

# MASTERING THE VERB POUVOIR IN FRENCH



 LOVE LEARNING LANGUAGES

## Mastering the Verb Pouvoir in French

### Introduction to Pouvoir

The verb pouvoir is a highly versatile French verb meaning "can" or "to be able to." It expresses ability, permission, or possibility. Unlike many French verbs, pouvoir is directly followed by an infinitive without requiring the prepositions à or de. For example:

- Je peux venir demain. I can come tomorrow.
- Nous pouvons partir tôt. We can leave early.

However, pouvoir is not typically used to express general ability, such as "I can do something." In these cases, the verb savoir followed by an infinitive is more appropriate:

- Je sais nager. I can swim.
- Nous savons conduire. We can drive.

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)

 [lovelearninglanguages.com](https://lovelearninglanguages.com) • © 2025 Love Learning Languages

To make pouvoir work, the sentence usually needs additional context after the infinitive, such as specifying time, conditions, or other details:

- Je peux nager dans la piscine ce soir. I can swim in the pool tonight.

## Conjugation of Pouvoir

### Present Tense

The present tense of pouvoir is used to express specific abilities or possibilities when followed by contextual information.

Person	Conjugation	Example
Je	peux	Je peux terminer ce travail avant midi.  I can finish this work before noon.
Tu	peux	Tu peux répondre à cette question maintenant.  You can answer this question now.

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)

Il/Elle/On	peut	Elle peut manger à la cantine.  She can eat in the cafeteria.
Nous	pouvons	Nous pouvons visiter le musée cet après-midi.  We can visit the museum this afternoon.
Vous	pouvez	Vous pouvez acheter un billet en ligne.  You can buy a ticket online.
Ils/Elles	peuvent	Ils peuvent travailler dans le jardin demain.  They can work in the garden tomorrow.

## Passé Composé

Pouvoir is conjugated with avoir as a helping verb in the passé composé. It often implies that the ability or

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)

permission was exercised successfully at a specific moment.

<b>Person</b>	<b>Conjugation</b>	<b>Example</b>
Je	ai pu	J'ai pu finir le projet.  I was able to finish the project.
Tu	as pu	Tu as pu entrer.  You were able to enter.
Il/Elle/On	a pu	Il a pu parler.  He was able to speak.
Nous	avons pu	Nous avons pu partir.  We managed to leave.
Vous	avez pu	Vous avez pu venir.  You were able to come.
Ils/Elles	ont pu	Elles ont pu voir.

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)

They were able to see.

## Imperfect Tense (Imparfait)

The imperfect tense of pouvoir describes an ongoing or habitual ability in the past. It is particularly used when the ability existed, but whether or not it was exercised remains uncertain.

Person	Conjugation	Example
Je	pouvais	Je pouvais aller au parc tous les week-ends.  I could go to the park every weekend.
Tu	pouvais	Tu pouvais préparer le dîner avant 19h hier.  You could prepare dinner before 7 PM yesterday.
Il/Elle/On	pouvait	Elle pouvait rester chez elle toute la journée samedi dernier.

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)

		She could stay at home all day last Saturday.
Nous	pouvions	Nous pouvions prendre le train pour Paris chaque été.  We could take the train to Paris every summer.
Vous	pouviez	Vous pouviez visiter le château chaque année avant sa fermeture.  You could visit the castle every year before it closed.
Ils/Elles	pouvaient	Ils pouvaient étudier à la bibliothèque tous les soirs.  They could study at the library every evening.

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)

## Present Conditional (Conditionnel Présent)

The present conditional of pouvoir expresses what could happen under certain conditions. It is often used to make polite requests or suggestions.

**Note:** If the English word 'could' refers to the past, the imperfect tense is required, not the present conditional.

Person	Conjugation	Example
Je	pourrais	Je pourrais vous aider avec vos devoirs.  I could help you with your homework.
Tu	pourrais	Tu pourrais voyager en France cet été.  You could travel to France this summer.
Il/Elle/On	pourrait	Elle pourrait venir à la fête.  She could come to the party.
Nous	pourrions	Nous pourrions organiser une

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)

		<p>réunion demain.</p> <p>We could organize a meeting tomorrow.</p>
Vous	pourriez	<p>Vous pourriez expliquer cette règle.</p> <p>You could explain this rule.</p>
Ils/Elles	pourraient	<p>Ils pourraient rester debout toute la nuit à étudier s'il le fallait.</p> <p>They could stay up all night studying if they had to.</p>

[View the full lesson](#)

[Level B2 French Course for Self Learners](#)

[Advanced Level French Masterclass](#)