

62. Making commands

1 Definition

The imperative is the form of a verb used to instruct or invite someone to do something. It has three persons:

2nd person singular: *donne!*

1st person plural: *donnons!*

2nd person plural: *donnez!*

2 Formation and use of imperative

2.1 For regular *-er* verbs and *aller*

The 2nd person singular is formed by taking the 2nd person singular of the present tense (e.g. *donnes*) and removing the final *-s*:

Donne-lui un coup de main pour la vaissaille!

Give him / her a hand with the washing-up!

Va lui donner un coup de main pour la vaissaille!

Go and give him / her a hand with the washing-up!

Note, however, that the *-s* returns to this form when it is followed by *y* or *en*:

Vas-y

Go on

Achète-en

Buy some

The 1st person plural is the same as the 1st person plural of the present tense (e.g. *donnons*):

Donnons-lui un coup de main pour la vaissaille!

Let's give him / her a hand with the washing-up!

Allons lui donner un coup de main pour la vaissaille!

Let's go and give him / her a hand with the washing-up!

The 2nd person plural is the same as the 2nd person plural of the present tense (e.g. *donnez*):

Donnez-lui un coup de main pour la vaissaille!

Give him / her a hand with the washing-up!

Allez lui donner un coup de main pour la vaissaille!

Go and give him / her a hand with the washing-up!

2.2 Other verbs

For most other verbs, all three persons are the same as the equivalent persons in the present tense:

Finis tes devoirs! / **Finissez** vos devoirs!

Finish your homework!

Rends / **rendez**-lui le livre!

Give him / her back the book!

There are, however, four irregular formations:

Être: *sois, soyons, soyez*

Avoir: *aie, ayons, ayez*

Savoir: *sache, sachons, sachez*

Vouloir: *veuille, (no 1st person plural), veuillez*

Sois sage!

N'**ayez** pas peur!

Sache que je n'y suis pas mêlé

Veillez vous asseoir

Be good!

Don't be afraid!

Please understand that I'm not involved

Please sit down

2.3 Pronominal verbs in the imperative

In affirmative imperative sentences, the reflexive pronoun comes immediately after the main verb.

Note that the pronoun *te* is replaced with *toi*:

Tu te lèves ⇒ Lève-toi! Levez-vous!

In negative imperative sentences, however, the word order reverts to the regular word order:

Tu ne te lèves pas ⇒ Ne te lève pas!

2.4 Use of imperative

The imperative is used very much as it is in English:

To give an order: **Fermez** la porte! - *Close the door!*

Make a suggestion: **Allons-y**! - *Let's go!*

Make an invitation: **Venez** chez nous! - *Come round to our house!*

Express a wish: **Dors** bien! - *Sleep well!*