**AUXILIARY VERBS AND MODAL VERBS**

Auxiliary verbs in French language are helping verbs used in conjugating verbs in the compound past tenses. The two main auxiliary verbs are “**etre**” and “**avoir**”. These verbs can also be conjugated separately on their own. The verb “**etre**” which means “**to** **be**” is generally used to describe people, things, etc., in terms of their state, location and so on. The verb “**etre**” is used to conjugate the compound past tenses of the 20 verbs generally referred to as verbs of movements. The verb also helps with the conjugation of the compound past tenses of all pronominal or reflexive verbs as well as all verbs used in the passive voice. But for the present study, we will be looking at the conjugation of these verbs in the present indicative tense.

**Etre (to be)**

Je suis

Tu es

Il/Elle/On est

Nous sommes

Vous êtes

Ils/elles sont

1. The verb « être » is used to convey the state of being of the subject.

Examples :

1. Le garçon est intelligent.
2. Je suis grande
3. Tu es riche
4. Vous êtes malade
5. Les oiseaux sont beaux
6. Nous sommes courageux
7. Mon frère est content.
8. Elle est triste
9. Elle est la dernière-née de la famille
10. Les Français sont blancs.
11. The verb « **être** » is used for identifying nationality, profession or status and religious faith.

Examples:

1. Buhari est Nigérian.
2. Sa femme est Nigérienne.
3. Je suis chrétienne.
4. Il est musulman
5. Monsieur Melaye est sénateur
6. Son oncle est banquier, mais il est infirmier.
7. Tu es Brésilien.
8. Nous sommes Africains
9. Vous êtes croyante
10. Je suis mariée.
11. The verb « **être** » is used to form fixed expressions of life experiences, time and dates.

Examples:

1. C’en est trop – That’s too much
2. Ca y est! – That’s it.
3. Etre de bonne humeur- to be in good mood
4. Etre à court d’argent – to be broke or short of money
5. Etre de garde – to be on call/on duty
6. Etre de mauvaise humeur – to be in bad mood
7. Etre de retour – to be back
8. Etre en retard- to be late
9. Etre à l’heure – to be punctual/to be on time
10. Etre en bonne santé – to be in good health
11. Etre sain et sauf – to be hale and hearty
12. Elle est des nôtres – she is one of us/on our side.
13. Nous sommes le 1er Octobre – it is October 1st.
14. Il en est – he is ready to be involved.
15. J’y suis – I understand/I get it.

The verb “**Avoir**” is used as a main verb (expressing possession), and it is also an auxiliary verb used in conjugating the compound past tenses of avoir itself and of other verbs. We will be looking at the conjugation of avoir in present indicative tense and the use in some sentences.

Avoir (to have)

J’ai

Tu as

Il/elle/on a

Nous avons

Vous avez

Ils/elles ont

1. **Avoir** is used a main verb to indicate what is possessed, what is contained or what something consists of.

Examples:

1. J’ai une maison
2. Le professeur a beaucoup de livres
3. J’ai la clé de la chambre
4. Vous avez un sac
5. Tu as quel âge ?
6. **Avoir** is also used with some adjectives, nouns and adverbs to form idiomatic expressions of feelings, thoughts, sensations and sicknesses. Here are some of the expressions formed with **avoir**:
7. Avoir besoin de – to be in need of/to need
8. Avoir chaud – to be hot (a person)
9. Avoir froid – to be cold
10. Avoir faim – to be hungry
11. Avoir soif- to be thirsty
12. Avoir de l’esprit – to be witty
13. Avoir de la chance – to be lucky
14. Avoir du courage – to have courage/to be courageous
15. Avoir honte de – to be ashamed of …
16. Avoir l’air de – to look/to seem ….
17. Avoir l’habitude de – to be used to…
18. Avoir l’intention de – to intend to…
19. Avoir envie – to feel like, to long for, to desire
20. Avoir raison – to be right
21. Avoir tort – to be wrong
22. Avoir sommeil – to be sleepy
23. Avoir peur de – to be afraid of
24. Avoir des crampes – to have cramps
25. Avoir une douleur – to have pains
26. Avoir une allergie de – to have an allergy to
27. **Avoir** is also used in its third person singular to form the impersonal expression: **il y a**. This expression is commonly used to introduce a numerical quantity, meaning there is, or there are, or to convey information on a period of time or to express some worry about a situation.

Examples:

1. Il y a deux étudiants dans la chambre – There are two students in the room
2. Je suis née, il y a vingt ans – I was born twenty years ago.
3. Qu’est-ce qu’il y a, mon cher ami? – What’s wrong, my dear friend?

**Semi-Auxiliary Verbs**

**Aller** is an irregular verb in French, it is an auxiliary verb for the futur proche (aller + infinitive). Its basic meaning is “to go”. It is conjugated in present indicative tense as follows:

**Aller**

Je vais

Tu vas

Il/elle/on va

Nous allons

Vous allez

Ils/elles vont

Examples of sentences with « **Aller** »

1. Je vais en classe
2. Samuel et Jane vont en vacances.
3. Emmanuella va à l’école.
4. Tu vas au marché.
5. Nous allons au travail.
6. Vous allez à la plage.

Examples with **Aller** in the futur proche:

1. Je vais manger du riz – I am going to eat some rice
2. Je vais acheter des nouveaux livres. – I am going to buy some new books

The verb “Faire” is also a semi-auxiliary verb. It basically means “to do” or “to make”, but it is often used in common expressions like weather-related expressions. The conjugation of the verb « faire » is also irregular.

**Faire**

Je fais

Tu fais

Il/elle/on fait

Nous faisons

Vous faites

Ils/elles font

**Examples :**

Je fais mes devoirs – I am doing my assignments

Il fait la lessive – He is doing the washing

Elle fait la vaisselle – She is washing the dishes

Nous faisons la cuisine – We are cooking

Vous faites le nettoyage – You are doing the cleaning

Tu fais les courses – you are going shopping.

**Other expressions with the verb “faire” are as follow:**

Faire la connaissance de – to meet, make acquaintance of

Faire un tour – to go for a stroll

Faire un voyage – to take a trip

Faire attention (a) – to watch out for

Faire de son mieux – to do one’s best

Faire une promenade – to take a walk/ride

Faire des courses- to run errands

Faire des progrès – to make progress

Faire du sport – to practice/do sports

Faire ses adieux – to bid good-bye

**Modal Verbs**

A modal verb is a verb that qualifies an action with regard to its desirability, its necessity, its possibility or its futurity. But as far as French linguistics is concerned, it is often said that French does not have modal verbs. But in recent years, and by assimilation with English and other languages, the expression “verbes modaux” is increasingly used in French.

French has less modal verbs than English. While English has “***will, may, shall, might, must, ought to, have to, can and be able to***, French has three modal verbs: ***pouvoir, vouloir, devoir***, to which can be added certain uses of ***savoir***. However, these verbs have tenses that can modify their modality. French does not use modal verbs to denote futurity, as this is done by means of the future tense and other mechanisms. We will take a look at the conjugation of these verbs in present indicative tense and some examples where they have been used.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pouvoir (to be able to/can) | Vouloir (to want) | Devoir (to have to/must) | Savoir (to know) |
| Je peux | Je veux | Je dois | Je sais |
| Tu peux | Tu veux | Tu dois | Tu sais |
| Il/elle/on peut | Il/elle/on veut | Il/elle/on doit | Il/elle/on sait |
| Nous pouvons | Nous voulons | Nous devons | Nous savons |
| Vous pouvez | Vous voulez | Vous devez | Vous savez |
| Ils/elles peuvent | Ils/elles veulent | Ils/elles doivent | Ils/elles savent |

Pouvoir expresses ability, corresponding to the English can or be able to. In present tense, it implies a definite or potential ability.

Examples:

1. Je peux aller au cinéma ce soir.- I can go to the movies this evening.
2. Nous pouvons aller au concert cette nuit. – We can go to the concert this night.
3. Les garçons peuvent jouer au tennis. – The boys can play tennis.
4. Tu ne peux pas fumer ici. – You cannot smoke here.

Vouloir is a verb expressing wish, desire or intention. In present tense, it implies a definite wish.

Examples:

1. Je veux de l’argent. – I want some money.
2. Tu veux sortir maintenant. – You want to go out now.
3. Elle veut savoir la réponse. – She wants to know the answer.
4. Vous voulez jouer au badminton samedi. – You want to play badminton on Saturday.

Devoir expresses obligation. In present tense, it corresponds to the English “must” or “have to”. The verb can also mean “to owe” in English.

Examples:

1. Je dois partir à midi. – I must leave by midday.
2. Vous devez arrêter le moteur maintenant. – You must stop the engine now.
3. Les enfants doivent aller à l’école aujourd’hui. – The children have to go to school today
4. Tu ne dois pas parler pendant l’examen.- You are not supposed to talk during examination.

**Savoir** is sometimes used in French to express acquired ability instead of **Pouvoir**. **Savoir** implies **to know a fact** or **to know how to**.

Examples:

1. Ma sœur sait parler cinq langues.- My sister can (know how to) speak five languages.
2. Tope sait la vérité. – Tope knows the truth.
3. Nous savons votre nom. – We know your name.
4. Vous savez conduire une voiture. – You know how to drive a car.