

HOW TO FORM/CONJUGATE REFLEXIVE VERBS IN FRENCH

In week 3 – *Leçon 1*, we learned how to conjugate *les verbes du premier groupe* (verbs of the 1st group- ER) in the present tense by memorizing only 6 verb endings and applying our simple formula. Please, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1jLEcXRbHw> if you want to listen to the audio version for this lesson. In Week 3 – *leçon 2*, we will still be working with verbs of the 1st group, but we will give them a little twist this time☺ : we will use them reflexively, that is, when we do an action to ourselves. You certainly know how to do this in English or Spanish; now let's see how it works in French.

Goal: By the end of this lesson, you should be able to use a verb in its reflexive form in order to describe an action done to oneself. **Important:** For the purpose of this lesson, I will only use verbs of the 1st group (ER) in the present tense in order to reinforce knowledge previously acquired in past lesson).

Let's consider these following examples:

- 1- Elena cuts a paper with a knife. (**Elena coupe un papier avec un couteau**).
- 2- Elena cuts **herself** with a knife. (**Elena se coupe avec un couteau**).

In sentence # 2 above, did you notice that the reflexive pronoun (herself) goes AFTER the verb (cut), while in French, the reflexive pronoun (se) goes BEFORE the verb (coupe)?

The table below contains all you need to know in order to form reflexive verbs in French.

English Reflexive pronouns	French Reflexive pronouns
Myself	Me (moi-même)
Yourself	Te (toi-meme)
Himself/herself	Se (lui-même/elle- même)
Ourselves	Nous (nous- mêmes)
Yourselves	Vous (vous- mêmes)
Themselves	Se (eux- mêmes/elles-mêmes)

In the left column, you can notice that I have added some parentheses after Me-Te-Se, etc. What are they? These parentheses contain the actual translation for myself, yourself, himself, etc. In other words, when you say “*Elena cuts herself*”, you actually mean in French, “*Elena coupe elle-même*.” But in a more advanced and refined French, you should use the corresponding *pronoms réfléchis* (me-te-se-nous-vous-se).

Exemples:

Now let's use these *pronoms réfléchis* (reflexive pronouns) in actual sentences. Remember, all verbs used in this lesson belong to the 1st group (ER) and are conjugated in the present tense. Translations in French are provided for each sentence.

To blame (somebody) = blâmer (quelqu'un)

Blame oneself = se blâmer

I blame my coach after the defeat. (Je blâme mon entraîneur après la défaite)
I blame myself after the defeat. (Je me blâme après la défaite.)

You blame your coach after the defeat. (Tu blâmes ton entraîneur après la défaite).
You blame yourself after the defeat. (Tu te blâmes après la défaite.)

He blames his coach after the defeat. (Il blâme son entraîneur après la défaite).
He blames himself after the defeat. (Il se blâme après la défaite.)

She blames her coach after the defeat. (Elle blâme son entraîneur après la défaite).
She blames herself after the defeat. (Elle se blâme après la défaite.)

We blame our coach after the defeat. (Nous blâmons notre entraîneur après la défaite).
We blame ourselves after the defeat. (Nous nous blâmons après la défaite.)

You (guys) blame your coach after the defeat. (Vous blâmez votre entraîneur après la défaite).
You blame yourselves after the defeat. (Vous vous blâmez après la défaite).

They (men) blame their coach after the defeat. (Ils blâment leur entraîneur après la défaite).
They blame themselves after the defeat. (Ils se blâment après la défaite).

They (women) blame their coach after the defeat. (Elles blâment leur entraîneur après la défaite).
They blame themselves after the defeat. (Elles se blâment après la défaite).

Important: In English, some actions that the subject does to himself or herself are not always expressed with reflexive pronouns (while in French they are). For example, it is not necessary to say “I wake up myself at 9 every morning” because “I wake up at 9...” is already correct. In French, if you are talking about yourself waking up, you should say “Je me reveille”, literally meaning “I wake myself up”

DESCRIBING DAILY ROUTINE: REFLEXIVES

Here is a list of reflexive verbs describing a typical daily routine. All these verbs belong to the first group, so you should be fine using them every morning as a practice☺. For example, as I look at myself in the mirror while shaving my beard, I may say:

“Je me mire et je me rase la barbe”, or while looking at my sister putting on makeup, i may say: “elle se maquille”. So if you want to build your vocabulary in French, this is good practice.

Se reveiller	To wake up
Se lever	To get up
Se coucher	To go to bed
Se doucher	To take a shower
Se baigner	To take a bath
Se laver les cheveux	To wash one’s hair
Se sécher	To dry off
Se raser (la barbe/la moustache)	To shave

Se brosser les dents	To brush one's teeth
Se peigner	To comb one's hair.
Se maquiller	To put on makeup
S'habiller	To put on one's clothes
Se déshabiller	To take off one's clothes
Se mirer /se regarder dans la glace	To look at oneself in the mirror

Before ending this lesson, I would like to quickly explain a few things about the reflexive pronouns *Me*, *Te* and *Se* (only).

Keep in mind that these 3 words will behave just like the subject pronoun *Je* in front of a vowel or a silent “h”: They will lose their “e” and instead take an apostrophe (‘) when the verb that follows them begin with a vowel or silent “h” (*h muet*).

For example, you should say, “*Tu t’amuses*” (you enjoy yourself), not “*Tu TE amuses*”. The verb *amuser* begins with a vowel (A) and *TE* should become *T’*. This happens in French in order to ensure that the “liaison” (link) is made between the 2 words (TE + AMUSES). Same for the verb *habiller* in “*Je m’habille*”. It begins with a silent “h”. Therefore we must treat such a verb as if “h” did not exist and we will consider the next letter in line, which happens to be the vowel A. *Me* will then become *M’* in front of verb *habiller*.

Also, while grading some papers, I have noticed that some of you used the reflexive pronouns/verbs even when the actions were not directed at the subject himself or herself. For example, in **Exam 3 – Exercise C**, the verb *regarder* (to look at/to watch) was used in 2 different contexts.

1) **You guys watch a football game = VOUS REGARDEZ UN MATCH DE FOOTBALL**

2) **They (ladies) look at themselves in the mirror = ELLES SE REGARDENT DANS LE MIROIR.**

In example 1, VOUS (subject) is watching the game. In example 2, the action of REGARDER is directed at the ladies themselves. In this case ONLY should a reflexive pronoun be used with the verb.

Now I would like to talk about the last point: The INFINITIVE of a reflexive verb in French is marked by the reflexive pronoun **SE** before the verb (Or **S’** if followed by a vowel or a silent h). “To look at ONESELF” = **SE** regarder. To enjoy ONESELF = **S’**AMUSER. ONESELF=SE when forming the infinitive of the verb. But we also use SE when he or she is the subject doing the action to himself or herself. For example, “Il **SE** regarde” = He looks at HIMSELF. Elle **S’**amuse = She enjoys HERSELF. Please, don’t be confused by this.

You may now download your [exercise](#) and practice. ☺