

Chanson&Grammaire : J'AI PASSÉ DEVANT TA PORTE (traditional)

LA GRAMMAIRE : the passé composé form of the past tense

There isn't just one way of expressing things in the past. For example, you can say "I ate," "I have eaten," "I was eating," "I used to eat,"... etc. The *passé composé* is the form of the past that generally translates to the first two examples: "I ate" or "I have eaten." It's used to express things like individual events or completed actions.

It's called "*composé*" because it's composed of two parts:

[subject of the sentence] + **AVOIR** (conjugated) + **VERB** (in past participle form)

Rose	a		parlé	avec David.
J'	ai	pas*	fini	mon souper.
Rose et David	ont		vendu	leur char.

*For negatives, the *pas* goes in between *avoir* and the verb.

These sentences could be translated to English as: *Rose spoke with David. I didn't finish my supper. Rose and David sold their car.*

They could also be translated to English as: *Rose has spoken with David. I haven't finished my supper. And Rose and David have sold their car.*

In International French, most verbs use *avoir* to make the *passé composé*, but there are some exceptions. Certain verbs, like *arriver* or *retourner*, use *être* to make the past tense - "*Je suis arrivé à midi*" or "*Elle est retournée au Texas*" - but in Louisiana, it's common to ignore those exceptions and use *avoir* across the board: "*J'ai arrivé à midi*" (I arrived at noon) or "*Elle a retourné au Texas*" (She went back to Texas)

To make the past participle:

regular -er verbs parler + é = parlé (spoken)	regular -ir verbs finir + i = fini (finished)	regular -re verbs vendre + u = vendu (sold)	
Irregulars - you just have to practice them until you remember, but start with these:			
avoir = eu	prendre = pris	pouvoir = pu	venir = venu
être = été	comprendre = compris	vouloir = voulu	connaître = connu
aller = été	voir = vu	écrire = écrit	mettre = mis
faire = fait	boire = bu	dire = dit	promettre = promis

Note that *être* and *aller* have the same past participle in Louisiana French: "*J'ai été au village*" can be translated as "I've been to town" or "I went to town."

I. Pratiquez! Use the verb in parentheses to write the sentence in the *passé composé*.

ex. (manger) On a mangé 20 livres d'écrevisses! (We ate 20 lbs of crawfish!)

- (perdre) T' _____ ton chien? (You lost your dog?)
- (voir, jongler) J' _____ ça et j' _____ à toi. (I saw that and I thought of you.)
- (écrire) Ils _____ une lettre au gouverneur. (They wrote a letter to the governor.)
- (dormir) Le bébé _____ pas _____ hier soir. (The baby didn't sleep last night.)

5. (faire) Vous-autres _____ un bon travail! (*Y'all did a good job!*)
6. (dire) T' _____ pas _____ la vérité. (*You didn't tell the truth.*)
7. (avoir) J' _____ pas _____ le temps. (*I haven't had the time.*)
8. (aller) Marc et Vincent _____ chez Guidry. (*Marc & Vincent went to Guidry's.*)

More about participles : Past participles can often be used as adjectives. You can eat *crème brûlée* ("burnt cream"), *pain perdu* ("lost bread" aka French toast), or crawfish *étouffée* ("smothered"). It's not just food - you may have *un coeur cassé* ("a broken heart") or your *place à la table* may already be *prise* ("taken").

II. Pratiquez! Take the following sentences that are in the present tense and rewrite them in the passé composé. If you're not sure about the verb, try looking it up in the *Dictionary of Louisiana French*, but know that it'll be listed in its infinitive form (*parler, finir, vendre, manger, faire, etc.*)

ex. *On mange ensemble.* (We eat together.) → *On a mangé ensemble.* (We ate together.)

1. *Ça prend une heure.* _____
2. *Tu bois une tasse de café.* _____
3. *Vous comprenez ce mot en anglais?* _____
4. *Jacques est malade.* _____
5. *Vous-autres connaît pas Monsieur Ardoin.* _____
6. *Je réponds pas au téléphone.* _____
7. *Elle mets une jolie robe.* _____
8. *Ils viennent à l'enterrement.* _____

To check your answers

Exercice I:

1. T'as perdu ton chien?
2. J'ai vu ça et j'ai jonglé à toi.
3. Ils ont écrit une lettre au gouverneur.
4. Le bébé a pas dormi hier soir.
5. Vous-autres a fait un bon travail. (Note: In La. French *vous-autres* is conjugated like *il/elle/on/ça*.)
6. T'as pas dit la vérité.
7. J'ai pas eu le temps.
8. Marc et Vincent ont été chez Guidry.

Exercice II:

1. Ça a pris une heure. (*It took an hour.*)
2. T'as bu une tasse de café. (*You drank a cup of coffee.*)
3. Vous avez compris ce mot en anglais? (*Did you [formal] understand that word in English?*)
4. Jacques a été malade. (*Jacques was sick or Jacques got sick.*)
5. Vous-autres a pas connu Monsieur Ardoin. (*Y'all didn't know Mister Ardoin.*) [See Note in section above]
6. J'ai pas répondu au téléphone. (*I didn't answer the telephone.*)
7. Elle a mis une jolie robe. (*She put on a pretty dress.*)
8. Ils ont venu à l'enterrement. (*They came to the burial.*)

LA CHANSON

"*J'ai passé devant ta porte*" is one of the classics of French-language music in Louisiana. Like most traditional tunes, there are several different versions but we've chosen Shirley Bergeron's for its simplicity. It dates back from a time when people held wakes in the home of the person who had died with the coffin present.

LIEN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZc5zqLCpf0>

<i>J'ai passé devant ta porte</i>	I passed in front of your door
<i>J'ai crié : « Bye-bye, la belle! »</i>	I cried out: 'Bye bye, beautiful!'
<i>Il y a personne qui m'a répondu</i>	There's no one who answered me
<i>Oh ye yaïe! Mon cœur fait mal</i>	Oh ye yaïe! My heart hurts
<i>Moi j'ai pris à observer</i>	I took to observing (=started to observe)
<i>Moi j'ai vu les chandelles allumées</i>	I saw the lit candles
<i>Tout le tour de son cercueil</i>	All around her coffin
<i>Oh ye yaïe! Mon cœur fait mal</i>	Oh ye yaïe! My heart hurts

Ye yaïe! is an interjection that expresses strong emotion (think "Man!" "Wow!" "Jeez!" etc.)

When you learn another form of the past tense in French, the *imparfait*, you'll need to distinguish between when to use *imparfait* and when to use *passé composé*. As the beginning of this lesson states, **the *passé composé* is used to talk about specific events or actions that happened at a moment in time**, as opposed to a general description (*It was a dark and stormy night...*) or a prolonged state of being (*I was so in love then...!*).

Re-read the lyrics of *J'ai passé devant ta porte* and notice how the story is really a series of events (He passes by her house, he hollers a goodbye, no one answers, he starts to notice something, he sees candles..etc.) If you want to practice what you've just learned, try circling all the verbs that are in the *passé composé*. When you've circled them, you can check yourself against the list below.

Verbes au *passé composé*:

j'ai passé, j'ai crié, personne m'a répondu, j'ai pris, j'ai vu ... + *allumées* is a past participle used as an adjective
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