

THE PAST TENSE IN FRENCH

- REGULAR VERBS WITH **ETRE**

(a.k.a. the perfect tense)

When to use it:

- when describing events that happened in the past
- when describing a single, completed action – ‘I was born’ etc
- when you would say “I went...” or “they left...” or “we stayed...” etc in English


To conjugate a perfect tense verb, we must first revise the verb **ETRE** (to be). Then we add our past participle: **‘we (are) + arrived’** (which does sound strange in English but trust me!)

Here is the verb **ETRE**:

ENGLISH Subject pronoun	French Subject pronoun	ETRE to be
I	je	suis
you (sgl.)	tu	es
he / she / we	il / elle / on	est
we	nous	sommes
you (pl.)	vous	êtes
they (m.) / (f.)	ils / elles	sont

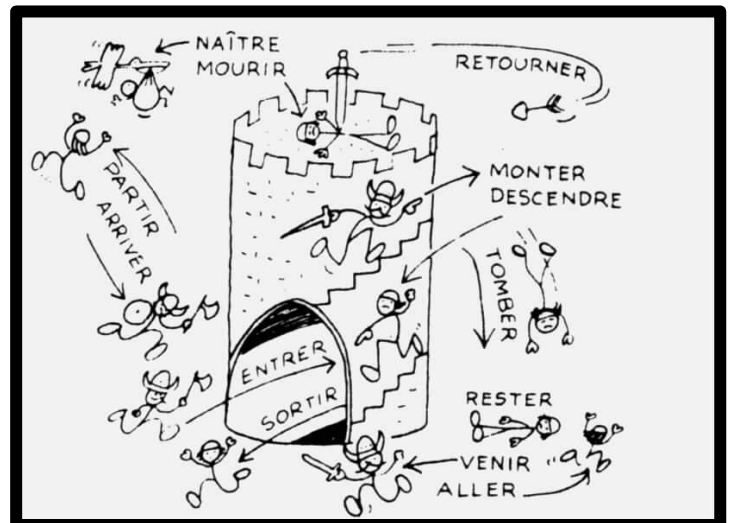
RULE:

1. Use the right subject pronoun (I, you, he, she etc)
2. Add the right part of **ETRE**.
3. Add the past participle next to **this** (check the verb ending agrees with the subject -add **-e** for feminine, **-s** for masc. plural and **-es** for fem. pl.)
i.e. *Sophie est alle*
ils sont parts
nous sommes arrivés



Most French verbs take ‘avoir’ in the past tense, but there are a few which take être instead. Here are most of them, listed using the mnemonic **MRS VAN DE TRAMP** to help us remember them:

M	MOURIR	to die	mort(e)
R	RESTER	to stay	resté(e)
S	SORTIR	to go out	sorti(e)
V	VENIR	to come	venu(e)
A	ALLER	to go	allé(e)
N	NAITRE	to be born	né(e)
D	DESCENDRE	to go down	descendu(e)
E	ENTRER	to enter	entré(e)
T	TOMBER	to fall (think ‘tumble’)	tombé(e)
R	RETOURNER	to return	retourné(e)
A	ARRIVER	to arrive	arrivé(e)
M	MONTER	to go up	monté(e)
P	PARTIR	to leave	parti(e)



<i>je suis allé</i> I went	<i>je suis parti</i> I left	<i>tu es sorti</i> you went out
<i>je suis retourné</i> I returned	<i>il est resté</i> he stayed	<i>je suis né</i> I was born