



05. Avoir & Être: Part 2

Helpful verbs! Let's talk about auxiliary verbs.

What is an auxiliary verb?

As you may have already noticed, some French tenses have two parts to them. These are called compound tenses. Look at two examples of sentences in a past tense known as the perfect tense:

- *J'ai mangé* – I ate
- *Je suis parti* – I left

The first word after the subject *je* is the **auxiliary** verb. It is the 'helping' verb and is always *avoir* or *être*. It is followed by the **past participle**.

The perfect tense is the tense we use when we are describing an event which is finished and in the past. For the purposes of this *Boost*, we will just have a quick tour of the perfect tense to introduce auxiliary verbs.

In a similar way to the present tense, there are three ways to translate the French perfect tense to English

English

1. I ate
2. I have eaten
3. I did eat

French

1. *J'ai mangé*

Which auxiliary verb to use?

So as we have seen, to form the perfect tense you need:

auxiliary verb in present tense (*avoir* or *être*) + **past participle***

*We will look at how to form past participles in a future *Boost*

The good news is that most verbs take *avoir*. Think of *avoir* as your default, helping verb and *être* as being used for special verbs.

You get to a stage where it just sounds right and the choice of auxiliary verb becomes instinctive, however, before then you need to memorise the verbs that take *être*. I will show you some techniques to remember these verbs further on, but first, here are the two categories that they fall into:

1. Intransitive verbs of motion (sounds awful but I'll explain below!)
2. Reflexive (or pronominal) verbs

1. Intransitive verbs – quick look

Intransitive verbs, meaning verbs that require no **direct object** to make sense. Examples:

1. *Je suis venu* – I came

And, also, their derivatives such as

2. *Je suis revenu* – I came back

Direct objects receive the action of the verb. As you can see in the examples above there is no **direct object** compared to the two sentences below:

3. *Je mets **ma chemise*** – I am putting **my shirt** on

4. *Je **t'aime*** – I love **you**

As you can see examples 3 and 4 need a **direct object** to make sense, otherwise, the sentence is unfinished.



There are 10 verbs in French which are always intransitive and 6 verbs which can be transitive or intransitive. Making a total of 16 verbs which take *être* (plus derivatives as explained above).

2. Reflexive verbs – quick look

These are verbs which have two pronouns – the subject pronoun (which we looked at in *Grammar Boost 1*) and the reflexive pronoun. Simply put, these verbs are recognisable as you will see *me, te, se, nous* or *vous* between the verb and the subject. Examples:

Se laver – to wash oneself

- Present Tense: *Je me lave* I wash myself/ I am washing myself/ I do wash myself
- Perfect Tense: *Je me suis lavé* I washed myself/ I have washed myself/ I did wash myself

Se lever – to stand up

- Present Tense: *Il se lève* He stands up/ I am standing up/ I do wash myself
- Perfect Tense: *Il s'est levé* He stood up/ He has stood up/ He did stand up

Techniques to memorise *être* verbs

To be quite frank, I have given you the full info on transitive and intransitive verbs but most French people would not be able to explain to you why a verb takes *être*! They have just learned them as they grew up through interactions and now that info is hard-wired. As learners, you may need a technique to fast-track this knowledge. Here are three techniques:

- Technique 1: Memorise the full list.

Here is the full list (verbs which can also be **transitive depending on context are in bold** & some derivatives in brackets):

<i>Aller</i>	to go
<i>Arriver</i>	to arrive
<i>Entrer</i>	to enter
<i>Naître</i>	to be born
<i>Mourir</i>	to die
<i>(Re)Partir</i>	to leave (again)
<i>Rester</i>	to remain
<i>(Re)Venir</i>	to come (back)
<i>Devenir</i>	to become
<i>Tomber</i>	to fall
<i>Descendre</i>	to go down
<i>Monter</i>	to go up/ climb
<i>Passer</i>	to pass
<i>Rentrer</i>	to go home
<i>Retourner</i>	to return
<i>Sortir</i>	to go out



Listen to the full list of verbs which take *être*

- Technique 2: Mnemonic.

If you need a mnemonic some people find the below helpful (although it has its weaknesses since it includes some derivatives but not all and no mention of *passer*).

Dr & Mrs Vandertramp

Devenir

Revenir

&

Monter

Retourner

Sortir

Venir

Aller

Naître

Descendre

Entrer

Rester

Tomber

Rentrer

Arriver

Mourir

Partir

- Technique 3: *La maison d'être* image

I like this technique as it builds a better understanding of *why* you are using *être*. It shows the intransitive verbs of motion in action. The only one from my above full list above not on there is *devenir* (to become) as it is hard to portray and it could be argued that it is a derivative of *venir*.



So that is auxiliary verbs! Still with me! Hope so! Remember, grammar is important but using language and making errors is part of learning. See you in the next *Boost*!