

TEACHING FRENCH USING MNEMONIC DEVICES

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Mnemonic devices are basically memory aides. I have always found them useful as have those who take my classes. When trying to create one, teachers should never hesitate to give free reign to their imagination. They must play with the letters and, when necessary, look for other examples that fit the rule under consideration. Sometimes one really must "cheat" a little. Words may have to be repeated or letters used that do not fit the acronym. Teachers should regularly repeat the devices in class and should require students to memorize them when feasible. Very often, after having taught one, I give extra credit on the next quiz to those who are able to reproduce the device and explain the grammatical point that it illustrates. I then require everyone to know it by heart for the following quiz or examination. Some devices may appeal to the ear, others to the eye. Some need to be used in conjunction with another one in order to make sense. The reader will find examples of these different points below.

ADJECTIVES

This is the traditional device used to help students remember which adjectives normally precede the noun.

Beauty: beau, joli, vilain

Age: jeune, nouveau, vieux

Number: premier, dernier, deuxième

Goodness: bon, gentil, mauvais, méchant, vilain

Size: court, haut, grand, gros, long, petit

Here is a French version of the preceding one.

Taille: court, haut, grand, gros, long, petit

Caractère: bon, gentil, mauvais, méchant, vilain

Âge: jeune, nouveau, vieux

Autre: autre

Nombre: premier, dernier, deuxième

Beauté: beau, joli, vilain

I have also used "BIG MAC" to supplement the preceding two.

BIG

Même

Autre

Chaque

This device is meant to help students learn the pattern in question. Because of its length, they are not asked to memorize it. It can be used several times: to introduce the direct-object indirect-object pattern, to teach direct object replacement, to teach indirect object placement, to teach double pronoun replacement and to teach past participle agreement.

Devoir quelque chose à quelqu'un
Attribuer quelque chose à quelqu'un
Demander quelque chose à quelqu'un

Raconter
Expliquer
Acheter
Dire

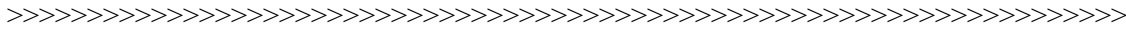
Servir
Prêter
Écrire
Envoyer
Donner

Montrer
Apporter
Indiquer
Lire

PREPOSITIONS

The following verbs require these prepositions in French.

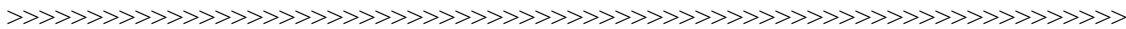
Sortir de	Monter dans
Partir de	Descendre de
Entrer dans	Diriger (se) vers



These verbs are not followed by a preposition in French.

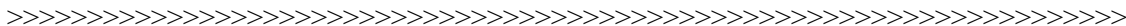
Chercher
Regarder
Attendre
Payer
Écouter
Dévisager

"**RED CAP**" is another version of this acronym. Some teachers replace "dévisager" by "demander." My students generally prefer the first one because of the way it sounds (it is *meant* to rime with the English pronunciation of "crêpe.")



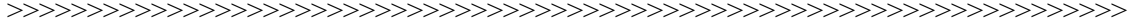
In the passive, when describing a state of being, these past participles are followed by "de".
La route est bordée d'arbres. La piscine est remplie d'eau.

Bordé de	Couvert de
Rempli de	Entouré de



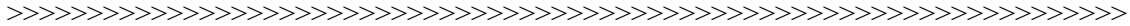
These verbs are followed by the preposition "à".

Assister	Téléphoner	Répondre
Obéir	Poser une question	Échouer
Réussir		



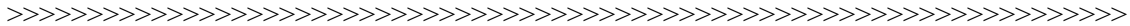
When these verbs are followed by an infinitive, no preposition is used.

Aller	Aimer	Préférer
Détester	Entendre	Espérer
Adorer	Désirer	



When these verbs are followed by an infinitive, the preposition "de" is used.

Parler	Choisir
Essayer	Oublier
Accepter	Refuser
Cesser	Promettre
Éviter	S'arrêter



When these verbs are followed by an infinitive, the preposition "à" is used.

Commencer	Hésiter	Inviter	Renoncer	Arriver	Continuer
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NOUNS

The following nouns are masculine in the singular, feminine in the plural. "ADO" is short for "adolescent" in French.

Amour	Délice	Orgue	un grand orgue les grandes orgues
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PRONOUNS

DISJUNCTIVE PRONOUNS

After one of these verbs, a disjunctive pronoun is used to replace a proper name or a noun designating a person. Je pense à Paul. Je pense à lui. Je tiens à ma mère. Je tiens à elle.

Penser à
Être à
Tenir à

After one of these verbs, a disjunctive pronoun is used to replace a proper name or a noun designating a person. Students should be told who Édith Piaf was and that the word also means "sparrow".

Présenter (se) à
Intéresser (s') à
Adresser (s') à
Fier (se) à

ADVERBIAL PRONOUNS

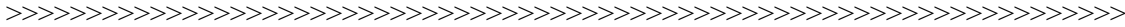
This device and the one that follows are based largely on sound association. Both are to be pronounced like the Japanese currency.

Yen

When "en" and all other prepositions other than "de" are followed by a noun designating a place, they are replaced by the pronoun "y".
Elles vont en France/à Paris/au concert. Elles y vont.

dEN

When "de" is followed by a noun designating a place, it is replaced by the pronoun "en".
Ils arrivent du Portugal/de Rome/du match. Ils en arrivent.



The pronoun "en" is used to replace a word following one of these words or expressions:

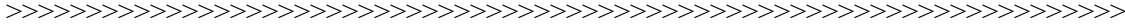
Adverbe de quantité

Numéro

Expression de quantité

Expression indéterminée [certains(es), un(e) autre, d'autres, plusieurs, la plupart, quelques]:

De



When teaching the order of pronouns, students rarely forget that "y" always precedes "en" when they are told to think about the Japanese currency "yen".

VERBS

AUXILIARY VERBS

When one of these verbs is followed by an object, "avoir" is used.

J'ai passé un examen. Nous avons monté les marches. J'ai sorti la voiture du garage.

Passer

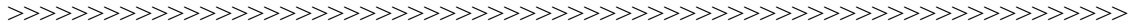
Monter

Descendre

Rentrer

Retourner

Sortir



DR&MRSVANDERTRAMPP

is a common device used to designate verbs conjugated with "être". Many textbooks also use the "house of 'être'" to teach this grammatical point. They present a picture of a house with individuals illustrating many of the verbs: arriving, entering, going upstairs, coming downstairs, leaving.

Descendre

Sortir

Devenir

Rentrer

Rester

Venir

Entrer

Aller

Mourir

Arriver

Revenir

Monter

Retourner

Naître

Tomber

Partir

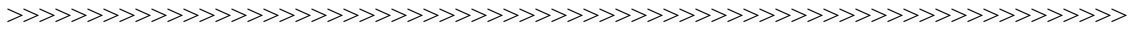
Passer

SPELLING AND ACCENT CHANGES

SHOE/BOOT/L-SHAPED VERBS

This device is visual in nature. Students must imagine what a boot, a high top shoe or an "L" looks like. Teachers can draw one of each on the board. The first, second and third person singular and the third person plural forms require the same change in the present tense (both indicative and subjunctive).

comme espérer: célébrer, posséder, préférer, protéger, répéter, révéler, suggérer, etc.
comme essayer: employer, ennuyer, essayer, nettoyer, payer, etc.
comme acheter: achever, élever, geler, lever, mener, peser, promener, etc.
comme jeter et appeler: chanceler, épeler, projeter, etc.



This device is oral in nature and is taught in conjunction with the next one. When the letter "g" is followed by an "a" or an "o", one adds an "e" after the "g". It is generally used when teaching verbs.

AGO

When the letter "c" is followed by an "a" or an "o", one adds a cedilla to the "c". It, too, is generally used when teaching verbs.

ACO

IRREGULAR CONJUGATIONS

In the present tense, these verbs are conjugated as is a verb from the first group.

Accueillir

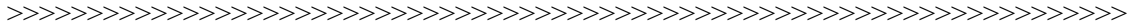
Couvrir

Offrir

Ouvrir

Redécouvrir

Souffrir

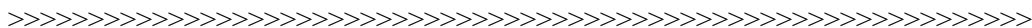


One uses the first three letters of the infinitive to form the present singular, the first four letters to form the plural.

Mentir **Dormir**

Sortir **Partir**

Sentir **Servir**



In order to form the singular, one eliminates the last three letters and adds the endings "s", "s", "t". In order to form the plural, one eliminates the last four letters and adds "gn" plus the endings "ons", "ez", "ent". In order to form the past participle, one eliminates the last three letters and adds a « t ».

Pl aindre (se) de	C raindre	E nfreindre
A tteindre	R ejoindre	P eindre
T eindre (se)	É teindre	A streindre qn à faire qch

NEGATION

The second part of the negation ("pas") can be dropped with these verbs in certain situations. **COPS** is a device meant to help students recognize a full negation when reading literary texts.

- C**esser
- O**ser
- P**ouvoir
- S**avoir

Ils ne cessent de parler. Nous n'avons pu aller à la plage.

CONJUNCTIONS

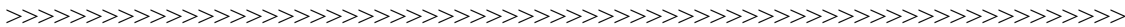
The conjunction "à ce que" is used after these verbs. Je tiens à ce que tu fasses la vaisselle.

- C**onsentir
- s'**Opposer
- s'**Attendre
- T**enir

TENSES

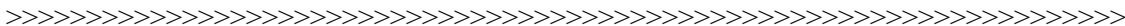
Even though there is no conjunction that begins with "g", this device is most helpful when teaching students that when one verb is in the present, the other is in the present and that when one is in the future, the other is in the future. At this point, they have not learned the future perfect.

G Quand	P endant que
L orsque	A ussitôt que
A ussitôt que	T ant que
D ès que	



The association of these two words occasionally helps students to know when to use the imperfect tense.

[Imparfait=Description] **I.D.**



If "was", "were" or "would" can be used in English to translate the French verb, the imperfect is required.

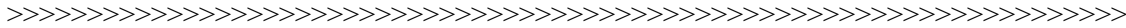
Was/Were/Would

**I
M
P**

This device is used in conjunction with the preceding one. The verb that directly follows the conjunction "pendant que" must be in the imperfect. The verb in the independent clause can be in either the imperfect or the preterit, depending upon the meaning of the sentence.

Pendant que tu dormais, je dormais aussi.
Pendant que tu dormais, j'ai regardé la télé et j'ai fait la vaisselle.

**Pendant que
I
M
P**



The imperfect is used with the following verbs or in the following situations.

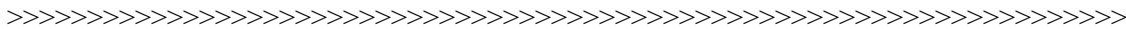
Heure	Pendant que
Used to	Émotion
	Action habituelle
WAS	Venir de
	Émotion
	Description

Keith Mason suggests this device for helping students know when to use the imperfect while narrating in the past (16).

**Continuous actions
Habitual Actions
Emotions
Age
Time
Endless Actions
Descriptions**

Constance Knop offers this acronym for the use of the imperfect (341).

Repeated Interrupted Continual/Continuing Habitual



If the verb that follows "si" is in the present, the verb in the main clause can be in the present, imperative or future. When teaching body parts, I teach my students the word "pif" and the expression "faire quelque chose au pif".

Présent Impératif Futur

Mason, Keith. 1996. "Mnemonics for Mastering the Imperfect and Irregular Future in French, Italian and Spanish," *Mosaic. A Journal for Language Teachers*, 3, 3: 16-17.

Knop, Constance K. 1971. "Mnemonic Devices in Teaching French." *The French Review*. 44, 2: 337-42.