

Mood choice after common conjunctions

French 4 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: French conjunctions fall into two camps. Those expressing purpose, concession, a limit, or something not yet real (bien que, pour que, avant que, à moins que, sans que) take the subjunctive. Those stating a real fact (parce que, après que, pendant que) take the indicative. With one shared subject, French often prefers a preposition plus an infinitive.

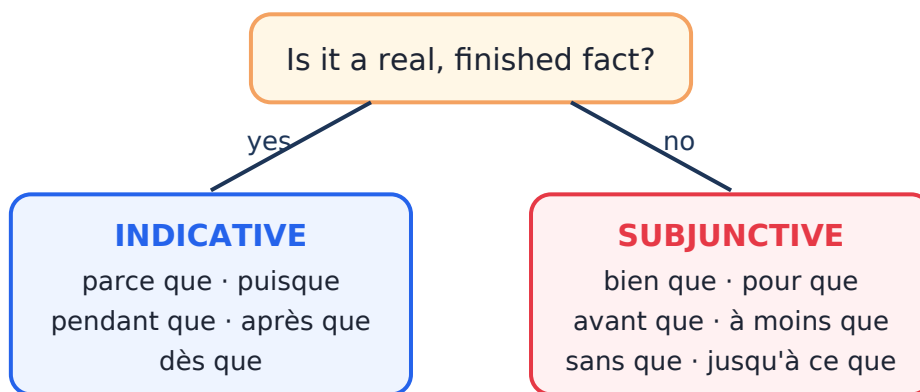
Level: French 4 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Mid) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Mid, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 4.1 Language Comparisons

Which conjunctions take the subjunctive?

Definition

A conjunction links a main clause to a subordinate clause. If the subordinate clause describes a goal, an obstacle that does not stop the action, a limit, or an event that has not happened yet, French switches to the subjunctive.

Conjunction	Meaning	Example
bien que	although	Bien qu'Inès soit enrhumée, elle joue le match. — Although Inès has a cold, she plays the game.
pour que / afin que	so that	Je parle lentement pour que tu comprennes . — I speak slowly so that you understand.
avant que	before	Sortons avant que la pluie commence . — Let's go out before the rain starts.
à moins que	unless	On part à moins que Kofi ait un problème. — We leave unless Kofi has a problem.
sans que	without	Il entre sans que personne le voie . — He comes in without anyone seeing him.
jusqu'à ce que	until	Attends jusqu'à ce que le bus parte . — Wait until the bus leaves.



Quick decision chart for the mood after a conjunction.

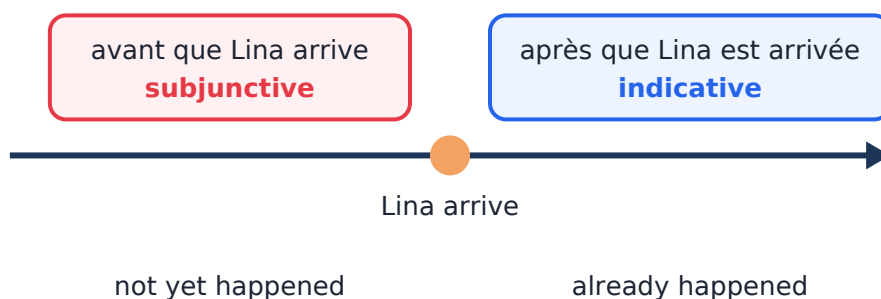
Which conjunctions keep the indicative?

Rule

When the clause states a real cause, a real time relation, or a fact that happened, use the indicative: **parce que**, **puisque**, **pendant que**, **après que**, **dès que**.

Examples

- Mamadou est content **parce que** son équipe **a gagné**. — Mamadou is happy because his team won.
- Je prépare le thé **pendant que** tu **cherches** tes clés. — I make tea while you look for your keys.
- **Après que** nous **avons visité** le musée, nous avons mangé. — After we visited the museum, we ate.



Avant que looks ahead to an event that has not happened; après que looks back at one that has.

What if both clauses share the same subject?

With **pour**, **avant de** and **sans**, French prefers an infinitive when one person does both actions: Je

révise pour **réussir**. — I study to succeed. Elle part sans **dire** un mot. — She leaves without saying a word. Bien que, à moins que and jusqu'à ce que always keep a full clause.

Common mistake

English speakers write après qu'il *soit* arrivé because "after" feels like "before". Do not copy that. Après que describes something that already happened, so the correct form is après qu'il **est arrivé**. Also never confuse parce que (a reason) with pour que (a goal).

Culture note

In formal writing, avant que and à moins que are often followed by a small ne (avant qu'il ne parte). It is called the ne explétif, carries no negative meaning, and is optional in speech.

Zoé's tip

Ask two questions. First: is it a real, finished fact? Then use the indicative. Second: do both verbs share one subject? Then try a preposition plus an infinitive before building a que-clause.

Key points to remember

- Subjunctive: bien que, pour que, afin que, avant que, à moins que, sans que, jusqu'à ce que.
- Indicative: parce que, puisque, pendant que, après que, dès que.
- Same subject in both clauses: pour / avant de / sans + infinitive.
- Après que is followed by the indicative because the event has really happened.
- Avant que and à moins que may take an optional, meaningless ne in formal writing.

Mood Choice After Common Conjunctions: frequently asked questions

Why does après que take the indicative when avant que takes the subjunctive?

Après que introduces an event that has already happened, so French treats it as a fact and uses the indicative. Avant que introduces an event that has not happened yet at that moment, which is why it takes the subjunctive.

How do I say "before leaving" when I am the only subject?

Use avant de plus the infinitive: Je mange avant de partir. Avant que is only needed when the two clauses have different subjects, as in Je mange avant que tu partes.

What is the difference between parce que and pour que?

Parce que gives a reason and takes the indicative: Je pars parce qu'il est tard. Pour que gives a purpose and takes the subjunctive: Je te l'explique pour que tu comprennes.

Do I have to use the ne after avant que and à moins que?

No. The ne explétif is optional and has no negative meaning. You may see it in formal writing, but leaving it out is correct and is what most speakers do.

Does bien que ever take the indicative?

In standard French, bien que always takes the subjunctive, even though the fact it introduces is true. The concession itself, not the truth of the fact, triggers the mood.