

Sequence of Tenses (1)

Je ferai le tour du monde quand j'aurai de l'argent.
I will travel round the world when I have some money.

LESSON

What is it?

In complex sentences where more than one conjugated verb is present, it is important to know what the relationship between both verbs is in order to establish the correct tense of the second verb in relation to the main one.

What is it like in English?

In English, various sequences of tenses are possible depending on the tense of the main verb and of the temporal relation with the second verb.

Unemployment figures will go down when growth **is** back. (present in English)

→ *Le chômage diminuera quand la croissance **reprendra**.* (future in French)

What is it like in French?

1. When the main verb is in the present tense:

The second conjugated verb can be in the past, present or future depending on when the action is taking place.

a. If actions are simultaneous, the second verb is in the present tense (indicative or subjunctive).

*L'univers est si grand que l'on ne **sait** pas s'il est fini ou infini.* (indicatif présent)

→ The universe is so large that we don't know if it is finite or infinite.

*J'insiste pour qu'elle **viene** à cette réunion.* (subjunctif présent)

→ I insist on her coming to this meeting.

b. If the action happens before the main one, the second verb can be in any of the past tenses or in the *futur antérieur* (= future perfect).

*Je pense qu'il **est parti** ce matin.* (passé composé)

→ I think he left this morning.

*Je sais qu'ils **étaient** fatigués.* (imparfait)

→ I know that they were tired.

*J'espère qu'ils **avaient pris** une bonne assurance avant de partir.* (plus-que-parfait)

→ I hope they took out a good insurance before they left.

*Les chroniques racontent que le bateau **coula** à 22 heures.* (passé simple)

→ The chronicles record that the boat sank at 10 pm.

c. If the action happens after the main one, the second verb will be in the future tense or in the present of the subjunctive.

*J'espère que vous **irez** bientôt mieux.* (futur simple)

→ I hope you will soon get better.

*Elle souhaite qu'ils **disent** la vérité.* (subjunctif présent)

→ She wishes they tell the truth.

2. When the main verb is in the future:

- a. If actions are simultaneous,** the second verb can be in the present tense (indicative or subjunctive).

*Il ira au supermarché pendant que je **suis** chez le coiffeur. (indicatif présent)*

→ He will go to the supermarket while I am at the hairdresser's.

*Il faudra qu'ils **répondent** rapidement. (subjunctif présent)*

→ They will need to answer fast.

- b. If the action happens before the main one,** the second verb can be in any of the past tenses or in the *futur antérieur*.

*Elle ira dans l'université où tu **as étudié**. (passé composé)*

→ She will attend the same university where you studied/have studied.

*Je ferai comme tu **faisais**. (imparfait)*

→ I will do as you used to do.

*Tu iras jouer quand tu **auras fini** tes devoirs. (futur antérieur)*

→ You will play when you have finished your homework.

The *futur antérieur* in French becomes the present perfect in English. You can also use the past infinitive in French, translated as an -ing form in English:

*Tu iras jouer après avoir **fini** tes devoirs.*

→ You will play after finishing your homework.

- c. If the action happens after the main one,** the second verb will be in the future tense or in the present of the subjunctive.

*J'irai où tu **iras**. (futur simple)*

→ I will go where you go.

*Il faudra qu'ils **aillent** à la mairie. (subjunctif présent)*

→ They will have to go to the Town Hall.

EXERCISES

1 Underline the correct tense in the following sentences.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>a. Il espère que vous [pouvez / pourriez] participer au séminaire.</p> <p>b. Je pense que vous [avez / ayez] tort.</p> <p>c. Le guide dit que le château [est construit / a été construit] au xv^e siècle.</p> <p>d. Il faut que vous [irez / alliez] au bureau demain.</p> | <p>e. Je répondrai quand [j'avais / j'aurai] la réponse.</p> <p>f. Nous vous téléphonerons dès que nous [rentrerons / rentrions].</p> <p>g. Le lit sera fait quand vous [êtes arrivés / arriverez].</p> <p>h. Je doute que vous [réussiriez / réussissiez].</p> |
|--|---|

2 Translate the following sentences into French.

- a. Birds abandon their nests after they have been touched.
→
- b. You will succeed after working hard.
→
- c. I will see you when I have finished with this customer.
→
- d. They will leave when they have received an answer.
→
- e. Once she has given me the key, I will be able to move in.
→
- f. She will have finished before we come back.
→

3 Conjugate the verb in the correct tense.

- a. Elle voudra que je [venir] à son anniversaire, c’est sûr !
- b. J’ignore s’il [être] libre.
- c. Voulez-vous que nous [graver] vos initiales ?
- d. Ils habitent ici depuis qu’ils [naître].
- e. Que ferez-vous quand vous [terminer] ?
- f. Je souhaite qu’elle [dire] cela plus tôt.

4 Free writing:

- a. Make a wish list for your dream holiday using the following verbs: *j’espère que, je souhaite que, je désire que, je demande que*, etc. followed by verbs in different tenses.

Mes vacances de rêve : J’espère qu’il.....
.....
.....
.....

- b. Make a To-Do list using the following verbs: *il faudra que, je ferai... quand, j’achèterai, je déménagerai... dès que*, etc. followed by verbs in different tenses.

.....
.....
.....
.....