

Talking through your background at an interview

French A2 (elementary) · Lesson

Quick answer: In a French job interview, talk about finished jobs with the *passé composé* (j'ai travaillé pendant deux ans), and about what you still do with the *présent plus depuis* (je travaille ici depuis 2022). Add skills with *je sais* and *je peux*, and give your hours as *de 9 h à 17 h*.

Level: French A2 (CEFR elementary) · **Standards:** CEFR A2, Spoken interaction

How do you talk about your work experience in French?

In an interview, the recruiter wants facts: where you worked, what you did, and for how long. Use the *passé composé* for jobs that are over. Use the *présent* for what you still do today.

Rule: finished jobs

Take *avoir* in the *présent* and add a past participle: j'ai travaillé, j'ai vendu. Add a length of time with *pendant* (for): pendant deux ans.

Infinitive	Passé composé	Meaning
travailler	j'ai travaillé	I worked
vendre	j'ai vendu	I sold
faire	j'ai fait	I did, I made
être	j'ai été	I was
apprendre	j'ai appris	I learned
gérer	j'ai géré	I managed

Examples

- Pendant deux ans, j'ai travaillé dans une boulangerie à Annecy. — For two years, I worked in a bakery in Annecy.
- J'ai été serveuse dans un hôtel à Dakar. — I was a waitress in a hotel in Dakar.

How do you say how long you have been doing something?

Rule: depuis + present

When something began in the past and *still goes on*, French uses the **present** with depuis. Je travaille ici depuis 2022. — I have been working here since 2022. To say when it started, use il y a with the passé composé: J'ai commencé il y a trois ans. — I started three years ago.

Un parcours dans le temps



Finished actions use the passé composé; an action that continues until today uses depuis + present.

Watch out

English says "I *have worked* here for three years". French does not use the passé composé for that: say Je travaille ici depuis trois ans. Never write j'ai travaillé depuis for a job you still have.

How do you talk about skills and working hours?

French	English
un poste, un entretien	a position, an interview
un CV, une lettre de motivation	a résumé, a cover letter
à temps plein, à temps partiel	full-time, part-time
les horaires (m. pl.)	working hours
je suis disponible	I am available
je sais utiliser...	I know how to use...
je peux travailler...	I can work...

Les horaires de Fatou	
lundi	9 h - 13 h
mardi	14 h - 18 h
mercredi	libre
samedi	8 h - 16 h
dimanche	repos

A part-time schedule: hours are written with h, as in 9 h - 13 h.

Examples

- Je sais parler anglais et wolof. — I can speak English and Wolof.
- Je peux travailler le samedi, de 8 h à 16 h. — I can work on Saturdays, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Culture note

A French résumé usually fits on one page. The interviewer will say vous to you, so answer with vous too, and a common opening is Parlez-moi de votre parcours. — Tell me about your background.

Zoé's tip

Start each answer with a time marker: Depuis 2021..., Pendant deux ans..., Il y a un an.... It makes your story clear and gives you a second to think!

Key points to remember

- Finished jobs take the passé composé: j'ai vendu, j'ai été, j'ai appris.
- Depuis + present describes something that started in the past and continues now.
- Il y a + duration + passé composé says how long ago something began.
- Pendant gives the length of a finished period: pendant deux ans.
- Hours use the 24-hour style with h: de 9 h à 17 h; address the interviewer with vous.

Talking Through Your Background at an Interview: frequently

asked questions

How do you say “I have worked here for two years” in French?

Use the present with depuis: Je travaille ici depuis deux ans. French does not use the passé composé when the job continues. English speakers often make that mistake.

What is the difference between depuis, pendant and il y a?

Depuis + present means “for/since” and the action goes on. Pendant gives the length of a finished period. Il y a means “ago” and goes with the passé composé.

Should I use tu or vous in a job interview?

Use vous with the interviewer, even if they are young. Their questions will be in vous form too: Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait chez votre ancien employeur ?

How do you write working hours in French?

Write the hour followed by h: 9 h, 17 h 30. To give a range, say de 9 h à 17 h. Official schedules use the 24-hour clock, so 5 p.m. is 17 h.

How do you say what you can and cannot do at work?

Use je sais + infinitive for a learned skill: je sais conduire un chariot. Use je peux + infinitive for availability: je peux commencer lundi.