

Sentir vs Se sentir vs Ressentir



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All three verbs can be translated as **“to feel”** in English, but they are used very differently.

1. Sentir - To smell / to touch / to sense

Sentir is used for **physical sensations**. It can mean:

1. To smell

- Je **sens** la fleur.
- I **smell** the flower.

- Ça **sent** le café.
- It **smells** like coffee.

2. To touch / to feel physically

- Je **sens** le vent sur mon visage.
- I **feel** the wind on my face.

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- Elle **sent** la chaleur du soleil.
- She **feels** the sun's warmth.

3. **To sense / perceive** (sometimes metaphorical)

- Je **sens** que quelque chose ne va pas.
- I **sense** that something is wrong.

Trick for English speakers:

- Don't use **sentir** to talk about emotions about yourself — that's **se sentir** or **ressentir**.

2. Se sentir - To feel (physically or emotionally, about oneself)

Se sentir is reflexive and always refers to **how someone feels**. It's used for:

1. **Physical state**

- Je **me sens** fatigué.
- I **feel** tired.

- Il **se sent** malade après le voyage.
- He **feels** sick after the trip.

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2. Emotional state

- Elle **se sent** heureuse aujourd'hui.
- She **feels** happy today.

- Je **me sens** stressé avant l'examen.
- I **feel** stressed before the exam.

Trick for English speakers:

- Never use **se sentir** to describe how someone else feels.

- Often paired with **adjectives**: *bien, mal, triste, heureux, fatigué...*

3. Ressentir - To experience / to feel (emotionally, often deeply)

Ressentir is more formal or literary. It expresses **experiencing an emotion or a physical sensation**, often intense or noticeable.

1. Emotional

- Je **ressens** de la tristesse.
- I **feel** sadness.

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- Elle **ressent** de la colère contre lui.
- She **feels** anger toward him.

2. Physical

- Il **ressent** une douleur au bras.
- He **feels** pain in his arm.

Trick for English speakers:

- Think of **ressentir** as more deliberate or intense than **se sentir**.
- Often paired with **nouns**: *de la douleur, de la tristesse, de la joie, de la peur, de la fatigue, de la tension...*

4. Reference Chart

Verb	Meaning	Use / Notes	Examples
sentir	to smell / feel physically / sense	physical perception	Je sens le parfum. Je sens le vent.
se sentir	to feel (about oneself)	personal physical or emotional state often paired with adjectives	Je me sens fatigué. Elle se sent heureuse.

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ressentir	to feel / experience (emotionally or physically)	usually intense emotion or sensation often paired with nouns	Il ressent de la peur. Je ressens une douleur au dos.
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Remember:

- **Sentir** = external / perception / senses
- **Se sentir** = internal / self / personal state
- **Ressentir** = intense / deeper feeling, often emotional

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