

Unit 12 - Past participles

1 Formation

For first group (-er) verbs, remove the -er ending from the infinitive and replace with -é :

aimer → aimé

For second group (-ir) verbs, remove the -ir ending from the infinitive and replace with -i :

finir → fini

The third group (irregular verbs), contains a whole range of irregular formations of the past participle, e.g **avoir** - *eu*, **être** - *été*, **faire** - *fait*, **pouvoir** - *pu* etc. There is a detailed listing of irregular verbs at the back of this book

2 Use

Past participles are used in a range of different contexts. These include:

The perfect	J'ai beaucoup aimé son dernier film <i>I really liked his / her last film</i>
The passive	Je n'ai pas été informé de la situation <i>I wasn't informed of the situation</i>
On its own	Le repas fini , ils ont fait la vaisselle <i>When the meal was over, they did the washing-up</i>
As an adjective	Le sol était couvert de feuilles mortes <i>The ground was covered with dead leaves</i>
Pluperfect	L'année précédente je l'avais rencontrée ailleurs <i>The year before I had met her somewhere else</i>
Perfect subjunctive	Je suis déçu qu'il n'ait pas pu venir <i>I'm disappointed he was unable to come</i>
Past infinitive	Je veux absolument avoir fini ce projet avant vendredi <i>I'm determined to finish this project before Friday</i>
Future perfect	Dans un an j' aurai payé toutes mes dettes <i>In a year I will have paid off all my debts</i>
Perfect conditional	Si nous avions eu une voiture, nous serions allés à la plage <i>If we had had a car, we would have gone to the beach</i>
Past anterior	Après que tous furent couchés je vis la porte entreouvrir <i>After everyone had gone to bed I saw the door opening</i>

3 Preceding direct object rule with *avoir* verbs

For verbs taking *avoir* in compound tenses (perfect, pluperfect etc.), the past participle does not take an agreement unless there is a **preceding direct object**, that is to say a direct object placed before the participle. This can take several forms :

UNIT 12 - PAST PARTICIPLES

3.1 The **relative pronoun** *que* and the noun it replaces :

Il a **pris** de bonnes décisions - *He made good decisions* ⇒

Les décisions qu'il a **prises** étaient bonnes - *The decisions (that) he made were good*

3.2 Certain **question words** : *lequel / laquelle / lesquels, combien + noun, quel(le)(s) + noun* :

Laquelle des deux maisons as-tu **préférée** ? - *Which of the two houses did you like best ?*

Combien de feuilles de papier a-t-il **prises** ? - *How many sheets of paper did he take ?*

Quelles raisons a-t-il **données** ? - *What reasons did he give ?*

3.3 The **personal pronouns** *le, la* and *les*, and *me, te, nous, vous* where these act as a direct object :

- Avez-vous **vu** mes lunettes ? - *Have you seen my glasses ?* ⇒

- Les avez-vous **vus** ? - Oui, je les ai **vus** sur la table

- *Have you seen them ?* - Yes, I saw them on the table

The past participle never agrees with *en* when this is a preceding direct object (p.d.o.) :

- A-t-il **voulu** des cigarettes ? *Did he want some / any cigarettes ?* ⇒

- En a-t-il **voulu** ? (and not * - *En a-t-il voulues ?*) - *Did he want some / any ?*

As the pronouns *me, te, nous, vous* can be direct or indirect, it is easy to confuse the two and get the wrong p.d.o. agreement :

Elle nous a donné [and **not** **donnés*] un conseil

She gave us a piece of advice

This is especially true in constructions taking an indirect object where the equivalent English construction takes a direct object (e.g. *désobéir à qn = to disobey sb*) :

On lui a dit de ranger sa chambre mais il nous a **désobéi**

[and **not** * *il nous a désobéïs*]

We told him to tidy his room but he disobeyed us

4 Exceptions to p.d.o. agreement rule

Note that there are instances where a participle does **not** agree with a preceding direct object :

4.1 When the past participle is part of an impersonal verb :

Le ministre a pris les mesures qu'il a **fallu** - *The minister took the necessary action*

4.2 When the past participle is followed by an infinitive it is important to ascertain which verb the preceding direct object relates to. If the p.d.o. is in fact the direct object of the infinitive, there is no agreement :

Nous avons **entendu** chanter de charmantes mélodies

We heard some charming melodies being sung

Nous les avons **entendu** chanter [here *les* is the direct object of *chanter*]

We heard them being sung

Compare this with :

Nous avons **entendu** chanter les chanteurs

We heard the singers singing

Nous les avons **entendus** chanter [here *les* is the direct object of *entendre*]

We heard them singing

UNIT 12 - PAST PARTICIPLES

- 4.3 When the past participle is that of *faire* when governing another verb, there is never any agreement :

Nous les avons **fait** jouer dans le jardin - *We made them play in the garden*

5 Verbs taking *être*

Some verbs generally take *être* as an auxiliary in compound tenses. These are : *arriver, partir, revenir, retourner, descendre, monter, venir, aller, entrer, sortir, naître, mourir, tomber, rester, passer*. When a compound tense is used, the past participle of these verbs always agrees with the subject.

Elle est **descendue** avec une valise pleine d'argent

She went down with a suitcase full of money

Elle est **sortie** faire des courses

She went out to do some shopping

Note, however, that some of these verbs take *avoir* when they are used transitively (that is, when they take a direct object) :

Elle a **descendu** l'escalier avec une valise [*l'escalier* = direct object of *descendre*]

She went down the stairs with a suitcase

La valise qu'elle a **descendue** était pleine d'argent [*la valise* = direct object of *descendre*]

The suitcase that she brought down was full of money

Elle a **sorti** un carnet pour prendre des notes [*un carnet* = direct object of *sortir*]

She got a notebook out to make some notes

6 Pronominal verbs

- 6.1 All pronominal (reflexive) verbs (*se lever, se coucher* etc.) take *être* as an auxiliary when used in compound tenses. Note that the past participle agrees with the reflexive pronoun (*me, te, se*, etc.) and **not** the subject. In many cases the reflexive pronoun is in fact a preceding direct object and consequently there is an agreement.

Elle s'est **lavée** avec le gant de toilette

She washed herself with the flannel

Elle s'est **coupée** avec le couteau à pain

She cut herself with the bread knife

- 6.2 Sometimes, however, the reflexive pronoun is an indirect object, and consequently there is no agreement. The most straightforward instance of this is where there is a clear direct object following the verb :

Elle s'est **lavé** le visage avec le gant de toilette

She washed her face with the flannel

Elle s'est **coupé** le doigt avec le couteau à pain

She cut her finger with the bread knife

Elle s'est **acheté** une nouvelle robe

She bought herself a new dress

- 6.3 Where the verb is followed by a clause rather than a noun, it is important to establish whether it is the reflexive pronoun or the clause which is the direct object. In order to do this, take the verb's non-reflexive counterpart (i.e. *dire* rather than *se dire*, *promettre* rather than *se promettre* etc.). If

UNIT 12 - PAST PARTICIPLES

this takes an indirect object relating to a person (e.g. *dire qch à qn*, *promettre qch à qn* etc.) then the reflexive pronoun will also be indirect, and there will be no agreement :

Les amants se sont **dit** qu'ils ne se sépareraient jamais
The lovers told each other [i.e. said to each other] that they would never separate
Elle s'était **promis** de lui dire la vérité
She promised herself [i.e. to herself] that she would tell him the truth

6.4 Note that there is never any p.d.o. agreement involving the constructions *se laisser* + infinitive, *se faire* + infinitive and *se voir* + infinitive :

Elle s'était **laissé** convaincre de sa mauvaise foi
She had let herself be persuaded of his insincerity
Elle s'est **vu** obliger de réexaminer la situation
She was forced to reconsider the situation
Elle s'est **fait** couper les cheveux
She got her hair cut

7 Use in the passive

In a passive construction, the past participle must always agree with its subject :

Elle n'a pas été **informée** du crime
She wasn't informed of the crime
Sa lettre avait été **publiée** dans le journal
Her letter had been published in the newspaper

Note that a passive construction does not always directly follow the subject of the sentence, and this might cause you to forget the need for an agreement :

Elle a affirmé ne pas avoir été **informée** du crime
She maintained that she hadn't been informed of the crime
Sa lettre sera bientôt prête à être **envoyée**
Her letter will soon be ready for sending

Remember that there must be an agreement when a past participle is used without an auxiliary :

La vaisselle **finie**, ils sont allés au cinéma
When they had finished the washing up, they went out to the cinema

It is particularly easy to forget this when the past participle stands before the subject :

Une fois **publiée**, la lettre a provoqué un scandale
Once published, the letter caused a scandal

8 Agreement with subject pronoun

Note that the subject pronouns *je*, *tu*, *nous* and *vous* may be masculine or feminine, and *vous* singular or plural, depending on whom they are referring to :

«**Je** suis levée depuis 5 heures» a-t-elle dit
"I've been up since 5 o'clock" she said
«**Tu** es levée?» a-t-elle demandé à sa fille
"Are you up?" she asked her daughter
«**Vous** êtes levé?» a-t-elle demandé au locataire
"Are you up?" she asked the lodger
«**Vous** êtes levés?» a-t-elle demandé à ses enfants
"Are you up?" she asked her children