

Sortir vs Partir vs Quitter vs Laisser



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The verbs **sortir**, **partir**, **quitter**, and **laisser** can all be translated as “**to leave**” in English, but they’re not interchangeable in French. Each verb expresses a different *type* of leaving, and they also carry additional meanings.

1. Sortir - To go out / To come out / To exit

Use **sortir** when you are **leaving a place you are inside of**. Think of it as “**to go out**” or “**to step out.**”

It focuses on the **movement from inside to outside**.

Examples:

- Je **sors** de la maison.
- I’m **going out** of the house.

- Il **sort** du cinéma.
- He’s **coming out** of the movie theater.

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- Nous **sommes sortis** hier soir.
- We **went out** last night.
- Le soleil **sort**.
- The sun **is coming out**.

When used with a direct object, you need **sortir quelque chose** which mean “to take something out.”

- Je **sors la poubelle**.
- I **take out** the trash.

2. Partir - To leave / To depart (for a destination)

Use **partir** when you're **leaving a location in order to go somewhere else**.

It often answers the question: **Where are you going? Je pars pour...**

Examples:

- Je **pars** demain matin.
- I **am leaving** tomorrow morning.
- Elle **part** pour Paris.
- She **is leaving** for Paris.

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- Nous **sommes partis** tôt.
- We **left** early.

- Tu **pars** déjà?
- **Are** you **leaving** already?

Partir focuses on **departure**, not specifically on exiting a building.

3. Quitter - To leave (a person, place, or situation) behind

Use **quitter** when you **leave someone or something** behind, meaning you **separate from it** or **stop being there**.

Quitter always takes a **direct object**.

Examples:

- Elle **quitte** la maison à 8h.
- She **leaves** the house at 8:00.

- Il a **quitté** son travail.
- He **left** his job.

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- Ils **se quittent** à la fin de la soirée.
- They **part ways** at the end of the evening.
- Il a **quitté** sa femme.
- He **left** his wife.

Important nuance: Quitter is often used in emotional or permanent “leaving” situations (relationships, jobs).

4. Laisser - To leave something or someone behind / to let / to allow

Use **laisser** when you **leave something or someone in a place** OR **allow/let** someone do something.

It does **not** mean “to depart.” It means **to leave behind** or **to permit**.

A. Leave something behind

- J’ai **laissé** mes clés sur la table.
- I **left** my keys on the table.
- Ne me **laisse** pas seul!
- Don’t **leave** me alone!

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B. To let / to allow

- **Laisse-moi** parler.
- **Let** me speak.

- Ils nous **laissent** entrer.
- They **let** us enter.

- Je te **laisse** choisir.
- I'll **let** you choose.

Comparison Chart

Verb	Meaning	Direct Object?	Example
sortir	go out / exit	optional	Je sors de la maison.
partir	leave / depart	no direct object	Il part demain.
quitter	leave someone/something	yes	Elle quitte son travail.
laisser	leave behind OR let/allow	yes	J'ai laissé mon sac. / Laisse-moi entrer.

How to remember them

- sortir = movement from inside / *to go out*
- partir = departure toward somewhere / *leave or depart*
- quitter = separate from / *leave someone or something*
- laisser = leave behind OR allow / *leave or let*

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