L’impératif (Command form)

The imperative, called l'impératif in French, is a verb mood which is used to:

give an order

express a desire

make a request

offer advice

recommend something

Unlike all other French verb tenses and personal moods, the subject pronoun is not used with the imperative:

Fermez la porte. = Close the door.

Mangeons maintenant. = Let's eat now.

The above are called "affirmative commands," because they are telling someone to do something. "Negative commands," which tell someone not to do something, are made by placing ne in front of the verb and the appropriate negative adverb after the verb:

Ne parle pas != Don't speak!

N'oublions pas les livres. = Let's not forget the books.

N'ayez jamais peur. = Never be afraid.

French imperative conjugations are relatively simple. There are only three grammatical persons that can be used in the imperative: tu, nous, and vous, and most of the conjugations are the same as the present tense - the only difference is that the subject pronoun is not used in the imperative.

**-ER verbs (regular, stem-changing, spelling change, and irregular)**

The imperative conjugations for nous and vous are the same as the present indicative, and the tu form of the imperative is the indicative minus the final s (but see item 4 on this page):

Parler: (tu) parle (nous) parlons (vous) parlez

Lever (tu) lève (nous) levon (vous) levez

aller (tu) va (nous) allon (vous) allez

Verbs which are conjugated like -ER verbs (meaning that in the indicative the tu form ends in -es), such as ouvrir and souffrir, follow the same rules as -ER verbs.

ouvrir (tu) ouvre (nous) ouvron (vous) ouvrez

**-IR verbs and -RE verbs**

The imperative conjugations for all regular and most\* irregular -IR and -RE verbs are the same as the present indicative conjugations.

finir (tu) finis (nous) finissons (vous) finissez

attendre (tu) attends (nous) attendons (vous) attendez

faire (tu) fais (nous) faisons (vous) faites

\*Except for verbs conjugated like -ER verbs and the following four irregular imperative verbs:

avoir (tu) aie (nous) ayons (vous) ayez

être (tu) sois (nous) soyons (vous) soyez

The order of words in a French sentence can be very confusing due to affirmative and negative imperative constructions and object and adverbial pronouns. This lesson will teach you exactly how to order your sentences when using the imperative. Remember that there are two kinds of imperatives, affirmative and negative, and the word order is different for each of them.

Negative imperatives are easier, because their word order is the same as that of all other simple verb conjugations: any object, reflexive, and/or adverbial pronouns precede the verb and the negative structure surrounds the pronoun(s) + verb:

Finis! - Finish!

Ne finis pas ! - Don't finish!

Ne le finis pas ! - Don't finish it!

Lisez ! - Read!

Ne lisez pas ! - Don't read!

Ne le lisez pas ! - Don't read it!

Ne me le lisez pas ! - Don't read it to me!

Affirmative commands are more complicated, for several reasons.

1. The word order is for affirmative commands is different from that of all other verb tenses/moods: any pronouns follow the verb and are connected to it and to each other with hyphens.

Finis-le ! - Finish it!

Allons-y ! - Let's go!

Mangez-les ! - Eat them!

Donne-lui-en ! - Give him some!

2. The order of the pronouns in affirmative commands is slightly different from all other verb tenses/moods (see table at the bottom of the page):

Envoie-le-nous ! - Send it to us!

Expliquons-la-leur ! - Let's explain it to them!

Donnez-nous-en ! - Give us some!

Donne-le-moi ! - Give it to me!

3. The pronouns me and te change to the stressed pronouns moi and toi...

Lève-toi ! - Get up!

Parlez-moi ! - Talk to me!

Dis-moi ! - Tell me!