



Basic French Grammar: Notes

In this lesson:

- Matching adjectives to nouns and gendered nouns in general
- How to make nouns plural
- Three types of pronominal verbs
- Present tense
- Passé composé

Matching Adjectives to Nouns and Gendered Nouns in General

- In the French language, adjectives must reflect the gender and number (singular/plural) of the noun they are describing
- Every noun in french has a gender. Remembering the genders of french nouns simply requires practice, as there is no quick rule you can use to determine what the gender of a noun is.
 - Take the masculine noun “Roi” which means king.
 - The first thing to remember with this is that if you were to say “the king” you would say “le roi,” as “le” is the masculine form of “the.”
 - Secondly, if you wanted to describe “le roi,” then you would first decide on your adjective, in this example it will be “grand/e” or “big.” Because “roi” is masculine, you’d use the masculine form of the verb, grand, “le grand roi”
 - Take the feminine noun “Reine” which means queen.
 - The first thing to remember with this is that if you were to say “the queen” you would say “la reine,” as “la” is the feminine form of “the.”
 - Secondly, if you wanted to describe “la reine,” then you would first decide on your adjective, in this example it will be “grand/e” or “big.” Because “reine” is feminine, you’d use the feminine form of the verb, grande, “la grande reine”



- More examples of adjectives and nouns can be found on the French Vocabulary: Notes
- How to write nouns and adjectives when they are singular or plural:
 - No matter the gender, a noun can be singular or plural, and the adjective must match. When describing several big kings, say “les rois grands.” When talking about big queens, say “les reines grandes.”
 - See that the adjectives have an added “s” at the end that make them match the plural nouns
 - If you’d like to talk about the big kings and queens together, the adjective is masculine and plural:
 - les rois et les reines grands.
- The common way to make an adjective feminine is to add an “e” to its masculine singular form
 - The default form adjectives are found in a French dictionary
- When masculine singular forms already end in “e.” For those, an extra “e” is not added to form the feminine singular; things stay as they were
 - For example, “calme” or “calm” in english, “aimable” or “nice” in english, and “utile” or “useful” in english are the same in masculine singular and feminine singular
- When there are adjectives that end in a vowel and a consonant, most times you should double the consonant prior to adding the “e” to make the feminine form.
 - Example: “bon” or “good” in english becomes “bonne”; “gros” or “fat” in english becomes “grosse”; “mignon” or “cute” becomes “mignonne.”
- When there are adjectives that end in “eur” or “eux”, most times you should replace the ending with “euse” to form the feminine.
 - Example: “amoureux” or “in love” in english becomes “amoureuse”, “heureux” or “happy” in english becomes “heureuse, and “affreux” “atrocious” becomes “affreuse.”
- For adjectives that end in “teur”, replace that ending with “trice” to form the feminine.



- Example: “Protecteur” or “protective” becomes “protectrice,” “conservateur” or “conservative” becomes “conservatrice,” etc.
- For adjectives that end in “er,” replace the ending with “ère” to form the feminine
 - Example: “dernier” or “last” to “dernière,” “premier” or “first” to “première,” and “cher” “expensive” to “chère.”
- For most adjectives that end in “et,” replace “et” with “ète” to form the feminine.
 - Example: “discret” or “discreet” becomes “discrète,” “complet” or “complete” becomes “complète,” and “secret” or “secret” becomes “secrète.”
- For adjectives that end in “f,” replace “f” with “ve” to form the feminine
 - Example: “neuf” or “new” becomes “neuve,” and “sportif” or “athletic” becomes “sportive.”
- Adjectives’ of nationality that end in “ain,”
 - Example: “américain” or “American” and “mexicain” or “Mexican” don’t double the “n.” They just add the “e.”
- Some adjectives are completely irregular and don’t follow a pattern. Here are the most common ones:

Masculine Singular	Feminine Singular	English Translation
vieux	vieille	old
faux	fausse	false
blanc	blanche	white
long	longue	long
nouveau	nouvelle	new
roux	rousse	red-haired
beau	belle	handsome/beautiful

- Usually, to make an adjective plural, you just add an “s” onto the end.



- Example: the masculine singular adjective “vert,” or “green” in english, is changed to “verts” in the plural form, and the feminine singular “verte” or “green” becomes “vertes” in the plural form.
- If the adjective already ends in an “s” or an “x” in masculine singular, it doesn’t take another “s” to form the plural. It remains as is and has the same form in masculine singular and plural.
 - Example: “épais” or “thick”, “gris” or “gray”, and “curieux” or “curious.”
- For masculine singular adjectives that end in “al,” drop the “al” and replace it with “aux” to form the plural form.
- Example: “normal” or “normal” becomes “normaux” in the plural form.
- Masculine singular adjectives that end in “eau” add an “x” instead of an “s.”
 - Example: “beau” or “handsome” becomes “beaux” in the plural form, and “nouveau” or “new” becomes “nouveaux.”
- The masculine singular adjective “tout” or “all” becomes “tous” in the masculine plural

How to Make Nouns Plural

- When changing most nouns to plural, you add “s” to the end.
 - Example: “résultat” or “result” becomes “résultats” or “results”; “fleur” or “flower” becomes “fleurs” or “flowers.”
- Nouns that end in “au” take “x” in the plural.
 - Example: “bateau” or (boat) becomes bateaux (boats), and manteau (overcoat) becomes manteaux (overcoats).
- Most nouns that end in “ou” take “s” in the plural, but some take “x.”
 - Example: “chou” or “cabbage” becomes “choux” or “cabbages,” and “bijou” or “jewel” becomes “bijoux” or “jewels.”



- Nouns that end in “al” drop that ending and use “aux” in the plural form.
 - Example: “journal” or “newspaper” becomes “journaux” or “newspapers”;
“animal” or “animal” becomes “animaux” or “animals.”
- Nouns that end in “s,” “x,” or “z” when they’re singular never change in the plural; only the accompanying article is changed
 - Example: un “Français” or “a Frenchman” remains “des Français” or “Frenchmen,” and “un virus” or “a virus” remains “des virus” or “viruses.”
- Family names are not pluralized in French.
 - Example: the Smiths lose the “s” in French but keep the article: Les Smith.

Three Types of Pronominal Verbs

In French grammar, verbs that use an extra pronoun are called pronominal verbs. The extra pronouns are reflexive, which means they reflect the subject of the verb, like (to) oneself does to a verb in English. The verbs fall into three categories:

- **Reflexive verbs**: They express an action done by the subject to itself
 - Example: Je me regarde (I look at myself).
- **Idiomatic pronominal verbs**: The extra pronoun indicates neither to oneself nor to one another
 - Example: tu te souviens (you remember).
- **Reciprocal verbs**: Indicate that two subjects are doing something to one another
 - Example: Ils se parlent (They talk to each other).



You can always identify a pronominal verb by its infinitive; it always has the pronoun “se” right before the infinitive, like in “se préparer” or “to get oneself ready.” These verbs are otherwise conjugated like they don’t have a reflexive pronoun. The only difference is that you would also conjugate the pronoun that you added.

Present Tense

The things present tense describes:

1. Current actions or states of being

Je travaille. I’m working.

Il est en retard. He’s late.

2. Habitual actions or states of being

Oui, je travaille le dimanche. Yes, I do work on Sundays.

Il est toujours en retard. He’s always late.

3. Actions which are about to occur

Je travaille demain. I’m working tomorrow.

Il arrive sur-le-champ. He’ll be right here.

4. Absolute or general truths

Le soleil se lève à l’est. The sun rises in the east.

L’eau est essentielle à la vie. Water is essential to life.

5. Conditions in likely situations (si clauses)

Si tu veux, tu peux dîner avec moi. If you want, you can have dinner with me.



Je vais le renvoyer s'il est en retard
demain.

I'm going to fire him if he's late
tomorrow.

6. Historical accounts

Conjugation in present tense

-ER

je	-e	nous	-ons
tu	-es	vous	-ez
il	-e	ils	-ent

Example:

parler (to talk, speak)

je	parle	nous	parlons
tu	parles	vous	parlez
il/elle/on	parle	ils/elles	parlent

-IR

je	-is	nous	-issons
tu	-is	vous	-issez
il	-it	ils	-issent

Example:

remplir (to fill)

je	remplis	nous	remplissons
tu	remplis	vous	remplissez
il/elle/on	remplit	ils/elles	remplissent

-RE

je -s nous -ons

tu -s vous -ez

il – ils -ent

Example:

perdre (to lose)

je perds nous perdons

tu perds vous perdez

il/elle/on perd ils/elles perdent

Passé composé

- The passé composé is used when talking about:
 - Completed actions
 - Oui, j'ai mangé à 8h.
 - Yes, I did eat at 8am.
 - Repeated actions
 - J'y ai mangé 3 fois.
 - I've eaten there 3 times.
 - Series of actions
 - J'ai mangé et puis je suis sorti avec Paul.
 - I ate, then I went out with Paul.