

Doing two things at once with -ant

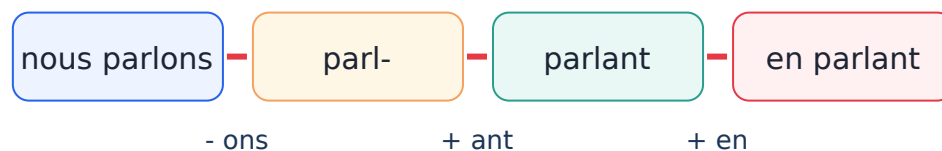
French 3 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: The French present participle ends in -ant and is built from the nous form of the present tense: nous parlons gives parlant. With en in front, it becomes the gérondif, which says that two actions happen at the same time or shows how something is done: Elle chante en cuisinant. Only être, avoir and savoir are irregular: étant, ayant, sachant.

Level: French 3 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Low) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Low, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

How do you form the present participle?

Take the nous form of the present tense, remove -ons, and add -ant.



From the nous form to the gérondif.

Infinitive	Participle	Gérondif
parler	parlant	en parlant
finir	finissant	en finissant
prendre	prenant	en prenant
manger	mangeant	en mangeant
faire	faisant	en faisant
être	étant	en étant
avoir	ayant	en ayant
savoir	sachant	en sachant

What does the gérondif express?

Rule

The gérondif (en + -ant) never changes and refers to the subject of the main verb. It answers

while doing what? or how?

Zoé fait ses devoirs

en écoutant du jazz

temps

Same subject, same time.

Examples

- Elle révisé **en écoutant** du jazz. — She studies while listening to jazz. (simultaneity)
- Il a appris le français **en regardant** des séries. — He learned French by watching shows. (means)
- **En partant** maintenant, tu seras à l'heure. — If you leave now, you will be on time. (condition)
- **Tout en riant**, elle a corrigé l'erreur. — Laughing all the while, she fixed the mistake. (tout en stresses the contrast)
- Elle sourit **en ne disant** rien. — negative: ne and pas surround the participle.

The gérondif is lighter than a full clause. Instead of Elle mange pendant qu'elle lit, French speakers say Elle mange **en lisant**. It saves a subject and a conjugated verb, which is why it is so common in speech, in news writing and in instructions. Remember the limit: if two different people act, you must keep pendant que.

Pronouns go before the participle: en se levant, en le voyant.

What about the participle without en?

The participle can also open a written sentence to give a reason. **Étant** malade, Inès est restée au lit. — Being sick, Inès stayed in bed. The compound form uses ayant or étant plus a participle:

Ayant fini son projet, Malik est sorti. — Having finished.

Common mistake

English uses -ing everywhere, but French does not. *I am reading* is Je lis or Je suis en train de lire, never Je suis lisant. After a preposition other than en, use the infinitive: sans dire, avant de partir, après avoir mangé.

A proverb

French speakers love this structure in sayings: C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron. —

You become a blacksmith by forging. It means that you improve by doing.

Zoé's tip

Before writing -ant, ask: is the doer the same person as the main subject? If yes, use en + -ant; if not, use a clause with pendant que.

Key points to remember

- Formation: nous form minus -ons, plus -ant (finissons gives finissant).
- Three irregular participles: étant, ayant, sachant.
- En + participle (gérondif) is invariable and shares the subject of the main verb.
- It expresses simultaneity, manner or means, and sometimes cause or condition.
- English -ing is not always -ant: after a preposition other than en, French uses the infinitive.

Doing Two Things at Once With -ant: frequently asked questions

How do you form the present participle in French?

Take the nous form of the present tense, drop -ons and add -ant: nous finissons gives finissant. Only être (étant), avoir (ayant) and savoir (sachant) are irregular.

What does the gérondif express?

The gérondif, en + participle, expresses an action happening at the same time as the main verb, the means or manner, and sometimes cause or condition. Il lit en marchant.

Does the gérondif agree with the subject?

No. After en the participle is invariable: elles chantent en dansant. It must describe the same subject as the main verb.

What is the difference between the gérondif and the participle alone?

The participle alone, often in writing, gives a reason: étant malade, ayant fini. Some participles also work as adjectives and agree: une histoire amusante.

When do I use the infinitive instead of the English -ing?

Use the infinitive after prepositions other than en and after most verbs: sans parler, avant de partir, j'aime nager. Use the progressive être en train de for an action in progress.