

Grammaire 22: l'Imparfait

The imperfect tense (l'imparfait), one of several past tenses in French, is used to describe states of being and habitual actions in the past.

STEM

The stem of the imparfait is the first person plural (nous) form of the present tense, minus the -ons. The imparfait stem is regular for all verbs except être:

verb	present tense 'nous' form	imparfait stem
-er verbs: parler	nous parlons	parl-
-ir verbs: finir	nous finissons	finiss-
-re verbs: descendre	nous descendons	descend-
faire	nous faisons	fais-
prendre	nous prenons	pren-
partir	nous partons	part-
être	(irregular)	ét-

ENDINGS:

pronoun	Imperfect ending
je	-ais
tu	-ais
Il/elle	-ait
nous	-ions
vous	-iez
Ils/elles	-aient

The imparfait answers the question 'What was going on when something else happened?' The imparfait is used to describe what was going on in the past, states of being in the past, or past habits.