

1. tense
2. aspect
3. mood
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tense

Tense is the grammatical term that refers to the time when the action of the verb occurs: past, present, future. The time frame of an action is usually established by referring to the present moment; for example, the **passé composé** and the **future** are respectively past and future in relation to the present.

However, some tenses establish their time frame by referring to other actions in the past or in the future. For example, the **plus-que-parfait** tense indicates a past action that occurred prior to the the completion of another past action. The **futur antérieur** tense indicates a future action that will have occurred before another future action. Actions that occur before another action are described as being **anterior**.

Tenses are also described by their number of parts. For example, a tense with only one verb form is called a **simple tense** (ie, le passé simple). In contrast, a tense comprising two forms, the auxiliary verb and the participle, is referred to as a **compound tense** (ie, le passé composé).

aspect

Aspect, unlike tense, is not concerned with placing events on a time line. Rather, aspect is concerned with making distinctions about the kinds of actions that are described by verbs: progressive actions, punctual actions, habitual actions, etc.

The most important aspectual distinction in French concerns the difference between the two most common past tenses: the **imparfait** and the **passé composé**. While both tenses refer to actions in the past, they are used for very different types of actions. The imparfait indicates an action that is ongoing or habitual. Actions in the imparfait may be simultaneous or overlapping. The passé composé on the other hand, indicates an action that is in a strict sequence in relation to another action. In other words, an event in the passé composé must be completed before another may be used in narration.

These aspectual differences are best understood in a **narrative** context where the **imparfait** is typically used to set the scene of a story by giving **background** information.

Installé à la terrasse du Cactus Cafe, Tex **regardait** les filles qui **passaient**. Il **savourait** une tasse de café, mais quelque chose **manquait** . . . une cigarette!

Seated on the terrace of the Cactus Cafe, Tex **was watching** the girls who **walked by**. He **was enjoying** a cup of coffee, but something **was missing** . . . a cigarette!

The **passé composé** is used for the **foreground**, that is, the plot line events. Note that plot line events are sequential, that is, an event must be completed before another event begins.

Tex **a sorti** une cigarette de son paquet. Il **l'a allumée** et il **a tiré** une grande bouffée. Mmm ... extase!

Tex **took out** a cigarette from his pack. He **lit** it and **took** a long drag. Mmm ... ecstasy!

mood

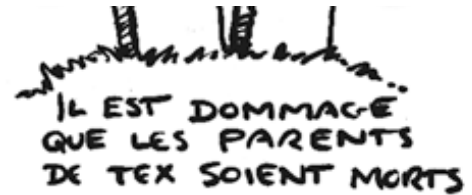
Mood is a grammatical category distinguishing verb tenses. There are four moods in French: **indicative**, **subjunctive**, **conditional**, and **imperative**. All of these moods, except the imperative, may be conjugated in different tenses. Each of these moods has a different function.



The **indicative mood** is the most common and is used to relate facts and objective statements.

Tammy **se réveille** tôt le matin.
(**present tense of the indicative mood**)

Tammy **gets up** early in the morning.



The **subjunctive mood** is used more commonly in French than in English. It is used to express opinions and feelings (subjective thoughts).

Il est dommage que les parents de Tex **soient** morts. (**present tense of the subjunctive mood**)

It is too bad that Tex's parents **are** dead.

The **conditional mood** is used to express hypothetical or contrary-to-fact statements.

Si Corey était beau, il **aurait** une copine.
(**present tense of the conditional mood**)

If Corey were handsome, he **would have** a girlfriend.

The **imperative mood** is used to give direct orders or commands.

Tex, **réveille-toi!**

Tex, **get up!**

voice

Voice is a grammatical category describing the relationship between a verb and its subject. Voice is either **active** or **passive**. Active voice refers to the situation where the subject of the sentence performs the action of the verb.

Les autorités **ont expulsé** Tex de France.

The authorities **expelled** Tex from France.

On the other hand, passive voice refers to the situation where the subject receives the action of the verb.

Tex **a été expulsé** de France (par les autorités).

Tex **was expelled** from France (by the authorities).