Conjugation: an essential skill

- Knowing how to write and say the **forms** of verbs is as important in learning French as knowing their meaning. Throughout 2nd-year French, there will be weekly **verb quizzes** to test your knowledge of different verb conjugations.
- This set of slides and the following exercise are designed to review basic concepts, and to help you think about verbs and conjugation in a systematic way.

A basic principle: *l'accord*

- French verbs have endings determined by the **grammatical subject** of the sentence (*je, tu, nous, etc.*). Grammarians express this by saying that verbs agree in **person** [1st, 2nd, 3rd person] and **number** [singular or plural] with their subject. This is the principle of **subject-verb agreement**. The French word for this is *l'accord*.

Regular verbs

- **Regular verbs** are large groups of verbs that share a single conjugation pattern. As you know, French has three major regular verb groups. Within each of the three groups, the infinitive forms share a common ending:
  - *-er*: parler, manger, aimer, vexer, *etc.*
  - *-ir*: finir, choisir, blanchir, rougir, grossir, etc.
  - *-dre*: attendre, vendre, descendre

  Knowing the conjugation patterns for these verbs enables you to conjugate 1000s of different verbs.

Irregular verbs with regular endings

- Alas, however, the infinitive ending does not always tell the whole story: a regular infinitive ending by itself may not indicate that a verb is regular. The verb ***aller*** is a good example. Only the *nous* and *vous* forms follow the regular *–er* pattern. The other four forms are irregular:
  - Je **vais**   Nous allons
  - Tu **vas**   Vous allez
  - On **va**   Ils **vont**
- *Aller* is the only irregular verb ending in *–er*, but there are <u>many</u> irregular verbs ending in *–ir* and *–re*.

-ir verbs: regular and irregular

- For example, <u>each</u> of the following verbs has a <u>different</u> conjugation pattern:
  - finir (regular)
  - venir
  - sortir
  - ouvrir
  - courir

  It would be a mistake to conjugate *venir* as a regular verb: *Je finis / Je venis??—>Je <u>viens</u>*. For this reason, you must learn to distinguish between different **families** of verbs, even if they have the same infinitive ending.

-re verbs: regular and irregular

- Verbs ending in *–re* can also be regular or irregular. Each of these verbs has a different conjugation pattern:
  - attendre (regular)
  - prendre
  - peindre
  - coudre

  Compare:

  nous … atten<u>d</u>ons / pre<u>n</u>ons / pei<u>gn</u>ons / cou<u>s</u>ons

- For this reason, it is essential to learn which *–ir* verbs belong to which family, and which *–re* verbs belong to which family so you can apply the correct conjugation pattern.
- Knowing which verb family a verb belongs to and the conjugation pattern for that family gives you control over many verbs. By learning the patterns for <u>seven</u> major groups of verbs and learning to sort them into the proper categories, you can correctly conjugate **several thousand verbs**.

A few reliable rules

- Although there may be a number of different conjugation patterns to master, there are some general rules that apply to verb endings and agreement. Remember these:
  - The <u>singular</u> endings follow the same pattern for most regular <u>and</u> irregular verbs: *-s | -s | -t or -d*.
    (Exceptions: regular *-er* verbs; *aller* [il v<u>a</u>]*; avoir* [j'ai, il <u>a</u>])
  - TU forms <u>always</u> end in *–s.*
    (Two exceptions only, *pouvoir* and *vouloir*: *tu peu<u>x</u>, tu veu<u>x</u>*)
  - Third person singular forms (*il, elle, on*) **never** end in *–s*. They end in either *–t* or *–d*: *il sort, elle finit, elle attend, on comprend*.
  - Despite different endings, the singular forms of a verb are all pronounced the <u>same</u>*:
    - parle / parles / parle; prends / prends / prend; veux / veux / veut

    - *Only three exceptions: *avoir, être, aller*

Singular ending pattern s / s / t - d
Examples:

	ÊTRE	FAIRE	FINIR	ATTENDRE
JE	sui**s**	fai**s**	fini**s**	attend**s**
TU	e**s**	fai**s**	fini**s**	attend**s**
ELLE/IL/ ON	es**t**	fai**t**	fini**t**	atten**d**