

*French Grammar
and Usage*

French Grammar and Usage

Second edition

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Glossary of key grammatical terms

Items in bold in the definitions are also defined in the glossary.

- adjective** - a class of words which **modify nouns**. Adjectives appear adjacent to nouns or separated from them by verbs like *être*, *devenir*, *rester*: e.g. *un PETIT problème* 'a small problem'; *une boîte CARRÉE* 'a square box'; *Cette robe est CHÈRE* 'This dress is expensive'.
- adverb** - a class of words which **modify** words, **phrases** and sentences: e.g. *Tout est si clair* 'Everything is so clear'; *Je fume MODÉRÉMENT* 'I smoke moderately'; *JUSTE avant le départ du train* 'Just before the train leaves'; *SOUDAIN, j'ai entendu un bruit* 'Suddenly I heard a noise'.
- adverbial** - a word or phrase which can function as an adverb, although it also has other functions: e.g. *parler BAS* 'to talk quietly' (*bas* = an **adjective**); *Je lui rends visite DE TEMPS EN TEMPS* 'I visit her from time to time' (*de temps en temps* = a **prepositional phrase**); *Elle travaille LE MATIN* 'She works in the mornings' (*le matin* = a **noun phrase**).
- affirmative sentence** - a sentence which is not a negative: e.g. *Elle parle* 'She is speaking'; *Parle-t-elle?* 'Is she speaking?'; *Parle!* 'Speak!' (as opposed to the negative sentences: *Elle ne parle pas*, *Ne parle-t-elle pas?* *Ne parle pas!*).
- agreement** - a form the **verb** must take to be compatible with a given **subject**: e.g. *NOUS* mangeons 'We're eating'/*Vous* mangez 'You're eating'. A form a **determiner** and an **adjective** must take to be compatible with a given **noun**: e.g. *UN BON REPAS* 'A good meal'/*UNE BONNE BIÈRE* 'A good beer'. A form a **past participle** must take to be compatible with a preceding **direct object**: e.g. *le coffre?* *Je L'AI OUVERT* 'The car boot? I've opened it': *La porte?* *Je L'ai OUVERTE* 'The door? I've opened it'; and so on.
- article** - definite article = *le, la, les*; indefinite article = *un, une, des*. The 'partitive' article - *du, de la, des* - indicates that a **noun** refers to something which is part of a larger mass: e.g. *du gâteau* 'some (of the) cake'; *des abeilles* 'some bees'.
- auxiliary verb** - the verbs *avoir* or *être* which accompany a **past participle** in compound **tenses** or the **passive**: e.g. *Elle A mangé* 'She has eaten'; *Le vélo A ÉTÉ réparé* 'The bike has been repaired'.
- cardinal number** - a number in the series *un* (1), *deux* (2), *trois* (3), etc.
- clause** - a string of words which contains just one **verb phrase** and a **subject** (whether overt or implied): e.g. *ELLE PART* 'She's leaving' - one clause; *DEPUIS JANVIER LES PRIX ONT AUGMENTÉ* 'Since January, prices have gone up' - one clause; *IL EST HEUREUX/PARCE QU'IL EST RICHE* 'He is happy because he is rich' - two clauses; *ELLE EST PRÊTE/A PARTIR* 'She is ready to leave' - two clauses

(in *à partir* the subject is implied: She is ready, and she will leave); *LES CIRCONSTANCES AIDANT/LE PARTI GAGNERA CES ÉLECTIONS* 'If the conditions are right, the party will win this election' - two clauses; *II DIT/QU'ON CROIT/QU'ELLE VA PARTIR* 'He says that they think that she will leave' - three clauses. Also see **coordinate clause, relative clause, subordinate clause.**

comparative - a way of **modifying adjectives** and **adverbs** to draw a comparison between one entity and another: // *veut acheter une PLUS GRANDE/une MOINS GRANDE/une AUSSI GRANDE voiture* 'He wants to buy a bigger car/a car which is not as big/a car which is just as big'; *Cette voiture-ci roule PLUS VITE/MOINS VITE/AUSSI VITE QUE l'autre* 'This car goes faster/slower/as quickly as the other one'.

complement - any phrase which follows a **noun, verb, adjective, adverb**, to form an expression with a cohesive meaning: e.g. *un appartement À LOUER* 'a flat to let'; *Ils se réunissent LE DIMANCHE AU STADE* 'They meet on Sundays at the stadium'; *Pierre est difficile À VIVRE* 'Pierre is difficult to live with'.

coordinate clause - a **clause** linked to another by *et, ou, mais*: e.g. *Il est riche ET il est heureux* 'He is rich and he is happy'.

declarative sentence - a sentence which makes a statement (as opposed to a **question or an imperative**).

demonstrative - demonstrative determiner = *ce, cette, ces*; demonstrative pronoun = *celui, celle, ceux, celles*.

determiner - an **article** (*un, une/le, la, les/des, etc.*), **demonstrative** determiner (*ce, cette, etc.*) or **possessive** determiner (*mon, ma/ton, ta, etc.*) which **modifies a noun**.

direct object - *see object.*

directly transitive verb - *see transitive verb.*

ditransitive verb - *see transitive verb.*

finite verb - a **verb** which is marked for **tense** and **agreement**, as opposed to non-finite forms like the **infinitive, imperative, participles**: e.g. *Je PARLE* 'I'm speaking'; *J'AI PARLÉ* 'I spoke'; *Je SAIS parler français* 'I can speak French'.

formal French - in this grammar 'formal French' refers to a style used by speakers of standard educated French when they are paying particular attention to the form of what they are saying or writing. It is a style usually appropriate when someone is speaking in an official capacity (lectures, sermons, speeches, etc.), or writing in learned, academic or literary style. Features of formal French which are absent from **informal French** include: the use of the simple past tense (*Il SORTIT* 'He went out'), the use of the past anterior tense (*Aussitôt qu'il FUT SORTI ...* 'As soon as he had gone out ...'), retention of *ne* in *ne . . . pas*.

gender - a division of **nouns** into two classes: masculine and feminine. The distinction shows up mainly in **determiners** (*le* versus *la, ce* versus *cette, mon* versus *ma, etc.*), in **pronouns** (*il* versus *elle*) and in the **agreement** of adjectives with nouns (*beau* versus *belle*). Gender distinctions are grammatical and need not correspond to sex distinctions in the real world (although they mostly do): e.g. *médecin* 'doctor' is masculine, but can refer to men or women; *personne* 'person' is feminine but can refer to men or women.

gerund - *see participle.*

- imperative** - a form of the **verb** used to give orders, express encouragement or give advice: e.g. *ASSEYEZ-VOUS!* 'Sit down!'; *ALLEZ!* 'Come on!'; *FAIS attention!* 'Watch out!'
- impersonal** - refers to a **pronoun** (usually a subject pronoun) which does not refer to any person, place, thing, idea etc. *il, ce, cela, ça* can be impersonal pronouns in French: e.g. *IL est temps de partir* 'It's time to leave'; *ÇA me fait peur d'y aller la nuit* 'It scares me to go there at night'.
- indicative** - the set of forms of the verb which are not **subjunctive, imperative, infinitive or participial**.
- indirect object** - see **object**.
- indirectly transitive verb** - see **transitive verb**.
- infinitive** - a form of the **verb** which ends in *-er, -ir, -re, -oir*, and corresponds to English 'to': *AIMER* 'to like', *FINIR* 'to finish', *VENDRE* 'to sell', *RECEVOIR* 'to receive'.
- informal French** - in this grammar 'informal French' refers to a style used by speakers of standard educated French in contexts of relaxed, spontaneous communication when they are interacting with friends, colleagues, family, etc. Features of informal French include: the non-use of the simple past or past anterior tenses, and the regular omission of *ne* from *ne ... pas*.
- intransitive verb** - a **verb** which has no **direct object**: e.g. *La neige TOMBAIT* 'Snow was falling'.
- modify, to** - to add to the meaning of a **noun, verb, adjective**, etc. by adding another word or phrase to it: e.g. *manteau, UN manteau, UN manteau GRIS; oiseau, UN oiseau, UN oiseau QUI CHANTE; parle, IL parle, IL parle LENTEMENT; grand, si grand, ELLE EST SI grande*.
- negator** - one of the elements *aucun, jamais, ni, nul, pas, personne, plus, rien* which can create negative expressions (see Chapter 16).
- noun** - a class of words which refers to people, places, things, ideas, and so on; it is usually preceded by a **determiner**: e.g. *un AMI; la FRANCE; une BIÈRE; le BONHEUR*.
- noun phrase** - the phrase consisting of a noun alone, or a noun and the elements which modify it. Each of the following is a noun phrase: *PIERRE, LE SOLEIL, UN CHER AMI* 'a dear friend', *UNE BIÈRE BIEN FROIDE* 'a really cold beer', *CHACUN DE MES AMIS LES PLUS CHERS* 'each of my dearest friends'.
- number** - a grammatical distinction between **nouns or pronouns** which are singular and those which are plural. Number distinctions need not correspond to real singular and plural distinctions in the world, and can differ between English and French (although mostly the grammatical and real-world distinctions coincide): e.g. 'hair' (singular) versus *cheveux* (plural); 'trousers' (plural) versus *pantalon* (singular). See also **cardinal number** and **ordinal number**.
- object** - a direct object is the **noun phrase or pronoun** affected directly by the action described by the verb: e.g. *Il a pris LE TRAIN* 'He took the train'; *Il l'a pris* 'He took it'. An indirect object is the noun phrase or pronoun affected indirectly by the action described by the verb. In French, indirect object noun phrases are always introduced by *à*: e.g. *Il a envoyé un cadeau À SA MÈRE* 'He sent a present to his mother'. An object of a preposition is any noun phrase