

SIMPLIFIED BASIC FRENCH GRAMMAR

(and pronunciation) LESSONS ☺

PRONUNCIATION



ALPHABET

a	ah	g	zheh	m	em	s	ess	y	ee-grek
b	beh	h	ahsh	n	en	t	teh	z	zed
c	seh	i	ee	o	oh	u	ew		
d	deh	j	zhee	p	peh	v	veh		
e	uh	k	kah	q	kew	w	doo-bluh-veh		
f	eff	l	ell	r	air	x	eeks		

French Vowels

IPA	Phonetic spelling	Sample words	General spellings
[i]	ee	vie, midi, lit, riz	i, y
[y]	ee rounded	rue, jus, tissu, usine	u
[e]	ay	blé, nez, cahier, pied	é, et, final er and ez
[ø]	ay rounded	jeu, yeux, queue, bleu	eu
[ɛ]	eh	lait, aile, balai, reine	e, è, ê, ai, ei, ais
[œ]	eh rounded	sœur, œuf, fleur, beurre	œu, eu
[a]	ah	chat, ami, papa, salade	a, à, â
[ɑ]	ah longer	bas, âne, grâce, château	a, â
[u]	oo	loup, cou, caillou, outil	ou
[o]	oh	eau, dos, escargot, hôtel	o, ô
[ɔ]	aw	sol, pomme, cloche, horloge	o
[ə]	uh	fenêtre, genou, cheval, cerise	e

French semi-vowels

IPA	Phonetic spelling	Sample words	General spelling
[w]	w	fois, oui, Louis	oi, ou
[ɥ]	ew-ee	lui, suisse	ui
[j]	yuh	oreille, Mireille	ill, y

French Consonants

ex + vowel	egz	examen, exercice
ex + consonant	eks	exceptionnel, expression
ch (Latin origin)	sh	architecte, archives
ch (Greek origin)	k	orchestre, archéologie
ti + vowel (except é)	see	démocratie, nation
c + e, i, y; or ç	s	cent, ceinture, maçon
c + a, o, u	k	caillou, car, cube
g + e, i, y	zh	genou, gingembre
g + a, o, u	g	gomme, ganglion
th	t	maths, thème, thym
j	zh	jambe, jus, jeune
qu, final q	k	que, quoi, grecque
h	silent	haricot, herbe, hasard
vowel + s + vowel	z	rose, falaise, casino
x + vowel	z	six ans, beaux arts
final x	s	six, dix, soixante (these 3 only!)

There are a lot of silent letters in French, and you usually do not pronounce the final consonant, unless that final consonant is **c, r, f** or **l** (except verbs that end in -r).

Stress & Intonation: Stress on syllables is not as pronounced as in English and it generally falls on the last syllable of the word. Intonation usually only rises for yes/no questions, and all other times, it goes down at the end of the sentence.

NOUN GENDER: All nouns in French have a gender, either **masculine** or **feminine**. It is very important to learn a noun's gender along with the noun itself because articles (a, the) and adjectives change depending on the gender of the noun they precede or follow. Notice that the **masculine** words are preceded by **le** and **feminine** words are preceded by **la** both of which mean **the**.



Most words in French that end in a *consonant* or a *-u* are **masculine**. (Except *-eur, -on*)
(Also words that end in *-ble, -cle, -de, -ge, -me, -ste, -tre*)

le corps (body)

le nez (nose)

le bras (arm)

le pied (foot)

le dîner (dinner)

le printemps (spring)

le déjeuner (lunch)

le dos (back)

le froid (coldness)

le vent (wind)

le chaud (heat)

le goûter (snack)

le cou (neck)

le ventre (stomach)

- ☆ Most words in French that end in *-e, -é, -lle, -eur* and *-on* are **feminine**.
(Except *-ble, -cle, -de, -ge, -me, -ste, -tre*)
- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| la tête (head) | la jambe (leg) | la fatigue (fatigue) |
| la bouche (mouth) | la heure (hour) | la famille (family) |

- ☆ There are a few exceptions. (Here are the ones expressed in these lesson plans):
The words **faim** (hunger), **dent** (tooth), **main** (hand) and **soif** (thirst) end in consonants yet they are **feminine** → **la faim, la dent, la main, la soif**

- ☆ Before a vowel the article becomes *l'*. Since the *h* is silent, the word acts exactly as if it began with a vowel.

l'œil (eye)	l'été (summer)	l'hiver (winter)
l'oreille (ear)	l'automne (fall)	

- ☆ Naturally words like **la mère, la fille** and **la sœur** that refer to females are **feminine** while words like **le père, le fils** and **le frère** that refer to males are **masculine**.

- ☆ Days of the week are all masculine in gender and they are not capitalized in writing:
lundi, mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi, samedi, dimanche

NUMBER (PLURALIZING NOUNS): Even though in English the word *the* does not become plural, **la** and **le** both become **les** when pluralized. To make a noun plural, you usually add an *-s* (which is not pronounced). But there are some exceptions:

- ☆ If a noun already ends in an *-s*, add nothing: **le bras** → **les bras**
- ☆ If a noun ends in *-eu, -eau* or *-ou* add an *x*: **le cou** → **les coux**
- ☆ If a noun ends in *-al* or *-ail*, change it to *-aux*: **le cheval** → **les chevaux** horse(s)

Exceptions: **bleu, un œil** (eye) → **des yeux** (eyes).

ADJECTIVES: In English, adjectives are always found in front of the noun, but most French adjectives follow the noun they modify (describe). Articles and adjectives must agree in number (singular/plural) and gender (masculine/feminine) with the nouns they modify.

- ☆ Usually the feminine adjective is formed by adding an *e* to the masculine form. To form the plural, just add an *-s*. If the adjective ends in an *x* or an *s* already, add nothing.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
grand, grande	grands, grandes
gros, grosse	gros, grosses
petit, petite	petits, petites
blanc, blanche	blancs, blanches
gris, grise	gris, grises
vert, verte	verts, vertes
bleu, bleue	bleus, bleues
noir, noire	noirs, noires
violet, violette	violets, violettes

☆ Since the final consonant of the plural is silent, the plural forms of the adjective are pronounced the same as singular forms.

☆ Adjectives that end in **e** do not change for the feminine. They simply add **s** for the plural.

rouge, rouge rouges

☆ Some adjectives of color do not change to agree with gender or number, such as adjectives that also exist as nouns: **orange, marron, rose**; remain masculine even if they describe a feminine noun.

COMPARISONS: Comparisons are expressed as follows:

plus [adjective] que	<i>more [adjective] than</i>
Ex: plus <u>grande</u> que	literally more <u>tall</u> than but more common as <u>taller</u> than
plus blanc que	<i>whiter than</i>
plus rouge que	<i>redder than</i>
plus petit que	<i>smaller than</i>
plus gross que	<i>fatter than</i>
plus grand que	<i>bigger/taller than</i>
plus mince que	<i>thinner than</i>

☆ Remember that adjectives must agree in gender and number:
Brigitte est plus grande que Antoine. ("grande" is describing Brigitte)
Antoine est plus grand que Gérard. ("grand" is describing Antoine)
Philippe y Michel sont plus grands que Monique. ("grands" is describing Philippe and Michel)
Colette y Louise sont más grandes que Luc. ("grandes" is describing Colette and Louise)

VERBS: This is where there is a lot of variance from English. Conjugation means to change a verb to fit a subject (and tense). Verbs are conjugated differently between the two languages.

☆ A verb that has not been conjugated is called an "infinitive". In French an infinitive ends in **-er, -ir** or **-re**. For example: **déjeuner, dîner, goûter**. In English an infinitive has the word "to" in front. The words on the line above in English mean: to eat lunch, to eat dinner, to eat a snack (respectfully). Other verbs used in these lesson plans include: (Notice the endings)

avoir = to have
être = to be
s'appeler (to be called/named)
faire = to make, to do
pleuvoir = to rain
neiger = to snow
arrêter = to stop
regarder = to look at, to watch
écouter = to listen to

venir = to come
aller = to go
dire = to say, to tell
toucher = to touch
faire mal = to hurt, to ache
revoir = to meet
aimer = to like, to love

✧ In English we have (in most cases) two conjugated forms of a verb in the present tense. For example: *I walk. He walks. Walk* is used for many subjects: *You walk. They walk. We walk. You all walk.* When the subject is singular then it becomes “walks”. (Irony that a singular subject uses a verb with an “s” on the end 😊.)

✧ In French there are 6 different verb endings in the present tense. The one you use depends on the subject. In the box below you will see how a conjugation box is set up. The singular subjects are on the left and the plural subjects are on the right. The rows are set up by 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person.

	Singular subjects	Plural subjects
1 st person →	je = I	nous = we
2 nd person →	tu = you	vous = you guys
3 rd person →	il = he & elle = she	ils, elles = they

The 3rd person singular box has limitless subjects: he, she, it, the cat, the house, my friend, New Jersey, the school, etc. Any subject, as long as it is singular and in the 3rd person, fits here. The same holds true for the 3rd person plural box: they, the foxes, the students, my parents, the buildings, the paintings, the countries, etc.

✧ Each of these boxes will contain a different verb form once the verb is conjugated. Example:

	Singular verbs	Plural verbs
1 st person →	j'ai = I have	nous avons = We have
2 nd person →	tú as = You have	vous avez = You all have
3 rd person →	il a = He has	ellos ont = They have

Notice that English uses “have” for all forms except the 3rd person singular where it becomes “has”: He has, She has, The cat has, Robert has, My mother has, The park has etc.



Other verbs used in these lesson plans that are already conjugated include:

ai = *I have*

fait = *it makes*

pleut = *it rains / it is raining*

neige = *it snows / it is snowing*

suis = *I am*

est = *(it) is*

sont = *(they) are*

Arrête! = *Stop!*

Regarde! = *Look!*

Écoute! = *Listen!*

Viens! = *Come!*

Va-t'en! = *Go!*

dit = *says*

touche = *touch*

aime = *I like, I love*

va = *he, she, it goes*

vas = *you go*

vais = *I go*

t'appelles = *you call yourself (your name is...)*

m'appelle = *I call myself (my name is...)*

NEGATIVES: To make a verb negative, add **ne** before the verb and **pas** after it.

Il **ne** fait **pas** soleil.

*It is **not** sunny.*

Je **ne** suis **pas** fatigué.

*I **am not** tired.* (Use fatiguée for a girl. Pronounced the same.)

Il **ne** neige **pas**.

*It is **not** snowing.*

Je *n'aime **pas** ça.

*I **do not** like that.*

Je *n'ai **pas** froid.

*I **am not** cold.*

(*a contraction is used when the word which follows ne begins with a vowel)

AVOIR and FAIRE (Expressing needs and telling the weather)

In English we say "*I am thirsty. I am hungry. I am cold. I am hot.*" We use the verb "to be" and adjectives: thirsty, hungry, cold and hot. In French we use the verb **avoir** (to have) and nouns to say the same thing: "**J'ai soif. J'ai faim. J'ai froid. J'ai chaud.**" **Soif, faim, froid** and **chaud** are nouns which means the sentences literally say "*I have thirst. I have hunger. I have coldness. I have heat.*"

The same thing happens when telling the weather. In English we say "*It is hot. It is cold. It is windy. It is sunny.*" Once again we use "to be" and adjectives. In French we use **faire** (to make) and nouns. **Chaud** (heat), **froid** (coldness), **vent** (wind), **soleil** (sun) are all nouns. We use **fait** (the singular form of the verb **faire**) with these nouns. **Il fait soleil** literally means *It makes sun*. It seems odd to have "it" be the subject of the weather. In a sense it helps to think of the "it" as Mother Nature or Jack Frost both singular subjects.

French

Il fait chaud.

Il fait froid.

Il fait du vent.

Il fait soleil.

Literal translation

It makes heat. →

It makes coldness. →

It makes wind. →

It makes sun. →

Comprehensible English ☺

It is hot.

It is cold.

It is windy.

It is sunny.



AVOIR (to have) to express pain: To say something hurts or that you have an ache, you can use **avoir mal à** (body part):

J'ai mal à la tête.	I have pain in the head.	(I have a headache.)
J'ai mal au* ventre.	I have pain in the stomach.	(I have a stomachache.)
J'ai mal au* bras.	I have pain in the arm.	(My arm hurts.)
J'ai mal au* dos.	I have pain in the back.	(I have a backache.)
J'ai mal aux* dents.	I have pain in the teeth.	(My teeth hurt.)

(*a contraction is formed with masculine nouns: à + le = **au** / **aux** is the plural)

DEMONSTRATIVES: This is a fancy name given words like *this* and *that*. In French there are masculine and feminine forms to these words. However, to simplify this complicated structure we will stick with **ça**. This is the spoken equivalent of **ceci** (*this*) and **cela** (*that*) which are used in formal French.

J'aime ça.	<i>I like this.</i>	<i>I like that.</i>
Je n'aime pas ça.	<i>I don't like this.</i>	<i>I don't like that.</i>

TIME: The question **¿Quelle heure est-il?** literally means *What hour is it?*

☆ "It is one o'clock" is said "**Il est une heure**" which literally means "*It is one hour*". **Une** (the feminine way to say *one*) is used because the word "heure" is feminine. *One* is the only number that can be feminine when telling time. Once the number to tell time is plural (2:00, 3:00, 4:00 etc), the structure word heure becomes plural: **Il est deux heures. Il est trois heures. Il est quatre heures.** etc.

☆ When you want to say "*It is time to [verb]*", you would use a verb in the infinitive form just as we do in English (marked by the "to"). You are saying "It is the hour to [verb]".

C'est l'heure du <u>petit déjeuner</u> .	<i>It is time to eat breakfast.</i>
C'est l'heure du <u>déjeuner</u> .	<i>It is time to eat lunch.</i>
C'est l'heure du <u>goûter</u> .	<i>It is time to eat a snack.</i>
C'est l'heure du <u>dîner</u> .	<i>It is time to eat dinner.</i>
C'est l'heure du <u>lire</u> .	<i>It is time to read.</i>
C'est l'heure du <u>dormir</u> .	<i>It is time to sleep.</i>
C'est l'heure du <u>jouer</u> .	<i>It is time to play.</i>
C'est l'heure du <u>ramasser</u> .	<i>It is time to clean up.</i>

ORDINAL NUMBERS: Ordinal numbers are used to express rank or position.

☆ All ordinal numbers in French (except first and second) are created by dropping the final e (if any) from their corresponding cardinal number and then adding **-ième**:

trois → troisième	huit → huitième
quatre → quatrième	neuf → neuvième
cinq → cinquième	dix → dixième
six → sixième	onze → onzième
sept → septième	

☆ Notice the spelling changes in **cinquième** and **neuvième**

☆ *First* is the only ordinal number that has a masculine form **premier** and a feminine form **première**. They must agree in number with the noun to which they refer.

la première fille	<i>the first daughter</i>
le premier fils	<i>the first son</i>

DATE: The structure for saying a date in French goes from smallest increment (day) to medium sized increment ☺ (month) to the largest increment (year). It looks like this:

C'est le (day)(month)(year).
It is the (day)(month)(year).

Example: **C'est le 8 avril 2008.**
The literal translation is: *It is the 8 April 2008.*

They would actually write this date like this: 08-04-08 (which is not August 4th ☺). Some students might think this is great but it will drive the rest wacko!

To say *My birthday is _____*, start with **Mon anniversaire est** then follow the date structure.
Mon anniversaire est le (day) (month) (year).

Months and days of the week are NOT capitalized in French. The only things that are capitalized are proper nouns and the first word in a sentence (even with book titles!)

SEASONS: The seasons are simple.

C'est l'été.	<i>It is summer.</i>	C'est l'automne.	<i>It is fall.</i>
C'est l'hiver.	<i>It is winter.</i>	C'est le printemps.	<i>It is spring.</i>

Students can put it together with the days of the week and the weather and say:

C'est lundi, le 4 février. C'est l'hiver. Il fait froid et neige.
It is Monday, the 4 February. It is winter. It is cold and snowing.