

The Temporal Prepositions: *Depuis, pour, pendant, dans, en, ça fait...*

“How long have you been studying French? I’ve been taking lessons for 5 years and I went to a French language school every week for 1 year!”

How do you translate this simple question and reply without getting into a muddle? As you learn French, you will discover the “temporal prepositions” (*pour, pendant, il y a, ça fait, etc...*) and you will notice that they are used quite differently in French than in English. Using the wrong preposition can change the time period of your message, and thus may create real confusion. It is sometimes challenging to learn how to keep them all straight, but it is worth the time and effort. So how do they work and how do we use them? Let’s first identify each preposition:

DEPUIS = indicates the origin of an action/a situation that is **still continuing at the moment** or that **was still going on at the time something else happened**. If the action is still current, you can simply conjugate the verb in the sentence in the present tense.

Examples:

Je suis ici depuis 2001 = I’ve been here since 2001

Elle était prête depuis 3 heures quand je suis allée la chercher = She had been ready for 3 hours when I went to fetch/pick her up.

PENDANT = indicates **the duration of an action/situation**. It is mostly used when speaking in the past tense about an action that is over, but can also be used in the present when expressing a generality.

Examples:

Je suis restée en Angleterre pendant 5 jours = I stayed in England for 5 days.

Je fais du jogging tous les matins pendant 30 minutes = I jog every morning for 30 minutes.



POUR = is used to project how **long a specific action/situation will last in the future**. You can conjugate the verb in the present if you’re speaking about schedules/timetables.

Example: *Je reste en Angleterre pour 5 jours* = I am staying in England for 5 days.

Note: The French will also use *pendant* in this case; either one is acceptable.

DANS = indicates **the start of a specific action/situation which will take place in the future**. Again, you may conjugate the sentence in the present when you’re speaking about timetables.

Example: *Je vais en Angleterre dans 5 jours* = I am going to England in 5 days.

EN = indicates **the amount of time it takes to complete an action**.

Example: *Je fais mes devoirs en 1 heure* = I do my homework in 1 hour.

IL Y A = an idiomatic expression meaning ‘ago’.

Example: *Je suis venue en France il y a 5 ans* = I came to France 5 years ago.

À = is used to express **the clock time at which an event occurs**.

Example: *J’ai rendez-vous à 10h* = I have an appointment at 10 o’clock.

Note: We also use *ça fait . . . que* a lot to indicate ‘I’ve been.. or it’s been..’ !!

Example: *Ça fait 5 ans que je suis en France* = I’ve been in France for 5 years.

Scenario: Introduce Yourself to Your Neighbour

Imaginez que vous venez de vous installer en France et que vous aimeriez vous présenter à votre nouveau voisin français.

Carole : Bonjour, je m'appelle Carole Smith et je suis votre nouvelle voisine.

Le voisin : Ah bonjour ! Je suis Didier Martin. Enchanté et bienvenue dans notre quartier !

Carole : Merci beaucoup, nous sommes ici **depuis** 3 jours.

Le voisin : Et vous êtes en France **depuis** combien de temps ?

Carole : Nous sommes en France **depuis** 1 an et nous restons ici **pour** au moins 2 ans.

Le voisin : Ah bon ! Vous déménagez beaucoup ?

Carole : Oui – c'est le travail de mon mari.

Le voisin : Vous aimez le quartier ?

Carole : Oui, c'est un très joli quartier. Vous êtes ici **depuis** longtemps ?

Le voisin : Oui, je suis ici **depuis** 10 ans. Avant j'étais à Paris **pendant** 5 ans. Je préfère la vie ici – c'est plus calme.

Carole : Oui, je comprends. Je suis allée à Paris **il y a** deux mois et c'est une ville très active. Un peu trop pour moi aussi !

Le voisin : Des fois, c'est un peu trop calme ici, mais les gens sont très serviables et gentils.

Carole : Oui, j'ai l'impression ! Je suis désolée mais je dois partir et continuer mon travail à la maison.

Le voisin : Bien sûr – bon courage !

Carole : Merci beaucoup et je voudrais vous inviter à un apéritif **dans** quelques jours.

Le voisin : Avec plaisir. A bientôt !



Imagine you've just settled in France and you would like to introduce yourself to your new French neighbour.

Carole: Hello, My name is Carole Smith and I'm your new neighbour.

The neighbour: Oh Hello! I'm Didier Martin. Nice meeting you and welcome to our neighbourhood!

Carole: Thank you very much; we've been here for 3 days.

The neighbour: And how long have you been in France?

Carole: We've been in France for 1 year and we'll stay here for at least 2 years.

The neighbour: Oh Really! You move often?

Carole: Yes - it's my husband's job!

The neighbour: Do you like the area?

Carole: Yes, it's a very nice area. Have you been here for a long time?

The neighbour: Yes, I've been here for 10 years. Before, I was in Paris for 5 years. I prefer life here – it's quieter.

Carole: Yes, I understand. I went to Paris 2 months ago and it's a very busy city. A bit too much so for me also!

The neighbour: Sometimes, it's a bit too quiet here, but the people are very helpful and kind.

Carole: Yes, I have that impression! I'm sorry but I must go and continue my work at home.

The neighbour: Of course – good luck!

Carole: Thank you very much and I would like to invite you for an aperitif in a few days.

The neighbour: With pleasure. See you soon!

