How French sounds La prononciation

The trick: French writes more than it says. Most last letters are silent, and a few vowel pairs make one sound. Learn these, and the spelling starts to make sense. Stress is light and falls on the last sound you hear.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
end letters	usually silent: -s, -t, -d, -x and a final -e	**petit** small
é	ay in say, short	**café** coffee
è, ê, ai	e in bed	**fête** party
ou	oo in food	**vous** you
u	lips round for oo, but say ee	**tu** you
eu	like ur in British fur, lips rounded	**deux** two
oi	wa	**moi** me
au, eau	o in go, short	**eau** water
an, en	ah through the nose, no n	**enfant** child
on	oh through the nose, no n	**bonjour** hello
in, ain	a in cat through the nose, no n	**pain** bread
ch	sh	**chat** cat
j	and g before e, i: s in pleasure	**jour** day
gn	ny in canyon	**montagne** mountain
ç	s	**garçon** boy
qu	k	**qui** who
h	always silent	**homme** man
th	t	**thé** tea
ill	usually y in yes	**fille** girl
r	at the back of the throat, a soft gargle	**rouge** red

le
masculine
le père, le livre, le café

la
feminine
la mère, la maison, la ville

l' · les
before a vowel · all plurals
l'eau (f), l'homme (m), les gens

le or la: every noun is one or the other, and there's no sure rule. Words ending in -tion and -té are la, and -ment and -age are usually le. Learn each noun with its article; the colours on the next pages help.

The first 214 words Les premiers mots

How: learn five a day, then hunt for them in Kitsumi subtitles. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Greetings and survival

Bonjour
hello, good morning

Bonsoir
good evening

Salut
hi, bye *(casual)*

Au revoir
goodbye

À bientôt
see you soon

Bonne nuit
good night

Merci
thanks

Merci beaucoup
thank you very much

De rien
you're welcome

S'il vous plaît
please *(polite)*

S'il te plaît
please *(casual)*

Pardon
sorry, excuse me

Excusez-moi
excuse me *(polite)*

Désolé
sorry

Oui
yes

Non
no

Si
yes it is! *(answering a no)*

D'accord
OK

Ça va ?
how's it going?

Ça va, merci
fine, thanks

Enchanté
nice to meet you

Je ne comprends pas
I don't understand

Je ne sais pas
I don't know

Santé !
cheers!

Bon appétit
enjoy your meal

Question words

quoi
what

qui
who

où
where

d'où
where from

quand
when

pourquoi
why

comment
how

combien
how much

quel
which

Me and you

je
I

tu
you *(casual)*

vous
you *(polite, or you all)*

il
he, it

elle
she, it

on
we *(everyday speech)*, one

nous
we

ils
they

elles
they *(all female)*

mon / ma
my *(le word / la word)*

Little words

et
and

mais
but

ou
or

aussi
also

très
very

seulement
only

déjà
already

encore
still, again

ici
here

là
there

avec
with

sans
without

pour
for

plus
more

moins
less

tu or vous: tu is for friends, family, kids and anyone your age. vous is for strangers, shops and work, and for more than one person. If you're not sure, use vous and wait to be offered tu.

People and time Les gens et le temps

Family

la mère
mother

le père
father

la maman
mom

le papa
dad

le frère
brother

la sœur
sister

le fils
son

la fille
daughter, girl

la grand-mère
grandmother

le grand-père
grandfather

les parents
parents

la famille
family

People

la personne
person

les gens
people

l'homme
man *(m)*

la femme
woman, wife

l'enfant
child *(m or f)*

le garçon
boy

l'ami
friend *(m)*

l'amie
friend *(f)*

le copain
boyfriend, mate

la copine
girlfriend, mate

le professeur
teacher

When

aujourd'hui
today

demain
tomorrow

hier
yesterday

maintenant
now

le matin
morning

l'après-midi
afternoon *(m)*

le soir
evening

la nuit
night

le temps
time, weather

l'heure
hour, the time *(f)*

la semaine
week

le week-end
weekend

l'an
year *(m)*

Days of the week

lundi
Monday

mardi
Tuesday

mercredi
Wednesday

jeudi
Thursday

vendredi
Friday

samedi
Saturday

dimanche
Sunday

on means we: in everyday French, on replaces nous: On y va, let's go. On mange ? Shall we eat?

Days are small: days and months have no capital letter: lundi, en janvier. Le lundi means on Mondays.

Numbers and food Les nombres et la cuisine

Numbers

zéro
0

un
1

deux
2

trois
3

quatre
4

cinq
5

six
6

sept
7

huit
8

neuf
9

dix
10

onze
11

douze
12

vingt
20

trente
30

cent
100

mille
1,000

Food and drink

l'eau
water *(f)*

le café
coffee

le thé
tea

le lait
milk

la bière
beer

le vin
wine

le pain
bread

le croissant
croissant

le fromage
cheese

la viande
meat

le poulet
chicken

le poisson
fish

la pomme
apple

le petit-déjeuner
breakfast

le repas
meal

délicieux
delicious

J'ai faim
I'm hungry

L'addition, s'il vous plaît
the bill, please

Counting in twenties: 70 is soixante-dix (sixty-ten), 80 is quatre-vingts (four-twenties) and 90 is quatre-vingt-dix. Belgium and Switzerland say septante and nonante.

l' before a vowel: le and la shrink to l' before a vowel or a silent h: l'eau, l'homme. That hides the gender, so those words carry (m) or (f).

Places, things, verbs Lieux, choses, verbes

Two forms: most verbs end in -er, and for I you just drop the r: parler, je parle. Before a vowel je shrinks to j': j'ai, j'aime.

Places

la maison
house

à la maison
at home

l'école
school *(f)*

le travail
work, job

le bureau
office, desk

le restaurant
restaurant

l'hôpital
hospital *(m)*

les toilettes
toilet *(always plural)*

la gare
train station

le magasin
shop

la ville
town, city

la rue
street

la France
France

le Canada
Canada

Things

le livre
book

le portable
mobile phone

l'argent
money *(m; also silver)*

le sac
bag

la clé
key

la voiture
car

Verbs: dictionary / je form

être / suis
be

avoir / ai
have

aller / vais
go

venir / viens
come

manger / mange
eat

boire / bois
drink

voir / vois
see

regarder / regarde
watch

faire / fais
do, make

dormir / dors
sleep

parler / parle
speak

apprendre / apprends
learn

aimer / aime
like, love

savoir / sais
know *(a fact)*

connaître / connais
know *(a person, a place)*

vouloir / veux
want

pouvoir / peux
can

Describing words

bon / mauvais
good / bad

grand / petit
big / small

beaucoup / peu
a lot / a little

chaud / froid
hot / cold

nouveau / vieux
new / old

rapide / lent
fast / slow

beau
beautiful, nice

fatigué
tired

Words every French show uses Les mots des séries

Reactions

C'est vrai ?
really?

Ah bon ?
oh really?

Trop bien !
so cool!

Grave
totally *(slang)*

Exactement
exactly

Bah
well, er

Et alors ?
so what?

N'importe quoi
nonsense

Aucune idée
no idea

Allez !
come on!

On y va
let's go

Au secours !
help!

Arrête !
stop it!

Je t'aime
I love you

Tu me manques
I miss you *(you are missing to me)*

Laisse-moi tranquille
leave me alone

Ouf !
phew!

Rude: on screen only

Mince !
darn! *(mild)*

Merde !
shit!

Putain !
f*** *(very common, strong)*

Tais-toi
shut up

T'es fou ?
are you crazy?

What to call people

monsieur
Mr, sir

madame
Mrs, Ms, madam

mec
dude, guy *(slang)*

chéri
darling

Don't copy these: merde and putain are everywhere on screen, but rude. Mince is the one you can say in front of anyone.

Where did ne go? in speech the ne of a negative usually disappears: je sais pas instead of je ne sais pas. Write it, but expect not to hear it.

Practice Entraînement

How: cover the grey lines with a strip of paper. Read the French out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Linking: a silent last letter wakes up when the next word starts with a vowel: les amis sounds like lay-za-mee, vous avez like voo-za-vay.

Questions by voice: in speech, just raise your voice at the end: Tu viens ? Are you coming? There's always a space before ? and ! in French.

Read these sentences

1. Bonjour, je m'appelle Léa.
   Hello, my name is Léa.

2. Comment tu t'appelles ?
   What's your name?

3. Où sont les toilettes ?
   Where is the toilet?

4. C'est combien ?
   How much is it?

5. Un café, s'il vous plaît.
   A coffee, please.

6. J'aime le chocolat.
   I like chocolate.

7. Il fait très chaud aujourd'hui.
   It's very hot today.

8. Demain, je vois mon ami.
   Tomorrow I'm seeing my friend.

9. C'est vraiment délicieux !
   It's really delicious!

10. Allons-y !
    Let's go!