Synthèse de grammaire

1. Describing the Past: *l'imparfait*

When talking about things that happened in the past, especially events that happened on a regular basis, or general descriptions about the way things were and what there was in a given place, use the *imparfait*:

C'était génial!
It was great!

Il y avait des framboises et des fraises.
There were raspberries and strawberries.

Les fruits étaient délicieux.
The fruits were delicious.

You can usually recognize the *imparfait* by its endings: *-ais, -ait, -aient* and others. *C'était* is the *imparfait* of *c'est; il y avait* is the *imparfait* of *il y a*. You can describe many things that happened in the past just by knowing these two expressions.

Contrast this new verb tense, the *imparfait*, with the tenses you already know:

Le présent: Je mange des gaufres. *I eat / I am eating waffles.*

Le futur proche: Je **vais** manger des gaufres. *I am going to eat waffles.*

L'imparfait: Je mange**ais** des gaufres. *I ate / I used to eat / I was eating waffles.*

Note: In the same way that the *-ent* ending of a present tense verb is silent, the *-aient* ending should sound the same as *-ais* and *-ait*.

2. Talking About What You Used to Do: *la formation de l'imparfait*

a. To figure out the beginning/stem of your *imparfait* verb, think of the *nous* form of that verb in the present tense. E.g., *nous faisons, nous aimons, nous voulons*. Then, remove the *-ons* ending. E.g., *fais-, aim-, voul-*. This is the beginning of your *imparfait* verb for all subject pronouns.

b. There is one verb that does not follow this pattern: the verb *être*. All forms of *être* in the *imparfait* begin with *ét-*. E.g., *j'étais, c'était*

c. Once you know how your verb begins, just add the appropriate ending:

je	faisais	nous	faisions
tu	faisais	vous	faisiez
il/elle/on	faisait	ils/elles	faisaient

The verb *manger* and others like it have a special spelling rule. The *je, tu, il/elle/on,* and *ils/elles* forms of the verb will have an extra letter *e*, but the *nous* and *vous* forms will not. Why? It's all in the sound. The combination *ge* in *mangeais* needs to have the same "soft g" sound as the *gi* in *mangions*.

je	mang**eais**	nous	mang**ions**
tu	mang**eais**	vous	mang**iez**
il/elle/on	mang**eait**	ils/elles	mang**eaient**

3. Avoiding Repetition Using *le pronom "en"*

The function of any pronoun is to refer back to something already mentioned in a conversation or text without repeating the exact words. In French, the pronoun *en* takes the place of a specific set of phrases.

A: Tu as besoin **de pommes** pour la tarte?
Do you need (some/any) apples for the pie?

B: Oui, j'**en** ai besoin!
Yes, I need some (of them).

A: Et **des poires**?
And (some/any) pears?

B: Non, je n'**en** ai pas besoin.
No, I don't need any (of them).

The key points to know when using *en* are:

- *En* takes the place of a specific noun/phrase. E.g., In the conversation above, Speaker B does not repeat the words *pommes* and *poires* when answering.

- Even though the original, specific noun came after the verb, the pronoun *en* usually goes before the verb.

- The pronoun *en* is specifically used to take the place of noun phrases beginning with *de, d', des (des pommes), du (du fromage), de la (de la soupe), de l' (de l'oignon)* or other quantities, including numbers and *un/une*. When using quantities and numbers, you can usually keep the specific amount while using *en* to replace the noun.
  E.g., Tu as beaucoup **de pommes**? → Oui, j'**en** ai beaucoup.
  Tu **en** as combien? → J'**en** ai cinq.