

FRENCH VERB «SOUHAITER»



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At first glance, the French verb **souhaiter** seems to be a direct equivalent of **to wish** in English. However, its usage in French is much more limited. In many cases, using **souhaiter** can sound too formal or unnatural, and other verbs are often preferred.

French Verb Souhaiter = Wishes or Formal Greetings

The most natural use of **souhaiter** is to express a wish for someone (like good luck, success, or happiness). It is often used in polite or formal contexts.

Common Examples:

Je vous souhaite une bonne journée.

I wish you a good day.

Nous vous souhaitons beaucoup de bonheur.

We wish you lots of happiness.

Il souhaite du succès à son fils.

He wishes his son success.

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Unlike in English, **souhaiter** is not commonly used to express a *personal desire* about oneself.

X Je souhaite aller en France cet été. (Technically correct, but sounds unnatural)

✓ J'aimerais aller en France cet été. (More natural)

✓ Je voudrais aller en France cet été.

Note: When talking about something you want for yourself, it's more natural to use "aimer", "vouloir", or "espérer".

"Souhaiter que" Requires the Subjunctive

When "souhaiter" is followed by "que", the next verb must be in the [subjunctive mood](#) because it expresses a wish, not a certainty.

Examples:

Je souhaite que tu réussisses ton examen.

I wish that you pass your exam.

Nous souhaitons que tout se passe bien.

We hope that everything goes well.

Elle souhaite que son fils soit heureux.

She wishes that her son be happy.

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Souhaiter Is NOT the Same as "To Wish" in Some Cases

In English, we often say "I wish I had more time" or "I wish you were here." In French, you cannot use "souhaiter" in these cases!

X Je souhaite avoir plus de temps. (Technically correct, but unnatural.)

✓ J'aimerais avoir plus de temps.

✓ Si seulement j'avais plus de temps!

X Je souhaite que tu sois là.

✓ J'aimerais que tu sois là.

✓ Si seulement tu étais là!

In these cases, it's better to use "aimer", "vouloir", or "si seulement".

More Natural Alternatives to Souhaiter

Espérer (to hope) - Followed by the indicative, not the subjunctive! Unlike "souhaiter", "espérer" takes the indicative because it expresses a likely reality.

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J'espère que tu vas bien.

I hope you're doing well.

Nous espérons partir en vacances cet été.

We hope to go on vacation this summer.

"Aimer" or "Vouloir" (used in the conditional)

J'aimerais visiter Paris un jour.

I'd like to visit Paris someday.

Je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît.

I'd like a coffee, please.

Si seulement..." (If only...)

Si seulement il faisait beau aujourd'hui!

I wish the weather were nice today!

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Si seulement je pouvais parler français couramment!

I wish I could speak French fluently!

Common Expressions with "Souhaiter"

Polite expressions:

Je vous souhaite une bonne année!

I wish you a happy new year!

Nous vous souhaitons un bon voyage!

We wish you a good trip!

Je te souhaite un bon rétablissement.

I wish you a speedy recovery.

In formal contexts:

Nous souhaitons votre réussite.

We wish for your success.

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Je souhaite vivement que ce projet aboutisse (subj).

I strongly wish for this project to succeed.

Other useful expressions:

Je souhaite la bienvenue à nos invités.

I welcome our guests.

Souhaitez-vous quelque chose à boire?

Would you like something to drink?

Summary:

- ✓ "Souhaiter" is mostly used for expressing wishes for others in formal or polite contexts.
- ✓ If "souhaiter" is followed by "que", the verb that follows must be in the subjunctive.
- ✓ To express personal desires or wishes about the past, "aimer", "vouloir", or "si seulement" are more natural.
- ✓ "Espérer" is a common alternative and is followed by the indicative.

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