

Online French courses

level A1 to C1

How to use the present tense in French

The Three Groups of French Verbs

In French, verbs are divided into three groups:

Group 1: Verbs ending in *-er* (*parler, danser, manger*)

Group 2: Regular verbs ending in *-ir* (*finir, choisir*)

Group 3: Irregular verbs (*être, avoir, aller, faire*)

Group 1: **-ER** Verbs

This is the easiest group!

Method: Remove *-er* and add the endings

Example: *parler* (to speak)

- *je parle* (I speak)
- *tu parles* (you speak - singular, informal)
- *il/elle/on parle* (he/she/one speaks)
- *nous parlons* (we speak)
- *vous parlez* (you speak - plural or formal)
- *ils/elles parlent* (they speak)

Other important verbs: *aimer* (to like), *chercher* (to look for), *demander* (to ask), *écouter* (to listen), *étudier* (to study), *habiter* (to live), *travailler* (to work), *regarder* (to watch)

Group 2: **-IR** Verbs

Method: Remove *-ir* and add the endings

Example: *finir* (to finish)

- *je finis* (I finish)
- *tu finis* (you finish)
- *il/elle/on finit* (he/she/one finishes)
- *nous finissons* (we finish)
- *vous finissez* (you finish)

- *ils/elles finissent* (they finish)

Other important verbs: *choisir* (to choose), *réussir* (to succeed), *grandir* (to grow)

Group 3: Essential Irregular Verbs

être (to be)

- *je suis*
- *tu es*
- *il/elle/on est*
- *nous sommes*
- *vous êtes*
- *ils/elles sont*

avoir (to have)

- *j'ai*
- *tu as*
- *il/elle/on a*
- *nous avons*
- *vous avez*
- *ils/elles ont*

aller (to go)

- *je vais*
- *tu vas*
- *il/elle/on va*
- *nous allons*
- *vous allez*
- *ils/elles vont*

faire (to do/make)

- *je fais*
- *tu fais*
- *il/elle/on fait*
- *nous faisons*

- *vous faites*
- *ils/elles font*

Modal Verbs

pouvoir (can/to be able to)

- *je peux / tu peux / il/elle/on peut*
- *nous pouvons / vous pouvez / ils/elles peuvent*

vouloir (to want)

- *je veux / tu veux / il/elle/on veut*
- *nous voulons / vous voulez / ils/elles veulent*

devoir (must/to have to)

- *je dois / tu dois / il/elle/on doit*
- *nous devons / vous devez / ils/elles doivent*

When Do We Use the Present Tense?

An action happening now

- *Je travaille* = I'm working / I work

A habit or routine

- *Je travaille tous les jours* = I work every day

A general truth

- *L'eau bout à 100°C* = Water will boil at 100°C

Near future (with a time expression)

- *Je pars demain* = I'm leaving tomorrow

"Since" or "for" (ongoing actions)

- *J'étudie le français depuis un an* = I have been studying French for one year

Important Irregularities in Group 1

Verbs ending in *-ger* (*manger, voyager*) → Add an e before *-ons*

- *Nous mangeons* (we eat)

Verbs ending in *-cer* (*commencer*) → c becomes ç before *-ons*

- *Nous commençons* (we begin)

Verbs ending in *-yer* (*essayer, payer*) → y becomes i (except with *nous/vous*)

- *J'essaie, tu essaies, il essaie* (I try, you try, he tries)
- But: *nous essayons, vous essayez* (we try, you try)