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The **infinitive** expresses the idea or concept of a verb's meaning, without specifying a specific subject or point in time (tense). In most cases, use of the infinitive in French corresponds to the English. Infinitive constructions may be categorized according to the following uses:

#### as a noun

The infinitive may sometimes function as a noun. For example, it may be the subject of a sentence. Note that the French infinitive is often translated as a gerund (the '-ing' form of the verb) in English.

🔊 Joe-Bob: **Étudier** n'est pas facile!

Joe-Bob: Studying is not easy!



#### as an imperative (command)

The infinitive may be used to give a written order when there is no specific addressee. You will often see this form on signs.

🔊 Ne pas **marcher** sur l'herbe.

Do not walk on the grass.



#### after verbs

The infinitive is often used directly after these conjugated verbs:

🔊 Verbs of movement: (In this category, the infinitive indicates purpose.)

**aller, descendre, partir, rentrer, retourner, revenir, sortir, venir, etc.**

Verbs of preference:

**adorer, aimer, désirer, détester, préférer, vouloir**

Verbs of opinion:

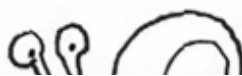
**compter, croire, espérer, nier, penser, valoir mieux** (impersonal: **il vaut mieux**)

Verbs of perception:

**écouter, entendre, regarder, sentir, voir**

Verbs of ability, obligation and necessity:

**avoir beau** (to do something in vain),  
**devoir, faillir** (to almost do something),  
**falloir** (impersonal: **il faut**) **pouvoir, savoir**





Tex et ses amis **sortent** dîner.

Tex and his friends are going out to have dinner.

Tex **compte** savourer un bon dîner français, mais Joe-Bob **veut** manger un hamburger.

Tex is counting on enjoying a good French dinner, but Joe-Bob wants to eat a hamburger.

Edouard les **écoute** discuter un moment et puis il dit: **J'ai failli** manger un hamburger une fois. Non, je ne **peux** pas faire ça, tout de même. **Il faut** trouver un vrai restaurant français.

Edouard listens to them discuss for a moment and then he says: I almost ate a hamburger once. No, I really can't do that. We have to find a real French restaurant.

### after prepositions

The infinitive is the verb form generally used after a preposition in French. The infinitive expresses purpose when it is used after **pour** or **afin de**. In the case of **avant de** and **sans**, the English translation is often a conjugated verb (Before they left), or a present participle (Before leaving), rather than the English infinitive. The infinitive follows the preposition **par** after the verbs **commencer** and **finir**.



**pour** or **afin de**

Tammy arrive **pour** sortir avec Tex et ses amis.

Tammy arrives [in order] to go out with Tex and his friends.

**avant de** and **sans**

**Avant de** partir, ils lui demandent de choisir un restaurant. Elle commence **par** suggérer le nouveau restaurant thaï. Tex et ses copains parlent **sans** écouter Tammy.

Before leaving, they ask her to choose a restaurant. She starts by suggesting the new Thai restaurant. Tex and his friends talk without listening to Tammy.

**par**

Elle finit **par** comprendre que choisir un restaurant était impossible.

She finally understands that choosing a restaurant was impossible.

Note that the preposition **en** is followed by a **present participle**, not the infinitive. (**En** sortant, Joe-Bob a dit au revoir. On leaving, Joe-Bob said good-bye.)

The infinitive may be used to complete the sense of an adjective or a pronoun. Generally infinitives following a noun or adjective are preceded by the preposition **de**. (Edouard ne serait pas content **de** manger un hamburger. Edouard would not be happy to eat a hamburger.) However, adjectives and nouns are followed by the preposition **à + infinitive** to indicate a passive sense or a function: C'est bon **à** manger. (It's good to eat.), une salle **à** manger (dining room), de l'eau **à** boire (drinking water).

### verbs followed by 'à' before an infinitive

When the following verbs are followed by an infinitive, the preposition **à** is required:



**aider à**, to help to

**s'habituer à**, to get used to

**s'amuser à**, to have fun at

**hésiter à**, to hesitate to

**apprendre à**, to learn to

**inviter à**, to invite to

**arriver à**, to succeed in, to manage to  
**s'attendre à**, to expect to  
**chercher à**, to try to, to attempt to  
**commencer à**, to start to  
**se décider à**, to make up one's mind to  
**encourager à**, to encourage to

**se mettre à**, to start to  
**se préparer à**, to prepare to  
**renoncer à**, to give up  
**réussir à**, to succeed at  
**servir à**, to be used for  
**tenir à**, to be anxious to, to be eager to

### verbs followed by 'de' before an infinitive:

When the following verbs are followed by an infinitive, the preposition **de** is required:

 **(s')arrêter de**, to stop

**conseiller de**, to advise to

**se contenter de**, to content oneself with

**décider de**, to decide to

**s'efforcer de** to try hard to, to endeavor to

**essayer de**, to try to

**s'excuser de**, to apologize for

**finir de**, to finish

**mériter de**, to deserve, to be worth

**oublier de**, to forget to

**permettre** (à quelqu'un) **de**, to permit someone to

**persuader de**, to persuade to

**se presser de**, to hurry to

**promettre de**, to promise to

**proposer de**, to propose to

**refuser de**, to refuse to


**rêver de** to dream of

**se soucier de**, to care about

**se souvenir de**, to remember to

### to avoid the subjunctive


The infinitive is often used in impersonal expressions to **avoid the subjunctive** when a specific subject is not necessary.

 Edouard: **Il est** tout à fait **barbare de** manger des hamburgers!

Edouard: It is completely uncivilized to eat hamburgers!

### in an interrogative or exclamatory phrase

The infinitive may be used in an interrogative phrase or exclamatory phrases to express a dilemma.

 Tex se demande: Quel restaurant **choisir**? Où **aller**?

Tex wonders: Which restaurant to choose? Where to go?


Oh! **Etre** en France! **Boire** un bon vin rouge!

Oh, to be in France! To drink a good red wine!



### negation of infinitives

**Ne pas, ne plus, ne rien,** or **ne jamais** are placed side by side before the infinitive to make it negative. **Ne personne,** however, straddles the verb.


 Tammy demande aux autres de **ne pas** se disputer.

Tammy asks the others not to fight.

Tex promet de **ne** se battre avec **personne**.

Tex promises not to fight with anyone.

**Pas** is sometimes omitted in the negative with an infinitive after the verbs **savoir, pouvoir, oser** and **cesser**.

 Tex et ses amis **ne** savent que faire  
et Tammy **n'**ose parler.

Tex and his friends don't know what to do  
and Tammy doesn't dare speak.

### past infinitive constructions

The infinitive of **avoir** or **être** plus the past participle of a verb is used after the preposition **après** to describe a preceding action in the past. Note the past participle agreement in past constructions with **être**.

 **Après avoir suggéré** plusieurs restaurants,  
ils choisissent un restaurant français.

After having suggested several restaurants,  
they choose a French restaurant.

**Après être arrivés** au restaurant, Joe-Bob et  
Corey commandent des hamburgers. Ils  
sont têtus!

After arriving at the restaurant, Joe-Bob  
and Corey order hamburgers. They are  
stubborn!



exercices

### fill in the blanks

Fill in the blank with the correct translations of the English indicated in parentheses.

1. Tex adore \_\_\_\_\_ au café. (going)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ est bon pour le coeur et la ligne. (dancing)
3. Prière de \_\_\_\_\_ . (do not enter)
4. Ce soir les amis sortent pour \_\_\_\_\_ . (to have dinner)
5. Tex écoute \_\_\_\_\_ Serge Gainsbourg. (singing)
6. Trey espère \_\_\_\_\_ une petite amie bientôt. (to find)
7. Vous devez vérifiez votre argent avant de \_\_\_\_\_ . (ordering)
8. Commençons par \_\_\_\_\_ un hors-d'oeuvre. (ordering)
9. On ne fête pas son anniversaire sans \_\_\_\_\_ un morceau de gâteau. (having)
10. Edouard! N'oublie pas d' \_\_\_\_\_ le ketchup. (to bring)
11. Après \_\_\_\_\_ le dîner, nous irons danser. (having finished)
12. Que \_\_\_\_\_ ? (to do)