

# Describing your morning routine in French

## French 2 (high school) · Lesson

**Quick answer:** A reflexive verb has a pronoun that matches the subject: je me lève, tu te laves, elle s'habille. The pronoun goes before the verb, and ne ... pas surrounds both: je ne me lève pas. In the passé composé, reflexive verbs always use être, and the participle usually agrees: elle s'est levée.

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

## What is a reflexive verb?

A reflexive verb describes an action that the subject does to itself, so the verb needs a second pronoun that points back at the subject. Many daily-routine verbs are reflexive in French even when English does not say "myself": se lever is "to get up", literally "to raise oneself". You can spot them in a dictionary by the little se in front.

### Definition

A reflexive verb is conjugated with a pronoun of the same person as the subject: me, te, se, nous, vous, se. Before a vowel or a mute h, me, te, se become m', t', s'.

| Subject     | se lever    | s'habiller     |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| je          | me lève     | m'habille      |
| tu          | te lèves    | t'habilles     |
| il / elle   | se lève     | s'habille      |
| nous        | nous levons | nous habillons |
| vous        | vous levez  | vous habillez  |
| ils / elles | se lèvent   | s'habillent    |



*A school-day morning, one reflexive verb at a time.*

### Everyday reflexive verbs

- se réveiller — to wake up
- se laver, se doucher — to wash, to take a shower
- se brosser les dents — to brush one's teeth
- se coiffer — to do one's hair
- se dépêcher — to hurry
- se coucher — to go to bed
- se promener — to go for a walk (je me promène)

## Where does the reflexive pronoun go?

### Rule: placement

The pronoun sits directly before the verb it belongs to. In the negative, ne goes before the pronoun and pas after the verb. With an infinitive, the pronoun stays in front of the infinitive and still matches the subject: Je vais **me** coucher. — I'm going to go to bed.

présent : Je ne **me** lève pas.

passé : Je ne **me** suis pas levé.

infinitif : Je vais **me** lever.

*The pronoun me always stays next to the verb it belongs to.*

## How do reflexive verbs work in the passé composé?

All reflexive verbs use être as the helper, and the pronoun comes before it. The participle agrees with the subject, because the pronoun stands for the same person: Elle **s'est levée**. Ils **se sont réveillés**. Nous (girls) **nous sommes dépêchées**. In the negative: Je **ne me suis pas** couché.

### Common mistake

English says "I wash my hands"; French says Je me lave **les** mains. The body part takes the article, not mes. When a body part follows, the participle does not agree: Elle s'est brossé les dents. Without it, it does: Elle s'est lavée.

### Culture note

A classic French breakfast is light: a tartine with butter or jam and a bowl of hot chocolate or coffee. Many teenagers have it standing up when they are late.

### Zoé's tip

If you can add "myself" or "herself" in English ("she washes *herself*"), the verb is reflexive. Match the pronoun to the subject and read it out loud: je me, tu te, elle se. The rhythm sticks.

### Key points to remember

- Reflexive pronouns: me, te, se, nous, vous, se (m', t', s' before a vowel or mute h).
- The pronoun comes right before the conjugated verb or before the infinitive.
- Negation wraps the pronoun and verb: je ne me lève pas.
- Passé composé: pronoun + être + participle (elle s'est réveillée).
- With a body part, French uses the article: je me lave les mains.

## Describing Your Morning Routine in French: frequently asked questions

### What are the reflexive pronouns in French?

They are me, te, se, nous, vous and se, matching je, tu, il/elle, nous, vous and ils/elles. Before a vowel or mute h, me, te and se become m', t' and s', as in je m'habille.

### Where does the reflexive pronoun go in a sentence?

It goes directly before the verb. In the negative, ne comes before it and pas after the verb: je ne me lève pas. With aller plus an infinitive, it sits before the infinitive: je vais me coucher.

### Which helping verb do reflexive verbs use in the passé composé?

Always être. The pronoun stays before the helper: elle s'est réveillée, nous nous sommes couchés. The participle usually agrees with the subject.

### Why does elle s'est brossé les dents have no agreement?

The direct object is les dents, which comes after the verb, so the reflexive pronoun is only an indirect object. The participle agrees only when the pronoun is the direct object, as in elle s'est lavée.

### How do you say I wash my hands in French?

Say je me lave les mains. French uses the article les with parts of the body, not the word mes. The pronoun me already tells us whose hands they are.