

# USING THE FRENCH «MAL» AS AN INTENSIFIER



## Understanding the Many Uses of "Mal" in French

The word *mal* is just as versatile as *bien*, and understanding its various functions will improve your fluency in French.

Let's take a look at how *mal* is used as an adverb, in verbal phrases, and as a noun.

### Mal as an Adverb

As an adverb, *mal* describes actions done poorly, badly, or incorrectly. It modifies verbs and is often the opposite of *bien*.

**Placement Rule:** In the passé composé, *mal* is a short common adverb that must be placed directly after the helping verb.

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## Examples

Elle a <b>mal</b> répondu aux questions.	She answered the questions poorly.
Il chante <b>mal</b> en public.	He sings badly in public.
J'ai <b>mal</b> dormi cette nuit.	I slept badly last night.
Les élèves ont <b>mal</b> suivi les instructions.	The students poorly followed the instructions.
Le mécanicien a <b>mal</b> réparé la voiture.	The mechanic poorly repaired the car.
Ils ont <b>mal</b> interprété les résultats.	They misinterpreted the results.
Nous avons <b>mal</b> jugé la situation.	We misjudged the situation.
Elle a <b>mal</b> expliqué le problème.	She poorly explained the issue.

## Mal in Verbal Phrases

*Mal* frequently appears in idiomatic expressions or phrases with verbs to indicate difficulty, pain, or discomfort.

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## Examples

Tu <b>as mal</b> au ventre.	You have a stomachache.
Ils <b>ont du mal</b> à se concentrer au travail.	They have trouble concentrating at work.
Je vais <b>mal</b> depuis quelques jours.	I've been feeling unwell for a few days.
Cette décision <b>fait mal</b> à l'entreprise.	This decision is hurting the company.
Les enfants <b>ont du mal</b> à s'endormir.	The children are having trouble falling asleep.
Tu <b>as du mal</b> à t'organiser.	You are having trouble getting organized.
J' <b>ai du mal</b> à croire cette nouvelle.	I find it hard to believe this news.
Cette brûlure lui <b>fait mal</b> .	This burn hurts him.

## Mal as a Noun


When used as a noun, *mal* refers to harm, pain, or trouble. It can also appear in fixed expressions related to physical or emotional challenges.

**Note:** The plural of *le mal* is *les maux*.

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## Examples

Ses paroles lui ont fait <b>du mal</b> .	Her words hurt him.
Il a <b>le mal</b> du pays depuis son départ.	He is homesick since leaving.
J'ai <b>le mal</b> de mer en bateau.	I get seasick on boats.
Elle lutte contre <b>les maux</b> du passé.	She is struggling with the pains of the past.
<b>Le mal</b> qu'il a causé est irréparable.	The harm he caused is irreparable.
<b>Les maux</b> de tête persistent depuis hier.	The headaches have been persisting since yesterday.
<b>Le mal</b> des autres ne doit pas être ignoré.	The suffering of others must not be ignored.
Ce traitement vise à soulager <b>les maux</b> chroniques.	This treatment aims to relieve chronic pain.

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## Summary of using the French *mal* as an intensifier

### 1. As an Adverb

*Mal* modifies verbs to indicate something done poorly, badly, or incorrectly, often serving as the opposite of *bien*. In the *passé composé*, it follows the helping verb due to its short, common nature.

### 2. Verbal Phrases

*Mal* often appears in idiomatic expressions or phrases with verbs to express discomfort, difficulty, or pain.

### 3. As a Noun

As a noun, *le mal* refers to harm, pain, or trouble. Its plural, *les maux*, is used to describe various forms of suffering or ailments.

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