

Grammar

▶ Learning grammar

Improving your knowledge of grammar isn't difficult if you take a little at a time, beginning with things you think you know. When you have made sure of them, you can look at the more exotic parts of the list. Don't be put off if you don't understand the grammatical terms. Check the example and see if you have seen something like it in your textbook.

For verbs, check you can write out the various tenses from memory. Then do it a little longer after you last looked at them, and then longer still, until you are foolproof. I once had a successful student who used to write out the present and imperfect tense of *avoir*, *être*, and one *-er*, *-ir* and *-re* verb on her rough paper before she started her essays. She then used them to check her work against. (NB This method only works if your memory is good!)

Grammar is often seen as boring and irrelevant. It isn't, as it allows you to generate sentences which you have not come across before, and helps your reading and listening comprehension. Find out how it works and you have the key to more French than you can possibly expect to learn by heart.

▶ Glossary of grammatical terms

Not all students are taught using formal grammar in their English or French lessons nowadays. There is nothing to be frightened of in the use of grammatical terms. After all, mechanics wouldn't attempt to describe what a spanner is every time they wanted to have one passed to them. They just use the technical term, which is 'spanner'. These grammatical terms are the technical 'jargon' of language-learning, which give you access to the patterns of French and other languages to enable you to learn them more quickly.

I have attempted to define them simply, and give examples. There are further examples and explanations later on in the chapter.

Adjective

This is a word which describes a noun or pronoun. It gives information about such things as colour, type, disposition, etc.

Example

le garçon *aimable* *the pleasant boy*

Adverb

This is a word which describes a verb (adds to the verb). It gives information about how something is done.

Example

Il court *vite*. *He runs quickly.*

Adverbs can also be used to add to adjectives or other adverbs.

Examples

le garçon *très aimable* *the very pleasant boy*
 Il court *très vite*. *He runs very quickly.*

Agreement

Adjectives in French alter their spelling to agree with, or conform to, or 'match' the noun they describe.

Examples

C'est un beau jardin et une belle maison avec de beaux arbres et de belles fleurs.

It's a beautiful garden and a beautiful house with beautiful trees and beautiful flowers.

Past participles agree, too. Look up the rules (see p. 187).

Articles

There are three sorts of article:

definite	le, la, les	<i>the</i>
indefinite	un, une	<i>a</i>
partitive	du, de la, des	<i>some, any</i>

Clause

This is a part of a sentence which contains a subject and a verb which agrees with that subject. There are main clauses and subordinate clauses. Main clauses tell you most of the message of the sentence.

Example

Le garçon court très vite. *The boy runs very quickly.*

Subordinate clauses tell you something more about some other part of the sentence.

Examples

Le garçon qui habite Lyon court très vite. *The boy who lives in Lyons runs very quickly.*

Comparatives

A way of using adjectives and adverbs to compare two people or things.

Examples

Je suis plus fort que toi. *I am stronger than you.*

Il court plus vite que moi. *He runs faster than me.*

Conjugation

The name given to the pattern that verbs follow. Regular verbs in French belong to the *-er*, *-ir* and *-re* conjugations. But unfortunately there are lots of exceptions!

Conjunction

Conjunctions join sentences and clauses.

Examples

et, mais, parce que *and, for, because*

Gender

In French there are two grammatical genders. All nouns are either masculine (*le, un*) or feminine (*la, une*).

Imperatives

These are the command forms of verbs, and are used when telling people to do something. They include the 'Let's...' sort of command, which is a way of telling yourself and one or more other people to do something.

Examples

Ecoute! *Listen!*
 Ecoutez! *Listen!*
 Ecoutons! *Let's listen!*

Infinitive

This is the part of the verb you find when you look it up in a vocabulary list, and which means 'to...'. It doesn't agree with a subject. They may be found in combination with other verbs.

Example

manger *to eat*

Interrogative pronouns

These are questions words. Their English equivalents mostly begin with 'wh'.

Examples

Qui? *Who?*
 Quoi? *What?*

Irregular verbs

These are verbs which don't follow one of the set patterns. They are written out for you in the verb table on pp. 224–35. They tend to be common verbs.

Nouns

These are the names of people, places and things.

Number

Things can be **singular** (one only) or **plural** (more than one).

Object

This is the thing or the person affected by the action of a verb. An object can be either a noun or a pronoun.

Examples

Je regarde la télé. *I watch TV.*
 Je l'aime. *I like it.*

Past participle

This is part of the verb which is used with *avoir* and *être* to form the perfect and pluperfect tenses. Irregular verbs commonly have irregular past participles. Be aware of rules about agreement of past participles (see p. 187).

Examples

J'ai dormi. *I slept / I have slept.*
 Nous sommes arrivé(e)s. *We arrived / We have arrived.*
 Ils se sont lavés. *They got washed / They have got washed.*

Prepositions

These are words which are placed in front of nouns and pronouns to show position and other relationships.

Examples

Le bol est **dans** l'évier. *The bowl is in the sink.*
 Marie vient **chez** moi. *Marie is coming to my house.*

Present participle

This is part of a verb which is expressed by '...ing' in English, and in French is usually found in combination with *en*.

Example

en mangeant *while eating*

Pronouns

These are words which are used to avoid repeating a noun or proper name.

Examples

je, il, me, etc.

Reflexive verbs

These are verbs where the person does the action to himself or herself. There are rather more of them in French than in English, and you would do well to familiarise yourself with the list given in the grammar reference section.

Example

se laver – je me lave *I wash myself*

Relative pronouns

These introduce a relative clause, which is a clause which tells you something more about another part of the sentence. They can often be omitted in English, but never in French.

Example

Voilà l'homme **que** je cherche. *There's the man I am looking for.*
There's the man that I am looking for.
There's the man who I am looking for.
 C'est un homme **qui** est très fort. *He's a man who is very strong.*

Subject

This is the thing or the person performing the action of the verb. A subject can be either a noun or a pronoun.

Examples

La dame aime la musique classique. Elle l'écoute à la radio.
The lady likes classical music. She listens to it on the radio.

Superlative

This is a way of using adjectives and adverbs to say who is the best, the fastest, etc.

Examples

Je suis le plus fort de tous. *I am the strongest of all.*
 Il court le plus vite de tous. *He runs the fastest of all.*

Tenses

These are the different forms of verbs which describe mainly **when** something takes place, took place, will take place, etc.

There are some differences in the use of tenses between French and English, but future tenses refer to the future, present tenses refer to now or to regular events which are still going on, and past tenses refer to events which have already taken place. The conditional is used for conditions, while the French subjunctive has no direct equivalent in English. Look them up in the grammar (see p. 202 and p. 203).


GRAMMAR IN GCSE FRENCH

The grammar you need to know for GCSE French is laid down by the Examining Groups in their Defined Contents. They have divided what you need to know into four categories, two at each of the Foundation and Higher Tiers.

At each Tier they list:

- ▶ productive skills (things you have to be able to say and write)
- ▶ receptive skills (things you need to understand, but are not necessarily able to say or write from memory).

This is just the same as in English, where you will understand many words and some items of grammar which you wouldn't necessarily use yourself.


Grammar list

To simplify matters, I am going to list grammar under Foundation and Higher Tiers.

Anything which is listed with an (R) against it is for receptive use only.

Items which have an (R) in the Foundation lists will be used productively at Higher Tier.

Space does not allow many examples in the list. However, I have given the correct grammatical terms for structures so that you can look them up in the grammar reference section of this chapter (see pp. 180–223). If you do have to set a priority on the most important things to revise, go for the forms of verbs in the various tenses first, followed by the agreement of adjectives.

Put a tick in the box alongside this list when you have revised the grammar items, and a tick in the second box when you have been tested (successfully!) by a friend.

You will find for most items of grammar a note of common mistakes, with both the mistake, and, more importantly, the correct answer. This is a unique feature of this book, appropriate because it is a study guide.

Verbs – Foundation Tier

		Learned	Tested
▶ present tense	<i>je joue, je finis, je réponds</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ perfect tense (also called <i>passé composé</i>) with <i>avoir</i> and <i>être</i>	<i>j'ai joué, je suis arrivé(e), j'ai répondu, j'ai fini</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ imperfect tense	<i>je jouais, je finissais, je répondais</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ future using <i>aller</i> + infinitive	<i>je vais manger</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ future tense	<i>je jouerai, je finirai, je répondrai</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		Learned	Tested
➤ reflexive verbs	<i>Je m'appelle Anne. Papa se lève.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ question forms		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ command forms (imperative)	<i>Joue! Jouons! Jouez!</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ infinitive	<i>jouer, répondre, finir</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ infinitive + <i>pour, sans, avant</i> <i>de, il faut</i>	<i>Il faut jouer. C'est pour manger.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ common verb + <i>à</i> or <i>de</i> + infinitive	<i>Il a demandé à sortir. Il a décidé de manger en ville.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ (R) perfect infinitive	<i>après avoir fini, après être venu(e)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ use of tenses with <i>depuis</i>	<i>J'habite à Blackpool depuis deux ans.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ negatives	<i>ne ... pas, ne ... jamais, ne ... rien, ne ... aucun, ne ... nulle part, ne ... personne, ne ... plus, ne ... que, ne ... ni ... ni ...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ present participle + <i>en</i>	<i>en jouant, en finissant, en répondant</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Verbs – Higher Tier

		Learned	Tested
➤ pluperfect tense	<i>j'avais acheté, j'étais arrivé(e)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ agreement of past participle with preceding direct object (PDO)	<i>Je les ai achetées, les montrés.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ <i>venir de</i> + infinitive	<i>je viens d'arriver, je venais d'arriver</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ <i>être en train de</i> + infinitive	<i>Je suis en train de manger.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ conditional	<i>J'aimerais voir tes dessins. Si j'étais plus âgée, je conduirais une belle voiture.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ (R) passive	<i>Il a été mordu.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ agreement of past participle with <i>être</i>	<i>elles sont arrivées</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ (R) present subjunctive of regular <i>-er, -ir</i> and <i>-re</i> verbs and of <i>avoir, être, aller,</i> <i>faire, pouvoir, savoir,</i> <i>prendre, venir</i>	<i>Il faut que je fasse mes devoirs. Il faut qu'ils soient bien faits.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ (R) past historic	<i>Il regarda Napoléon. Ils se regardèrent.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adjectives – Foundation and Higher Tiers

		Learned	Tested
▶ agreement		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ position		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ certain masculine adjectives before a vowel	<i>bel, nouvel, vieil</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ possessive adjectives	<i>mon, ma, mes, etc.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ comparative	<i>Je suis plus grand que toi.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ superlative	<i>Je suis la plus belle de toutes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adverbs – Foundation and Higher Tiers

		Learned	Tested
▶ regular formation ending in -ment, -emment, -ement		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ irregular adverbs	<i>bien, mal</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ comparison of adverbs	<i>Il joue mieux que toi. Il court plus vite que toi.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ superlative of adverbs	<i>Elle chante le mieux.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Nouns – Foundation and Higher Tiers

		Learned	Tested
▶ gender	<i>le or la, un or une</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ number (singular or plural)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ plurals, including the irregular ones	<i>chevaux</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Pronouns – Foundation Tier

		Learned	Tested
▶ subject and object pronouns	<i>je, me, etc.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ emphatic (also known as stressed or disjunctive) pronouns	<i>moi, toi, lui, elle, etc.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ position of pronouns		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ (R) order of pronouns	<i>Il me l'a donné.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ relative pronouns	<i>qui and que</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ (R) relative pronoun	<i>dont</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
▶ indefinite pronouns	<i>quelque chose, quelqu'un, tout, tous, tout le monde</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Pronouns – Higher Tier

As for Foundation, plus:

		<i>Learned</i>	<i>Tested</i>
➤ relative pronouns	<i>lequel, lesquels</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Word order – Foundation Tier

		<i>Learned</i>	<i>Tested</i>
➤ (R) inversion after direct speech	<i>'Je mange', a-t-elle dit.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ (R) inversion after <i>peut-être</i>	<i>Peut-être arrivera-t-il.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ (R) inversion in certain subordinate clauses	<i>Le collègue où travaille mon cousin.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Word order – Higher Tier

As for Foundation Tier, but all for productive use.

Numbers and time – Foundation and Higher Tiers

		<i>Learned</i>	<i>Tested</i>
➤ cardinal numbers	<i>un, deux, trois, etc.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ ordinal numbers	<i>premier, deuxième, troisième, etc.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ telling the time on 24-hour clock and on 12-hour clock		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ dates		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Conjunctions

		<i>Learned</i>	<i>Tested</i>
➤ common conjunctions	<i>et, parce que</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Prepositions

		<i>Learned</i>	<i>Tested</i>
➤ common prepositions	<i>dans, pour, chez</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>


GRAMMAR REFERENCE

Use the grammar list (above) to find out which grammatical features you are expected to know for either Foundation or Higher Tier, and whether you should know them actively or passively. In practice, the more you know the better, and there is a strong case for ignoring the Examining Groups' rather arbitrary divisions into Foundation and Higher and concentrating on mastering the fundamentals of French grammar outlined below.

The items appear in the same order as on the grammar list.

► **Verbs** French verbs are notoriously difficult. Many of the common ones are irregular, i.e. they do not follow a rule. In all of them the spelling changes depending on who is speaking, but the pronunciation does not always change to match. If you can master them, you have the key to success. So do make every attempt to get to grips with them. Take a few at a time. Make a point of checking the spelling, including the accents.

Present tense

There is only one form of the present tense for each French verb. In English there are three: 'I eat', 'I am eating' and 'I do eat'. The French form *je mange* is used as an equivalent for all three. (You will probably have noticed that French speakers often mix up the English forms.)

- 1 **Use of the present tense** The present tense is used
 - to describe events that happen regularly, for example:
Je mange beaucoup de bonbons. *I eat a lot of sweets.*
 - to describe what is happening now, for example:
Je lis un excellent livre. *I am reading an excellent book.*
 - after *depuis* (see below).
- 2 **Formation of the present tense** Regular verbs are identified by the last two letters of their infinitive: *-er*, *-ir*, and *-re*. They form the present tense in different ways. You will also need to learn the formation of irregular verbs carefully.

Regular -er verbs

Regular *-er* verbs in French follow this pattern:

parler *to talk or speak*

je parle	<i>I speak / I am speaking</i>
tu parles	<i>you speak / you are speaking</i>
il parle	<i>he speaks / he is speaking</i>
elle parle	<i>she speaks / she is speaking</i>
on parle	<i>we speak / we are speaking (one speaks, etc.)</i>

nous parlons	<i>we speak / we are speaking</i>
vous parlez	<i>you speak / you are speaking</i>
ils parlent	<i>they speak / they are speaking</i>
elles parlent	<i>they speak / they are speaking.</i>

The endings for *-er* verbs are:

je	-e
tu	-es
il/elle/on	-e

nous	-ons
vous	-ez
ils/elles	-ent

These endings are added to the stem of the verb, *parl-*, that is the infinitive *parler* minus its *-er* ending.

Other common regular *-er* verbs include:

aider	aimer	arriver*	casser	chercher
compter	danser	déjeuner	désirer	dessiner
détester	donner	durer	écouter	entrer*
fumer	gagner	inviter	jouer	laver