# Masculine or feminine? Masculin ou féminin ?



**Every French noun is masculine or feminine.** Not just people and animals: a cake is masculine, a suitcase is feminine. You can't see why, but there are patterns, and this sheet is about them. On every page **masculine is blue** and **feminine is pink**.

## What the gender changes

### The little word in front the, a

**le** gâteau · **la** valise

**un** gâteau · **une** valise

le and un for masculine, la and une for feminine. It hides in du too: **du fromage, de la confiture**, some cheese, some jam.

### Describing words they match the noun

**un** grand gâteau · **une** grande valise

**Le** gâteau est petit.
The cake is small.

**La** valise est petite.
The suitcase is small.

Most add an e for feminine, so you hear the t of petite and the d of grande.

### il or elle for things too

Où est **la** voiture ? Elle est là.
Where's the car? It's there. Elle, she, because voiture is feminine.

Et **le** gâteau ? Il est délicieux.
And the cake? It's delicious. Il, he.

For a thing you've named, it is il or elle, following the noun's gender.

### my, his, her mon or ma, son or sa

**mon** gâteau · **ma** valise

They match the thing, not the owner: **sa valise** is his suitcase or her suitcase. And before a vowel, ma becomes mon: **mon adresse**, my address.

## Where you can't hear it

### Before a vowel: l' le and la both shrink

l'appartement (m) · l'image (f)

One is masculine, one is feminine, and you can't tell from l'.

### In the plural: les and des the same for both

les gâteaux · les valises

des gâteaux · des valises

**So learn every noun with un or une.** Not with le or la, because l' hides the gender. un and une show it every time: **un** appartement, **une** image. Say the pair out loud, and the right one starts to sound right.

## The big rule of thumb: look at the ending

### Meaning helps less than you'd think

**un** vélo · **une** moto

Both have two wheels, yet one is masculine and one is feminine. Most of the time, the meaning won't tell you.

### The ending helps much more

**le** from**age** · **la** bagu**ette**

-age is usually masculine, -ette usually feminine. Page 2 lists endings that lean masculine, page 3 those that lean feminine.

**Usually, not always.** Each ending comes with the exceptions you're most likely to meet, and says so when there are none worth learning. Not sure? A dictionary marks every noun: nm for masculine, nf for feminine. And if you get one wrong, people will still understand you.

# Usually masculine Plutôt masculin



**Nouns with these endings are usually masculine.** Each card shows four everyday words, then the exceptions you're likely to meet. The exceptions are the ones to learn by heart: the rule takes care of the rest.

## -age

le fromage — cheese
le voyage — trip
le message — message
le village — village

but **la page, la plage, l'image (f), la cage**
The exceptions are mostly short words.

## -ment

le moment — moment
le vêtement — piece of clothing
le sentiment — feeling
le médicament — medicine

but **la jument**
The classic exception: a mare.

## -eau

le bateau — boat
le gâteau — cake
le cadeau — present
le chapeau — hat

but **l'eau (f), la peau**
Water and skin.

## -isme

le tourisme — tourism
l'optimisme (m) — optimism
le cyclisme — cycling
le journalisme — journalism

No common exceptions.

## -et

le billet — ticket
le jouet — toy
le secret — secret
le poulet — chicken

No common exceptions.

## -oir

le miroir — mirror
le soir — evening
le couloir — corridor
l'espoir (m) — hope

No common exceptions.

## -ier

le cahier — exercise book
le papier — paper
le panier — basket
l'escalier (m) — stairs

No common exceptions.

## -er

le dîner — dinner
le déjeuner — lunch
le danger — danger
le rocher — rock

but **la mer**
The sea.

## -at

le chat — cat
le chocolat — chocolate
le plat — dish
le résultat — result

No common exceptions.

## -ail, -eil

le travail — work
le détail — detail
le soleil — sun
le réveil — alarm clock

Add -le and it flips to feminine:

la taille — size
la médaille — medal
la bouteille — bottle
l'oreille (f) — ear

## -o

le vélo — bike
le piano — piano
le stylo — pen
le numéro — number

but **la photo, la moto, la radio, la vidéo**
Photo, moto and radio are short for longer feminine words.

## -ou

le genou — knee
le bijou — jewel
le chou — cabbage
le trou — hole

No common exceptions.

**Say them with un or une: un** fromage, **un** cadeau, **une** page, **une** photo. Once your ear knows the pattern, the exceptions start to stand out on their own.

# Usually feminine Plutôt féminin



**Nouns with these endings are usually feminine.** Same layout as page 2: four everyday words, then the exceptions worth knowing. -tion and -sion alone give you thousands of nouns, many of them close to English.

## -tion, -sion

la question — question
la station — station
la télévision — television
la décision — decision

Almost always. Only -tion and -sion, though: other words in -ion go both ways.

## -té

la liberté — freedom
la beauté — beauty
la santé — health
la vérité — truth

but l'été (m), le côté, le pâté
Summer, side and pâté.

## -ure

la voiture — car
la nature — nature
la confiture — jam
la chaussure — shoe

but le murmure
A murmur.

## -ance, -ence

la chance — luck
la confiance — trust
la différence — difference
la patience — patience

but le silence
Silence, the one you'll meet.

## -ette

la fourchette — fork
la chaussette — sock
la recette — recipe
la baguette — baguette

but le squelette
A skeleton.

## -elle

la poubelle — bin
la vaisselle — washing-up
la ficelle — string
la nouvelle — piece of news

but le violoncelle
A cello.

## -ude

la solitude — loneliness
l'habitude (f) — habit
l'attitude (f) — attitude
l'étude (f) — study

but le prélude
A prelude.

## -ise

la valise — suitcase
la chemise — shirt
la surprise — surprise
la cerise — cherry

but le pare-brise
A windscreen.

## -ie

la vie — life
la pluie — rain
la boulangerie — bakery
la sortie — way out

but le parapluie, le génie, l'incendie (m)
Rain is la pluie, but an umbrella is le parapluie.

## -ée

la journée — day
la soirée — evening
l'idée (f) — idea
l'année (f) — year

but le musée, le lycée
Museum, secondary school.

## -esse

la jeunesse — youth
la tristesse — sadness
la promesse — promise
la vitesse — speed

No common exceptions.

## -ine

la cuisine — kitchen
la machine — machine
la piscine — swimming pool
la vitrine — shop window

but le magazine
A magazine.

**A final -e on its own is only a hint.** Lots of feminine nouns end in -e, but so do lots of masculine ones, so don't trust a lone e. Trust the longer endings on these two pages, and learn the rest with un or une.

# Traps Les pièges



## Same word, two genders, two meanings

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **le** livre<br>a book<br>**la** livre<br>a pound, money or weight | **le** tour<br>a turn, a trip round<br>**la** tour<br>a tower<br>la tour Eiffel | **le** poste<br>a job, a post<br>**la** poste<br>the post office | **le** mode<br>a way, a mode<br>**la** mode<br>fashion<br>à la mode |
| **le** manche<br>a handle<br>**la** manche<br>a sleeve | **le** moule<br>a mould, a cake tin<br>**la** moule<br>a mussel<br>moules-frites | **le** voile<br>a veil<br>**la** voile<br>a sail, sailing | **le** mémoire<br>a dissertation<br>**la** mémoire<br>memory |

## Words for people: the gender follows the person

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| add -e<br>**un** étudiant<br>**une** étudiante<br>student | add -e<br>**un** ami<br>**une** amie<br>friend | -eur → -euse<br>**un** chanteur<br>**une** chanteuse<br>singer | -eur → -euse<br>**un** vendeur<br>**une** vendeuse<br>shop assistant | -teur → -trice<br>**un** acteur<br>**une** actrice<br>actor |
| -teur → -trice<br>**un** directeur<br>**une** directrice<br>head, director | -er → -ère<br>**un** boulanger<br>**une** boulangère<br>baker | -ien → -ienne<br>**un** musicien<br>**une** musicienne<br>musician | same word<br>**un** journaliste<br>**une** journaliste<br>journalist | same word<br>**un** élève<br>**une** élève<br>pupil |

**Careful with -teur:** many take -trice, like acteur and actrice, but chanteur gives chanteuse. And a few words keep one gender for everyone: **une** vedette, a star, even when the star is a man.

**Jobs:** French has been adding feminine forms for jobs, and you'll often meet them today: **un** auteur: **une** autrice or **une** auteure · **un** professeur: **une** professeure. You may also see the masculine used for a woman, mostly in older texts.

## Always masculine

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Days** | lundi mardi mercredi jeudi vendredi samedi dimanche | With le, a day means every week: **le samedi, je ne travaille pas**, on Saturdays I don't work. |
| **Months** | janvier mai juillet août décembre | Every month is masculine, but you rarely need an article: **en mai, en août**. |
| **Seasons** | printemps été automne hiver | All four, even été with its -té ending. In spring is **au printemps**, but **en été, en automne, en hiver**. |
| **Languages** | français anglais espagnol japonais | No capital letter in French: **le français, l'anglais**. |

**Ending in -e: mostly feminine**
**la** France, **l'**Italie (f), **l'**Espagne (f), **la** Chine

**Other endings: mostly masculine**
**le** Canada, **le** Japon, **le** Portugal, **le** Brésil

**The one you'll meet most: le** Mexique ends in -e but is masculine. The gender even changes the word for in: en France, en Italie, but au Canada, au Japon, au Mexique.

# Practice Entraînement



**Usually masculine**
-age -ment -eau -isme -et -oir -ier -er
-at -ail -eil -o -ou

**Usually feminine**
-tion -sion -té -ure -ance -ence -ette -elle
-ude -ise -ie -ée -esse -ine

**How:** say each noun out loud with un or une. Most are new words: let the ending decide. Five are exceptions from pages 2 and 3. Then check the answers in small print at the bottom.

1 _____ garage — garage

2 _____ situation — situation

3 _____ château — castle

4 _____ qualité — quality

5 _____ photo — photo

6 _____ pharmacie — chemist's

7 _____ rasoir — razor

8 _____ lecture — reading, not a lecture

9 _____ sommeil — sleep

10 _____ page — page

11 _____ casquette — cap

12 _____ musée — museum

13 _____ métier — job, trade

14 _____ sagesse — wisdom

15 _____ contrat — contract

16 _____ passion — passion

17 _____ silence — silence

18 _____ mouvement — movement

19 _____ parapluie — umbrella

20 _____ caillou — pebble

## Answers

1 **un** garage · -age
2 **une** situation · -tion
3 **un** château · -eau
4 **une** qualité · -té
5 **une** photo · -o, exception
6 **une** pharmacie · -ie
7 **un** rasoir · -oir
8 **une** lecture · -ure
9 **un** sommeil · -eil
10 **une** page · -age, exception
11 **une** casquette · -ette
12 **un** musée · -ée, exception
13 **un** métier · -ier
14 **une** sagesse · -esse
15 **un** contrat · -at
16 **une** passion · -sion
17 **un** silence · -ence, exception
18 **un** mouvement · -ment
19 **un** parapluie · -ie, exception
20 **un** caillou · -ou

**Make it stick:** when a new noun turns up in a show, look for un or une, le or la in the same line, and learn the two together.

**Meet a word you don't know?** In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.