

FRENCH POWER VERB VOULOIR



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Mastering the Verb Vouloir in French

Introduction to Vouloir

The French verb *vouloir* means "to want" and is a versatile, commonly used verb. In this lesson, we'll cover its use, conjugation, and how its meaning changes depending on the tense. We'll also highlight a key feature: *vouloir* can be directly followed by an infinitive without requiring a preposition (*à* or *de*).

Followed Directly by an Infinitive

Unlike some other verbs in French, *vouloir* does not require a preposition (*à* or *de*) before the infinitive verb it modifies. For example:

Je veux manger. I want to eat.

Ils veulent partir tôt. They want to leave early.

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Present Tense: Expressing Wants or Desires

In this tense, *vouloir* is direct and immediate, expressing what someone wants or intends to do.

Person	Conjugation	Example
Je	veux	Je veux apprendre le français. I want to learn French.
Tu	veux	Tu veux aller au cinéma ? Do you want to go to the cinema?
Il/Elle/On	veut	Elle veut un café. She wants a coffee.
Nous	voulons	Nous voulons visiter Paris. We want to visit Paris.
Vous	voulez	Vous voulez écouter de la musique.

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		You want to listen to music.
Ils/Elles	veulent	Ils veulent voyager en Italie. They want to travel to Italy.

Passé Composé: A Completed Desire or Refusal

In the passé composé, *vouloir* refers to a specific desire in the past that is often tied to an attempt or action. It can also indicate outright refusal in the negative form.

Key Difference from the Imperfect

The passé composé often implies an actionable or concrete situation. For example, *J'ai voulu t'aider* suggests not just a desire but an attempt. The negative form (*n'a pas voulu*) implies refusal:

Il n'a pas voulu venir. He refused to come.

Person	Conjugation	Example
Je	ai voulu	J'ai voulu essayer ce restaurant.

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		I attempted to try out this restaurant.
Tu	as voulu	Tu as voulu partir trop tôt. You attempted to leave too early.
Il/Elle/On	a voulu	Il a voulu jouer au football. He tried to play football.
Nous	avons voulu	Nous avons voulu rester à la maison. We tried to stay at home.
Vous	avez voulu	Vous avez voulu changer de place. You attempted to change seats.
Ils/Elles	ont voulu	Elles ont voulu apprendre le piano.

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They tried to learn piano.

Imparfait: Ongoing or Habitual Wants in the Past

The imperfect tense describes ongoing, habitual, or general desires in the past without focusing on whether the desire was fulfilled.

Key Difference from the Passé Composé

The imperfect focuses on describing a state of mind or habitual desire without linking it to a specific action or outcome.

Quand j'étais jeune, je voulais être médecin. When I was young, I wanted to be a doctor.

Person	Conjugation	Example
Je	voulais	Je voulais devenir écrivain. I wanted to become a writer.
Tu	voulais	Tu voulais être professeur? Did you want to be a teacher?

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Il/Elle/On	voulait	Elle voulait acheter une maison. She wanted to buy a house.
Nous	voulions	Nous voulions toujours voyager. We always wanted to travel.
Vous	vouliez	Vous vouliez apprendre à danser. You wanted to learn to dance.
Ils/Elles	voulaient	Ils voulaient des vacances au soleil. They wanted a vacation in the sun.

Present Conditional: Polite or Hypothetical Wants

The conditional form of *vouloir* is used for polite requests or to express hypothetical desires.

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In this tense, *vouloir* shifts from expressing immediate desires to conveying courtesy or imagined situations:

Je voudrais apprendre le piano. I would like to learn piano.

Person	Conjugation	Example
Je	voudrais	Je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît. I would like a coffee, please.
Tu	voudrais	Tu voudrais venir avec nous? Would you like to come with us?
Il/Elle/On	voudrait	Elle voudrait une explication. She would like an explanation.
Nous	voudrions	Nous voudrions voir ce film.

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		We would like to see this movie.
Vous	voudriez	Vous voudriez parler à un agent? Would you like to speak to an agent?
Ils/Elles	voudraient	Ils voudraient visiter le musée. They would like to visit the museum.

Summary

Present Tense: Expresses straightforward, immediate wants.

Passé Composé: Indicates specific, actionable desires in the past or refusal in the negative.

Imparfait: Describes ongoing or habitual wants in the past without focusing on outcomes.

Conditional: Adds politeness or expresses hypothetical desires.

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