

# FRENCH RECIPROCAL VERBS

## LE PASSÉ COMPOSÉ



**Grammar topic:** Reciprocal Verbs - Le Passé Composé

**Curriculum:** French Level A2

### “NORMAL” REFLEXIVE VERBS IN THE PASSÉ COMPOSÉ

Many French reflexive verbs fall into the “normal” category. The subject is both the giver and receiver of the action. All reflexive verbs use être as a helping verb in the passé composé, and reflexive pronouns come before être.

In the following examples, the reflexive pronouns are also direct objects of the verb. When direct object pronouns precede past participles, agreement must be made.

In the case of reflexive verbs and pronouns, we can also view the past participle agreement as being made with the subject of the sentence.

We know that the reflexive pronoun is direct because it answers the question “Who?” Who is being washed? Me. Who is doing the washing? Me.

Je me suis lavé(e).	ME is a reflexive pronoun.
Agreement is made with both JE and ME.	ME is also a direct object pronoun. It answers the question “Who?”

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Tu t'es endormi(e).	Agreement with TU and TE.
Elle s'est couchée.	Agreement with ELLE and SE.
Il s'est rasé.	Agreement with IL and SE.
Nous nous sommes amusé(e)s.	Agreement with NOUS and NOUS.
Vous vous êtes inquiété(e)(s).	Agreement with VOUS and VOUS.
Elles se sont blessées.	Agreement with ELLES and SE.
Ils se sont reposés.	Agreement with ILS and SE.

## THE BODY PART RULE

When reflexive verbs are followed by body parts, it's helpful to think of the subject as doing something for himself. This way, we can more easily recognize the reflexive pronoun as indirect.

We know that the reflexive pronoun is indirect because it answers the question "For whom?" Who is she brushing the hair for? For herself.

Agreement is only made when the reflexive pronoun is also direct.  
Agreement is never made with indirect object pronouns.

Elle s'est brossé les cheveux.	No agreement is made.
She brushes her hair (for herself).	SE is indirect.

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# REFLEXIVE OR RECIPROCAL VERBS WITH INDIRECT OBJECTS

When we talked about “normal” reflexive verbs, the reflexive pronouns were also direct object pronouns.

Je me suis lavé(e).	ME is a reflexive pronoun.
Agreement is made with both JE and ME.	ME is also a direct object pronoun. It answers the question “Who?”

Much like the body part rule, some reflexive verbs (and pronouns) are indirect. That means no agreement is made even though être is the helping verb.

In order to know if a reflexive or reciprocal pronoun is direct or indirect, just look at the verb. If the verb is followed by “à” or “pour” and a person or animal, it’s indirect. Indirect objects answer the questions “To whom?” or “For whom?”

Les enfants se sont téléphoné. <u>téléphoner à</u>	The children called each other.
Mes amis se sont écrit. <u>écrire à</u>	My friends wrote to each other.
Nous nous sommes donné des cadeaux. <u>donner à</u>	We gave each other gifts.
Elles se sont offert des fleurs. <u>offrir à</u>	They offered (gave) each other flowers.
Tu t’es envoyé un message. <u>envoyer à</u>	You sent yourself a message.

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Ils se sont prêté des livres. <u>prêter à</u>	They lent each other books.
Elles se sont répondu par e-mail. <u>répondre à</u>	They answered each other by email.
Vous vous êtes acheté des souvenirs. <u>acheter à/ pour</u>	You bought each other souvenirs.
Elles se sont parlé hier. parler à	They spoke to each other yesterday.
Nous nous sommes demandé des conseils. <u>demander à</u>	We asked each other for advice.

## REFLEXIVE VERBS WITH DIRECT OBJECT PRONOUNS

Let's go back to the body part rule for reference. The rule says that the reflexive verb is indirect, so no agreement is made. That will not change. However, the body part that follows is a direct object. What is she brushing? Her hair. It answers the question "What?", so *les cheveux* is a direct object. What happens if you want to replace it with a pronoun?

Elle s'est brossé les cheveux.	No agreement is made.
She brushes her hair (for herself).	SE is indirect.

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Elle s'est brossé <u>les cheveux</u> .	SE is indirect, so no agreement is made.
Elle se <u>les</u> est brossés.	LES is direct, and agreement must be made with preceding direct object pronouns.

Keep in mind that this is not an exception to the rule. We're sticking to the rule that no agreement is made with the indirect object (which could also be seen as making agreement with the subject of the sentence).

However, we now have a preceding direct object pronoun, so another rule applies, and agreement must be made.

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