger* (*manger* - to eat): the stem is *mange* → just *g* before *nous/vous* → *nous mangions* (not *mange-*)

- *falloir* / *pleuvoir* (to need / to rain): only exist in the 3rd person → *il fallait*, *il pleuvait*

#### Uses (4 contexts)

Simultaneous actions in the past: *Lorsque vous étiez à Saint-Malo, je séjournais à Cannes* → "When you were in Saint-Malo, I was staying in Cannes"

Habit or repeated action in the past: *Quand j'étais petite, je jouais dans le jardin* → "When I was a child, I used to play in the garden"

An action ongoing at a specific moment in the past (equivalent to English past continuous): *La nuit tombait...* → "Night was falling..."

Description or state in the past: *Il pleuvait toute la journée* → "It rained the whole day"

**Be careful!** Distinguish from the *passé composé* (*il a plu*): the *imparfait* shows the action while it was happening, whereas the *passé composé* marks a completed action, disconnected from the present.

#### Conditional context

In a sentence with "*si*" (if), the *imparfait* expresses the condition, followed by the *conditionnel présent* for the consequence: *Si je connaissais la réponse, je la donnerais* → "If I knew the answer, I would give it"