

Turning verbs into nouns for news style

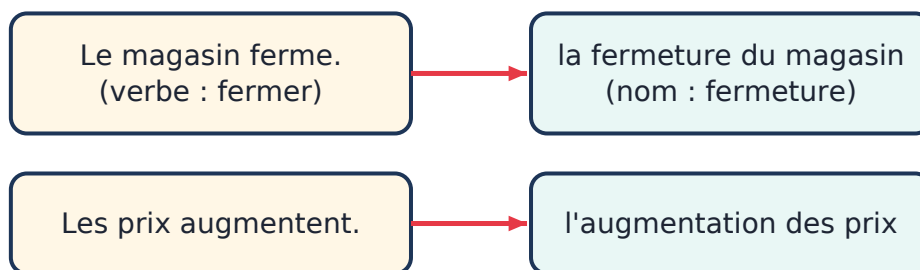
French B2 (upper intermediate) · Lesson

Quick answer: French nominalization replaces a verb with its noun, as in augmenter to l'augmentation. It makes a sentence shorter and more formal. Press headlines drop articles and helper verbs, often use the present for past events, and show the passive with a participle alone, as in Trois cyclistes blessés.

Level: French B2 (CEFR upper intermediate) · **Standards:** CEFR B2, Reading

What is nominalization and why does the press love it?

Nominalization means replacing a verb with the noun built on it: Les prix augmentent. becomes l'augmentation des prix. The noun group is shorter, sounds more formal and fits easily into a headline, a report or a DELF B2 reading text. French journalists use it daily, so recognizing the pairs is essential for reading.



Two sentences become noun groups: the verb is replaced by its noun.

Verb	Noun	Meaning
augmenter	l'augmentation (f.)	increase
licencier	le licenciement (m.)	dismissal
réduire	la réduction (f.)	reduction
décider	la décision (f.)	decision
arriver	l'arrivée (f.)	arrival
échouer	l'échec (m.)	failure
croître	la croissance (f.)	growth
fermer, ouvrir	la fermeture, l'ouverture (f.)	closure, opening

Rule: suffix and gender

Endings tell you the gender. **-tion, -sion, -ance, -ence, -ture, -ée** are feminine; **-ment, -age** are masculine. Some nouns are irregular, so learn them with their article: le départ, l'échec, l'achat.

How does the rest of the sentence change?

The subject of the verb moves after the noun, introduced by *de* or *par*. The direct object follows with *de*. Time clauses become prepositional phrases.

Examples

- Le gouvernement a réduit les impôts. → la réduction des impôts par le gouvernement — the reduction of taxes by the government
- Quand le ministre est arrivé, la foule a applaudi. → À l'arrivée du ministre, la foule a applaudi. — On the minister's arrival, the crowd applauded.
- Parce que l'usine a fermé, deux cents personnes ont perdu leur emploi. → À cause de la fermeture de l'usine, deux cents personnes ont perdu leur emploi.

How do you read a headline?

Headlines drop articles and often drop the verb altogether. A past event may be written in the present, and a participle alone can replace *être* + participle.

LA UNE

Hausse des loyers à Montréal : les locataires inquiets

Le chapeau : une ou deux phrases qui résument l'article.

Le titre : noms, peu de verbes, pas d'article.

Le texte : phrases complètes avec des verbes.

Parts of a French newspaper article: headline, lead and body.

Headline	Full sentence
Hausse des prix du gaz en Bretagne	Les prix du gaz ont augmenté en Bretagne.
Trois cyclistes blessés à Lyon	Trois cyclistes ont été blessés à Lyon.
Un maire suspendu	Un maire a été suspendu.

How is the passive formed?

Rule: être + past participle

Use être in the tense you need + past participle, which agrees with the subject. The agent comes after par: La loi a été votée par l'Assemblée. — The law was passed by the Assembly. Other tenses follow: est, était, sera + participle. The agent is omitted when it is unknown or unimportant.

Watch out

English speakers translate *the opening of the shop* with an *-ing* form and write l'ouvrant du magasin. French needs a real noun: l'ouverture du magasin. Also do not forget agreement in the passive: Les mesures ont été annoncées.

Culture note

The front page of a French paper is called la une. Under the headline, the short summary is le chapeau. Press articles are a standard text type in the DELF B2 reading paper.

Zoé's tip

To decode a headline, find the noun that replaced a verb and ask: who did what? To write one, keep the strongest noun and delete the article and the helper verb.

Key points to remember

- Most nouns end in -tion, -ment, -ance, -ure or -ée; some are irregular, like le départ and l'échec.
- Endings tell the gender: -tion and -ance are feminine, -ment and -age masculine.
- The former subject follows the noun with de or par: la réduction des impôts par le gouvernement.
- The passive is être + past participle agreeing with the subject.
- Headlines drop articles and the verb être.

Turning verbs into nouns for news style: frequently asked questions

What is nominalization in French?

It is the replacement of a verb by a noun, for example arriver by l'arrivée. The result is a shorter, more formal and more written style.

How do you know whether a derived noun is masculine or feminine?

Look at the ending. Nouns in -tion, -sion, -ance and -ure are feminine, while nouns in -ment and -age are masculine. Learn irregular nouns with their article.

Why do French headlines have no verb?

A headline must be short and strong, so it keeps the nouns that carry the information and removes articles and auxiliary verbs. Readers rebuild the full sentence.

How do you form the passive?

Conjugate être in the tense you need and add the past participle, which agrees with the subject. Add par plus the agent if it matters.

Is the present used for past events in headlines?

Yes. Headlines often use the present to make an event feel immediate, and the full article then switches to the passé composé.