

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

Âge: jeune, nouveau, vieux

Nombre: premier, dernier, deuxième

Caractère: bon, gentil, mauvais, méchant, vilain

Autre: autre

Beauté: beau, joli, vilain

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

BIG

Même

Autre

Chaque

ADVERBS

This device is visual in nature and is designed to help students remember that "mieux", not "meilleur", is the irregular comparative form of "bien."

bIEn

mIEux

ADVERBS OF QUANTITY

These adverbs of quantity are followed only by "de" ("d").

Plus	Moins	Combien
Un peu	Autant	Assez
Tant	Trop	Beaucoup

DEFINITE ARTICLES

These verbs are never followed by the partitive.

Préférer	Haïr
Adorer	Aimer
	Détester

INDEFINITE ARTICLES

Two versions for this device exist because one of them may offend some people. If the predicate nominative is not modified, one uses the appropriate subject pronoun: "il(s), elle(s)." If it is modified, one uses "ce(c')." Il est Français. C'est un Français. Elles sont ingénieurs. Ce sont de bonnes ingénieurs.

Parti politique Citoyen(neté)
Occupation Religion
Religion Occupation
Nationalité Parti politique

INDIRECT AND DIRECT OBJECT PRONOUNS

THE THREE "As"

The three "As" are used when teaching direct objects ("compléments d'objet direct" or COD in French) because they help students recognize them. If an object is preceded by one of these words and nothing else, it is direct. If one of these words is preceded by a preposition or if there is a number, a partitive, an expression of quantity, etc. before the noun, a COD cannot be used.

A COD: Nous chantons l'*/cet/* ton air.

Not a COD: Nous jouons avec tes amis. Nous lisons trois poèmes/des poèmes/beaucoup de ces poèmes..

Article défini
Adjectif possessif
Adjectif démonstra-

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 rhyme with the English pronunciation of "crêpe.")

when describing a state of being, these past participles are used: *bordé d'arbres*. La piscine est remplie d'eau.

Rempli de Entouré de

These verbs are followed by the preposition "à".

Assister	Téléphoner	Répondre
Obéir	Poser une question	Échouer
Réussir		

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

Aller	Aimer	Préférer
Détester	Entendre	Espérer
Adorer	Désirer	

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

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

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

Commencer Hésiter Inviter Renoncer Arriver Continuer

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

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 designnnating 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.

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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

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DR&MR SVANDER TRAMPP

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

Naitre

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, essuyer, 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 if they were from the first group.

Accueillir

Couvrier

Offrir

Ouvrir

Redécouvrir

Souffrir

uses the first

the letters

2

Sortır Sınıfı

10

Partır Gemeinde

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 ».

Plaindre (se) de
Atteindre
Teindre (se)

Craindre Rejoindre Éteindre

Enfreindre
Peindre
Astreindre 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.

Cesser
Oser
Pouvoir
Savoir

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.

Consentir
s'Opposer
s'Attendre
Tenir

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	Pendant que
Lorsque	Aussitôt que
Aussitôt que	Tant que
Dès que	

perfecttense.

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

Was/**W**ere/**W**ould

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.

H eure	P endant que
U sed to	Émotion
	Action habituelle
W AS	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 **I**nterrupted **C**ontinual/**C**ontinuing **H**abitual

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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 **I**mpérATif **F**utur

After my students understand that a "si" clause in the present can be followed by the present, the future or an imperative, I repeat the following statements in order to help them remember the other sequences of tenses.

1. Temps simple d'un côté, temps simple de l'autre. Terminaisons de l'imparfait d'un côté, terminaisons de l'imparfait de l'autre. Si j'avais faim, je mangerais quelque chose.
They also find this device most useful: Imperfect Condo.

2. Temps composé d'un côté, temps composé de l'autre. Terminaisons de l'imparfait d'un côté, terminaisons de l'imparfait de l'autre. Si j'avais eu soif, j'aurais bu quelque chose.
The present is used after «depuis quand». The students have not as yet learned the imperfect. PDQ (the chain of stores called PDQ or «Dairy Queen» or the expression «Pretty Darn Quick») le Présent + Depuis Quand

MOODS

The pleonastic or expletive "ne" is used after these conjunctions.

CAMP

de Crainte que Avant que à Moins que de Peur que

The pleonastic or expletive "ne" is used after these verbs.

CRAP [CARP] [PARC]

Craindre Redouter Avoir Peur

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Knop suggests this acronym when teaching the subjunctive: **WEDDINGS**

Will: souhaiter, vouloir; il est souhaitable, il faut

Emotion: être content, heureux, ravi; il est dommage, triste

Desire: aimer, désirer, souhaiter

Doubt: douter, il est douteux, ne pas être sûr, certain, clair

Interrogative: Croyez-vous, Pensez-vous, Trouvez-vous, Est-il sûr, certain, clair

[Impersonal expressions: il est bon, essentiel, naturel, utile]

Negation: ne pas croire, penser, trouver, ne pas être sûr, certain, clair

General avoir besoin, chercher, existe-t-il, y a-t-il,

characteristics for things or people that one is not sure exists:

Superlative

According to Knop, "The teacher may add that in a wedding two *different* persons are involved (reinforcing the idea of the subjunctive being used only with two different subjects) and that in French the 'ring' that joins these two separate people in the wedding is *que*" (340).

Mnemonic devices are very useful when teaching a new concept. Since they are primarily descriptive in nature, students must be given ample opportunity to internalize them. After they have had sufficient work with the principle involved, they will first develop monitors that lead to automatic self-correction and finally to errorless use of it. This is, after all, the ultimate goal of language instruction.

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.

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