

Leaving, sleeping, opening: irregular -ir verbs

French 2 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Partir, sortir, dormir, servir and sentir are irregular -ir verbs: they drop the final consonant in the singular (je pars, tu pars, il part) and bring it back in the plural (nous partons). Ouvrir and offrir take -er endings. In the passé composé, partir and sortir use être; the others use avoir.

Level: French 2 (high school, ACTFL Novice High) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice High, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

How do you conjugate partir, sortir, dormir, servir and sentir?

Rule: short singular, full plural

These verbs are irregular. In the singular, drop the last consonant of the stem and add -s, -s, -t. In the plural, keep that consonant and add -ons, -ez, -ent.

	partir	sortir	dormir	servir	sentir
je	pars	sors	dors	sers	sens
tu	pars	sors	dors	sers	sens
il / elle	part	sort	dort	sert	sent
nous	partons	sortons	dormons	servons	sentons
vous	partez	sortez	dormez	servez	sentez
ils / elles	partent	sortent	dorment	servent	sentent

Singular: short stem

je dors
tu dors
il dort

Plural: full stem

nous dormons
vous dormez
ils dorment

The stem grows by one consonant in the plural.

Examples

- Je **pars** pour Québec vendredi. — I leave for Québec on Friday.

- Ils **sortent** du gymnase à six heures. — They leave the gym at six.
- Ce café **sert** des crêpes au sirop d'érable. — This café serves maple syrup crêpes.
- Je me **sens** fatigué ce matin. — I feel tired this morning.

What else can these verbs mean?

Sortir means to go out, to leave a place or to date: Elle sort avec Malik depuis juin. — She has been dating Malik since June. Partir needs a place with de, pour or à: Nous partons de Nantes pour Bordeaux. Sentir also means to smell, and se sentir describes a feeling. Mentir (to lie) and s'endormir (to fall asleep) follow the same pattern: je mens, je m'endors.

Which verbs behave like ouvrir?

Ouvrir, offrir, couvrir, découvrir and souffrir end in -ir but take the endings of -er verbs: j'ouvre, tu ouvres, il ouvre, nous ouvrons, vous ouvrez, ils ouvrent. Their participles end in -ert: ouvert, offert, couvert, découvert, souffert.

Do these verbs use être or avoir in the passé composé?

être (agrees)

partir, sortir
elle est partie

avoir (no agreement)

dormir, servir, sentir, ouvrir
elle a dormi

Two auxiliaries.

Participles: parti, sorti, dormi, servi, senti. With être the participle agrees with the subject: Awa est partie. Nous sommes sortis. With avoir it does not: Elle a dormi. When sortir has a direct object, it takes avoir: J'ai sorti mon vélo.

Common mistake

Partir has no direct object. Say Je pars de la maison or Je quitte la maison, never Je pars la maison. Also avoid Elle a parti.

Culture note

French train stations show departures on a board called le tableau des départs, with times in 24-hour format, like 17 h 45.

Zoé's tip

Hold your pen: the plural is a long word with a long stem, the singular is the short one. Say dors, dors, dort three times, then dormons, dormez, dorment.

Key points to remember

- Singular endings are -s, -s, -t after a shortened stem: je dors, il dort.
- The plural keeps the consonant: nous dormons, vous dormez, ils dorment.
- Ouvrir, offrir, couvrir, découvrir and souffrir take -e, -es, -e like -er verbs.
- Participles: parti, sorti, dormi, servi, senti, but ouvert, offert, couvert.
- Partir and sortir take être in the passé composé; dormir, servir, sentir and ouvrir take avoir.

Leaving, Sleeping, Opening: Irregular -ir Verbs: frequently asked questions

How do you conjugate partir in the present?

Je pars, tu pars, il part, nous partons, vous partez, ils partent. The singular drops the t and uses -s, -s, -t. The plural keeps the t.

Which auxiliary do dormir and sortir take?

Dormir takes avoir: elle a dormi. Sortir takes être when it has no object: nous sommes sortis. With a direct object it takes avoir: j'ai sorti la poubelle.

Is ouvrir regular or irregular?

It is irregular because it ends in -ir but takes -er endings: j'ouvre, tu ouvres, nous ouvrons. The participle is ouvert. Offrir, couvrir, découvrir and souffrir follow the same pattern.

What is the difference between partir and quitter?

Partir has no direct object: je pars de Lyon. Quitter needs one: je quitte Lyon. Both can translate as to leave.

How do you say "I feel tired"?

Use the reflexive verb se sentir: je me sens fatigué (or fatiguée). In the passé composé it uses être: elle s'est sentie fatiguée.