

ADVANCED. GRAMMAR#3. THE PASSÉ SIMPLE 1



The French preterite is the *passé simple*. It's nowadays used only in literary writings and very very formal speech. In conversation and informal writings, it's almost always replaced by the *passé composé*. But we meet this tense a lot in literature, in fairy tales, in narrative writings. That's why it's useful to know it...

*Il était une fois une princesse qui était très malheureuse.
Un jour, elle **rencontra** un crapaud...*

When to use it ?

As the *passé composé*, the *passé simple* is used alongside the *imparfait* tense. The *imparfait* is used to put the setting in place while the *passé simple* (exactly as the *passé composé*) is used to **express the important actions**.

*Un roi venait de perdre sa femme. Un jour il **décida** de se remarier.*

The *passé simple* is used to express a **completed action that is delimited in the past** (we know when it began and when it stopped). It can be a short action as well as a very long one.

*Elle le **gifla**. / Il **vécut** cent ans.*

How to form it ?

The *passé simple* is a very difficult tense to conjugate (even for French people) as it's a very irregular one. Of course, there are a few rules to know.

The **verbs of the first group** (they end with **-er**) always conjugate the same way. We take the stem then we add the following endings :

-ai, -as, -a, -âmes, -âtes, -èrent.

Chanter	Aimer
Je chantai	J'aimai
Tu chantas	Tu aimas
Il chanta	Il aima
Nous chantâmes	Nous aimâmes
Vous chantâtes	Vous aimâtes
Ils chantèrent	Ils aimèrent

The **verbs of the second group** (they end with **-ir** but they all have the ending **-issons** with *nous* at the present tense) always conjugate the same way. We take the stem then we add the following endings :

-is, -is, -it, -îmes, -îtes, -irent.

Finir	Désobéir
Je finis	Je désobéis
Tu finis	Tu désobéis
Il finit	Il désobéit
Nous finîmes	Nous désobéîmes
Vous finîtes	Vous désobéîtes
Ils finirent	Ils désobéirent



Conjugate the verb *aller* at the *passé simple*.

Conjugate the verb *punir* at the *passé simple*.

Translate in English.

1. Il mangea. – Ils finirent. – Je changeai.
2. Il l'aima longtemps.
3. Je rougis quand je le vis.
4. Quand elle arriva, les enfants pleurèrent.