

# THE PAST TENSE IN FRENCH

## (a.k.a. the imperfect tense)

### When to use it:

- when describing events that happened in the past
- when describing **ongoing** actions – ‘It rained every day on holiday’ etc
- when you would say “*I used to...*” or “*I was doing X when Y happened*” etc in English

**RULE:** To conjugate the imperfect tense, we use the present tense of the verb we need. Find the **NOUS** form of the verb. and remove the **-ons** ending. Then we add our imperfect verb ending:

Here are the imperfect verb endings:

ENGLISH Subject pronoun	French Subject pronoun	imperfect verb endings
I	je	-ais
you (sgl.)	tu	-ais
he / she / we	il / elle / on	-ait
we	nous	-ions
you (pl.)	vous	-iez
they (m.) / (f.)	ils / elles	-aient

You've probably already seen the imperfect tense without even realising it...

### EXAMPLE:

we want to say “I used to play basketball”

Following the rule above; to play = **jouer**

we play = **nous jouons**

remove the **-ons** ending (leaving us with ‘jou-’)

now just add the imperfect verb ending for ‘je’ = **je jouais**

c' <b>était</b>	=	it was / it used to be
j' <b>étais</b>	=	I was / I used to be
ce <b>n'était pas</b>	=	it wasn't / didn't used to be
quand j'av <b>ais</b> dix ans	=	when I was 10 years old
il y av <b>ait</b>	=	there was / were
il <b>n'y avait pas</b>	=	there wasn't / weren't
je jou <b>ais</b>	=	I played / used to play / was playing
tu fais <b>ais</b> de la danse	=	you danced / used to dance / were dancing
il lis <b>ait</b>	=	he read / used to read / was reading
elle aim <b>ait</b>	=	she liked / used to like / was liking
nous dorm <b>ions</b>	=	we slept / used to sleep / were sleeping
vous nage <b>iez</b>	=	you swam / used to swim / were swimming
ils pouv <b>aient</b>	=	they (m. pl.) could / used to be able to
elles attend <b>aient</b>	=	they (f. pl.) waited / used to wait / were waiting