

Jouer à vs Faire de



Jouer à vs Faire de (and Jouer de) — The Clear, No-Confusion Guide

English speakers often ask:

- Why do we say *jouer au foot* but *faire du foot*?
- Why *jouer du piano* but also *faire du piano*?
- Why *faire de la natation* but *jouer au tennis*?

Below is the cleanest, most reliable way to understand the “French system”.

PART 1 — The REAL Core Idea

There are **two different questions** you must ask:

A) Are you talking about a GAME?

If yes, use **jouer à**. This includes anything you “play”: games, team sports, competitive activities. This is about **the game itself**.

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Examples:

- Je **joue au** foot.
- Nous **jouons à** un jeu vidéo.
- Elles **jouent aux** cartes.
- Il **joue au** basket.

B) Are you talking about DOING an activity (practice, hobby, discipline)?

If yes, use **faire de**. This is about **the activity as a practice**, not the “game.”

Examples:

- Je **fais de la** natation.
- Il **fait du** yoga.
- Nous **faisons du** cyclisme.
- Elle **fait de la** danse.

PART 2 — The Confusing but Important Truth

Some activities can be seen as:

- a **game you play, OR**
- a **sport/hobby you practice**

You will hear **both** jouer à *and* faire de, depending on meaning.

For example: **tennis, football, basketball, badminton, ping-pong, rugby, golf.**

✓ As a **GAME**, use *jouer à*

- Je **joue au** tennis.
- Ils **jouent au** foot.

✓ As a **SPORT YOU PRACTICE**, use *faire de*

- Je **fais du** tennis.
- Elle **fait du** foot.
- Nous **faisons du** basket.

Both are correct — they answer different questions.

French speakers use both depending on whether they're thinking of *the game* or *the sport/hobby*.

This is the key idea learners usually miss.

PART 3 — Activities that ALWAYS use *jouer à*

These are pure games. You “play” them, you don’t “practice” them.

- ✓ board games
- ✓ card games
- ✓ video games

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Examples:

- Je **joue à** cache-cache.
- On **joue aux** échecs.
- Ils **jouent aux** jeux vidéo.

You **cannot** say *faire de cache-cache, faire des échecs, faire du Monopoly*.

Unlike sports, board games cannot be viewed as a “practice.”

PART 4 — Activities that ALWAYS use *faire de*

These are **not** games and cannot be framed as something you “play.” These cannot take *jouer à* under any meaning.

Athletics:

- **faire de la** natation
- **faire du** cyclisme
- **faire de la** course à pied

Fitness / wellness:

- **faire du** yoga
- **faire du** Pilates
- **faire de la** musculation

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Arts:

- **faire de la** danse
- **faire du** théâtre
- **faire de la** peinture

Hobbies:

- **faire du** jardinage
- **faire de la** couture

PART 5 — Musical Instruments (both **jouer de** AND **faire de**)

Here is the clear breakdown that avoids all confusion:

1. **Jouer de + instrument = physically playing the instrument**

- Je **joue du** piano.
- Il **joue de la** batterie.
- Elle **joue de la** harpe.

This is the **standard** and most common expression.

2. **Faire de + instrument = taking lessons / practicing / being involved in the instrument as an activity**

- Je **fais du** piano depuis trois ans. (I have been taking piano lessons for three years. / I have been studying

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piano for three years.)

- Elle **fait du** violon au conservatoire. (She is taking violin lessons at the conservatory. / She is studying violin at the conservatory.)
- Il **fait de** la guitare tous les lundis. (He takes guitar lessons every Monday. / He studies guitar every Monday.)

Meaning difference:

- **jouer du piano** - playing it right now or the ability to play
- **faire du piano** - doing piano as an activity, learning/studying/being involved in it

Both are correct. They are **not** interchangeable, but both exist for different meanings.

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PART 6 — Summary Chart

activity type	jouer à	faire de	jouer de	notes
Games	✓	✗	✗	board/card/video games
Team sports	✓ (the game)	✓ (the practice)	✗	both correct, different meanings
Individual sports	✓ (the game)	✓ (the practice)	✗	same logic as team sports
Arts	✗	✓	✗	dance, theater, painting
Hobbies	✗	✓	✗	gardening, sewing
Musical instruments	✗	✓ (studying) ✓ (practice)	✓ (play) ✓ (perform)	both exist, different meanings
Singing/music theory	✗	✓	✗	not “played,” only “done”

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