Reflexive Verbs

Read the following notes on reflexive verbs

Pronominal verbs are verbs that need a reflexive pronoun in addition to a subject pronoun, because the subject(s) performing the action of the verb are the same as the object(s) being acted upon.

Nous nous habillons. We're getting dressed (dressing ourselves).
Tu te baignes. You're taking a bath (bathing yourself).

The pronominal voice is much more common in French than in English - many French verbs that require the pronominal voice are equivalent to the active voice in English. In French, you can recognize pronominal verbs by the se which precedes the infinitive.

French has three types of pronominal verbs:

- 1. reflexive verbs
- 2. reciprocal verbs
- 3. idiomatic pronominal verbs

There are two steps in conjugating pronominal verbs. First, take the reflexive pronoun se, change it to agree with the subject of the verb, and place it directly in front of the verb. Then, as with all verbs, conjugate the infinitive according to whether it's an -er, -ir, -re, or irregular verb.

Elle se brosse les dents. She's brushing her teeth.
Vous vous levez tard. You get up late.

French Reflexive Verbs - Verbes à sens réfléchi

The most common pronominal verbs are reflexive verbs, which indicate that the subject of the verb is performing the action upon himself, herself, or itself. Reflexive verbs mainly have to do with parts of the body, clothing, personal circumstance, or location. Here are some common reflexive verbs:

s'approcher de to approach
s'asseoir to sit down
se baigner to bathe, swim
se brosser (les cheveux, les dents)  to brush (one's hair, one's teeth)
se casser (la jambe, le bras)  to break (one's leg, one's arm)
se coiffer  to fix one's hair
se coucher  to go to bed
se couper  to cut oneself
se déshabiller  to get undressed
se doucher  to take a shower
se fâcher  to get angry
s'habiller  to get dressed
se laver (les mains, la figure)  to wash (one's hands, one's face)
se lever  to get up
se maquiller  to put on makeup
se marier (avec)  to get married (to)
se moquer de  to make fun of (someone else)
se moucher  to blow one's nose
se peigner  to comb one's hair
se promener  to take a walk
se raser  to shave
se regarder  to look at oneself
se reposer  to rest
se réveiller  to wake up
se souvenir de  to remember

Tu te reposes.  You're resting.
Il se lève à 8h00.  He gets up at 8:00.

Note that many reflexive verbs also have a non-reflexive use; that is, they can describe someone performing the action of the verb on someone or something else:

Elle se promène.  She's taking a walk.
   vs
   Elle promène le chien.  She's taking the dog for a walk.

Je me lave les mains.  I'm washing my hands.
   vs
   Je lave le bébé.  I'm washing the baby.

*When referring to parts of the body, the French possessive pronoun is rarely used. Instead, the owner is indicated with the reflexive pronoun and the definite article precedes the body part.
French has three kinds of pronominal verbs. The most common are reflexive verbs, but there are also two lesser-known types: reciprocal verbs and idiomatic pronominal verbs.

**French Reciprocal Verbs - Verbes à sens réciproque**

While reflexive verbs tell you that one or more subjects are acting upon themselves, reciprocal verbs indicate that there are two or more subjects acting on one another. Here are the most common French reciprocal verbs:

- **s'adorer** to adore (one another)
- **s'aimer** to love
- **se comprendre** to understand
- **se connaître** to know
- **se détester** to hate
- **se dire** to tell
- **se disputer** to argue
- **s'écrire** to write to
- **s'embrasser** to kiss
- **se parler** to talk to
- **se promettre** to promise
- **se quitter** to leave
- **se regarder** to look at
- **se rencontrer** to meet

- **se sourire** to smile at
- **se téléphoner** to call
- **se voir** to see

Nous nous adorons! We adore one another!
Elles se voient le lundi. They see each other on Mondays.

Note that reciprocal verbs can also be used without the pronoun for a non-reciprocal meaning:

Nous nous comprenons. We understand each other.

vs

Nous comprenons la question. We understand the question.

Ils s'aiment. They love each other.

vs

Ils m'aiment. They love me.
French Idiomatic Pronominal Verbs - *Verbes à sens idiomatique*

Idiomatic pronominal verbs are verbs that take on a different meaning when used with a reflexive pronoun. Here are the most common French idiomatic pronominal verbs (and their non-pronominal meanings):

- **s'en aller** to go away (to go)
- **s'amuser** to have a good time (to amuse)
- **s'appeler** to be named (to call)
- **s'approprier** to appropriate (to suit, adapt to)
- **s'arrêter** to stop (oneself) (to stop [s.o. or s.t. else])
- **s'attendre (à)** to expect (to wait for)
- **se demander** to wonder (to ask)
- **se débrouiller** to manage, get by (to disentangle)
- **se dépêcher** to hurry (to send quickly)
- **se diriger vers** to head toward (to run, be in charge of)
- **s'éloigner** to move (oneself) away (to move s.t. else away)
- **s'endormir** to fall asleep (to put to sleep)
- **s'ennuyer** to be bored (to bother)
- **s'entendre** to get along (to hear)
- **se fâcher** to get angry (to make angry)
- **se figurer** to imagine, picture (to represent, to appear)
- **s'habiter à** to get used to (to get in the habit of)
- **s'inquiéter** to worry (to alarm)
- **s'installer** to settle in (to a home) (to install)
- **se mettre à** to begin to (to place, put)
- **se perdre** to get lost (to lose)
- **se rendre compte de** to realize (to account for)
- **se réunir** to meet, get together (to gather, collect)
- **se tromper** to be mistaken (to deceive)

**se trouver** to be located (to find)

See how the meaning changes when idiomatic pronominal verbs are used with and without the reflexive pronoun:

*Je m'appelle Sandrine.* My name is Sandrine.  
vs  
*J'appelle Sandrine.* I'm calling Sandrine.

*Tu te trompes.* You are mistaken.
Tu me trompes. You are deceiving me.

Placement of the reflexive pronoun is exactly the same as for object pronouns and adverbial pronouns: the pronoun directly precedes the verb in all tenses and moods*

   Je m'habille.  I'm getting dressed.
   Tu te reposeras.  You will rest.
   Il se levait quand...  He was getting up when...

*Except the affirmative imperative, when it follows the verb, attached by a hyphen:

   Repose-toi !  Rest!
   Habillons-nous.  Let's get dressed.

Pronominal verbs in the negative

With negation, ne precedes the reflexive pronoun:

   Je ne m'habille pas.  I'm not getting dressed.
   Tu ne te reposes jamais.  You never rest.

Pronominal verbs in the interrogative

Questions with pronominal verbs are usually asked with est-ce que and the reflexive pronoun once again stays directly in front of the verb. If you use inversion, the reflexive pronoun precedes the inverted subject-verb:

Is he shaving?
   Est-ce qu'il se rase ?
   Se rase-t-il ?

Are you washing your hands?
   Est-ce que tu te laves les mains ?
   Te laves-tu les mains ?

Pronominal verbs in the negative interrogative

To ask a negative question with pronominal verbs, you pretty much have to
use inversion. The reflexive pronoun stays directly in front of the inverted subject-verb, and the negative structure surrounds that whole group:

Isn't he shaving?
_Ne se rase-t-il pas ?_

Don't you ever wash your hands?
_Ne te laves-tu jamais les mains ?_

In **compound tenses** like the **passé composé**, all pronominal verbs are **être verbs**, which means two things:

- 1. The auxiliary verb is **être**
- 2. The past participle may need to agree with the subject in gender and number

In compound tenses, the reflexive pronoun precedes the auxiliary verb, not the past participle:

_Elle s'est couchée à minuit._
She went to bed at midnight.

_İls s'étaient vus à la banque._
They had seen one another at the bank.

_Après m'être habillé, j'ai allumé la télé._
After getting dressed, I turned on the TV.

**Agreement with pronominal verbs**

When pronominal verbs are in the compound tenses, the past participle has to agree with the reflexive pronoun when the pronoun is a **direct object** but not when it's an **indirect object**. So the trick is to figure out whether the reflexive pronoun is direct or indirect.

1. For most* pronominal verbs that are not followed by a noun, the reflexive pronoun is the direct object, so the past participle needs to agree with it.

    _Nous nous sommes douchés._
We showered.

_Marianne s'est fâchée._
Marianne got mad.

2. Likewise, with a pronominal verb plus a preposition plus a noun, the reflexive pronoun is the direct object, so you need agreement:

_Elle s'est occupée du chien._
She took care of the dog.

3. When a pronominal verb is followed directly by a noun with _no preposition in between_, the reflexive pronoun is indirect, therefore there is no agreement:

We bought ourselves a car.
_Nous nous sommes acheté une voiture._
.xxx _Nous nous sommes achetés une voiture._ xxx

She told herself the truth.
_Elle s'est dit la vérité._
.xxx _Elle s'est dite la vérité._ xxx

4. When you have a sentence with a reflexive pronoun plus an object pronoun, the reflexive pronoun is always the indirect object, so there is no agreement with it. However, there is agreement with the object pronoun, per the rules of _direct object pronoun agreement_:

We bought it (the book) for ourselves.
_Nous nous le sommes acheté._ (_Le livre_ is masculine)

We bought it (the car) for ourselves.
_Nous nous la sommes achetée._ (_La voiture_ is feminine)

She told it (the lie) to herself.
_Elle se l'est dit._ (_Le mensonge_ is masculine)

She told it (the truth) to herself.
_Elle se l'est dite._ (_La vérité_ is feminine)

*5. For the following verbs, the reflexive pronoun is always an indirect object so the past participle does not agree with it:

_s'acheter_ to buy (for) o.s.
se demander  to wonder
se dire to say (to o.s. / e.o.)
se donner to give (to e.o.)
s'écire to write (to e.o.)
se faire mal to hurt o.s.
s'imaginer to imagine, think
se parler to talk (to o.s. / e.o.)
se plaire (à faire...) to enjoy (doing...)
se procurer to obtain (for o.s.)
se promettre to promise (o.s. / e.o.)
se rendre compte de to realize
se rendre visite to visit (e.o.)
se ressembler to resemble (e.o.)
se rire (de qqun) to mock (someone)
se sourire to smile (at e.o.)
se téléphoner to call (e.o.)

Key:
o.s. = oneself
e.o. = each other

We smiled at each other.
Nous nous sommes souri.
xxx Nous nous sommes souris. xxx

They talked to each other.
Elles se sont parlé.
xxx Elles se sont parlées. Xxx

When you use pronominal verbs in the **infinitive** or **present participle**, there are two things to keep in mind:

- 1. The reflexive pronoun directly precedes the infinitive or present participle
- 2. The reflexive pronoun agrees with its implied subject

**Pronominal verbs in dual-verb constructions**

**Dual-verb constructions** are those where you have a verb like *aller* (to go) or *vouloir* (to want) followed by an infinitive. When using a pronominal verb in this construction, it’s important to remember that the reflexive pronoun goes directly in front of the infinitive, not the conjugated verb, and that the
reflexive pronoun has to agree with the subject.

*Je vais m'habiller.*
I'm going to get dressed.

*Nous voulons nous promener.*
We want to go for a walk.

*Tu devrais te laver les cheveux.*
You should wash your hair.

**Pronominal verbs after prepositions**

When you use pronominal verbs in the infinitive after prepositions, remember to change the reflexive pronoun to agree with the implied subject of the verb:

*Avant de te coucher, range ta chambre.*
Before you go to bed, clean your room.

*Il faut trouver un juge pour nous marier.*
We have to find a judge to get married.

**Pronominal verbs used as subjects**

To use pronominal verbs in the infinitive as subjects at the beginning of a sentence, remember to change the reflexive pronoun to agree with the implied subject of the verb:

*Me lever tôt est une règle de ma vie.*
Getting up early is a rule for me.

*Te moquer de ton frère n'est pas gentil.*
Making fun of your brother isn't nice.

**Pronominal verbs as present participles**

Once again, the reflexive pronoun always has to agree with the subject, including when pronominal verbs are used as present participles:
En me levant, j'ai entendu un cri.
While getting up, I heard a scream.

C'était en vous inquiétant que vous avez attrapé un ulcère.
It was by worrying that you got an ulcer.

(Notes from http://french.about.com/od/grammar/a/pronominalverbs.htm)