

French, Step by Step, Root by Root

An etymology-driven curriculum, built one word at a time

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This edition compiled incrementally — new chapters added as they
are written.

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Preface

This book teaches French one word at a time, and it teaches each word by taking it apart — traced back to its root (usually Latin), then forward to the English cousins you already own, so nothing here is a fresh thing to memorize. It is written for someone starting from zero, whose only shared language is English. *jour* ("day") arrives next to *journal* and *journey*; *salut* ("hi") turns out to wish you *health*, like *salute* and *salubrious*.

French has a close sibling in Spanish — both are worn-down Latin — so where a French word and its Spanish cousin descend from one Latin root, the book shows both and dwells on the *difference* between them (why the same *dies* became French *jour* but Spanish *día*; why French keeps *bonjour* singular where Spanish pluralizes *buenos días*). Every such comparison is supplied in full by the text — no prior Spanish is assumed; it is offered as enrichment, and a reader who happens to know Spanish simply nods along.

How to use this book

Every numbered section is one word, or one small phrase, and takes a few minutes — the length of a queue, an errand, or the walk to the bus. Read them in order the first time through: each section stands on the ones before it, and nothing is used before it has been taught. After that the book becomes reference, and you can open it anywhere.

Say the French out loud wherever you can. The prompts under *Your turn* are written to be spoken, and saying a word is most of what makes it stay. The questions under *Before you move on* carry their own answers in brackets: cover them, answer from memory, then look.

Nothing here is gated behind pronunciation. Each lesson names the one or two sounds its own word needs, exactly where they are needed. The whole system is gathered in a reference at the back of the book — somewhere to look things up when you are curious, never a chapter to sit through first.

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Chapter 1

Greetings

Modes:  voice (9)  eyes (1)  pen (5)  Hands-free start: first 1 of 15 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone in French, recognize the reply, and choose an appropriate response.

The French greetings, built from their pieces — a word for “good,” words for “day,” “evening” and “night,” and the gender machine that decides their endings. French and Spanish are both daughters of Latin; where a French word and its Spanish cousin split from one Latin root, both appear here, because the difference between them is often the lesson — and the text supplies the Spanish word whether or not you have met it before.

1.1 salut — “hi,” and a wish for your health

Your first French word, and a warmer one than it looks. *Salut* is the casual “hi” — but taken apart, it literally wishes you good health.

Sounds you’ll need

- **silent-final** — the final **t** is **silent**: *salut* is *sa-LU*, not *sa-LUT*. Most French final consonants go silent. → reference
- **vowel-u** — the **u** is the French front-rounded *ee* (say *ee* with pursed lips), not *oo*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

salut — informal “hi” (and “bye”). Root: Latin **salus, salutem** (“health, safety, well-being”). So *salut* is, at root, a wish of *health* — the same instinct as English “cheers” or old “hail” (be healthy). The family you already own in English:

- **salute, salutation** — a greeting (a wishing-of-health).
- **salutary, salubrious** — health-giving.
- and, from the close cousin *salvus* (“safe”), *save, salvation, safe*.

Spanish note: its casual “hi” is *hola* — an uncertain, rootless interjection. French *salut* is the opposite: a transparent Latin word meaning “health.” Two Romance languages, two totally different casual “hi”s.

Why it’s said this way

Salut is strictly **informal** — friends, family, peers — and it doubles as “bye.” For anyone you’d show respect to, or a first meeting, you reach past it for *bonjour* (coming in a few lessons), exactly as Spanish reaches past *hola* for *buenos días*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “salut” — *sa-LU*, silent *t*
- “salut” then English “salute”, “salutary” — the health root

Before you move on

What does *salut* literally wish someone? (Health — from Latin *salus*.) What happens to its final *t*? (Silent.)

1.2 *salut* — let your eye and hand meet one known word

Say the casual greeting you just learned: *salut*, *sa-LU*. Today adds no new French. You will only notice how that familiar word sits on a page.

What you've built — one spelling

s a l u t → salut

The word has five written letters. Your voice finishes on **u**; the final **t** stays visible and silent. Point to each letter from left to right once.

Writing — trace with the model visible

Keep **salut** visible. Slowly finger-trace the five letters once, left to right. Then trace the word once in the air. Say *sa-LU* only after your finger reaches the silent **t**.

This is noticing, not a handwriting test. Use the letter forms you normally write; there is no new alphabet and no demand for perfect penmanship.

Before you move on

Point to the silent letter. Stop here; copying comes in the next tiny lesson.

1.3 *salut* — one supported copy

Point to the last letter in **salut**. It is written **t** and said as silence. Keep the model on the page for the whole lesson.

Writing — guided copy

Copy **salut** once. You may look back after every letter.

When you finish, touch **s-a-l-u-t** in your copy and say *sa-LU*. The eye checks five letters; the voice does not add a final *t* sound.

Before you move on

Compare only the order and presence of the five letters. Repair one letter if needed, then stop. The model stays visible today.

1.4 *salut* — look, hide, write, compare

Look at **salut** for five seconds. Touch the final silent **t**. Do not copy it yet.

Writing — delayed copy

1. cover the model;
2. wait five seconds;
3. write the word once from memory;
4. uncover **salut**, compare, and repair only the place that differs.

If one letter differs, circle that place and repair only that letter. A repair is part of the exercise, not a failure.

Before you move on

Read your repaired word as *sa-LU*. Stop after one memory attempt.

1.5 One heard greeting — write what you know

Cover the answer line lower on this page. You will hear one familiar casual greeting. No new vocabulary is hiding in this lesson.

Writing — short dictation

Hear: *sa-LU*

Write the French greeting from the sound alone. Remember that your pen records one final letter that your voice does not pronounce.

Now uncover and compare: **salut**. Check only the five letters and the silent final **t**. Repair one place if needed.

Before you move on

Writing from sound is the endpoint of this four-step runway. It is not yet a DILF mock; later lessons will grow from one known word to contact details, numbers, forms, and short practical messages.

1.6 bien — “well,” a whole answer

A tiny, essential word: **bien**, “well.” It carries a good chunk of everyday conversation, and its root reaches straight into English.

Sounds you’ll need

- **nasal-in** — **ien** is a **nasal byan**: air through the nose, and the *n* itself is silent. Not “bee-en.” → reference

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bien — “well.” Root: Latin **bene** (“well”). The English *bene-* family is yours already:

- **benefit** (“do well”), **benevolent** (“wish well”), **benediction** (“speak well”), **benign**.

A cross-language aside: Spanish, another daughter of Latin, has the very same word — *bien*, also from *bene*, also “well.” French and Spanish each inherited the Latin adverb independently and it barely changed in either; when two Romance languages agree this exactly, you’re looking straight at the shared Latin parent.

Using it alone: “*Comment ça va?*” (how’s it going?) → “**Bien.**” (“Well / good.”) Intensified: “**très bien**” (“very well”).

Grammar Lens: the “good” it pairs with

bien is the **adverb** (“well” — *how* something is done). The **adjective** “good” (describing a thing) is a different word, **bon** — the next lesson. This is the same *well* vs. *good* split as English, and the same *bien* vs. *bueno* split as Spanish; French’s adjective is *bon*, from Latin *bonus*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bien” — nasal *byan*
- “très bien”
- “bien” then English “benefit”, “benevolent”

Before you move on

French *bien* and Spanish *bien* come from the same Latin word — which one? (*bene*, “well.”) Adverb or adjective? (Adverb — “good” the adjective is *bon*, next.)

1.7 bon / bonne — “good,” the block you build greetings from

This is the word that starts *bonjour* and *bonsoir*. Learn it alone first — including the trick that its two forms *sound* completely different even though they look nearly the same.

Sounds you’ll need

- **nasal-on** — **bon** is a **nasal** *bõ*: the *n* is silent, the vowel goes through the nose. → reference
- **silent-final** — but **bonne** (feminine) is *bun* — the doubled *nn* **cancels the nasal** and you actually pronounce an *n*. So *bon* (*bõ*) and *bonne* (*bun*) sound different despite looking alike.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bon — “good” (adjective, masculine). **bonne** — “good” (feminine). Root: Latin **bonus** / **bona** (“good”). Your English cousins:

- **bonus** (borrowed straight from Latin *bonus*), **bonanza**, and — via Old French *bonté* — **bounty**. Even *bonbon* (“good-good,” a candy).

Spanish cousin: from the same *bonus* / *bona*, Spanish made *bueno* / *buena*. Notice French kept it shorter (*bon*) while

Spanish broke the *o* into a diphthong (*bue-*). Same Latin word, two accents of wear.

Grammar Lens: adjectives agree with their noun

Like every Romance adjective, *bon* **agrees** with its noun's gender and number — *bon* (masc.), *bonne* (fem.), *bons* (masc. pl.), *bonnes* (fem. pl.). This is Latin's legacy: adjectives change their ending to match the noun (Spanish runs the same machine on *bueno* / *buena*). You'll watch it in the next few lessons: *bon jour* (masc.) but *bonne nuit* (fem.).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bon” (nasal *bõ*) then “bonne” (*bun*) — hear the difference
- the four shapes — bon, bonne, bons, bonnes

Before you move on

Why do *bon* and *bonne* sound different? (The double *nn* in *bonne* cancels the nasal — *bõ* vs *bun*.) Which Spanish adjective shares *bon*'s Latin root? (*bueno*, from the same *bonus*.)

1.8 le, la, les — “the,” and the gender it carries

Before your first noun: the words for “the.” French splits “the” by gender — masculine *le*, feminine *la* — a habit it inherited from Latin (its sibling Spanish did the same, from the same source).

Sounds you'll need

- **le** = *luh*, **la** = *lah*, **les** = *lay* (the *s* is silent — **silent-final**).
→ reference

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

le — “the” (masculine). **la** — “the” (feminine). **les** — “the” (plural, both genders). Roots: Latin demonstratives *ille* / *illa* / *illos* (“that one / those”):

- **le** ← *ille*, **la** ← *illa*, **les** ← *illos* — the pointing force (“that”) faded into a plain “the,” and the initial *il-* wore off.

Spanish cousin, exactly: from the *same ille / illa / illos*, Spanish made *el / la / los*. French kept *le* where Spanish kept *el* — same parent. And those same Latin demonstratives also gave French **il** (“he”) and **elle** (“she”) (Spanish *él / ella*): article and pronoun, one Latin root. (English “the” is Germanic — unrelated.)

Grammar Lens: French gender, also from Latin

Every French noun is **masculine or feminine** — a grammatical gender baked into the noun, inherited from Latin: its three genders (masculine, feminine, neuter) collapsed to two, the neuters folding into the masculine. (Spanish, the other Latin daughter, did the very same.) You learn each noun **with its article** (*le* or *la*), because the gender can’t be guessed. French has one convenience here: in the plural, both genders share a single article, *les*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le”, “la”, “les”
- “le jour” (masc.), “la nuit” (fem.) — the nouns are coming

Before you move on

le and *la* come from which Latin words? (*ille / illa*, “that one” — same as Spanish *el/la*.) What’s the single plural “the”? (*les*.)

1.9 jour — “day,” and a detour through Latin that explains English *journey*

Your first French noun. In Spanish “day” is *día*; in French it’s *jour* — they look nothing alike, yet they’re cousins. The gap between them is the whole lesson, and it cracks open a shelf of English words.

What to know first

- le / la / les — gender and the articles; *jour* is masculine, *le jour*.

Sounds you'll need

- j-zh — **j** is the soft *zh* of *measure*: *jour* starts *zh*-.
- vowel-ou — **ou** = *oo*. So *jour* = *zhoor*. → reference

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

le jour — “the day” (masculine). Root: Latin **diurnum** (“daytime, daily”) — itself from **dies** (“day”). That extra step through *diurnum* is why *jour* looks so unlike Spanish *día*:

- Spanish took *dies* → *día* (short path).
- French took the derivative *diurnum* → *jorn* → *jour* (the *di*-crushed down to *j*-).

Same ultimate root, two different Latin words, two very different results. And *diurnum* is a goldmine of English cousins — most of them arrived through French:

- **journal** (a *daily* record), **journey** (originally a *day*’s travel or work — French *journée*, “a day’s worth”), **journalist**.
- **sojourn** (“to stay [for days]”), **adjourn** (à *jour*, “to [another] day”).
- and straight from *dies*: **diurnal**, **diary** — cousins of *jour* through the grandparent root.

So English *journey* and Spanish *día* are cousins, meeting back at Latin *dies* — one through French *jour*, one direct. That’s the kind of hidden family this whole book is built to show.

Grammar Lens

jour is **masculine** — *le jour* — a gender it inherited from its Latin source. As always, learn it with the article. Plural: French adds a

(silent) **-s** — *les jours* — sounds identical to the singular; only *les* tells your ear it's plural.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le jour” — *luh zhoor*
- “jour” then “journal”, “journey” — the daily root
- “les jours” — plural, heard only in the *les*

Before you move on

jour and Spanish *día* share which grandparent root? (Latin *dies*.)
What English travel-word is literally “a day’s worth”? (*Journey*, from *journée*.)

1.10 bonjour — assembled, and *not* plural (unlike Spanish)

Snap two words together — *bon* + *jour* — and you have the single most important word in French politeness. And there’s a sharp contrast with Spanish hiding in it.

What to know first

- *bon* / *bonne* · *jour*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bonjour = **bon** (“good”) + **jour** (“day”) = “good day.” One written word, said *bõ- zhoor*. *bon* is masculine because *jour* is masculine — the agreement from the *bon* lesson, quietly at work.

Why it’s said this way

Here’s the contrast worth banking. Spanish says *buenos días* — **plural**, “good days,” the fossil of a blessing (“may God give you good days”). French says *bonjour* — **singular**, just “good day.” French

didn't fossilize the plural; it kept the plain, single wish. Same two building blocks (*good + day*), same Latin roots, but Spanish pluralized the blessing and French didn't. Two neighbours, two instincts. Culturally, *bonjour* carries weight far beyond "hello": in France, opening almost any interaction — a shop, a bus, a desk — *without* a *bonjour* reads as rude. It's the formal, all-purpose daytime greeting (switch to *bonsoir* in the evening), and the polite default where *salut* would be too casual.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- build it — “bon” ... “jour” ... “bonjour”
- “salut” (casual) then “bonjour” (polite) — feel the register gap
- *bonjour* vs Spanish *buenos días* — one singular, one plural

Before you move on

bonjour is singular; the Spanish equivalent is plural — what is it, and why plural? (*Buenos días*, fossil of “may God give you good days.”)

1.11 *soir* — “evening,” and the same “late” idea Spanish used

The evening counterpart of *jour*. And there's a lovely parallel with Spanish waiting: both languages built their “later in the day” word out of the Latin word for *late*.

What to know first

- *jour* — the day word; *soir* is its evening partner.

Sounds you'll need

- vowel-oi — **oi** = *wa*: *soir* is *swahr*. → reference

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

le soir — “the evening” (masculine). Root: Latin **sērum** (*tempus*), “the **late** [hour],” from **sērus** (“late”). English cousins are few but real: *soirée* (an evening party — borrowed straight from French *soir*), and the rare *serotine* (a bat that flies in the *late* evening).

Spanish parallel — this is the good part. Spanish *tarde* (“afternoon”) comes from Latin *tardus*, “**late**.” French *soir* (“evening”) comes from *sērus*, “**late**.” Two different Latin “late” words, two languages, the same idea: name the later part of the day after its *lateness*.

Grammar Lens

soir is **masculine** — *le soir* — so, like *jour*, it will take *bon* (not *bonne*) in the greeting. Plural *les soirs*, the *s* silent.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le soir” — *luh swahr*
- “soir” then English “soirée”
- Spanish *tarde* ← “late”, French *soir* ← “late” — same idea

Before you move on

What did *soir*’s Latin root *sērus* mean? (“Late.”) What Spanish time-word did the exact same thing from a different “late” word? (*Tarde*, ← *tardus*.)

1.12 bonsoir — good evening

Same assembly as *bonjour*, one word swapped. If you have that one, this is nearly free.

What to know first

- bon / bonne · soir · bonjour

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bonsoir = **bon** (“good”) + **soir** (“evening”) = “good evening.” *bon* stays masculine because *soir* is masculine — same as *bonjour*, no new agreement to learn. Said *bõ- swahr*.

Why it’s said this way

bonsoir is the evening swap for *bonjour*: as the day turns to evening (roughly late afternoon on), French speakers switch from *bonjour* to *bonsoir*. Both are the polite, all-purpose greeting for their time of day. And like Spanish *buenas noches*, *bonsoir* works both **arriving** and **leaving** in the evening — “good evening” on the way in, “goodnight-ish” on the way out. (For actually sending someone to bed, French has a separate phrase — the next two lessons.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bonsoir” — *bõ- swahr*
- “bonjour” (daytime) then “bonsoir” (evening) — the pair

Before you move on

What two words build *bonsoir*, and why does *bon* stay masculine? (*bon* + *soir*; *soir* is masculine.)

1.13 nuit — “night,” and a sound-change that mirrors Spanish

“Night.” In Spanish it’s *noche*; in French, *nuit*. They came from the *same* Latin word and drifted apart by two different rules — and once you see the rules, you can predict a dozen more words.

What to know first

- *le* / *la* / *les* — *nuit* is feminine, *la nuit*.

Sounds you'll need

- **nuit** = *nwee* — the **u** is the front-rounded French *u* gliding into *ee*; the final **t** is silent (**silent-final**). → reference

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

la nuit — “the night” (feminine). Root: Latin **noctem** (*nox*, stem *noct-*). English cousins through the *noct-* root: **nocturnal**, **nocturne**, **equinox** (“equal night”).

The sound-change, side by side with Spanish. Latin *noctem* went two ways:

- Spanish softened *-ct-* → **-ch-**: *noctem* → *noche*.
- French turned *-ct-* → **-it-**: *noctem* → *nuit*.

And it's a *rule*, not a one-off — watch it repeat:

Latin	Spanish	French	English
<i>noctem</i>	noche	nuit	night
<i>lactem</i>	leche	lait	(lact-, “milk”)
<i>factum</i>	hecho	fait	fact

So a Spanish *-ch-* word and a French *-it-* word are often the *same* Latin word — and the English cousin usually kept the *-ct-*.

Grammar Lens

nuit is **feminine** — *la nuit* — inherited from Latin, where *nox* was feminine (exactly as Spanish *la noche* is). Its gender matters next lesson: it's why “good night” is *bonne nuit*, not *bon nuit*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la nuit” — *lah nwee*
- “nuit” then Spanish “noche” — same Latin *noctem*, two rules
- the row — “noche, nuit, night”

Before you move on

Latin *noctem* → Spanish *noche* by *-ct-→-ch-*; → French *nuit* by which change? (*-ct-→-it-*.) Is *nuit* masculine or feminine? (Feminine — *la nuit*.)

1.14 *bonne nuit* — good night, and the feminine side of *bon*

The last greeting of the day — and the one that finally shows *bon* in its feminine coat.

What to know first

- *bon* / *bonne* · *nuit*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bonne nuit = **bonne** (“good,” feminine) + **nuit** (“night,” feminine) = “good night.” Here it is at last: because *nuit* is **feminine**, *bon* becomes **bonne** — and, from the *bon* lesson, remember they even *sound* different: *bon* is nasal *bõ*, but *bonne nuit* is *bun nwee*, with a real *n*.

So the three evening-ish greetings line up and show the whole agreement rule in one breath:

- *bonjour* — *jour* masculine → *bon*
- *bonsoir* — *soir* masculine → *bon*
- *bonne nuit* — *nuit* feminine → *bonne*

Why it’s said this way

Unlike *bonsoir* (an evening *greeting*), *bonne nuit* is a **farewell for bed** — “goodnight,” said when parting for sleep. It maps onto the Spanish split you may feel forming: Spanish overloads *buenas noches* for both, while French keeps *bonsoir* (evening hello/bye) separate from *bonne nuit* (off-to-sleep).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bonne nuit” — *bun nwee*
- the trio — *bonjour*, *bonsoir*, *bonne nuit* — and for each, is *bon* masculine or feminine, and why?

Before you move on

Why is it *bonne nuit* but *bon jour*? (*nuit* is feminine, *jour* masculine — agreement.) *bonsoir* vs *bonne nuit* — which is “off to bed”? (*Bonne nuit.*)

1.15 Practice — the French greetings

No new words — just the ones you built, until the register and the agreement are automatic.

What you’ve built

- **salut** — casual “hi/bye” (← *salus*, “health”).
- **bien** — “well,” a one-word answer (← *bene*; Spanish kept the same word).
- **bon / bonne** — “good,” the adjective (← *bonus*), and its agreement.
- **le / la / les** — “the,” carrying gender (← *ille/illa/illos*).
- **bonjour** = *bon* + *jour* (masc.) — polite daytime “hello,” *singular* where Spanish is plural.
- **bonsoir** = *bon* + *soir* (masc.) — evening greeting.
- **bonne nuit** = *bonne* + *nuit* (fem.) — off-to-bed “goodnight.”

Two threads run through it all: **register** (*salut* vs *bonjour*) and **agreement** (*bon jour* / *bon soir* / *bonne nuit*).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- greet a friend casually, then a shopkeeper politely — *salut / bonjour*
- pick the right greeting for right now (day → *bonjour*, evening → *bonsoir*)
- *bonjour*, *bonsoir*, *bonne nuit* — and say why each takes *bon* or *bonne*
- answer “how are you” in one word — *bien*, then *très bien*

Twice through: Run *bonjour* → *bonsoir* → *bonne nuit* without hesitating on *bon/bonne*.

Writing — close the first runway

Cover the word **salut** elsewhere in this chapter. Write the casual greeting once from memory, then uncover it and check the silent final **t**. This is a chapter-level retrieval of the tiny trace-to-dictation runway, not a new word.

Before you move on

French *bonjour* is singular; the Spanish morning greeting is plural — name it. (*Buenos días*.) Next chapter: introducing yourself — *je m'appelle...* — and French's own formal/informal “you,” **tu** vs **vous**.

Chapter 2

Introducing Yourself

Modes: 🗣️ voice (8) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: none of the 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can introduce myself in French, give my name, and understand the other person's name.

Now a first real exchange — “Je m'appelle Mira.” / “Comment vous appelez-vous?” / “Je m'appelle Arun.” / “Enchanté.” — giving your name, asking for someone else's, and saying you are glad to meet them. We build it the same way as the greetings: each piece taken apart first, then assembled.

2.1 je — “I,” the smallest word you own

To introduce yourself you need “I.” French's is tiny — but it comes from a word you already own whole in English.

Sounds you'll need

- **je** = *zhuh* — a soft *j* (as in *measure*) plus a light *uh*.
- Before a vowel it **elides**: *je ai* → **j'ai** (“I have”). You'll see the same squeeze in *je m'appelle*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

je — “I.” Root: Latin **ego**. That Latin form survives *raw* in English:

- **ego**, **egoist**, **egotism**, **egocentric** — the “I” at the center of the self.

So the word for “I” and the psychologist’s *ego* are the **same** ancient word — one worn down to a whisper (*je*), one kept whole (*ego*). (Spanish wore *ego* down to *yo*; French wore it further, to *je*.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “je” (*zhuh*)
- the elision — “je ai” → “j’ai”
- the English cousin that kept the Latin whole — *ego*

Before you move on

What Latin word is **je** worn down from, and what English word kept it whole? (*ego* — English *ego*.) What happens to *je* before a vowel? (It elides to *j’*.)

2.2 me — “myself,” the same word as English *me*

The middle piece of *je m’appelle*. It’s a real word with a real history — not just a bit of glue — and you’ve owned it in English all your life.

Sounds you’ll need

- **me** = *muh* — a light *uh*, like *je*.
- Before a vowel it **elides**: *me appelle* → **m’appelle** (the *e* drops, the words fuse).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

me — “me / myself.” Root: Latin **mē** (the accusative “me”) — literally the **same** word as English **me**. The whole family grows from one Proto-Indo-European root ***me-**:

- English **me**, **my**, **mine**;
- Latin **mē** and **meus** (“my”), which became French *mon* / *ma* /

mes.

So the tiny *m'* in *je m'appelle* is a first-person marker you've carried in English since childhood — *me*, *my*, *mine* are its cousins.

Grammar Lens: the reflexive set (*me* / *te* / *se*)

me is one of three little pronouns that **bounce a verb back onto its doer** — *me* (“myself”), *te* (“yourself”), *se* (“himself, herself”). Their roots run in parallel with the one you just met, and two of them you already own in English:

- *te* ← Latin *tē*, the cousin of archaic English **thee**.
- *se* ← Latin *sē*, the “self” root behind **separate** and, at a distance, **suicide** (*suī*, “of oneself”).

Only **me** does any work here: it is what gives your own name, *je m'appelle*. *te* turns up once, in the informal “what’s your name?” (*comment tu t'appelles?*), and *se* waits for a lesson that needs it. The set is named so its shape is familiar, not laid out as a grid to memorize — you meet each one where it earns its place.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “me” (*muh*), then its elision — “m'appelle”
- the English cousins from the same root — *me*, *my*, *mine*
- the set — *me* (myself), *te* (yourself), *se* (oneself)

Before you move on

What Latin word is **me** from, and what three English words share its root? (*mē* — *me*, *my*, *mine*.) What are its two siblings, and what does *me* do to a verb? (*te*, *se*; it bounces the action back onto the doer — reflexive.)

2.3 (s')appeler — “to call,” and “to call *oneself*”

French says “my name is” by saying “I call myself.” Here’s the verb that does it — and a fat English family riding on it.

Sounds you’ll need

- **appeler** = *a-play* — the *-er* infinitive ending is a plain “ay.”
- In **m’appelle** the doubled *ll* keeps a crisp “l”: *ma-PELL*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

appeler — “to call.” Root: Latin **appellāre** (“to address, call by name”). The English cousins are everywhere in formal language:

- **appeal** — to *call* to a higher authority.
- **appellation** — a name or title (an *appellation* of wine is its official name).
- **appellate**, **appellant** — the court that hears appeals, and the one who brings it.

To **name** someone is, at root, to **call** them.

Grammar Lens: reflexive verbs — doing something to yourself

French builds “to be called” from “to call” plus a little word that bounces the action back onto the doer: **s’appeler**, “to call *oneself*.” That bounce-back word changes for each person:

- **me** = myself · **te** = yourself · **se** = himself/herself.

So “I call myself” needs **me**: *je me appelle* → (elided) *je m’appelle*. English hides the same move in “I call **myself**” — French just uses it as the normal way to give a name.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “appeler” (*a-play*)

- the English cousins — *appeal, appellation*
- “call oneself” with *me* — *je me appelle*

Before you move on

What Latin verb is **appeler** from, and two English cousins? (*appellāre* — *appeal, appellation.*) What does a *reflexive* verb do, and which little word means “myself”? (Bounces the action back on the doer; *me.*)

2.4 je m'appelle... — “my name is...,” literally “I call myself”

Assemble the two pieces you just met — *je* and *(s')appeler* — into the single most useful sentence for meeting anyone.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Three atoms, each already taken apart on its own — *je* (I, ← *ego*), *me* (myself, ← *mē*), *appelle* (call, ← *appellāre*):

- **je** (I) + **me** (myself) + **appelle** (call).
- *me* elides before the vowel of *appelle* → **m'**.

je m'appelle... = word for word “I call myself...” = “**my name is...**”

Je m'appelle Arun. → “My name is Arun.” *Je m'appelle Mira.* → “My name is Mira.”

Why it's said this way

French *prefers* this verb-based “I call myself” to a literal “my name is.” The literal form does exist:

- **mon nom est...** (“my name is...”), with **nom** (“name”) ← Latin *nōmen* → English **noun, nominate, nominal, nomenclature.**

But *mon nom est* sounds stiff and official — a passport-desk phrase. For a real introduction, reach for **je m'appelle**. (You now also see

why “noun” is literally “a naming word.”)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “je m’appelle...” then your own name
- what it *literally* says (“I call myself”)
- the stiff literal alternative — “mon nom est...”

Before you move on

What does **je m’appelle** literally mean, and why does *me* become *m’*? (“I call myself”; elision before the vowel of *appelle*.) What’s the more literal but stiffer “my name is,” and what English word is *nom* cousin to? (*mon nom est*; *noun*.)

2.5 tu / vous — “you,” familiar and formal

To *ask* someone their name, you need “you.” French has two, and choosing between them is a small act of social judgment.

Sounds you’ll need

- **tu** = *too*, but with the front-rounded French *u* (lips rounded, tongue forward). **vous** = *voo* (silent *s*).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- **tu** (familiar “you”) ← Latin **tū**.
- **vous** (formal / plural “you”) ← Latin **vōs**, “you all.”

English once had the same split — old **thou** was the *tu* — but *thou* died out, leaving one flat **you** for everyone.

Grammar Lens: two “you”s, chosen by register

- **tu** — for friends, family, children, peers. Intimate, equal.
- **vous** — for strangers, elders, anyone you’d show respect — **and** it’s the plural “you all.”

The trick: French makes politeness by using the **plural** on a single person. Addressing one respected person as “you all” is the polite move (French even has a verb for it, *vouvoyer*). This is the same politeness Spanish builds with *usted*, but by a different route: Spanish coined a whole new pronoun (from “your grace”); French just borrows its plural. Using *tu* too early can feel over-familiar — **when in doubt, *vous***.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “tu” (front-rounded *u*), “vous” (*voo*)
- who gets *tu* (friends), who gets *vous* (strangers, elders)
- the rule of thumb — “when in doubt, *vous*”

Before you move on

What decides *tu* vs *vous* — and what does French do to be polite to one person? (Register — familiar vs respect; it uses the *plural* (*vous*) on one person.) What old English word was the lost *tu*? (*thou*.)

2.6 comment — “how,” from the same *quomodo* as Spanish *cómo*

French asks “what’s your name?” as “**how** are you called?” — so first, the word for “how.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **comment** = *ko-MAHN* — the final *-ent* is a **nasal** vowel; the *t* is silent.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

comment — “how.” Root: Latin **quo modo**, “in what manner” — two words fused and worn into one.

- That same **quomodo** also became Spanish **cómo** — two Romance languages, one Latin “in-what-way,” reshaped differently.
- The piece **modo** (“manner, measure”) is alive in English **mode**, **model**, **moderate**, **modify** — all about the *way* a thing is done.

Grammar Lens: French counts names as a matter of “how”

Where English asks “**what** is your name?”, French asks “**how** are you called?” — *comment* (how), not *what*. The question is about the *manner* of your calling, not a thing to be named. Don’t translate word for word; learn the French logic: the name-question runs on **comment**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “comment” (*ko-MAHN*, nasal ending)
- the Latin *quo modo* → French *comment*, Spanish *cómo*
- English *mode/model* share the *modo* piece

Before you move on

What two Latin words fused into **comment**, and what Spanish word shares them? (*quo modo* — Spanish *cómo*.) English asks “what is your name?” — what does French literally ask? (“*How* are you called?”)

2.7 comment vous appelez-vous? — “what’s your name?”

Assemble it: “how” + “do you call yourself” = the polite question that gets the introduction going.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- **comment** (how) + **vous appelez-vous** (“do you call yourself”).

comment vous appelez-vous? = literally “how do you call yourself?” = the polite “what’s your name?”

Grammar Lens: asking by inversion

A statement — *vous vous appelez* (“you call yourself”) — becomes a **question** by flipping the verb and the pronoun, joined with a hyphen:

vous appelez-vous?

That flip is French’s formal way to ask anything. The **informal** version simply swaps in *tu*:

comment tu t’appelles? — note *te* elides to **t’**, exactly as *me* became *m’* in *je m’appelle*.

So the same verb, *s’appeler*, runs the whole exchange: *je m’appelle* to give your name, *comment vous appelez-vous?* to ask for theirs.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “comment vous appelez-vous?” (formal)
- the informal — “comment tu t’appelles?”
- the pair — ask, then answer: “...vous appelez-vous?” / “je m’appelle...”

Before you move on

What does **comment vous appelez-vous?** literally say? (“How do you call yourself?”) How do you turn the statement into a question, and what’s the *tu* version? (Invert verb + pronoun with a hyphen; *comment tu t’appelles?*)

2.8 enchanté(e) — “delighted,” i.e. “pleased to meet you”

The graceful close to an introduction — and it literally says you’ve been put under a spell.

Sounds you’ll need

- **enchanté** = *ahn-shahn-TAY* — two **nasal** vowels (*en*, *an*), then a clean “tay.” **ch** = English *sh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

enchanté — “delighted.” Root: Latin **in-** (“upon”) + **cantāre** (“to sing, chant”). To *enchant* was literally to **sing a spell upon** someone. The magic survives in the English family:

- **enchant**, **incantation**, and the plain **chant**.

So saying *enchanté* on meeting someone means, gallantly, “I’m **enchanted** [to meet you].”

Grammar Lens: it agrees with *you*

enchanté follows the gender-agreement rule you met in *bon/bonne*: it reports the **speaker’s own gender**.

- A man says **enchanté**.
- A woman says **enchantedée** — an extra *-e* (same sound, silent).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “enchanté” (*ahn-shahn-TAY*)
- the English cousins — *enchant*, *incantation*, *chant*
- both forms — *enchanté* (m.) / *enchantedée* (f.)

Before you move on

What does **enchanté** literally mean, and from what Latin pieces? (“Enchanted” — *in-* + *cantāre*, “to sing upon.”) How does a woman say it, and why? (*enchantée* — it agrees with the speaker’s gender.)

2.9 Chapter 2 — the introduction, whole

Every piece is built. Here’s the exchange it was all for.

The exchange

French	English
<i>Je m’appelle Mira.</i>	My name is Mira.
<i>Comment vous appelez-vous?</i>	What’s your name?
<i>Je m’appelle Arun.</i>	My name is Arun.
<i>Enchanté.</i>	Pleased to meet you.

Every piece traced to a root:

- **je** ← *ego* (English *ego*)
- **me** ← *mē* (English *me*, *my*, *mine*)
- **(s’)appeler** ← *appellāre* (English *appeal*, *appellation*)
- **comment** ← *quo modo* (Spanish *cómo*, English *mode*)
- **enchanté** ← *in-cantāre* (English *enchant*, *incantation*, *chant*)

And two habits of French to keep: it gives a name with a **reflexive verb** (“I call *myself*”) and asks for one with “**how**” (“*how* are you called?”), and it makes politeness by using the **plural** *vous* on one person.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole exchange, both voices
- your own introduction — “je m’appelle ..., enchanté(e)”
- ask it back — “comment vous appelez-vous?”

Before you move on

Give your name in French, ask someone else's, and say you're pleased to meet them. (*Je m'appelle...* / *Comment vous appelez-vous?* / *Enchanté(e)*.) Which two French habits does this exchange show? (Naming with a reflexive verb; asking with “how,” not “what.”)

Next chapter: *Comment ça va?* (“how’s it going?”) and answering with *bien* again — the responding cycle.

Chapter 3

How Are You?

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask how someone is in French, answer naturally, and return the question.

Now the small talk that follows a name: thanking, answering a thank-you, and asking how someone is doing. French asks that last question with a verb of motion — not “how are you?” but “how does it go?”

3.1 merci — “thank you,” and it means *mercy*

You can introduce yourself in French. Next you’ll ask *how are you?* — and every polite answer needs **merci** first. It hides a word you already know: *mercy*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **r-uvular** — **merci** = *mehr-SEE*, with the soft guttural French *r* at the back of the throat (never the Spanish tap). Stress the end: *mehr-SEE*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

merci — “thank you.” Root: Latin **mercēs**, “*wages, reward, price, that which is earned.*” Saying *merci* originally invoked a **reward** owed for a kindness — and, in old religious use, a plea for divine **mercy** (a reward you haven’t earned).

That one root **merc-** (“pay, trade, reward”) pays out a huge English

family:

- **mercy, merciful** — the reward/pity sense.
- **mercenary** — a soldier who fights for *wages*.
- **merchant, commerce, market, mercantile** — buying and selling, the *price* sense (Latin *mercārī*, “to trade”).
- Even **Mercury** — the Roman god of merchants.

Why it’s said this way

Here’s a lovely contrast to lock in:

language	“thank you”	literal root
French	<i>merci</i>	<i>mercēs</i> — reward / mercy
Spanish	<i>gracias</i>	<i>grātia</i> — grace / favour
Portuguese	<i>obrigado</i>	<i>obligātus</i> — “I am obliged ”

Three Romance sisters, three different pictures of gratitude: French hands you a **reward**, Spanish hands you **grace**, Portuguese declares itself **obliged**. Same feeling, three metaphors — this is exactly the kind of thing worth *noticing*, not just memorizing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “merci” — *mehr-SEE*, guttural *r*
- “merci” then English “mercy, merchant, commerce” — one family
- French *merci* (reward) vs Spanish *gracias* (grace) — feel the difference

Before you move on

What everyday English word is *merci* a cousin of? (*Mercy*.) And its “trade” cousins? (Merchant, commerce, market, mercenary.) How

does its metaphor differ from Spanish *gracias*? (*merci* = reward/mercy; *gracias* = grace.) Next: the reply — **de rien**.

3.2 de rien — “you’re welcome,” or “it was nothing”

Someone says **merci**. The easy reply: **de rien** — literally “*of nothing*.” You wave the favour off as no trouble — and Spanish pulls *this exact trick* too.

Sounds you’ll need

- **nasal-in** — **rien** is a nasal ending: the air goes out through the nose and there is no hard *n* to stop it. *duh RYAN*, with that final vowel humming rather than closing.
- **r-uvular** — that guttural French *r* again, at the back of the throat.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- **de** = “of / from” (Latin **dē**).
- **rien** = “nothing.” And here is the beautiful part.

rien comes from Latin **rem** — the accusative of **rēs**, “*a thing*.” In Latin *rem* meant a **thing**, something real. But French kept using it inside negations — *ne ... rien*, “not ... a thing” — until the *thing* word absorbed the “nothing” and **rien** came to mean ‘nothing’ all by itself.

Latin *rēs* also gives English **real**, republic (*rēs pública*, “the public thing”), and **rebus**. So *rien* is, at the root, a **real thing** that learned to mean nothing at all.

Why it’s said this way

If that sounds familiar, it should: **Spanish did the identical thing with nada** (← Latin *nāta*, “a born thing” → “nothing”). Two sister languages, the same move — the word for **thing** collapses into the word for **nothing**:

language	“you’re welcome”	the “nothing” word, from Latin
French	<i>de rien</i>	<i>rien</i> ← <i>rem</i> , “a thing”
Spanish	<i>de nada</i>	<i>nada</i> ← <i>nāta</i> , “a born thing”
Two sister languages, one instinct: wave the favour off as no <i>thing</i> at all.		

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “merci” ... “de rien” — the full exchange, both voices
- French *de rien* and Spanish *de nada* back to back — same idea, two “thing → nothing” words

Before you move on

What did *rien* (“nothing”) originally mean in Latin? (*rem* — a *thing*.) What Spanish word pulled the same trick, and from what? (*nada* ← *nāta*, “a born thing.”) Next: the verb French uses for “how are you?” — and it’s not “to stand” like Spanish, but **to go**.

3.3 aller — “to go,” the verb behind “how are you?”

Spanish asks *how are you* with **estar**, “to *stand*.” French asks it with **aller**, “to **go**” — *how does it go?* Same question, a different picture of a life: one language stands, the other walks. Meet **aller**.

Sounds you’ll need

- **er-ending** — the infinitive **-er** is a clean *ay*: **aller** = *ah-LAY* (the double *l* is just one *l* sound; the *r* is silent here).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

aller means “to go.” Its origin is one of the great messes of French — it is **suppletive**, meaning it was stitched together from **three** different Latin verbs, and you can still see the seams in its everyday forms:

- **je vais** (“I go”) ← Latin **vādere**, “to go, to rush” → English **invade**, **evade**, **wade** (all “going” words).
- **nous allons** (“we go”), and the infinitive **aller** ← Latin **ambulāre**, “to walk” → English **amble**, **ambulance** (a walking hospital), **preamble**, **perambulate**.
- **j’irai** (“I will go”) ← Latin **īre**, “to go” → English **exit** (*ex-it*, “he goes out”), **transit**, **initial**.

So a single French verb carries **three** Latin roots for motion. You don’t need to conjugate it yet — just recognize one form for the next lesson:

- **ça va** = “it goes” (the *va* is from *vādere*) — the beating heart of French small talk.

Grammar Lens: “going” as “being”

Lots of languages borrow a motion verb to talk about *state*: English says “how are you **getting on**? / how’s it **going**?” French made that the standard: *Comment ça va?* = “How does it **go**?” Hold the metaphor — it makes the next lesson obvious.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “aller” — *ah-LAY*
- “ça va” — *sa VA*, “it goes”
- English “amble, ambulance” (walk) and “invade, evade” (go) — aller’s two big families

Before you move on

What does *aller* literally mean, and how many Latin verbs is it stitched from? (To *go*; three — *ambulāre*, *vādere*, *īre*.) Which everyday form means “it goes”? (*ça va*.) So *Comment ça va?* literally asks — what? (“How does it *go*?”) Next: ask it for real.

3.4 *Comment ça va ?* — “how are you?”

You know **comment**, “how,” and **ça va**, “it goes.” Assemble the most useful neutral check-in in spoken French.

Comment ça va ? — “How are you?” literally:
“How does this go?”

The even shorter **Ça va ?** is extremely common. Answer with the same words:

Ça va ? — **Ça va**. “How’s it going? — It’s going / I’m fine.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- **comment** comes from Latin *quōmodo*, “in what manner”;
- **ça** comes from *ecce hoc*, “behold this”;
- **va** is the third-person form of **aller**, “to go.”

French pictures wellbeing as **going**. Spanish uses a “standing” verb instead; the comparison is a memory hook, not a prerequisite. Pronounce *comment* roughly *ko-mahn*: the ending is nasal and the written *t* is silent in this neutral phrase.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*Comment ça va ?*”
- the shorter question — “*Ça va ?*”

- the pair — “Ça va ? — Ça va.”

Twice through: “Ça va ? — Ça va.”

Before you move on

What does *Comment ça va ?* literally ask? (“How does it go?”)
Which verb owns **va**? (**Aller.**) What is the shortest version? (**Ça va ?**) How can you answer it? (**Ça va.**) Next: choose *tu* or *vous* explicitly.

3.5 Comment vas-tu ? / Comment allez-vous ?

Comment ça va ? avoids naming the listener. Now use the *tu* / *vous* choice you learned when you gave your name.

Grammar Lens: a ladder of three registers

French offers a neat climb from casual to formal. *tu* is the familiar “you” (a friend, a peer); *vous* is the formal or plural “you” (a stranger, an elder, a group).

register	question	literally
casual, universal	Comment ça va ? (or Ça va ?)	“How does <i>it</i> go?”
informal, one friend	Comment vas-tu ?	“How go <i>you</i> ?”
formal or plural	Comment allez-vous ?	“How go <i>you</i> (vous)?”

Vas and **allez** are simply the *tu* and *vous* forms of *aller*, “to go.”

Formal writing and careful speech invert verb and pronoun:

allez-vous, literally “go-you.” For a stranger or a boss, reach for **Comment allez-vous ?**

Sounds you’ll need

The final *t* of **comment** is normally silent. Before vowel-initial **allez**, liaison can carry it across:

Comment allez-vous ? — roughly *ko-mahn-ta-lay-voo*

That linking sound is not an extra word; it is a normally silent consonant surfacing between two words.

Use **Ça va ?** as the easy neutral default, **vas-tu** for a friend when you want explicit informality, and **allez-vous** for formal or plural address.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- to a friend — “Comment vas-tu ?”
- to a stranger — “Comment allez-vous ?”
- the neutral default — “Ça va ?”

Twice through: “Vas-tu — friend. Allez-vous — formal or plural.”

Before you move on

Which form addresses one friend? (**Comment vas-tu ?**) Which is formal or plural? (**Comment allez-vous ?**) What sound appears in the liaison? (The normally silent *t* of *comment*.) Next: the “so-so” answer.

3.6 comme ci, comme ça — the classic French shrug

Someone asks *Ça va?* You’re not great, not bad. The perfect, gloriously French answer — a phrase English borrowed whole — is **comme ci, comme ça**: “like this, like that.” A verbal shrug of the shoulders.

First, twenty seconds of review. From your first greetings: **bien** — “well” (← Latin *bene*). So *Ça va bien* = “It’s going well.” Now the answer for when it’s only *going*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

comme ci, comme ça — literally “like this, like that.” Every piece is an old friend:

- **comme** = “like, as” — from Latin *quōmodo*, “in what manner.” That’s the **same root as** *comment* (“how”) from last lesson! *comment* = “in what manner (as a question)”; *comme* =

“in the manner of, like.” One Latin word, two French children.

- **ci** = “here / this” ← Latin **ecce hic**, “behold here.”
- **ça** = “there / that” ← Latin **ecce hoc**, “behold this” — the same *ça* from *Ça va?*.

So you’re literally waving a hand: *a bit like this way, a bit like that way* — neither up nor down.

Grammar Lens: your answer set for *Ça va?*

answer	sense
(Très) bien, merci	(very) well, thank you
Ça va	fine / okay (“it goes”)
Comme ci, comme ça	so-so
Pas mal	not bad

Why it’s said this way

Every language has its shrug, and each paints it differently: Spanish says **más o menos** (“more or less”) or **regular**, Italian says **così così** (“so so”), French says **comme ci, comme ça** (“like this, like that”). Same gesture, three pictures.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “comme ci, comme ça” — with a little hand-wobble in the voice
- answer “Ça va?” three ways — “Bien” / “Ça va” / “Comme ci, comme ça”
- notice *comme* and *comment* share a root — *quōmodo*

Before you move on

What does *comme ci, comme ça* literally mean? (“Like this, like that.”) What “how”-word shares *comme*’s root? (*comment* — both from *quōmodo*.) What’s the Spanish equivalent shrug? (*más o*

menos / regular.) Next: put the whole exchange together.

3.7 Practice — “comment ça va ?”, start to finish

No new words. This chapter’s atoms — *merci, de rien, aller, ça va, comme ci comme ça* — assemble into a real exchange, run formally and informally. It picks up right where the introduction exchange left off.

The exchange

Formal (a stranger, an elder):

— Bonjour. **Comment allez-vous ?** — **Très bien, merci.**
 Et vous ? — **Comme ci, comme ça.** — [later, after a small favour] — **Merci !** — **De rien.**

Informal (a friend):

— Salut ! **Ça va ?** — **Ça va, et toi ?** — Comme ci, comme ça.

The glue word is **et vous ? / et toi ?** — “and you?” (*et* = “and,” Latin *et*; *toi* is the stressed “you”). It bounces the question back — exactly like Spanish *¿y usted?* / *¿y tú?*

What you’ve built this chapter

- **merci** — thank you (← *mercēs*, “reward / mercy”).
- **de rien** — you’re welcome (← *rem*, “a thing” → “nothing”; twin of Spanish *de nada*).
- **aller / ça va** — “to go,” the verb French uses for *how are you* (vs Spanish *estar*, “to stand”).
- **Comment ça va ? / allez-vous ? / vas-tu ?** — the casual, formal, and informal question.
- **bien / ça va / comme ci comme ça / pas mal** — the answer ladder.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the full *formal* exchange, both voices
- the same *informally* — *allez-vous* → *ça va*, *vous* → *toi*
- chain the introduction onto this one — “Je m’appelle ... Comment allez-vous ?”

Twice through: “Ça va ? — Ça va, et toi ?” until it’s reflex.

Before you move on

Which verb carries French “how are you?”, and how does its metaphor differ from Spanish’s? (*aller*, “to go” — *how does it go?* — vs *estar*, “to stand.”) What does *de rien* literally say, and its Spanish twin? (“Of nothing”; *de nada*.) Next chapter: **farewells** — au revoir, à bientôt, bonne journée.

Chapter 4

Farewells

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 5 of 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can end a French conversation politely and choose a farewell that fits the situation.

You can open a French conversation; now close it. French has one plain goodbye and a small family of soft ones, all built the same way — the preposition à (“to”) followed by a time word — and this chapter also teaches the accents, the cedilla and the trema you have been reading all along.

4.1 au revoir — “goodbye,” i.e. “until we see each other again”

You can open a French conversation; now close it. The standard goodbye is **au revoir** — and where Spanish *adiós* commends you *to God*, French makes a promise to **see you again**.

Sounds you’ll need

- **r-uvular** — two guttural French *r*’s: *oh ruh-VWAHR*.
- **vowel-oi** — **-voir** = *vwahr* (the *oi* = *wa*, as in *soir*, the evening).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

au revoir is **au** + **revoir** = “at the re-seeing”:

- **au** = “at/to the” (a fusion of *à* + *le*).

- **revoir** = “to see again” = **re-** (“again”) + **voir** (“to see”).

So *au revoir* literally means “**until the seeing-again**” — a small promise that this isn’t the end. It’s built on **voir**, from Latin **vidēre**, “to see” — one of the richest roots in English:

- **vision**, **visible**, **visit**, **visa**, **view**, **video** (“I see”).
- **re-vise** (“look again”), **e-vident** (“seen out”), **pro-vide**, **super-vise**, **sur-vey**.

Why it’s said this way

Here’s a satisfying cross-language pair: **German says the exact same thing.** *Auf Wiedersehen* = *auf* (“on”) + *wieder* (“again”) + *sehen* (“to see”) = “on the seeing-again.” French and German, side by side, both promise a **re-seeing**; Spanish *adiós* instead commends you *to God*. Same moment, two different pictures.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “au revoir” — *oh ruh-VWAHR*
- “au revoir” then English “vision, revise, video” — the *vidēre* family
- French *au revoir* and German *auf Wiedersehen* — both “see you again”

Before you move on

What does *au revoir* literally mean? (“Until the seeing-again.”) What Latin verb is *voir* from, and two English cousins? (*vidēre* — vision, video, revise.) Which other language builds its goodbye the same “see again” way? (German *auf Wiedersehen*.) Next: **à plus tard**.

4.2 à plus tard — the casual “see you later”

The everyday, friendly “see you later” is **à plus tard** — and among friends it shrinks to just **à plus** (*ah PLUSS*, and here

you *do* sound the final *s*). It's the French twin of Spanish *hasta luego*.

Sounds you'll need

- **silent-final** — in the full phrase, *plus* is *ploo* (silent *s*): *ah ploo TAR*. But in the clipped **à plus**, the *s* is pronounced: *ah PLUSS*.
- **tard** = *tar* (silent *d*).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

à plus tard = literally “to more late” → “see you later.”

- **à** = “to / at” (Latin *ad*) — French’s all-purpose farewell preposition, the way Spanish leans on *hasta*: *à* + a time = a soft goodbye.
- **plus** = “more,” from Latin **plūs** — the *plus* you already write in English (and the *plu-* of *plural*, *surplus*).
- **tard** = “late,” from Latin **tarde**, “slowly, late.” English keeps it in **tardy** and **retard** (“hold back, make late”).

So *à plus tard* is “until more-late” — see you at some later point.

Why it's said this way

Spanish inherited that identical Latin *tarde* — the word you met giving your name — but the two languages grew it in different directions. French kept it meaning **late** (*tard*); Spanish grew it into **afternoon** (*tarde*). One Latin word, two everyday meanings. And where French leans on **à** for its soft goodbyes, Spanish leans on **hasta** (“until”): *hasta luego* is the twin of *à plus tard*.

Grammar Lens: the “à ...” farewells

French’s soft goodbyes are all **à** + a time word — mirror this against Spanish *hasta*:

French	Spanish	“until / to ...”
à plus tard / à plus	hasta luego	later
à bientôt	hasta pronto	soon
à demain	hasta mañana	tomorrow

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “à plus tard” (*ah ploo TAR*), then clipped “à plus” (*ah PLUSS*)
- “tard” then Spanish “tarde” — the same Latin *tarde*, “late”
- English “tardy, retard” — held back, late

Before you move on

What does *à plus tard* literally mean? (“To more late.”) What Spanish word is *tard* identical to at the root, and what does each mean now? (*tarde* — French “late”, Spanish “afternoon.”) What preposition carries French’s soft goodbyes, like Spanish *hasta*? (*à*.) Next: **à bientôt**.

4.3 à bientôt — “see you soon”

For when you’ll genuinely meet again shortly: **à bientôt**, “see you soon” — the French twin of Spanish *hasta pronto*. It hides a word you already know from your first greetings: **bien**.

Sounds you’ll need

- nasal-in — **bien** = *byan*, nasal (the sound you met in your first greetings).
- **bientôt** = *byan-TOH*; the circumflex on *ô* just marks a long *o*, and the final *t* is silent. Whole phrase: *ah byan-TOH*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

à **bientôt** = “to soon” → “see you soon.”

- **à** = “to” (the farewell preposition again).
- **bientôt** = “soon,” and it’s a compound you can pull apart: - **bien** = “well” (from Latin *bene*, the *bene* of *benefit*). - **tôt** = “early / soon.” - Together, *bien* + *tôt* = “**well-soon**” → *quite soon*. (French loves gluing *bien* onto words for emphasis — *bientôt* “soon”, *bienvenue* “welcome” = “well-come”.)

The circumflex **ô** is itself a little history lesson: a circumflex usually marks an **s that dropped out** (*hôtel* was *hostel*, *forêt* was *forest*). *tôt* came from an older *tost* — so the hat on *ô* is the ghost of a lost *s*.

Grammar Lens: bien, the intensifier

You met *bien* as “well” (an answer to *ça va?*). Here it’s doing a second job: **gluing onto another word to strengthen it** — *bien* + *tôt* = “soon indeed.” Same word, new trick.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “à bientôt” — *ah byan-TOH*
- pull it apart — “bien” (well) + “tôt” (early) = bientôt (soon)
- “à bientôt” = Spanish “hasta pronto” — see you soon

Before you move on

What two words hide inside *bientôt*? (*bien* “well” + *tôt* “early” → soon.) What does the circumflex on *ô* usually mark? (A dropped *s* — *tost* → *tôt*.) What’s the Spanish equivalent of *à bientôt*? (*hasta pronto*.) Next: **à demain**.

4.4 à demain — “see you tomorrow”

Parting for the day: **à demain**, “until tomorrow” — the twin of Spanish *hasta mañana*. And *demain* shares a hidden root with *mañana* that’s worth seeing.

Sounds you’ll need

- **nasal-in** — **demain** = *duh-MAN*: the *-ain* is a nasal (like *pain*, *main*); the final consonant is silent. *ah duh-MAN*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

à demain = “to tomorrow” → “see you tomorrow.”

- **à** = “to” (the farewell preposition, one last time).
- **demain** = “tomorrow,” from Latin **dē māne**, “**from the morning**”: - **dē** = “from” · **māne** = “in the morning.” - The next “morning” is *tomorrow* → *de mane* fused into **demain**.

English keeps *māne* too, in the poetic **matins** (morning prayers) and **matinée** (a *morning*/daytime show).

Why it’s said this way

Spanish *mañana* (“tomorrow / morning”) comes from Latin (*hōra*) *maneana* — built on the **same** *māne*, “morning.” So French **demain** and Spanish **mañana** are cousins through one Latin word: both turn “morning” into “tomorrow,” just assembled differently — French says *from-morning*, Spanish says *morning-ish hour*.

Grammar Lens: the “à ...” farewells, complete

Your French soft-goodbye set, mapped to Spanish:

French	Spanish	when
à plus tard / à plus	hasta luego	later (default)
à bientôt	hasta pronto	soon
à demain	hasta mañana	tomorrow

...and **au revoir** for the plain goodbye.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “à demain” — *ah duh-MAN*
- “demain” ← *de mane* “from morning”; Spanish “mañana” ← *maneana* — same *māne*
- the three “à ...” goodbyes — à plus tard / à bientôt / à demain

Before you move on

What does *demain* literally come from? (*dē māne* — “from the morning.”) What Spanish word shares that *māne* root? (*mañana*.) Which French goodbye for parting until tomorrow? (*à demain*.) Next: put the farewells together.

4.5 Practice — saying goodbye in French

No new words. The farewells — *au revoir* and the three *à ...* goodbyes — now close a real conversation and fold back into everything since *salut*.

Your turn: choosing the right goodbye

you’re...	say
parting plainly / politely	au revoir
expecting to meet again shortly	à bientôt
casual “see you”	à plus (tard)
leaving for the day	à demain

The exchange, start to finish

Everything from the French Chapters 1–4:

— Salut ! Je m’appelle Chloé. Comment tu t’appelles ? — Je m’appelle Marc. Enchanté. — Ça va ? — Ça va bien, merci, et toi ? — Très bien. Bon... **à demain**, Marc. — Oui, **à demain**, Chloé. **Au revoir** !

What you've built this chapter

- **au revoir** — the plain goodbye (“until the seeing-again”; the *voir* / *vidēre* family; twin of German *auf Wiedersehen*).
- **à plus tard** / **à bientôt** / **à demain** — later / soon / tomorrow, all **à** + a time, mirroring Spanish’s **hasta**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the full conversation, both voices — *salut* to *au revoir*
- pick the goodbye — a friend you’ll see tomorrow? (*à demain*); a polite plain goodbye? (*au revoir*)

Twice through: Run the exchange, greeting to goodbye, without stopping.

Before you move on

What does *au revoir* literally promise? (A *re-seeing* — “until we see again.”) Which preposition carries French’s soft goodbyes? (*à* — like Spanish *hasta*.) You can now hold a whole short French exchange, hello to goodbye. Next chapter: numbers, or everyday courtesies (*s’il vous plaît*).

4.6 é è ê — the three hats on e, and the one that hides an s

French sprinkles little marks over its vowels, and they are **not** decoration — each does a specific job. You’ve read them since *enchanté* and *très*. Three of them ride on *e*, and one of the three hides a word you already know in English.

You’ll want to know: the three accents, and what they do

- **é** — *accent aigu* (rising stroke, like Spanish’s). It fixes the sound: **é** = a **crisp “ay”** (no glide). *café*, *enchanté*, *été* (“summer”).

- è — *accent grave* (falling stroke). è = **an open “eh”** as in *bed. très* (“very”), *mère* (“mother”), *père*. The grave also just **separates look-alikes**: *a* (“has”) vs *à* (“to”); *ou* (“or”) vs *où* (“where”) — same job as Spanish *tu/tú*.
- ê — *accent circonflexe* (a little hat). This one is a **fossil**.

Why it’s said this way

Centuries ago French dropped an *s* before certain consonants, and left a **hat** where it used to stand. English, having borrowed the older form, usually **still has that s** — so the circumflex is a decoder ring between the two languages:

French (hat)	the lost <i>s</i>	English kept it
forêt	forest	forest
hôpital	hospital	hospital
île	isle	isle / island
bête	beste	beast
fête	feste	feast
pâte	paste	paste / pasta
goût	gust	(Latin <i>gustus</i> , cf. <i>gusto</i>)
être	estre	(Latin <i>stāre</i> , cf. <i>stare/estar</i>)

So when you meet a circumflex, **mentally slot an *s* back in** and an English cousin often appears. *Hôpital* → *hospital*. It’s the single most useful reading trick in French spelling.

Writing: the three accents

All three are small strokes **above** the vowel: *é* leans right (up-stroke), *è* leans left (down-stroke), *ê* is a little peak ($\wedge$). Get the *lean* right — *é* and *è* are different sounds, so the direction matters.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “é” = *ay* (*café*), “è” = *eh* (*très*) — hear the two sounds
- forêt → forest, hôpital → hospital, île → isle — put the *s* back

- “à” vs “a”, “où” vs “ou” — the grave that only separates

Before you move on

Which accent makes *e* say “ay,” and which “eh”? (*é* aigu = ay; *è* grave = eh.) What does the circumflex *ê* usually mark, and how do you use it? (A lost *s* — slot it back to find the English cousin: *forêt* → forest.) Next writing lesson: the little hook under *c* — the **cédille**.

4.7 ç — the little tail that softens *c*

You’ve seen it in **français** and **garçon**. The **cédille** is the tiny hook under a *c* — **ç** — and it exists to solve one specific spelling problem.

You’ll want to know: the problem the cedilla solves

In French (as in Latin, Italian, Spanish), **c** is **soft** (an *s* sound) before *e* and *i*, but **hard** (a *k*) before *a*, *o*, *u*:

- *ce*, *ci* → soft: *ceci* = *suh-SEE*.
- *ca*, *co*, *cu* → hard: *car*, *comme*, *cure* = *k*.

So “franc-ais” would read *frank-ay* — wrong. To force the **soft** *s* before *a/o/u*, French adds the hook: **ç**.

- **français** = *frah-n-SEH* (not “frank-”).
- **garçon** = *gar-SOHN* (“boy”).
- **ça** = *sa* (“that” — the *ça* of *ça va?*).
- **reçu** = *ruh-SU* (“received”).

The rule is tidy: **ç** **only ever appears before a, o, u** — never before *e/i*, where *c* is already soft and the hook would be pointless.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The *cédille* is literally “**a little z.**” Its name is Spanish **zedilla** (“little zeta”) — medieval scribes wrote a small subscript **z** under the *c* to say “pronounce this like *z/s*, not *k*.” Over time the little *z* shrank into the hook you write today. So **ç = c + a ghost z.** (Spanish later dropped it; French and Portuguese kept it — *ç* is alive in *português* itself.)

Writing: the cedilla

Write a normal **c**, then add a small **hook curling left off the bottom**, like a tiny *5*’s tail. Only ever under *c*, only before *a/o/u*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “français”, “garçon”, “ça” — the *ç* forcing a soft *s*
- imagine no *cédille* — “franc-ais” as *frank-ay* — that’s what it prevents

Before you move on

What does the *cédille* do, and before which letters does it appear? (Keeps *c* soft (*s*) — only before *a, o, u*.) What is the hook, historically? (A shrunken subscript *z* — Spanish *zedilla*, “little *z*”). Next writing lesson: the two dots — the **tréma**.

4.8 ï ë ü — the two dots that say “say me on my own”

The last French mark: two little dots over a vowel — the **tréma** (English calls it a *diaeresis*). It answers one question the reader would otherwise get wrong: **do these two vowels blend, or not?**

You’ll want to know: the problem the trema solves

French loves to fuse vowel pairs into one sound: *ai* = *eh*, *au* = *oh*, *ou* = *oo*, *oi* = *wa*. Usually that’s what you want. But sometimes two vowels really

should be sounded **separately** — and the tréma is how the spelling says so: **“break these apart; pronounce the marked vowel on its own.”**

- **naïve** = *na-EEV* (na-i, two syllables) — not “nave.” (English kept the dots: *naïve*.)
- **Noël** = *no-EL* (“Christmas”) — *o* and *e* separately, not “nurl.”
- **maïs** = *ma-EES* (“corn”) — vs **mais** (*meh*, “but”). The two dots are the *only* difference, and they flip the meaning.
- **Citroën, Israël, égoïste** — same rule: split the vowels.

So the tréma is the **opposite** of a blend instruction: where *ai* says “merge,” *aï* says “don’t.”

Writing: the trema

Two dots, side by side, **above** the vowel that starts its **own** sound — the *second* vowel of the pair (na-**ï**-ve). (It looks like a German umlaut, but the job is different: German ä/ö/ü *change* the vowel; the French tréma *separates* it. Same two dots, opposite purpose — that’s the next lesson.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “naïve” = na-EEV, “Noël” = no-EL — two syllables each
- “maïs” (ma-EES, corn) vs “mais” (meh, but) — the dots flip it

Before you move on

What does the tréma tell you to do? (Pronounce the two vowels **separately**, not blended.) How is it different from a German umlaut? (Tréma *separates* vowels; umlaut *changes* a vowel’s sound.) That’s the French writing kit: **é è ê, ç, and ï ë**.

Chapter 5

The First Verbs

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can build short present-tense French sentences with the chapter’s first verbs.

Until now you have assembled fixed phrases. This chapter hands you a pattern instead: the regular -er verbs, the largest verb family in French by a wide margin. Learn the one template and thousands of verbs come with it — and with it you build your first sentence that nobody handed you pre-made.

5.1 parler — “to speak,” and the great regular French verb

Until now you’ve assembled fixed phrases. **parler** (“to speak”) is your first real **verb** — and it’s the model for the **biggest** French verb family by far: the **-er** verbs. Learn this one pattern and you can drive thousands.

Sounds you’ll need

- **er-ending** — the infinitive **-er** is a clean *ay*: **parler** = *par-LAY* (the *r* is silent in the ending). The stem is *parl-*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

parler comes from Late Latin **parabolāre**, “to tell parables, to discourse” — from **parabola**, “a comparison, a speech” (itself from

Greek *parabolē*, “a throwing-beside”). So to *speak*, in French, is at root to *tell parables*. That root fans into English:

- **parable** — the story-comparison itself.
- **parole** — a spoken word of honour (a prisoner’s *parole*).
- **palaver** — a long talk; **parley** — to talk terms; even **parliament** — a *talking*-place.

Grammar Lens: the -er present tense (and its silent trap)

Drop **-er**, add the ending for the person:

person	ending	<i>parler</i> →	sounds like
je	-e	je parle	<i>parl</i>
tu	-es	tu parles	<i>parl</i>
il / elle	-e	il parle	<i>parl</i>
nous	-ons	nous parlons	par-LON
vous	-ez	vous parlez	par-LAY
ils / elles	-ent	ils parlent	<i>parl</i>

Here is the great French surprise: **-e, -es, and -ent are all SILENT** — *je parle, tu parles, ils parlent* **all sound identical**, just *parl*. Only *nous* (-ons) and *vous* (-ez) are audible.

Grammar Lens: why French keeps its pronouns

That silence has a consequence which shapes the whole language. In Spanish the ending alone tells you who is speaking — *hablo* (“I speak”) against *hablas* (“you speak”) — so the pronoun can be dropped. In French your ear cannot hear any difference between *parle, parles* and *parlent*, so the **pronoun must stay** to carry the person. *Je* and *tu* are not optional decoration in French; they are the only thing telling you who is doing the speaking.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “parler” — *par-LAY*
- “je parle, tu parles, il parle” — all *parl*, identical

- “parler” then English “parable, parole, palaver” — the *parabola* root

Before you move on

What Latin word is *parler* from, and its English cousins? (*parabolāre* ← *parabola* — parable, parole.) Which three present-tense endings are silent? (-e, -es, -ent — je/tu/ils all sound *parl.*) Why does French keep *je/tu* when Spanish drops *yo/tú*? (The endings are silent, so the pronoun carries the person.) Next: **habiter**, “to live.”

5.2 habiter — “to live,” and it’s about *having a place*

A second **-er** verb — snap it into the exact template you just learned. **habiter** (“to live, to dwell”) lets you say *where* you live, the answer to a *où* (“where”) question.

Sounds you’ll need

- silent-final — the **h** is silent (French *h* never sounds):
habiter = *a-bee-TAY*. Same -er = *ay* ending as *parler*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

habiter comes from Latin **habitāre**, “to dwell, to keep on having [a place]” — the **frequentative** of **habēre**, “to have.” To *dwell* somewhere is to *keep having* it as your place. That root is thoroughly English:

- **habitat** — the place a creature dwells.
- **inhabit, inhabitant, habitation** — to dwell in / one who dwells.
- and (via *habēre*, “have”) **habit** — what you “keep having,” and **able, ability** (what you “have” it in you to do).

Grammar Lens: same -er template

Drop **-er**, add the endings — identical to *parler*, silent trap and all:
| j’habite · tu habites · il habite | (all *a-BEET*) |

| nous habitons · vous habitez | (a-bee-TON · a-bee-TAY) |
 Note **j’habite** — *je* elides to **j’** before the vowel of *habite* (the *h* is silent, so it counts as a vowel). Now you can answer *où* questions:

J’habite à Paris. — “I live in Paris.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “habiter” — *a-bee-TAY*, silent *h*
- “j’habite, tu habites, il habite” — all *a-BEET*
- “habiter” then English “habitat, inhabit” — the *habitāre* root

Before you move on

What Latin verb is *habiter* from, and what does it literally involve? (*habitāre*, “keep having a place” — from *habēre*, “to have.”) English cousins? (Habitat, inhabit, habitation.) Say “I live in Paris.” (*J’habite à Paris.*) Next: **travailler**, “to work.”

5.3 travailler — “to work,” and the torture behind “travel”

A third **-er** verb, and it shares its dark, delightful origin with a Spanish word you may already know: **travailler** (“to work”) began as a word for **torture**, and it’s the secret ancestor of English **travel**.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ai-y** — the **-ill-** is a *y* glide: **travailler** = *tra-va-YAY*. Same **-er** = *ay* ending.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

travailler comes from Vulgar Latin **tripaliāre**, “to torture” — from **tripalium**, a Roman instrument of torture made of **three stakes** (*tri-* “three” + *pālus* “stake” → English *pale*, *impale*).

The slide of meaning is grim and logical: *torture* → *painful toil* → **work**. And two English words came down the same road:

- **travail** — painful, laborious effort.
- **travel** — journeying was once such an **ordeal** that *travail* (toil) became *travel* (to make a journey). You are, etymologically, *tortured* every time you travel.

Why it's said this way

Spanish **trabajar** (“to work”) comes from the very same *tripaliāre* — a perfect cross-language twin, torture and all. The middle of the word went one way in each language: the *-al-* stayed in French (*travail*, *travailler*) and softened to *-aj-* in Spanish (*trabajo*, *trabajar*).

Grammar Lens: same -er template

| je travaille · tu travailles · il travaille | (all *tra-VYE*) |
| nous travaillons · vous travaillez | |

Je travaille à Paris. — “I work in Paris.”

Nothing new to learn — that’s the point. **One template, every -er verb.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “travailler” — *tra-va-YAY*
- “je travaille” — *je tra-VYE*, “I work”
- *travailler* → *travail* → *travel* — torture became a journey; twin of Spanish *trabajar*

Before you move on

What did *travailler* originally mean, and from what device? (“To torture,” ← *tripalium*, three stakes.) What two English words share the root? (*Travail* and *travel*.) Its Spanish twin? (*Trabajar* — same

tripaliāre.) Next: build your first full sentence — **Je parle français**.

5.4 Je parle français — your first real sentence

The moment it all pays off: you take a **verb** you conjugated and a **noun**, and build a sentence **no one handed you pre-made** — *Je parle français*, “I speak French.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **soft-c-s** — **français** = *frahn-SEH*. The cedilla under the **ç** forces a soft *s* where a plain *c* would have been hard.
- The opening *fran-* is nasal, and the final *-ais* is a plain *eh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

français = “French” — both the language and a French person — from **Francia**, “land of the **Franks**”: the Germanic people who settled Roman Gaul and gave France its name. And here is the twist: the Franks’ own name meant “**free**.” That is why English **frank** and **frankly** mean open and unguarded, and why the old French coin was called a *franc*.

Grammar Lens: two rules hiding in four words

Snap together two things you own:

Je (I, ← *ego*) + **parle** (speak, from *parler*) = **Je parle français**.

A complete, grammatical French sentence. Two rules are hiding in it:

- **You keep the *je*.** Spanish drops its pronoun — *hablo español* says “I speak Spanish” with no word for “I,” because the ending *-o* carries the person. French cannot do that: *parle*, *parles* and *parlent* all sound alike, so **the pronoun must stay**. This is the single biggest structural difference between French and its Iberian cousins.

- **No article on the language** here: *je parle français*, not *je parle le français*.

Swap the pieces and it generates:

- **J’habite à Paris.** — “I live in Paris.”
- **Tu parles français ?** — “Do you speak French?” (just raise the tone).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Je parle français” — *zhuh parl frahn-SEH*
- keep the *je* — French can’t drop it (unlike Spanish *hablo*)
- swap — “Tu parles français ?”, “J’habite à Paris”

Before you move on

Where does *français* come from, and what did the Franks’ name mean? (*Francia*, “land of the Franks”; the name meant “free” — English *frank*.) Why must French keep *je* where Spanish drops *yo*? (French endings are silent, so the pronoun carries the person.) Next: practice.

5.5 Practice — making sentences with -er verbs

For the first time you’re not reciting phrases — you’re **building** sentences from a pattern. Drill the three verbs, and burn in the French rule the whole language turns on: **keep the pronoun** (the endings are silent).

Your turn: conjugate on command

Run each through *je / tu / il*:

- **parler:** je parle · tu parles · il parle — all **parl**

- **habiter**: j’habite · tu habites · il habite — all **a-beet**
- **travailler**: je travaille · tu travailles · il travaille — all **tra-vye**

Every singular form (and the *ils* form) **sounds the same** — the *-e/-es/-ent* are silent. That’s why *je, tu, il* stay put: they carry the person your ear can’t hear.

Your turn: say something real

— **Tu parles** français ? — Oui, je **parle** un peu. (Do you speak French? — Yes, I speak a little.) — **Où** habites-tu ? — **J’habite** à Lyon. Et je **travaille** à Paris. — Merci ! — De rien.

What you’ve built this chapter

- **the regular -er present tense** — drop *-er*, add *-e/-es/-e/-ons/-ez/-ent*; the singular + *ils* endings are **silent**, so the pronoun is mandatory (the big contrast with Spanish/Italian pro-drop).
- **parler** (← *parabolāre* → parable/parole), **habiter** (← *habitāre* → habitat/inhabit), **travailler** (← *tripalium* → travail/travel; twin of Spanish *trabajar*).
- **Je parle français** — your first self-assembled sentence (*français* ← *Francia*, the Franks = “free”).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- conjugate all three verbs, je/tu/il — hear that they don’t change
- answer about yourself — where you live, where you work, what you speak
- chain it — “Bonjour ! Je parle français. Tu parles français ? ... Au revoir !”

Twice through: “Tu parles français ? — Oui, je parle un peu.”

Before you move on

Which -er endings are silent, and what follows from that? (-e, -es, -ent — so French keeps its subject pronouns.) Give “I” forms of the three verbs. (*Je parle, j’habite, je travaille.*) Say “I live in Paris and I work in Lyon.” (*J’habite à Paris et je travaille à Lyon.*) French now moves in real sentences.

Chapter 6

Numbers One to Ten

Modes: 🗣️ voice (12) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 12 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count from one to ten in French and use the numbers in a short exchange.

The ten most-reused words in the language, taken one at a time.

Each is a Latin numeral that barely moved on its way into French, so English has already handed you half of them — and four of them left a copy of themselves in the calendar, still counting two months out of place.

6.1 un — one

Numbers are the most-reused words in any language, and French inherited them from Latin almost unchanged. You already half-know them through English. We take them **one at a time**, starting with the first.

Sounds you'll need

- **nasal-un** — **un** is a **nasal vowel**, close to “uh” hummed through the nose. No *n* is ever pronounced. The letters *u-n* are a single sound, not two.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

un (1) comes from Latin **ūnus**, and that root is everywhere in English:

- **unit** — one thing counted

- **union** — many made one
- **unique** — one of its kind
- **universe** — everything turned into one

English **one** and **a/an** descend from the same ancient word, worn down at home rather than borrowed. Spanish keeps the Latin shape more plainly: *uno*.

Grammar Lens: one word for “one” and “a”

French draws no line between “one” and “a/an.” **un** does both jobs, and it takes the gender of the noun it stands in front of:

- **un** before a masculine noun — *un jour*, “a day” **or** “one day”
- **une** before a feminine noun — *une nuit*, “a night” **or** “one night”

You met that same masculine/feminine split in *le* and *la*. It is the same split, on a different word. Spanish does exactly this too (*un / una*). The counting words that follow never change shape; this first one is the only one that does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “un” — hum it through the nose, no *n* at the end
- “un jour” then “une nuit” — same word, two genders
- “un” then English “unit, union, unique” — hear the *ūnus*

Before you move on

How do you say one in French? (**un**, nasal, with no *n* sounded.) What two things does it mean? (**One**, and **a/an**.) What is its feminine form, and when do you use it? (**une**, before a feminine noun — *une nuit*.) Next: the number two.

6.2 deux — two

One down. The second number brings a vowel your mouth has to be taught, and a final letter you must **not** say.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-eu** — say “eh,” then round your lips as if for “oo” without moving your tongue. That rounded *eu* is the whole word: **deux** = *deuh*.
- **silent-final** — the **x** is silent. French writes letters at the end of a word that it has stopped pronouncing, and this is your first one.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

deux (2) comes from Latin **duo**, which English borrowed several times over:

- **duo** — two performers
- **dual, duel** — of two
- **duet** — a piece for two
- **double** — Latin *duplus*, “two-fold”

Spanish went the other way with the same word and wore it down to *dos*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “deux” — round the lips, stop before the *x*
- “un, deux” — count what you have so far
- “deux jours” — two days

Before you move on

How do you say two? (**deux**, *deuh*.) What happens to the **x**? (Nothing — it is silent.) Which English words carry the same Latin *duo*? (*Duo*, *dual*, *duet*, *double*.) Count what you have. (*Un*, *deux*.) Next: the number three.

6.3 trois — three

The third number shows you the most French vowel spelling there is: **oi**, which sounds nothing like either letter in it.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-oi** — the pair **oi** is always *wa*. So **trois** = *trwa*.
- **silent-final** — the **s** is silent here, exactly as the *x* was in *deux*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

trois (3) comes from Latin **trēs**. Look at what happened next: French turned it into *trois* and Spanish into *tres*. **Same Roman word, worn two different ways** — the clearest picture yet of how one language becomes two.

English took the Latin form whole, over and over:

- **trio** — three players
- **triple** — three-fold
- **trident** — three teeth
- **triangle** — three corners

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “trois” — *trwa*, one syllable
- “un, deux, trois” — the count so far
- “trois” then Spanish “tres” — one Latin word, two shapes

Before you move on

How do you say three? (**trois**, *trwa*.) What sound does **oi** always make? (*Wa*.) Which Latin word gave both *trois* and Spanish *tres*? (**trēs**.) Count to three. (*Un, deux, trois*.) Next: the number four.

6.4 quatre — four

The fourth number is the first that runs to two syllables, and it ends in a letter French writes but barely breathes.

Sounds you'll need

- **quatre** = *KA-truh*. The **qu-** is a plain *k*; no *w* sound survives.
- **silent-final-e** — the closing **-e** is a whisper, not a vowel you lean on.
- **r-uvular** — the French **r** is made at the back of the throat, near where you would gargle, and never rolled at the tip of the tongue.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

quatre (4) comes from Latin **quattuor**. English borrowed the Latin stem and kept the *qua-* visible in every one:

- **quart** — a fourth of a gallon
- **quarter** — a fourth of anything
- **quatrain** — a four-line verse
- **quadrant** — a quarter of a circle

Spanish stayed nearer the Latin with *cuatro*; French compressed the middle of the word away.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “quatre” — *KA-truh*, the *r* at the back of the throat

- “un, deux, trois, quatre”
- “quatre” then English “quarter, quadrant” — the same *quattuor*

Before you move on

How do you say four? (**quatre**, *KA-truh*.) Where in your mouth is the French **r** made? (At the **back of the throat**.) Which English words come from *quattuor*? (*Quart*, *quarter*, *quatrain*, *quadrant*.) Next: the number five, which closes the first hand.

6.5 cinq — five

Five closes the first hand — and this one came into English so completely that you have handled it on a pair of dice.

Sounds you’ll need

- **soft-c-s** — a **c** before *i* or *e* is an *s*. So **cinq** opens with *s*, not *k*.
- **nasal-in** — the **in** is nasal, like the *un* you met in **un**, but with the tongue further forward. The **q** at the end **is** sounded: *sank*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

cinq (5) comes from Latin **quīnque**. English took the Latin stem for counting words:

- **quintet** — five players
- **quintessence** — the *fifth* essence, the one the ancients set above earth, water, air and fire

And English took the **French** word whole for one job: **cinque**, the five on a die or a playing card. Spanish, again, kept the Latin *q*: *cinco*.

Grammar Lens: what the first five have in common

Set the five beside their Latin parents and one fact stands out: **the numbers barely moved**. *ūnus*, *duo*, *trēs*, *quattuor*, *quīnque* went into French as the five words you have learned, and into Spanish as *uno*, *dos*, *tres*, *cuatro*, *cinco*. Words used every day by every speaker

are the words a language changes least.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “cinq” — *sank*, the *q* sounded
- “un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq” — count the whole hand
- “cinq jours” — five days

Twice through: “un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq”

Before you move on

How do you say five? (**cinq**, *sank*.) Why does the **c** sound like *s*? (It stands before **i**.) Which English word for the 5 on a die is French? (**cinq**ue.) Count to five. (*Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq*.) Next: the number six, and a rule about final letters that turn on and off.

6.6 six — six

Six is spelled like the English word and means the same thing. The new thing here is not the word. It is that its last sound **switches on and off** depending on what follows.

Sounds you’ll need

- Counting on its own, **six** ends in an *s* sound: *sees*.
- The **i** is the short, tight vowel of English *machine*, not of *sit*.

Grammar Lens: a final letter that comes and goes

French final consonants are not a fixed yes or no. **six** has three settings, and which one you hear is decided by the next word:

- **counting, or standing alone** — the *s* is sounded: *sees*
- **before a consonant** — the *s* falls silent: *six livres* = *see livres*
- **before a vowel** — it comes back voiced, as a *z*: *six ans* =

see-z-ans

That third case is called **liaison**: a silent ending waking up to bridge into a vowel. French does this constantly, and you will meet it in every chapter from here on.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

six (6) comes from Latin **sex**, which is where English got:

- **sextet** — six players
- **sextant** — an instrument marking a sixth of a circle
- **semester** — Latin *sex mensis*, “six months”

Spanish made *seis* from the same *sex*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “six” alone — *sees*, the *s* sounded
- “six livres” — *see livres*, the *s* gone
- the count so far, one through six
- “six ans” — *see-z-ans*, the *s* back as a *z*

Before you move on

How do you say six when counting? (*Sees*, with the *s*.) What happens to that *s* before a consonant? (It **goes silent** — *six livres*.) And before a vowel? (It returns as a **z** — *six ans*. That is **liaison**.) Next: the number seven, and a secret hidden in the calendar.

6.7 sept — seven

Seven is the first of four numbers that left a copy of themselves in the calendar. Learn the number and you have been handed a month.

Sounds you'll need

- **sept** = *set*. The **p** is written and never spoken.
- The final **t**, unusually, **is** spoken. French keeps a handful of final consonants alive, and this is one of them.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sept (7) comes from Latin **septem**. The same *septem* stands, undisguised, at the front of a month you already know:

- **septembre** — French for September
- **septet** — seven players

The month is worth staring at. *Septembre* announces itself as the **seventh**, and everybody uses it as the ninth. That gap has an explanation, and it is waiting at the end of this chapter. Spanish made *siete* from the same *septem*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sept” — *set*, no *p*
- the count so far, one through seven
- “sept” then “septembre” — the seven inside the month

Before you move on

How do you say seven? (**sept**, *set*.) Which written letter is silent? (The **p**.) Which month carries the same Latin *septem*? (**Septembre** — which is the ninth month, for a reason we come to.) Next: the number eight.

6.8 huit — eight

Every number so far has looked like its Latin parent. This one looks like nothing at all — and that is the lesson.

Sounds you'll need

- **silent-h** — French never pronounces a written **h**. Not here, not anywhere.
- **huit** = *weet*, with the final **t** sounded.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

huit (8) comes from Latin **octō**, and the road it travelled is worth following step by step:

octō → *oit* → **huit**

The *c* dropped out, the vowels softened, and a written *h* grew on the front as a prop. The number came out unrecognisable. English, which borrowed the Latin form directly, kept it whole in **octave**, **octagon** and **octopus** — the eight-armed one.

Here is the consolation: French kept the old shape in the **month**.

Octobre still carries *oct-* in plain sight. The eight vanished from the number and survived in the calendar. Spanish made *ocho*, which sits about halfway along the same road.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “huit” — *weet*, no *h*, with the *t*
- the count so far, one through eight
- the road — “octō, oit, huit” — then “octobre”, where the *oct-* held

Before you move on

How do you say eight? (**huit**, *weet*.) What does French do with a written **h**? (Never pronounces it.) Which Latin word is *huit* worn down from, and where can you still see it? (**octō** — kept intact in **octobre**.) Next: the number nine.

6.9 neuf — nine

You met a final letter that goes silent before a consonant. Nine shows you the other move: a final letter that **changes shape** to reach a vowel.

Sounds you'll need

- **neuf** = *nuhf*. The vowel is the rounded *eu* you learned in **deux**, and the **f** is sounded.

Grammar Lens: the f that turns into a v

Standing before a vowel, the **f** of *neuf* softens into a **v**:

- **neuf ans** (“nine years”) = *neu-v-ans*
- **neuf heures** (“nine o’clock”) = *neu-v-eures*

This is the same instinct you saw in *six ans*: French will not let a consonant sit awkwardly against a following vowel, so it bends the sound to bridge them. With *six* the ending woke up as a *z*; with *neuf* it softens to a *v*. Both are liaison, doing the one job of keeping the line smooth.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

neuf (9) comes from Latin **novem**. Once again the month kept the number visible: **novembre** wears its *nov-* on the outside, and English has **novena**, a devotion of nine days. Spanish made *nueve*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “neuf” — *nuhf*, with the *f*
- “neuf ans” — *neu-v-ans*, the *f* softened
- “six ans, neuf ans” — a *z* and a *v*, the same bridging move

Before you move on

How do you say nine? (**neuf**, *nuhf*.) What happens to the **f** before a vowel? (It becomes a **v** — *neuf ans*.) Which month keeps the same Latin *novem*? (**Novembre**.) Next: the number ten, and the count is complete.

6.10 dix — ten

The last number of the count, and the one you have been carrying in your pocket in English without knowing it.

Sounds you'll need

- Counting on its own, **dix** ends in an *s* sound: *dees*.
- It behaves exactly like **six**: silent before a consonant (*dix livres* = *dee livres*), and back as a *z* before a vowel (*dix ans* = *dee-z-ans*).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

dix (10) comes from Latin **decem**, and it has left tracks in three places you already walk:

- **décembre** — the month that says “ten”
- **decimal** — counting by tens
- **dime** — a tenth of a dollar. That one came through Old French **disme**, from Latin *decima*, “a tenth.” The coin in an American pocket is a French word for a tenth part.

Spanish made *diez* from the same *decem*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “dix” alone — *dees*
- “dix livres”, then “dix ans” — silent, then *z*
- “dix” then English “decimal, dime” — the *decem* in both

Before you move on

How do you say ten on its own? (**dix**, *dees*.) Which other number shares its on-and-off ending? (**six**.) Which American coin is a worn-down French word for a tenth? (The **dime**, from *disme* ← *decima*.) Next: why those four months are counting wrong.

6.11 The months that are off by two

Four times in this chapter a number turned up at the front of a month, and four times the arithmetic was wrong by two. Here is why.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Line up what the four months **say** against where they **sit**:

month	says	sits at
septembre	seven (<i>septem</i>)	9th
octobre	eight (<i>octō</i>)	10th
novembre	nine (<i>novem</i>)	11th
décembre	ten (<i>decem</i>)	12th

Every one is two places late, and all four are late by the **same** two places. A single event moved them.

The old Roman year began in **March**, not January. Counting from March, *September* genuinely was the seventh month and *December* the tenth — the names were accurate. Later, two months named for **Julius Caesar** and the emperor **Augustus** were fixed into the middle of the year, and the start of the year was moved back to January. The counting months were shoved two places along. Their Latin names never caught up.

So every December, in French and in English alike, you are saying the Roman word for **ten**. Spanish carries the identical fault: *diciembre* is *decem* too.

Before you move on

What does *septembre* mean, and which month is it? (**Seven** — and it is the ninth.) In which month did the old Roman year begin? (**March**.) Which two months were pushed in, and for whom? (The

two named for **Julius Caesar** and **Augustus**.) What number are you saying when you say *décembre*? (**Ten**, Latin *decem*.)

6.12 Practice — counting to ten, out loud and in use

Ten words, taken one at a time. Now run them together until the chain is one motion, then put it to work.

Your turn: the whole count

Up, then down:

un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix

Twice through: the count from one to ten

Then backwards, which is where a memorised chant stops helping and the words have to be individually yours: *dix, neuf, huit, sept, six, cinq, quatre, trois, deux, un*.

Your turn: the endings that move

Three numbers change sound depending on what comes next. Say each pair and listen for the difference:

- *six livres* / *six ans* — silent, then **z**
- *dix livres* / *dix ans* — silent, then **z**
- *neuf livres* / *neuf ans* — **f**, then **v**

Your turn: say something real

— Bonjour ! **Un** jour ? — Non, **deux** jours.

— **Trois** ? — Non, **deux**. Merci !

— De rien. Bonne nuit — **une** nuit, **deux** nuits.

Say how many, then correct yourself. The exchange is short on purpose: every word in it is already yours, from this chapter or from the first.

What you've built this chapter

- **un** to **dix** — the ten most-reused words in the language, each of them a Latin numeral that barely moved on the way in.
- **un** / **une** — the number one doubling as “a/an,” and taking gender.
- **liaison** — *six*, *dix* and *neuf* changing their final sound to reach a following vowel.
- **the four months at the end of the year** — still counting seven to ten, two places out of place ever since the Roman year stopped starting in March.

Before you move on

Count from one to ten without stopping. Now backwards. Which three numbers change their ending before a vowel, and how? (*Six* and *dix* to a **z**, *neuf* to a **v**.) What is the difference between *un jour* and *une nuit*? (Gender — the same word for “one” and “a,” agreeing with the noun.) Why does the twelfth month say **ten**? (The Roman year began in **March**, and two months were later inserted.)

Chapter 7

The Days of the Week

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) 👁️ eyes (2) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 7 of 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the days of the week in French and use them in simple plans.

Seven day-names that are a map of the sky. Five carry a Roman planet-god and all of them carry Latin dies, “day” – so half of every weekday comes free, and English names the same gods on the same days under Germanic names. Then two days where a later faith wrote over the planets entirely.

7.1 la lune — the Moon

The seven-day week is one of the oldest things any language carries, and the French day-names are a **map of the sky**. Before we read the map, one of the objects on it.

Sounds you’ll need

- **front-rounded-u** — the French **u** has no English equivalent. Say “ee,” and then, without moving your tongue, round your lips as though for “oo.” That is **u**. So **lune** is *lün*, never *loon*.
- **silent-final-e** — the closing **-e** is a whisper, not a syllable of its own.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

la lune is feminine, so it takes **la**, the article you already know. It comes from Latin **lūna**, which English kept in a small family:

- **lunar** — of the Moon
- **lunation** — one full cycle of it
- **lunatic** — someone the Moon was believed to have unsettled, back when moonlight was thought to disturb the mind

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “lune” — *lün*, lips rounded and tongue forward
- “la lune” — feminine, so *la*
- “lune” then English “lunar, lunatic” — the same *lūna*

Before you move on

How do you say the Moon? (**la lune**, *la lün*.) Which article does it take, and why? (**la** — the word is feminine.) How do you make the French **u**? (Say “ee,” then round the lips without moving the tongue.) Next: the day named after it.

7.2 lundi — Monday

You have the Moon. Add one ending and you have the first day of the week — and, with it, the second half of five more words.

Sounds you’ll need

- **lundi** = *luh(n)-DEE*, opening with the nasal *un* you met in the number **un**.
- The weight falls on the **second** syllable. French leans on the end of a word where English leans near the front: *MON-day* against *lun-DI*.

Grammar Lens: every weekday ends in “day”

Every French weekday ends in **-di**, always said *DEE*. That **-di** is Latin **diēs**, “day” — the same word English puts at the *end* of *Monday*, and French puts at the end too.

So a French weekday reads as “[god]’s **day**,” the god in front and the day behind:

lundi = *lūnae* (“of the Moon”) + *diēs* (“day”) = **the Moon’s day**

The Romans named each day for a planet-god, and the planets were the gods. Learn to hear that **-di** and half of five more words is already yours.

Why it’s said this way

English *Monday* says the identical thing — *Moon* plus *day* — but out of Germanic parts rather than Latin ones. The two languages did not copy each other. They inherited the **same Roman week** and each translated it into its own words. That is why the days will keep lining up as we go, and why they will line up through their *meanings* rather than their sounds.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “lundi” — *luh(n)-DEE*, weight on the end
- it split — “lune” plus “-di”: the Moon’s day
- “lundi, Monday” — the same sentence in two languages

Before you move on

How do you say Monday? (**lundi**, *luh(n)-DEE*.) What does the **-di** mean, and from which Latin word? (“Day,” from **diēs**.) What does *lundi* mean once you take it apart, and what does *Monday* mean? (Both: **the Moon’s day**.) Next: the day of the war-god.

7.3 mardi — Tuesday

The second day carries the best story in the week: *mardi* and *Tuesday* look nothing alike and are, underneath, exactly the same word.

Sounds you'll need

- **mardi** = *mar-DEE*, with the **r** made at the back of the throat, as in **quatre**.
- The familiar **-di** closes it, so only the first syllable is new.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

mardi is **Martis diēs**, “the day of **Mars**” — the god of war, and the red planet named for him.

Why it's said this way

English *Tuesday* is named for **Tiw**, the Germanic war-god. French *mardi* is named for **Mars**, the Roman one. Different gods, different sounds — and the **same day**, because it is the same slot in the same week.

Here is how that happened. The Romans mapped their gods onto the planets and named the days for them. When the week reached the Germanic-speaking peoples, they did not borrow the Roman names; they **swapped in their own gods**, matching them role for role. Scholars call that *interpretatio germanica*: translating a pantheon rather than a word.

So the two languages will keep agreeing about **which** god each day belongs to while disagreeing about that god's name. Once you know that, every remaining weekday has an English key.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mardi” — *mar-DEE*, the *r* at the back of the throat
- “lundi, mardi” — the first two, both ending *DEE*
- the bridge — “mardi is Mars, Tuesday is Tiw, both the war-god”

Before you move on

How do you say Tuesday? (**mardi**, *mar-DEE*.) Which god is it named for? (**Mars**, the war-god.) Why do *mardi* and *Tuesday* line up despite sharing no sound? (Same day, same role — Latin used *Mars*, the Germanic peoples put in their own war-god **Tiw**.) Next: the messenger’s day.

7.4 mercredi — Wednesday

The longest day-name of the week, and the first place to try the key you were handed: find the god, and English will tell you the day.

Sounds you’ll need

- **mercredi** = *mair-kruh-DEE*, three syllables with the weight at the end.
- Two throat-**r** sounds in one word, one in each of the first two syllables. Take it slowly; this word is worth drilling on its own.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

mercredi is **Mercuriū diēs**, “the day of **Mercury**” — the messenger of the gods, and the swiftest planet. English kept the god’s name in **mercurial**, “quick-changing,” and gave it to the metal that runs like water.

Why it’s said this way

Apply the key from *mardi*. English *Wednesday* is **Woden’s day** — and Woden is the god the Romans matched to Mercury, both of them travellers, guides and carriers of the dead. Same day, same role, two names. English still spells the *d* it stopped pronouncing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mercredi” — *mair-kruh-DEE*, slowly, both *r* sounds at the back

- “lundi, mardi, mercredi” — three down
- the key again — “Mercury for the Romans, Woden for the Germanic peoples, one day”

Before you move on

How do you say Wednesday? (**mercredi**, *mair-kruh-DEE*.) Which god is it named for? (**Mercury**, the messenger.) Which god does English name the same day for? (**Woden** — the god Rome matched to Mercury.) Next: the day of the king of the gods.

7.5 jeudi — Thursday

The fourth day belongs to the king of the gods, and it introduces the sound most people get wrong on their first attempt at French.

Sounds you'll need

- **j-zh** — the French **j** is the soft buzz in the middle of English *measure* or *vision*. It is never the hard *j* of *jam*.
- **vowel-eu** — the rounded *eu* you learned in **deux**.
- Together: **jeudi** = *zheu-DEE*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

jeudi is **Jovis diēs**, “the day of **Jove**” — Jove being the other name of **Jupiter**, king of the gods and the largest planet. English keeps *Jove* in the phrase *by Jove*, and keeps the god’s temperament in **jovial**: cheerful, the way people born under Jupiter were said to be.

Why it’s said this way

The key once more. English *Thursday* is **Thor’s day** — Thor, the thunder-god, matched to Jupiter, who also threw the lightning. Two pantheons, one sky-king, one day. Every weekday so far has agreed on the god’s *job* and disagreed on the god’s *name*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “jeudi” — *zheu-DEE*, the soft *j* of “measure”
- “mercredi, jeudi” — the pair
- the bridge — “Jupiter and Thor, both the thunder-king, one day”

Before you move on

How do you say Thursday? (**jeudi**, *zheu-DEE*.) What English sound is the French **j**? (The buzz in *measure*, never the *j* of *jam*.) Which god is *jeudi* named for, and which god does *Thursday* name? (**Jupiter**, or Jove — and **Thor**.) Next: the day of the morning star.

7.6 vendredi — Friday

The fifth day closes the planet-week, and it is the only one named for a goddess.

Sounds you’ll need

- **nasal-en** — the opening **en** is nasal, sent through the nose like the *un* of **lundi** but with the mouth more open. So **vendredi** = *van-druh-DEE*.
- The **r** is the throat-**r** again, and the ending is the familiar *DEE*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

vendredi is **Veneris diēs**, “the day of **Venus**” — goddess of love and the brightest thing in the sky after the Sun and Moon. Her name is still in English **venerate**, “to hold in reverence.”

Why it’s said this way

The last application of the key, and the cleanest. English *Friday* is **Frigg’s day** — Frigg, the Germanic goddess of love and marriage, matched to Venus. Five days, five gods, and every single pairing made by role.

That is the whole planet-week: **lundi** the Moon, **mardi** Mars,

mercredi Mercury, **jeudi** Jupiter, **vendredi** Venus. Two days are left, and neither of them is a planet — which is the next surprise.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vendredi” — *van-druh-DEE*, the *en* through the nose
- the work week — “lundi, mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi”
- each as a god — “Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus”

Twice through: the five weekdays, in order

Before you move on

How do you say Friday? (**vendredi**, *van-druh-DEE*.) Which goddess is it named for, and who does English name it for? (**Venus** — and **Frigg**.) Give the five planet-days in order. (*Lundi, mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi*.) Next: the two days where the planets stop.

7.7 samedi — Saturday

Five days named for planets — and then two that are not. The weekend is where **religion overwrote astronomy**, and French shows both layers.

Sounds you’ll need

- **samedi** = *sam-DEE*. The **a** is open, and the middle **e** is so light it nearly disappears: two syllables in practice, not three.
- **nasal-none** — the **am** here is **not** nasal, because the *m* is followed by a vowel that pulls it into the next syllable.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

samedi still carries the **-di** of *diēs*, so the shape of the week holds. What changed is the first half. It is **sambatī diēs**, from Latin **Sabbatum**, which is Hebrew **shabbāt** — “to cease, to rest.”

Not a god. An instruction.

Why it's said this way

By the Roman pattern this should have been **Saturn's day** — and in English it still is. *Saturday* is the one weekday English kept a Roman god for, while replacing the other four with Germanic ones. French did the reverse. It kept the Roman gods on the weekdays and let this one go: Latin-speaking Christians took the Jewish **Sabbath** and put it here, so the planet was written over by the rest-day. So *Saturday* and *samedi* are the same day under two ideas — **the planet against the Sabbath** — and the two languages swapped exactly which half of the week they preserved.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “samedi” — *sam-DEE*, the middle *e* almost gone
- “vendredi, samedi” — the pair
- the contrast — “samedi is the Sabbath, Saturday is Saturn”

Before you move on

How do you say Saturday? (**samedi**, *sam-DEE*.) Where does the first half come from? (The **Sabbath** — Latin *Sabbatum*, Hebrew *shabbāt*, “to rest.”) Which planet-god does English keep on this day that French dropped? (**Saturn**.) Next: the last day, where even the **-di** moves.

7.8 dimanche — Sunday

Six days have ended in **-di**. The seventh breaks the pattern in public — and once you see how, it is not a break at all.

Sounds you'll need

- **ch-sh** — the French **ch** is *sh*, as in English *machine*. Never *ch* as in *church*.

- **nasal-an** — the **an** is nasal, the same open nasal as the **en** of **vendredi**: French spells that one sound two ways.
- Together: **dimanche** = *dee-MAHNSH*.

Grammar Lens: the ending that moved to the front

Look at the first two letters. **Dimanche**. That is the **same** *diēs* every other day of the week ends with, sitting at the front instead.

diēs Dominica → *di-manche* → **dimanche**

Latin let the two words come in either order, and for this one day the order that survived is “day of the Lord” rather than “the Lord’s day.” So the pattern did not break; it flipped. All seven days still carry *diēs*, and *dimanche* is the only one that wears it where you can see it first.

Why it’s said this way

Dominica comes from **Dominus**, “lord, master” — which English holds in **dominion**, **dominate**, and, worn much smoother, **dame**. English kept **Sunday**, the star. French dropped it entirely for “the Lord’s day.” Put beside *samedi*, that makes the weekend two different rewrites of the same Roman week:

- **samedi** — the planet replaced by the **Sabbath**, a day of rest
- **dimanche** — the Sun replaced by the **Lord**, a day of worship

Five days of Roman sky, then two days where a later faith wrote over it. The French week is a record of both.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “dimanche” — *dee-MAHNSH*, the *ch* as *sh*
- “samedi, dimanche” — the weekend
- the whole week — “lundi, mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi, samedi, dimanche”

Before you move on

How do you say Sunday? (**dimanche**, *dee-MAHNSH*.) Where did its *diēs* go? (**To the front** — *diēs Dominica*.) What does it mean literally? (“The **Lord’s** day.”) What does English keep on this day that French dropped? (The **Sun**.) Next: the whole week, run together.

7.9 Practice — the whole week

Seven days, taken one at a time. Now put them in a row and make the row automatic — a week you have to assemble is a week you cannot use.

Your turn: the seven, in order

Read down the column, then cover the right-hand side and read down the left:

French	English
lundi	Monday
mardi	Tuesday
mercredi	Wednesday
jeudi	Thursday
vendredi	Friday
samedi	Saturday
dimanche	Sunday

Twice through: the seven days, in order

Then start from **jeudi** and go round to *mercredi*. A list you can only say from the top is a list you have memorised rather than learned.

Your turn: name the god

Five of the seven still name a planet. Say each day, then what is inside it:

- **lundi** — *la lune*, the Moon
- **mardi** — Mars
- **mercredi** — Mercury

- **jeudi** — Jupiter
- **vendredi** — Venus

Every one of those ends in **-di**, Latin *diēs*, “day.”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **the -di rule** — every weekday ends in Latin *diēs*, “day,” so half of five words came free.
- **the planet week** — Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, named by Rome.
- **the key to English** — *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday* and *Friday* name the **same** gods by their Germanic names, matched role for role. The days agree about the god’s job and disagree about the god’s name.
- **the weekend rewrite** — *samedi* is the **Sabbath** where English keeps Saturn; *dimanche* is the **Lord’s day** where English keeps the Sun. And in *dimanche* the *diēs* moved to the front.

Before you move on

Give the seven days without stopping. Now start from **jeudi**. What does the **-di** mean? (“Day,” Latin *diēs*.) Which two days are not named for a planet, and what replaced them? (**samedi**, the Sabbath; **dimanche**, the Lord’s day.) Why do *mardi* and *Tuesday* mean the same thing? (Same day, same role — the war-god, called **Mars** in Latin and **Tiw** in Germanic.)

Chapter 8

Telling the Time

Modes: 🗣️ voice (8) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 8 of 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask for and tell the time in French.

One noun, one frame and three small additions. heure is the same word as English hour, both from Latin hora and both keeping an h neither language ever said; il est ... heures counts the hours where English says o'clock; and midi and minuit are one idea used twice, the middle of the day and the middle of the night.

8.1 heure — the hour

With your numbers in hand you are one word away from telling the time. This is that word — and it turns out you have been saying it in English your whole life.

Sounds you'll need

- **silent-h** — the **h** of **heure** is silent, exactly as in English *hour*. Say *eur*.
- **liaison-z** — because the word **begins with a vowel sound**, the number in front links straight onto it. That is the liaison you met counting: **deux heures** = *deu-z-eur*, **trois heures** = *troi-z-eur*.

The silent *h* is why the liaison happens at all. A written *h* that is never pronounced is not a consonant in the way; the number hears a vowel

and reaches for it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

heure comes from Latin **hōra**, which came from Greek **hōrā**. The Greek word did not mean “hour.” It meant *a period, a season, the right time* — the goddesses of the seasons were the **Horae**. Latin narrowed it to a fixed slice of the day, and French wore *hōra* down to **heure**. English took the **same** Latin *hōra* and made **hour**. So *heure* and *hour* are one word spelt two ways — and the silent *h* in both is a fossil of the Latin spelling that neither language ever said aloud.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “heure” — *eur*, no *h* at all
- “deux heures” — *deu-z-eur*, the number linking on
- “trois heures, six heures, dix heures” — hear the *z* each time

Before you move on

How do you say hour? (**heure**, *eur*.) Why does a number link onto it with a *z*? (The **h** is silent, so the word starts with a vowel sound.) What did the Greek *hōrā* originally mean? (**A season, the right time** — the *Horae* were the season-goddesses.) Next: the frame that puts a number in front of it.

8.2 il est ... heures — telling the clock

One word for the hour, one small frame to hang it in, and the clock is yours. Take the frame whole for now — it never changes.

Grammar Lens: French counts the hours

To say the time, French uses a fixed opening — **il est** — then the number, then **heures**:

il est + *number* + **heures**

Il est deux heures. Read it literally and it says “*it is two **hours**.*” French **counts the hours**. English does something stranger and then hides it: *two o’clock* is a worn-down *two of the clock*, which counted the hours too before it shrank.
Learn **il est** as one unbreakable piece for now. It is the same *it is* that English uses for weather and time — a subject that stands for nothing in particular — and you will meet the verb inside it properly later.

Sounds you’ll need

- **il est** = *eel-eh*. The final **t** of *est* is silent on its own.
- But before **heures**, with its silent *h*, that **t** wakes up and links: **il est une heure** = *eel eh-t-ün-eur*. Another liaison, the same instinct as *deux heures*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “il est” — *eel-eh*, no *t* sounded
- “Il est deux heures.” — *eel eh deu-z-eur*
- “Il est six heures. Il est dix heures.”

Twice through: “Il est deux heures.”

Before you move on

What frame tells the time in French? (**il est** + number + **heures**.)
What does *Il est deux heures* say literally? (“It is two **hours**.”)
What is English *o’clock* worn down from? (*Of the clock* — which counted hours too.) Next: the one hour that takes a different ending.

8.3 une heure — one o’clock

Eleven of the twelve hours behave identically. One does not, and the reason is a rule you already met on a different word.

Grammar Lens: one hour, two hours

heure is a **feminine** noun, so “one” in front of it is **une**, not *un* — the same gendered “one” you learned counting. And because the noun counts, it takes a plural **-s** from two upwards:

- **Il est une heure.** — one o’clock. One hour, so no *-s*.
- **Il est deux heures.** — two o’clock. Two hours, so *-s*.

Now listen rather than read. That **-s** is **silent**, like every plural *-s* in French. *Une heure* and *deux heures* end in the identical sound. The plural is visible on the page and inaudible in the air — what your ear actually uses to tell them apart is the **number in front**, which is why French never drops it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Il est une heure.” — *eel eh-t-ün-eur*
- “Il est deux heures.” — *eel eh deu-z-eur*
- both again and notice the ending never changes — only the number does

Before you move on

How do you say one o’clock? (**Il est une heure** — *une*, because *heure* is feminine.) When does *heure* take an **-s**? (From **two** upwards.) Can you hear that *-s*? (**No** — it is silent, so the number carries the count.) Next: the two hours that refuse a number altogether.

8.4 midi — noon

Two hours in the day do not get a number. They get a name, because they are the pivots the rest of the day turns on. Here is the first.

Sounds you'll need

- **midi** = *mee-DEE*, two clean syllables with the weight at the end.
- Both vowels are the tight French **i** of *machine*, never the *i* of *sit*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

midi is Latin **medius diēs**, “the middle day,” and both halves are still visible:

mi- (“middle,” from *medius*) + **-di** (*diēs*, “day”) = **the day’s middle**

You already own the second half. That **-di** is the same *diēs* that ends *lundi* and *mardi* — here it has come round to the front of a different word. And *medius* is the English **medium**, **median**, **mid** and **middle**, all one family.

Grammar Lens: a name instead of a number

Because **midi** *is* the hour, it does not take **heures**. Drop the number and drop the noun:

Il est midi. — “It is noon.”

Not *il est douze heures*. The frame stays; what goes into it is a name.

Why it’s said this way

English **noon** is Latin **nōna hōra**, “the **ninth** hour” — which in Roman reckoning was the middle of the afternoon. Over centuries the meal it named crept earlier, and the word came with it until it landed on midday and stopped. So English says *noon* and means “the ninth hour”; French says *midi* and means what it says.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “midi” — *mee-DEE*
- “Il est midi.” — no number, no *heures*

- it split — “mi- plus -di: the day’s middle”

Before you move on

How do you say noon? (**midi**, *mee-DEE*.) What are its two halves? (**mi-**, “middle,” and **-di**, *diēs*, “day.”) Where have you met that *-di* before? (Ending **lundi** and **mardi**.) Why is there no *heures* after it? (*Midi* is the hour.) Next: its opposite number.

8.5 minuit — midnight

The second pivot, and it is built from a word you have had since the very first chapter.

Sounds you’ll need

- **minuit** = *mee-NWEE*. The **ui** is a single gliding sound, *wee*, not two vowels taken in turn.
- The final **t** is silent, as it is in **nuit** itself.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

minuit is Latin **media nox**, “the middle night,” and the two halves are as plain as they were in *midi*:

mi- (“middle,” *medius* again) + **-nuit** (*nox*, “night”) = **the night’s middle**

The second half is the **nuit** you learned in your first week. Latin *nox* has the stem *noct-*, which English carries in **nocturnal** and, straight through its Germanic side, in **night** itself.

So the two pivots of the French day are one idea applied twice: the **middle** of the day, and the **middle** of the night. English builds *midday* and *midnight* out of exactly the same two pieces.

Grammar Lens: the same rule as midi

minuit is the hour, so no number and no **heures**:

Il est minuit. — “It is midnight.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “minuit” — *mee-NWEE*, the *ui* as one glide
- “Il est midi. Il est minuit.” — the two pivots
- both split — “the day’s middle, the night’s middle”

Before you move on

How do you say midnight? (**minuit**, *mee-NWEE*.) What are its two halves? (**mi**-, “middle,” and **nuit**, “night,” from Latin *nox*.) Which English word carries the *noct*- stem? (**Nocturnal**.) Say both pivots. (*Il est midi. Il est minuit.*) Next: the quarter hour.

8.6 et quart — quarter past

Whole hours are not enough to make an appointment. Three small additions finish the clock, and the first is already half-known to you from counting.

Sounds you’ll need

- **quart** = *kar*. The **qu**- is a plain *k*, and the final **t** is silent.
- The **r** is the throat-**r**, as in **quatre**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

quart is “a fourth part,” and it comes from the same Latin **quattuor** that gave you **quatre**. English took the identical word and made **quarter** — a fourth of an hour, a fourth of a gallon, a fourth of a town. Once you see *quatre* inside *quart*, it stops being a new word and becomes a number you already have, doing a different job.

Grammar Lens: adding to the hour

French adds the quarter with **et** (“and”), after the hour:

Il est deux heures et quart. — “It is a quarter past two.”

Read literally: “*it is two hours **and a quarter.***” French does not say “past”; it adds.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “quart” — *kar*, no *t*
- “Il est deux heures et quart.”
- “quatre, quart” — the number and the fourth part, one root

Before you move on

How do you say a quarter? (**quart**, *kar*.) Which number is it built on? (**quatre** — Latin *quattuor*.) How do you say quarter past two? (*Il est deux heures **et quart.***) Next: the half hour.

8.7 et demie — half past

Same move as the quarter, a different fraction — and a spelling that tells you something about the word it leans on.

Sounds you’ll need

- **demie** = *duh-MEE*. The first **e** is the light, almost-swallowed vowel you met in the middle of *samedi*.
- The final **-e** is silent, so *demie* and *demi* sound identical.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

demie comes from Latin **dimidius**, “halved” — literally *di-* (“apart”) plus *medius*, the “middle” you have now met twice, in **midi** and **minuit**. To halve a thing is to cut it at its middle. English borrowed the French form as the prefix **demi-**: a **demigod** is half a god, a **demitasse** is half a cup.

Grammar Lens: why it is demie and not demi

The **-e** on the end is agreement. It follows **heure**, which is feminine, so the half agrees with it and takes a feminine **-e**:

Il est deux heures et demie. — “It is half past two.”

After **midi** and **minuit**, which are masculine, it drops the **-e**:

Il est midi et demi. — “It is half past twelve.”

Your ear cannot tell them apart; the page can. That is the same silent-agreement pattern as the plural **-s** on *heures*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “demie” — *duh-MEE*
- “Il est deux heures et demie.”
- “Il est midi et demi.” — masculine, so no **-e** on the page

Before you move on

How do you say half past two? (*Il est deux heures et demie.*) Why does *demie* carry an **-e**? (It agrees with **heure**, which is feminine.) What is inside Latin *dimidius*? (*Medius* — the same “middle” as in *midi*.) Next: the one that subtracts.

8.8 moins le quart — quarter to

Twice now you have **added** to the hour. The last piece of the clock does the opposite, and it does it with a word you can read on a calculator.

Sounds you’ll need

- **moins** = *mwa(n)*. The **oi** is *wa*, as in **trois**, and the **in** is nasal, as in **cinq**.

- The final **s** is silent. Two familiar sounds and one silent letter — nothing in this word is new.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

moins is Latin **minus**, and it means exactly what *minus* means: **less**, taken away. English uses the Latin form untouched for subtraction, and keeps the same root in **minor**, **minimum** and **diminish**.

Grammar Lens: French subtracts from the next hour

To say “quarter to,” French does not look back at the hour that has passed. It names the hour **coming**, and takes the quarter off it:

Il est trois heures moins le quart. — “It is a quarter to three.”

Literally: “*it is three hours **minus** the quarter.*” English does the same arithmetic and hides it behind the word *to*; French shows its working. So the three additions to the hour are one small system:

- **et quart** — the hour, plus a quarter
- **et demie** — the hour, plus a half
- **moins le quart** — the *next* hour, minus a quarter

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “moins” — *mwa(n)*, no *s*
- “Il est trois heures moins le quart.”
- the three in a row — “deux heures et quart, deux heures et demie, trois heures moins le quart”

Before you move on

How do you say quarter to three? (*Il est trois heures **moins le quart.***) Which hour does French name in that sentence, the one gone or the one coming? (**The one coming** — it subtracts from

it.) What Latin word is *moins*? (**Minus**.) Next: the whole clock, put to use.

8.9 Practice — reading the clock

One frame, one noun and three small additions. Put them together and you can say any time on a clock face.

Your turn: whole hours

Put each of these into the frame — *Il est ...* — then cover the right column and read back from the left:

French	English
une heure	one o'clock
deux heures	two o'clock
six heures	six o'clock
dix heures	ten o'clock

Twice through: the four whole hours, each inside *Il est ...*

Listen for the liaison each time: *ün-ur*, *deu-z-ur*, *see-z-ur*, *dee-z-ur*.

Your turn: the two that take a name

- **Il est midi.** — noon, “the day’s middle”
- **Il est minuit.** — midnight, “the night’s middle”

No number and no *heures*: each of them **is** the hour.

Your turn: the parts of the hour

French	English
deux heures et quart	quarter past two
deux heures et demie	half past two
trois heures moins le quart	quarter to three
midi et demi	half past twelve

Say all four inside the frame and hear the clock move. The third names the hour **ahead** and subtracts from it.

What you've built this chapter

- **heure** — the same word as English *hour*, both Latin *hōra*, both keeping a silent *h* neither language ever pronounced.
- **il est ... heures** — French counts the hours; English says *o'clock*.
- **agreement you cannot hear** — *une heure* against *deux heures*, *et demie* against *et demi*. The page shows it; the ear uses the number in front.
- **midi** and **minuit** — one idea twice: the *middle* of the day and of the night, with the *-di* of *lundi* and the *nuit* of your first chapter.
- **adding and subtracting** — *et quart*, *et demie*, *moins le quart*.

Before you move on

Say one o'clock, then two. (*Il est une heure. Il est deux heures.*) Say noon and midnight, and what each means literally. (*Midi*, the day's middle; *minuit*, the night's middle.) Say quarter past two, half past two, quarter to three. Which of those names an hour that has not arrived? (**Quarter to** — *moins le quart* subtracts.) Why do *heure* and *hour* both carry a silent *h*? (Both are Latin *hōra*, where it was already silent.)

Chapter 9

The Months: Gods and Beginnings

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

***By the end of this chapter:** I can name the first six months in French and say which Roman figure each one carries.*

Six months, and not one of them is a number. The calendar is a procession of Roman gods and festivals carried almost unchanged out of Latin – Janus in the doorway of the year, the Februa that cleaned the city before it turned, and the war-god who already owns a weekday.

9.1 janvier — January

The week was a map of the sky. The calendar is a **procession of Roman gods and emperors**, carried almost unchanged out of Latin — and it opens with the one god who faces both ways at once.

Sounds you'll need

- j-zh — the soft **j** of *measure*, the one you met in **jeudi**.
- nasal-an — the **an** is nasal.
- Together: **janvier** = *zhan-vee-AY*, three syllables, weight at the end.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

janvier is Latin **Januarius**, “the month of **Janus**.”

Janus is the god of **doorways** — of gates, of thresholds, of any moment where one thing stops and another starts. He is carved with **two faces**, one looking back and one looking forward, because that is what a doorway is.

Put the first month of the year in his care and the name explains itself: the month that stands in the door, looking back at the year that closed and forward into the one opening. English **January** is the identical word; a **janitor** was once a doorkeeper, from the same *janua*, “door.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “janvier” — *zhan-vee-AY*, the soft *j* of **jeudi**
- the god — “Janus, two faces, the doorway of the year”
- “janvier” then English “January, janitor” — one door-god in all three

Before you move on

How do you say January? (**janvier**, *zhan-vee-AY*.) Which god is it named for, and what is he god of? (**Janus** — **doorways**, beginnings.) Why does he have two faces? (One looks **back**, one looks **forward** — the year’s threshold.) Next: the month named for a washing.

9.2 février — February

Eleven of the twelve months are named for a god, an emperor or a number. This one is named for a **festival** — and specifically for a cleaning.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vowel-e-acute** — the **é** is a tight, bright *ay*, said with the mouth narrow. It is the accent that tells you the vowel is that one and no other.

- **février** = *fay-vree-AY*. The **r** is the throat-**r**, and the ending is the same -*AY* as **janvier**.

Why it's said this way

février is Latin **Februarius**, from the **Februa** — a Roman festival of **purification** held in this month.

That placement is the interesting part. The old Roman year began in **March**, so February was the **last** month, and the city cleaned itself before the year turned. The month is named for the scrubbing that came before the fresh start.

English **February** is the same word, and English speakers have been quietly dropping its first **r** for centuries.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “février” — *fay-vree-AY*, the *é* bright and narrow
- “janvier, février” — the first two, both ending -*AY*
- the reason — “the Februa, the cleaning before the year turned”

Before you move on

How do you say February? (**février**, *fay-vree-AY*.) What is it named after? (The **Februa**, a festival of **purification**.) Why did a cleaning-festival fall at the end of the year? (The Roman year began in **March**, so February closed it.) Next: a month you already know as a day.

9.3 mars — March

This one you have already half-learned, in a different part of the calendar. The war-god who owns Tuesday also owns a month.

Sounds you'll need

- **mars** = *marss*. The final **s** is sounded here — one of the small set of French words that keeps it.

- Do not read it as English *Mars*, which has a different vowel; the French **a** is open and flat.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

mars is Latin **Martius**, the month of **Mars**, the war-god. Now put it beside the weekday:

- **mars** — *Martius*, **his month**
- **mardi** — *Martis diēs*, **his day**

The same god, twice in the calendar. Spot one and you already know the other, which is the first time a French word has paid you back in two different systems at once. English keeps the god's name in **martial**, “of war,” and in the planet **Mars**.

Why it's said this way

March was the **first month** of the old Roman year. That single fact has now explained three separate things you have met: why *février*'s cleaning festival came at the end, why the counting months land two places late, and why the war-god gets the opening of the year — campaigning season began when the weather turned.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mars” — *marss*, the *s* sounded
- the pair — “mars, mardi”: his month and his day
- “janvier, février, mars” — the first three

Before you move on

How do you say March? (**mars**, *marss*, with the *s*.) Which god is it named for? (**Mars**, the war-god.) Which weekday is named for the same god, and what is the difference between the two words? (**mardi** — *Martis diēs*, his **day**; *mars* is *Martius*, his **month**.) Which month opened the old Roman year? (**March**.) Next: the

month the buds open.

9.4 avril — April

Every month so far has had a firm answer behind it. This one has a guess — and the guess is old enough that the Romans were already making it.

Sounds you'll need

- **avril** = *a-VREEL*. Two syllables; the **r** sits at the back of the throat, and the **i** is the tight vowel of *machine*.
- The final **l** is sounded.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

avril is Latin **Aprilis**, and where *Aprilis* came from is genuinely uncertain. The oldest guess, and still the best one, is Latin **aperīre**, “to **open**” — the month the buds open.

It is worth noticing that this is a **guess**, and saying so. A book that hands you a confident story for every word is inventing some of them. English **aperture**, an opening, comes from that same *aperīre*, so if the guess is right, an aperture and April are the same idea: something unclosing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “avril” — *a-VREEL*, the *l* sounded
- “mars, avril” — the pair
- the guess — “aperīre, to open; the buds open”

Before you move on

How do you say April? (**avril**, *a-VREEL*.) What is the best guess at its root, and what does it mean? (**aperīre**, “to **open**.”) How certain is that? (Not very — it is a **guess**, and an ancient one.) Next: the

goddess of growing.

9.5 mai — May

The shortest month-name in French, and one of the shortest words you have met: three letters, one syllable.

Sounds you'll need

- **ai-y** — the pair **ai** is a single sound, close to the *e* of English *bed*. So **mai** = *may*, in one beat. Neither letter is heard on its own.
- This is the same **ai** you will meet again and again; it is one of the most common vowel pairs in French, and it never splits.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

mai is Latin **Maius**, the month of **Maia** — an old Italic goddess of **growth** and increase, worshipped long before the Romans wrote much down about her.

Her name is thought to sit on the same root as Latin **maior**, “greater,” which English carries in **major**, **majority** and **mayor**. If that is right, then *mai* is the **growing** month in the plainest sense: the one where things get bigger.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mai” — *may*, one beat, the *ai* never split
- “avril, mai” — the pair
- the goddess — “Maia, growth; and maior, greater”

Before you move on

How do you say May? (**mai**, *may*.) What sound does the pair **ai** make? (One sound, close to the *e* of *bed* — never two.) Which goddess is the month named for, and what is she goddess of? (**Maia** — **growth**.) Next: the queen of the gods.

9.6 juin — June

The sixth month closes the half-year, and it belongs to the one figure in the calendar who outranks everybody else in it.

Sounds you'll need

- j-zh — the soft **j** again, as in **jeudi** and **janvier**.
- nasal-in — the **in** is nasal, as in **cinq**.
- Together: **juin** = *zhwa(n)*, one syllable. It is shorter than it looks.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

juin is Latin **Junius**, the month of **Juno** — queen of the gods, wife of Jupiter, and the goddess of marriage.

That last detail still shows. June is the traditional wedding month across Europe because it was **her** month, and couples wanted her on their side.

You have already met her husband: **jeudi**, *Jovis diēs*, is Jupiter's day. So the calendar now holds both halves of the divine marriage — his **day** and her **month**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “juin” — *zhwa(n)*, one syllable
- “mai, juin” — the pair
- the couple — “juin is Juno's month, jeudi is Jupiter's day”

Before you move on

How do you say June? (**juin**, *zhwa(n)*, one syllable.) Which goddess is it named for? (**Juno**, queen of the gods.) Why are weddings held in June? (She is the goddess of **marriage**, and it is her month.) Which day belongs to her husband? (**jeudi** — Jupiter's.) Next: the first six, run together.

9.7 Practice — the first half of the year

Six months, taken one at a time. Run them together now, then say what is inside each one.

Your turn: the six, in order

Read down the left, then cover the right and read back:

French	English
janvier	January
février	February
mars	March
avril	April
mai	May
juin	June

Twice through: the six months, in order

Four of them end in that same unstressed *-AY*; **mars** and **mai** are the two short ones, and they are the two easiest to lose.

Your turn: name what is inside

Say each month, then the figure or thing behind it:

- **janvier** — **Janus**, the two-faced god of doorways
- **février** — the **Februa**, a festival of purification
- **mars** — **Mars**, the war-god (and *mardi* is his day)
- **avril** — perhaps *aperire*, “to open,” though nobody is certain
- **mai** — **Maia**, goddess of growth
- **juin** — **Juno**, queen of the gods

What you’ve built this chapter

- **six month names**, each of which is a Roman figure rather than a number.
- **one word paying twice** — *mars* and *mardi* are the same god’s month and day, which is the first time a French word has cashed out in two systems.

- **the old Roman year began in March**, which has now explained three separate oddities: why a cleaning-festival names February, why the war-god opens the year, and why four months you have seen are counting two places out.

Before you move on

Give the six months without stopping. Now start from **avril**. Which month shares its god with a weekday, and which weekday? (**mars** — with **mardi**, both Mars.) Which month is named for a festival rather than a person? (**février**, the Februa.) Which one is a guess? (**avril** — perhaps *aperire*, “to open.”)

Chapter 10

The Months: Caesars and Counting

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the last six months in French and explain why four of them are counting wrong.

Two men put their names on a calendar of gods, and the four months after them have been miscounting since long before either was born. juillet is Julius Caesar and août is the emperor Augustus — but neither added a month: Quintilis and Sextilis were renamed. What pushed septembre to décembre two places out was janvier and février, added at the front of a year that used to begin in March.

10.1 juillet — July

Six months named for gods and a festival. The next two are named for **men** — the only two months in the year that carry a person who actually lived.

Sounds you'll need

- ill-mouille — the **ill** in the middle is not an *l* sound at all. It is a *y*, as in English *yes*. This spelling is everywhere in French and it catches every beginner once.
- With the soft **j** of **juin**: **juillet** = *zhwee*-YAY.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

juillet is Latin **Julius**, and the Julius in question is **Julius Caesar**. He **reformed the entire calendar** — the Julian calendar is his, and it ran Europe for sixteen centuries. He did not add a month while doing it. The month was already there, and it was called **Quintilis**, “the 5th.” After his death it was **renamed** in his honour, and *Quintilis* has not been heard since.

English **July** is the same name, worn down a different way from the same *Julius*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “juillet” — *zhwee-YAY*; the *ill* is a **y**, never an *l*
- “juin, juillet” — both open with the soft *j*, and they are easy to confuse; say them back to back until they separate
- the man — “Julius Caesar: Quintilis, the 5th, renamed for him”

Before you move on

How do you say July? (**juillet**, *zhwee-YAY*.) What sound does the **ill** make? (A **y**, as in *yes* — never an *l*.) Who is it named for, and what did he do to the calendar? (**Julius Caesar** — he **reformed** it.) Did he add this month to the year? (**No** — it already existed as **Quintilis**, “the 5th,” and was **renamed** for him.) Next: the emperor who copied him.

10.2 août — August

The most violently worn-down word in the French calendar. Four letters on the page, and barely two sounds in the mouth.

Sounds you’ll need

- **août** = *oot*, and in much of France simply *oo*. The **a** is not sounded, and the final **t** is optional.
- **circumflex** — the little hat on the **û** is a **gravestone**. It marks

a letter that used to be there and is gone: older French wrote *aoust*, and when the **s** fell silent the hat took its place.

You have met that hat before, on **hôpital** and **forêt** in English's *hospital* and *forest*. Wherever you see a circumflex, try putting an **s** after the vowel and see whether an English word appears.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

août is Latin **Augustus**, the first Roman emperor.

Julius Caesar had a month renamed for him. His heir Augustus, not to be outdone, had **the next one** renamed for himself: **Sextilis**, “the 6th,” became *Augustus*.

Note what neither man did. **Neither one added a month.** *Quintilis* and *Sextilis* were already sitting in the year; the two most powerful men in Rome simply took the two of them and wrote their own names over the top. The calendar did not get longer. Two of its months just stopped being numbers and started being people.

Why it's said this way

Ten of the twelve months are a god, a festival or a number. **Two are people.**

Julius and Augustus put themselves among the gods, in the most public place available — the calendar everybody has to say out loud. They did not need to build anything to do it; they only had to rename what was there. Two thousand years later, France still says both their names every summer, and nobody thinks of either man while doing it. That is what winning looks like at scale.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “août” — *oot*, and hear how little of the spelling survives
- “juillet, août” — the two men, back to back
- the hat — “aoust lost its *s*, and the circumflex marks the grave”

Before you move on

How do you say August? (**août** — *oot*, or simply *oo*.) What does the circumflex mark? (A **lost letter** — here an *s*, from older *aoust*.) Who are the two months named for people? (**Julius Caesar** and the emperor **Augustus**.) Did either of them add a month to the year? (**No** — they **renamed** two that already existed, *Quintilis* and *Sextilis*, “the 5th” and “the 6th.”) Next: the four that are still counting.

10.3 septembre — September

You met this word while counting, as the proof that *sept* means seven. Now take it as a month in its own right.

Sounds you’ll need

- **septembre** = *sep-TAHM-bruh*. The **em** in the middle is **nasal**, and the closing **-re** is barely a syllable.
- All four of the counting months end this same way, so learning it once buys you four.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

septembre is Latin **september**, “the **seventh**” — from **septem**, the seven you can already count with.

You know why it sits ninth: the old Roman year began in **March**, so counting from there, *september* really was the seventh. Then **janvier** and **février** were added at the **front** of the year — centuries before either Caesar was born — and every month behind them slid two places without being renamed. The name never caught up.

That is worth being exact about, because the story is usually told wrong. It was not Julius and Augustus. They renamed two months in the middle and added nothing; the damage was done long before them, at the **front** of the year.

What is new here is the **word**: *septembre* is now yours as a month, not only as evidence about a number.

English **September** is the identical Latin word, carrying the identical mistake.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “septembre” — *sep-TAHM-bruh*, the *em* through the nose
- “sept, septembre” — the number and the month it hides in
- “août, septembre” — the emperor, then the month that miscounts for an older reason

Before you move on

How do you say September? (**septembre**, *sep-TAHM-bruh*.) What number is inside it? (**sept**, seven — Latin *septem*.) Which month is it actually? (The **ninth**.) What put it two places out — the emperors, or something older? (**Older**: *janvier* and *février* were added at the **front** of a year that used to begin in March.) Next: the eighth month, which is the tenth.

10.4 octobre — October

Of the four counting months, this is the one that rescues a number you could no longer see.

Sounds you’ll need

- **octobre** = *ok-TOH-bruh*. The **o** sounds are both closer to English *taught* than to *toe*.
- Same *-bruh* ending as **septembre**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

octobre is Latin **october**, “the **eighth**,” from **octō**.

Here is why this word matters more than the other three. When you learned to count, *octō* had been battered past recognition on its way to **huit** — the *c* gone, the vowels softened, a written *h* propped on the front. The number kept none of its ancestry.

The month kept all of it. *Oct-* stands there in plain sight, exactly as Latin left it, and English **octave**, **octagon** and **octopus** stand beside it. The eight vanished from the number and survived in the calendar.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “octobre” — *ok-TOH-bruh*
- the contrast — “huit, octobre”: the same eight, unrecognisable and intact
- “septembre, octobre” — the pair

Before you move on

How do you say October? (**octobre**, *ok-TOH-bruh*.) What number is inside it? (**octō**, eight.) Why is the eight easier to see here than in the number **huit**? (*Huit* wore its Latin away; the **month kept it**.) Next: the ninth, which is the eleventh.

10.5 novembre — November

The third of the four, and by now you can predict both the shape and the arithmetic.

Sounds you’ll need

- **novembre** = *no-VAHM-bruh*, the **em** nasal and the ending the same *-bruh* as the last two.
- Three months in a row have now ended identically. That is the pattern paying out.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

novembre is Latin **november**, “the **ninth**,” from **novem** — the nine you count with as **neuf**.

Unlike *huit*, **neuf** still shows its Latin: *novem* to *neuf* is a short walk, and the *nov-* is right there in both. English keeps the same root in **novena**, a devotion of nine days.

Be careful of one false friend: Latin **novus** means “new,” and English **novel** and **novelty** come from *that*, not from *novem*. Two similar roots, two different ideas. **November is a count, not a newness.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “novembre” — *no-VAHM-bruh*
- “neuf, novembre” — the nine in both
- “septembre, octobre, novembre” — three in a row, one ending

Before you move on

How do you say November? (**novembre**, *no-VAHM-bruh*.) What number is inside it? (**novem**, nine — the *neuf* you count with.) Does it have anything to do with “new”? (**No** — that is Latin *novus*, a different root.) Next: the last of them, and the biggest number.

10.6 décembre — December

The twelfth month, and it says **ten**. This is the last and largest of the four miscounts, and after it the year closes.

Sounds you’ll need

- **décembre** = *day-SAHM-bruh*. The **é** is the bright *ay* of **février**, the **c** before *e* is an *s*, and the **em** is nasal.
- The familiar *-bruh* closes it for the fourth and final time.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

décembre is Latin **december**, “the **tenth**,” from **decem**.

That root is one of the most productive you have met. It gave you the number **dix**; it gives English **decimal**, **decade** and **decimate**; and it reached an American pocket as the **dime**, through Old French *disme* from Latin *decima*, “a tenth part.”

So every December, in French and English alike, you say the Roman word for ten and mean the twelfth month. Spanish carries the identical fault: *diciembre* is *decem* too.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “décembre” — *day-SAHM-bruh*
- “dix, décembre, dime” — one Latin *decem* in three places
- all four — “septembre, octobre, novembre, décembre”

Before you move on

How do you say December? (**décembre**, *day-SAHM-bruh*.) What number is inside it? (**decem**, ten — the *dix* you count with.) Name two English words from the same root. (*Decimal*, *decade*, *decimate* — or the **dime**.) Next: all twelve, together.

10.7 Practice — the whole year

Twelve months, six at a time. Run the whole year now, and hear where it breaks.

Your turn: the twelve, in order

Read down the left, then cover the right and read back:

French	English
janvier	January
février	February
mars	March
avril	April
mai	May
juin	June
juillet	July
août	August
septembre	September
octobre	October
novembre	November
décembre	December

Twice through: the twelve months, in order
Then start from **juillet** and go round to *juin*.

Your turn: the two hard pairs

Two pairs cause almost all the trouble. Drill them alone:

- **juin / juillet** — *zhwa(n)* against *zhwee-YAY*. Both open with the soft *j* and neither is long.
- **mars / mai** — *marss* against *may*. The two short ones, and the two most easily swallowed.

What you've built this chapter

- **twelve month names**, and the year runs end to end.
- **two men in a calendar of gods** — *juillet* for Julius Caesar, *août* for the emperor Augustus. Neither added a month: *Quintilis* and *Sextilis*, “the 5th” and “the 6th,” were already there and were **renamed**.
- **why the last four miscount** — the Roman year began in **March**, and *janvier* and *février* were later added at the **front**, sliding *septembre* through *décembre* two places along. Their Latin names never caught up. The emperors get blamed for this and had nothing to do with it.
- **a number rescued** — *octō* is unrecognisable inside **huit** and perfectly legible inside **octobre**. When a word wears down, look for a longer relative that did not.

Before you move on

Give the twelve months without stopping. Now start from **septembre**. Which two are named for people, and who? (**juillet**, Julius Caesar; **août**, the emperor Augustus.) Did either add a month? (**No** — both were **renamings**.) So what pushed the counting months two places out? (**janvier** and **février**, added at the **front** of a year that began in March.) Which month shows a number that its own French numeral has lost? (**octobre** — the *octō* that vanished from *huit*.)

Chapter 11

The Four Seasons

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖐️ Hands-free start: first 4 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the four seasons in French and say that something happens in one of them.

Four small Latin poems about heat, sleep and first things. printemps is primum tempus, “the first time”; été is aestās, “heat”; hiver is hibernum, the wintry season that gave English hibernate. And three seasons take en while spring takes au, for a reason that is not about seasons at all.

11.1 le printemps — spring

Twelve months name gods, emperors and numbers. The four seasons are something else entirely: four small Latin poems about **heat, sleep and first things**. Here is the first thing.

Sounds you’ll need

- **le printemps** = *luh pran-TAHN*. **Two nasal vowels in one word:** the **in** of *prin-* and the **em** of *-temps*.
- Everything after that second nasal is silent. The **-ps** on the end is not said at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

printemps is two words fused: **primum tempus**, “the **first time**.”

prin- = *primum*, “first” — English **prime**, **primary**,

premier -temps = *tempus*, “time, season” — English
temporal, tempo

So spring is the year’s **prime time**, and the French say so every time they name it. Older French used **primevère**, from the same *prima vera*, “first spring” — which Italian keeps to this day as **primavera**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le printemps” — *luh pran-TAHN*, both vowels through the nose
- it split — “*primum tempus*: the first time”
- “décembre, printemps” — the year ending, then the year beginning
- “printemps” then Italian “primavera” — two names for one idea

Before you move on

How do you say spring? (**le printemps**, *luh pran-TAHN*.) What are its two halves? (*primum*, “**first**,” and *tempus*, “**time**.”) How many nasal vowels does it hold? (**Two**.) What does Italian call the same season? (**Primavera** — the same “first spring.”) Next: the hot one.

11.2 l’été — summer

Spring was named for its **place** in the year. Summer is named for what it **feels like**.

Sounds you’ll need

- **été** = *ay-TAY*. Both **é** are the bright, narrow *ay* you met in **février**.
- **elision** — the article does not stay *le*. Before a vowel sound it drops its own vowel and clamps on: *le été* is impossible, so it becomes **l’été**, said as one word, *lay-TAY*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

été is Latin **aestās**, and *aestās* means “**heat**.”

Not “the third season” or “the warm months” — just *heat*. Summer, in Latin and so in French, is named for the thing itself. English keeps the same root in **estival**, “of summer,” and in **aestivate**, which is what an animal does when it sleeps through the hot season rather than the cold one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “l’été” — *lay-TAY*, one word, the article clamped on
- “le printemps, l’été” — hear the article change shape
- the meaning — “aestās: heat”

Before you move on

How do you say summer? (**l’été**, *lay-TAY*.) Why is it *l’* and not *le*? (The word starts with a **vowel**, so the article elides.) What does the Latin *aestās* mean? (**Heat**.) Next: the one English borrowed whole.

11.3 l’automne — autumn

Three of the four seasons are a Latin idea reshaped by French. This one is a Latin word that French barely touched, and then handed to English intact.

Sounds you’ll need

- **diphthong-au** — the pair **au** is a single *o* sound, closer to English *taught* than to *cow*. It never sounds like *ow*.
- **automne** = *o-TON*. Here is the oddity worth knowing: the **m** is written and the **n** is not sounded — the spelling keeps a letter the mouth dropped.
- With elision: **l’automne** = *lo-TON*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

automne is Latin **autumnus**, and unlike the other three seasons nobody is sure what *autumnus* originally meant. It may not even be Latin in origin.

What is certain is where it went. English took **autumn** from French, spelling and silent letter and all — which is why English writes an *n* it does not say in exactly the same place. Two languages carrying the identical silent letter, because one copied the other's spelling.

American English mostly prefers **fall**, a Germanic word for the leaves coming down; **autumn** is the French one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “l’automne” — *lo-TON*, the *au* a single *o*
- “l’été, l’automne” — both elide
- French “automne” then English “autumn” — the same silent letter twice

Before you move on

How do you say autumn? (**l’automne**, *lo-TON*.) What sound does **au** make? (A single **o**.) Which written letter is not pronounced, and does English do the same? (The **n** — and **yes**, English *autumn* copied the spelling from French.) Next: the cold one, and a bear.

11.4 l’hiver — winter

The last season, and it shares a root with the deepest sleep in the animal world.

Sounds you’ll need

- **silent-h** — the **h** is silent, exactly as in **heure**. And because a silent *h* is no obstacle, the article elides straight through it: **l’hiver**, *lee-VAIR*.
- The **r** at the end is the throat-**r**, and it **is** sounded.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

hiver is Latin **hibernum**, short for *hibernum tempus* — “the **wintry** season.” Like *printemps*, it is a *tempus* phrase with the *tempus* worn off.

Now follow that root sideways. English **hibernate** is *hibernāre*, and it means, with no metaphor at all, “**to spend the winter.**” A bear hibernating is a bear *wintering*.

So the same Latin word gave French a season and English a kind of sleep — one naming the time, the other naming what you do in it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “l’hiver” — *lee-VAIR*, the *h* silent and the article through it
- “heure, hiver” — two silent *h*, two elisions
- the pair — “hiver and hibernate: the season and the sleeping”

Before you move on

How do you say winter? (**l’hiver**, *lee-VAIR*.) Why does the article elide in front of an **h**? (The **h** is silent, so the word begins with a vowel sound.) What does English **hibernate** literally mean? (“**To spend the winter.**”) Next: how to say you are *in* a season.

11.5 au printemps, en été — saying you are *in* a season

You have the four seasons. Now put something *in* one — and meet a rule with exactly one exception, which turns out not to be an exception at all.

Grammar Lens: three take en, one takes au

Three of the four use **en**:

en été · en automne · en hiver

And spring does not:

au printemps

Learn it as a list and it is an oddity to memorise. Look at the words and it stops being odd. **Été**, **automne** and **hiver** all begin with a **vowel sound** — that is why each of them elides its article to *l'*. **Printemps** begins with a consonant, and it is the only one that does. So the split is not about seasons at all. It is the **same vowel-or-consonant question** that decided *le* against *l'*, asked one more time about a different little word. French keeps asking it, and once you hear it you stop needing the list.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three — “en été, en automne, en hiver”
- the one — “au printemps”
- the reason aloud — “three start with a vowel, one starts with a consonant”

Twice through: “au printemps, en été, en automne, en hiver”

Before you move on

How do you say “in summer”? (**en été**.) In winter? (**en hiver**.) In spring? (**au printemps** — not *en*.) And **why** is spring different? (It is the only season starting with a **consonant**; the other three begin with a vowel sound, which is also why they elide to *l'*.)

11.6 Practice — the turning year

Four seasons, four small Latin poems. Run them, then put a month inside each one.

Your turn: the four, in order

Read down the left, then cover the right and read back:

French	English
le printemps	spring
l'été	summer
l'automne	autumn
l'hiver	winter

Twice through: the four seasons, in order

Notice which article each one carries. **Three elide to l'** and one does not, and that single fact is about to do a second job.

Your turn: in a season

- **au printemps** — the consonant one
- **en été** · **en automne** · **en hiver** — the three vowel ones

Now join what you learned last chapter to what you learned this one. Say each month inside its season:

en hiver — *janvier, février* · **au printemps** — *mars, avril, mai* **en été** — *juin, juillet, août* · **en automne** — *septembre, octobre*

What you've built this chapter

- **four season names**, each one a Latin sentence worn down to a word: *printemps* is “the **first time**,” *été* is “**heat**,” *hiver* is “the **wintry** season,” and *automne* is a word so old nobody is sure of it.
- **two of them still pay out in English** — *estival* from *aestās*, and *hibernate*, which means, with no metaphor, “to spend the winter.”
- **au against en**, and the reason behind it: **printemps** is the only season beginning with a consonant. It is the same vowel-or-consonant question that decided *le* against *l'*, asked about a different word.

Before you move on

Give the four seasons. Which three take **en**, and which takes **au**? (*En été, en automne, en hiver; au printemps.*) Why? (Spring is the only one starting with a **consonant**.) What does *printemps* literally mean? (“The **first time**.”) Which English word means “to spend the winter”? (**Hibernate** — from the same *hibernum* as *hiver*.)

Chapter 12

Family, and the Oldest Words We Have

Modes:  voice (6)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 5 of 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the four closest family members in French, each with its article, and use one sound-law to recognise their English cousins.

Four words — père, mère, frère, sœur — and every one of them is older than Latin. Each also hands you an English word you already knew: paternal, maternal, fraternal, sorority. One sound-law, Grimm's $p \rightarrow f$ and $t \rightarrow th$, turns père into father and frère into brother in a single move, and the fused letter æ arrives here and waits in cœur, œuf and œil.

12.1 le père — father

The calendar took you back two thousand years, to Rome. This word goes back further than Rome — further than Latin, further than any written language at all.

Sounds you'll need

- **e-grave** — the è is open, the mouth wider than for é. Think of the *e* in English *bed*, held a moment longer.
- **r-uvular** — the **r** is the French one, made at the back of the throat.

- Together: **le père** = *luh PEHR*, one syllable after the article.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

père is Latin **pater**, worn down by French mouths for fifteen centuries until only four letters were left.

pater itself is inherited, not invented. Behind it stands Proto-Indo-European ***ph₂tēr** — a word nobody ever wrote down, reconstructed from the shapes its descendants kept. Sanskrit *pitṛ*, Greek *patēr*, Latin *pater*: the same word, spoken across a continent, for longer than anyone can document.

English never borrowed *père*, but it borrowed *pater* itself, over and over, and left it visible every time:

- **paternal**, **paternity** — “of a father”
- **patron** — a man who stands to you as a father would
- **patriarch**, **expatriate**, **patrimony**

So the French word is short and the English cousins are long, and they are the same word. When *père* looks like nothing you know, say *paternal* and the *p* and the *t* are still there.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le père” — *luh PEHR*, the *è* open and the *r* in the throat
- the ladder — “*ph₂tēr, pater, père”
- “père → paternal, patron” — the *p* and *t* still standing

Before you move on

How do you say “the father”? (**le père**, *luh PEHR*.) Which article does it take, and what does that tell you? (**le** — it is masculine.) What Latin word is it? (**pater**.) Name two English words with that *pater* still inside them. (**paternal**, **patron** — also *paternity*, *patriarch*.) Next: the other half of the pair.

12.2 la mère — mother

The same word, one letter different, one article different — and a much stranger set of English cousins waiting at the end of it.

Sounds you'll need

- **la mère** = *lah MEHR*. The vowel is the identical open è you just met in **père**; only the first consonant changes.
- Say them back to back — *père, mère* — and hear that the rhyme is exact. That rhyme is not a coincidence; it is two inherited words worn down by the same mouths in the same way.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

mère is Latin **māter**, from Proto-Indo-European ***méh₂tēr**. The obvious English cousins are the ones you would guess:

- **maternal**, **maternity** — “of a mother”
- **matron**, **matriarch**, alma **mater**

And then there is one nobody guesses. Latin took *māter* and built **materia** from it — originally the **usable wood of a tree**, the growing part, the stuff a mother-trunk yields. Roman writers then stretched *materia* to mean the stuff anything is made of, and English inherited it twice over:

- **material** — what a thing is made of
- **matter** — stuff itself, the physical world

So when a physicist says *matter*, the word underneath is *mother*. That is the kind of thing etymology is for: not a party trick, but a reminder that abstract vocabulary is almost always a concrete word that travelled.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la mère” — *lah MEHR*

- the pair — “le père, la mère”; the rhyme is exact, the articles are not
- the surprising one — “māter → materia → matter”

Before you move on

How do you say “the mother”? (**la mère**, *lah MEHR*.) Which article, and why is it not the same as *père*’s? (**la** — *mère* is feminine.) Give both parents together. (**le père, la mère**.) Which everyday English word for physical stuff comes from *māter*? (**matter** — through *materia*, the wood a tree yields.) Next: why English says *father* where French says *père*.

12.3 père / father — one sound-law

You have met two words that mean what English *father* and *mother* mean, and look almost nothing like them. That is about to stop being true.

Grammar Lens: the same word went down two roads

French took *pater* and *māter* straight from Latin. English did **not** borrow them from anybody. It inherited the very same Proto-Indo-European words down a different branch of the family — and on that branch, one systematic change hit every word at once. It is called **Grimm’s law**, and the part that matters here is short: **p became f, and t became th**.

Apply it and watch the disguise fall off. Each row is one inherited word, shown first as it is reconstructed, then down each of the two roads:

Proto-Indo-European	Latin → French	English
*ph ₂ tēr	<i>pater</i> → père	father
*méh ₂ tēr	<i>māter</i> → mère	mother

père keeps the **p**; *father* shifts it to **f**. The *t* of *pater* is still a *t* in French and has become *th* in English. Nothing else moved.

This is why the resemblance between *maternal* and *mother* feels different from the resemblance between *paternal* and *father*: **maternal** came into English late, borrowed whole from Latin with its *t* intact, while **mother** came down the long way and took the sound-change

with it. Two arrivals of one word, centuries apart.
 The point is not the pair. It is that sound-change is **regular** — it applies to a language wholesale, not word by word — which is exactly what makes a word you have never seen guessable.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the law — “p becomes f, t becomes th”
- “père, father” — then “mère, mother”; hear the same word twice
- the two arrivals — “maternal came by boat, mother came on foot”

Before you move on

Which two sounds does Grimm’s law change, in the version you need here? (**p** → **f** and **t** → **th**.) Are *père* and *father* borrowed from each other? (**No** — they are the **same inherited word**, arriving by two different roads.) Why does *maternal* keep its *t* while *mother* does not? (*maternal* was **borrowed late from Latin**; *mother* came down the Germanic road and took the sound-change.)
 Next: the brother.

12.4 le frère — brother

Parents done. The next word rhymes with both of them, and it lets you use the sound-law you just learned instead of only hearing about it.

Sounds you’ll need

- **le frère** = *luh FREHR*. The same open **è**, the same throat **r** — and now an **r** on each side of the vowel, which is the only hard part.
- Say **père**, then **frère**. One consonant has been added at the front; everything else is identical.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

frère is Latin **frāter**, from Proto-Indo-European ***b^hréh₂tēr**.

Now use what you have. English **brother** is that same PIE word down the Germanic road: the *t* became *th*, exactly as it did in *father* and *mother*. The law you just met explains a third pair without being told to.

By the Latin road, English got the formal set:

- **fraternal**, **fraternity**, **fraternize**
- and, softened through Old French *frere*, **friar** — a monk who is literally a *brother* of his order

Fraternity and *friar* are the same word twice, once in a lecture hall and once in a monastery, and the difference between them is only how long each spent in a French mouth on the way.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le frère” — *luh FREHR*, an *r* on both sides of the vowel
- the three so far — “le père, la mère, le frère”
- the law again — “frāter, brother: the *t* went to *th*”
- “frère → fraternal, friar”

Before you move on

How do you say “the brother”? (**le frère**, *luh FREHR*.) What Latin word is behind it? (**frāter**.) Which sound-change turns *frāter* into English *brother*? (The same one: **t** → **th**.) What is a **friar**, underneath the word? (A **brother** — the same *frère*, worn down through Old French.) Next: the sister, and a letter you have not met.

12.5 la sœur — sister

Three words that rhyme, and then this one. *Père, mère, frère* — and **sœur**, which refuses the pattern and brings a letter with

it.

Sounds you'll need

- **la sœur** = *lah SUR*, but not the *sur* of English *sure*. Round your lips as if to say *oo*, then say *eh* without moving them. That rounded front vowel is what **œu** spells.
- The **r** is the throat **r**, as in the other three.
- The strange letter is **œ**, an *o* and an *e* fused into one. It gets a lesson of its own next; for now, read it as the single vowel you just made.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sœur is Latin **soror** — and you can watch it collapse:

soror → *seror* → *suer* → **sœur**

Two syllables ground down into one, which is why it stopped rhyming with its three relatives. They were worn evenly; this one was worn out of shape.

English kept *soror* whole in the borrowed words:

- **sorority**, **sororal**
- and a nun is still addressed as **Sister** in English and **ma sœur** in French, the same word in both mouths

English **sister** is not from *soror* by borrowing — it comes down the Germanic road from the same PIE ***swésōr**. So *soror* and *sister* are cousins who have not spoken since before either language existed.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la sœur” — lips rounded, then *eh* without moving them
- the pair — “le frère, la sœur”
- the collapse — “soror, seror, sœur”
- all four — “le père, la mère, le frère, la sœur”

Before you move on

How do you say “the sister”? (**la sœur**, *lah SUR* with rounded lips.) What Latin word is behind it? (**soror**.) Why does it not rhyme with the other three? (It was worn down from **two syllables to one** — *soror* → *sœur*.) An English word that kept *soror* whole? (**sorority**.) Next: that fused letter, on its own.

12.6 œ — one letter, not two

You have just read a word containing a character English does not own. It is worth two minutes on its own, because it is not decoration and it is not rare.

Script: œ, one letter and not two

œ is an *o* and an *e* pushed together into a **single letter**. French calls it *e dans l'o* — “e in the o” — which is exactly what it looks like.

Three things follow, and they are the whole lesson:

- It counts as **one** letter when you spell aloud. **sœur** is spelled *s-œ-u-r*: four letters, not five.
- Writing it as two separate letters — *soeur* — is a **substitution**, the way writing *ae* for *æ* is. French readers accept it and French typography does not; a printed book, a newspaper and a road sign all use **œ**.
- It is not a separate sound of its own. In **sœur** the vowel is spelled **œu**, the rounded vowel you made in the last lesson.

Its capital exists too, and looks like what you would expect: **Œ**.

Writing: œ, and the four words that need it

The list of everyday **œ** words is short enough to hold in your head, and you already have one of them:

- **la sœur** — the sister, which you have
- **le cœur** — the heart

- **l'œuf** — the egg
- **l'œil** — the eye

l'œuf and **l'œil** both come back later in this book as words in their own right, so learning the letter now means that when they arrive, only the meaning is new. **le cœur** is here because you will meet it everywhere else — it is one of the most common nouns in the language — and because four words is a short enough list to simply keep.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the name of the letter — “e dans l'o”
- *Say it:* spell it — “s-œ-u-r”, four letters
- *Say it:* the short list — “sœur, cœur, œuf, œil”
- *Write it:* **œ** three times: draw the *o*, then start the *e* inside its right edge

Before you move on

How many letters is **œ**? (**One.**) What does French call it? (*e dans l'o* — “e in the o”.) How many letters in **sœur**? (**Four** — *s-œ-u-r*.) Name two other words that use it. (**cœur, œuf, œil** — any two.) Next: putting the family together.

12.7 Practice — four words, one law

Four words, learned one at a time. Run them as a set now, and then cash in what each one buys you in English.

Your turn: the set, with articles

The article is half the word, and a family word said bare is a word half learned.

Say these aloud:

- “le père, la mère” — the parents, masculine then feminine
- “le frère, la sœur” — the siblings, same order

- all four straight through, then in reverse

Twice through: “le père, la mère, le frère, la sœur”

Your turn: the three that rhyme, and the one that does not

Say these aloud:

- “père, mère, frère” — one vowel, three times: the open è
- “sœur” after them, and hear the break
- why it broke — “soror ground down two syllables into one”

Your turn: cash in the English

Each French word hands you an English one you already knew and never thought about, and the French is the key rather than the lock.

Say these aloud:

- “père → paternal, patron”
- “mère → maternal, matter”
- “frère → fraternal, friar”
- “sœur → sorority”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **four family words**, each with its article.
- **one sound-law** — Grimm’s law, $p \rightarrow f$ and $t \rightarrow th$. It is why *père* is *father*, *mère* is *mother* and *frère* is *brother*, and it turned three separate memorisations into one fact.
- **a letter** — œ, one character, waiting in *cœur*, *œuf* and *œil*.
- **a habit worth more than any of them**: when a French word looks like nothing, reach for the long formal English word rather than the short common one. *Père* is opaque next to *father* and obvious next to *paternal*.

Before you move on

Give all four family words with their articles. (**le père, la mère, le frère, la sœur.**) Which two are feminine? (**la mère, la sœur.**) State Grimm's law in the form you need. (**p** → **f**, **t** → **th**.) Use it: what English word is *frāter*? (**brother.**) How many letters is **œ**, and name a word besides *sœur* that has it. (**One**; *cœur*, *œuf* or *œil*.) Which English word for physical stuff traces back to *mère*? (**matter.**)

Chapter 13

Bread, Water, Wine

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name bread, water and wine in French, and ask for some of any of them.

Three things on a table, and two opposite fates for one kind of word: aqua dissolved into eau, a single vowel spelled with three letters, while vīnum stayed legible in wine, vine and vinegar. pānis gave French its bread and English its companions. Then one rule that English simply leaves out — de plus the article, contracting to du — turns each noun from the thing into some of it.

13.1 le pain — bread

Food at last. This one word sits at the centre of the French table, and it hides what may be the loveliest word-story English has.

Sounds you'll need

- **nasal-in** — the **-ain** is a **nasal vowel**: the air goes through the nose and the **n** is never said as a consonant of its own.
- **silent-final** — nothing after that vowel is pronounced.
- Together: **le pain** = *luh PA(N)*, where the *(n)* is the nose and not a letter you hear. It is masculine: **le** pain.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

pain is Latin **pānis**, “bread.” That much is unremarkable. What the root did in English is not.

Take *com-*, “with,” and put *pānis* after it. **com + pānis** — “one you break bread with.” That is a **companion**, and the word means nothing else:

- **companion, company** — a *company* was first a group who ate together, and only later a body of soldiers or a business
- **pantry** — the room the bread is kept in
- **pannier** — a bread-basket, now the bag slung over a bicycle or a donkey

So *le pain* and *companion* are the same root wearing two different jobs. French kept the bread; English kept the friendship built on it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le pain” — *luh PA(N)*, the vowel through the nose
- the sum — “com + pānis: one you break bread with”
- “pain → companion, company, pantry”

Before you move on

How do you say “the bread”? (**le pain**, *luh PA(N)*.) Is the **n** a consonant here? (**No** — it marks the vowel as **nasal**.) What Latin word is it? (**pānis**.) What does *companion* literally mean? (“One you **break bread with**” — *com-* + *pānis*.) Next: the drink that wore away to a single vowel.

13.2 l’eau — water

Every word so far has been worn down a little. This one was worn down almost completely — and you can still hear what it used to be, in English.

Sounds you'll need

- **o-eau** — **eau** is pronounced “**oh**.” That is the entire word. Three written letters, *e-a-u*, spelling **one** vowel sound and nothing else.
- **elision** — it begins with a vowel sound, so the article elides: **l’eau**, not *le eau*. The same elision you met on **l’été**.
- Together: **l’eau** = *loh*. Two letters heard, four written.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

eau is Latin **aqua**. Say those two aloud, one after the other, and the distance is almost comic.

Watch the erosion happen, though, and each step is small:

aqua → *ewe* → *eaue* → **eau**

The **q** goes, then the **w**-sound goes, then the final vowel goes, and what is left is a held “oh” with a spelling that remembers the rest.

French, quite literally, **drank the consonants out of aqua**.

Meanwhile the loud original survived — in **English**, which borrowed the Latin word whole and never wore it at all: **aquatic**, **aquarium**, **aqueduct**, **aqualung**. Italian barely touched it either: *acqua*.

So **l’eau** and **aquarium** are the two far ends of one word, and English is holding the end that still looks like Latin.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “l’eau” — *loh*, one vowel and no more
- the erosion — “aqua, ewe, eaue, eau”
- the two ends — “l’eau, aquarium”
- “le pain, l’eau” — and notice why one elides and the other does not

Before you move on

How do you say “the water”? (**l’eau**, *loh*.) How many sounds are in **eau**? (**One**.) Why is the article **l’** and not *le*? (**eau** begins with a **vowel sound**.) What Latin word is underneath it? (**aqua**.) Where

can you still hear *aqua* loud and whole? (**English** — *aquatic*, *aquarium*, *aqueduct*; and Italian *acqua*.) Next: the drink that refused to wear down.

13.3 le vin — wine

Eau dissolved down to one vowel. This word, sitting on the same table, did the opposite — and the reason is not linguistic.

Sounds you'll need

- **nasal-in** — the same nasal you met in **pain**, spelled **-in** this time rather than **-ain**. Two spellings, one vowel.
- **silent-final** — again, the **n** is the nose and not a consonant.
- Together: **le vin** = *luh VA(N)*. Say **pain** and **vin** back to back and hear that only the first consonant differs.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

vin is Latin **vīnum** — and unlike *aqua*, it is still recognisable everywhere it went.

English has it several times over, by several routes:

- **wine** — *vīnum* borrowed into early Germanic, long before French existed
- **vine**, **vineyard** — the plant it comes from
- **vinegar** — French *vin* + *aigre*, “**sour wine**,” which is exactly what vinegar is
- **vintage**, **vinyl** — the harvest year, and a plastic named from wine spirit

Why did *aqua* dissolve while *vīnum* held? Because words wear down with use and hold their shape when they are **traded**. Water is what you have; wine is what you buy, ship, tax and write down. A word that keeps appearing on a bill of lading in three countries stays legible in all three.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le vin” — *luh VA(N)*, the nose again
- the near-pair — “le pain, le vin”; one consonant apart
- “vin → wine, vine, vinegar”
- the contrast — “l’eau wore away, le vin did not”

Before you move on

How do you say “the wine”? (**le vin**, *luh VA(N)*.) Which other word this chapter has the same vowel? (**le pain**.) What Latin word is behind it? (**vīnum**.) What does *vinegar* literally say? (**Sour wine** — *vin + aigre*.) Next: how to ask for **some** of any of them.

13.4 du pain, de l’eau — asking for *some*

You have three things on the table and no way to ask for any of them yet. **le pain** is *the* bread — a particular loaf. What you actually want at a table is **some** bread, and French makes you say so.

Grammar Lens: French says “of the”, where English says nothing

English can drop the word entirely. “*I’d like bread*” is perfectly good English. French cannot: it marks **an unmeasured amount of a thing** with **de** plus the article the noun already takes.

de + le pain → **du pain** — *some bread*

de + le vin → **du vin** — *some wine*

de + l’eau → **de l’eau** — *some water*

That is one rule, not three. **de + le** always contracts to **du**; **de + l’** has nothing to contract, so it simply stays apart. You are not learning a new list here — you are putting *de* in front of the article you already know, and letting the vowel rule you already met decide the shape.

And the contrast is worth hearing directly:

- **le pain** — *the* bread, that loaf, the one on the table
- **un pain** — *a* loaf, one whole item you could pick up
- **du pain** — *some* bread, an amount with no edges

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three — “du pain, du vin, de l’eau”
- the reason — “de plus the article; du where it contracts”
- the ladder on one noun — “le pain, un pain, du pain”

Twice through: “du pain, du vin, de l’eau”

Before you move on

How do you say “some bread”? (**du pain**.) Some wine? (**du vin**.)
Some water? (**de l’eau** — *eau* takes **l’**, so there is nothing to contract.) What are the two words hiding inside **du**? (**de + le**.)
What is the difference between *un pain* and *du pain*? (**un pain** is a loaf, one whole item; **du pain** is **some bread**, an amount with no edges.) Next: all three together.

13.5 Practice — the table, and asking for some of it

Three nouns and one rule. Run the nouns first, then put the rule on each of them in turn.

Your turn: the three, with their articles

Say these aloud:

- “le pain, l’eau, le vin”
- the odd one — “l’eau elides, because it opens with a vowel”

- the near-pair — “le pain, le vin”; the same nasal, one consonant apart

Twice through: “le pain, l’eau, le vin”

Your turn: now ask for some

Say these aloud:

- “du pain, du vin, de l’eau”
- each noun three ways — “le pain, un pain, du pain”
- the same three ways for wine — “le vin, un vin, du vin”

Your turn: two words that wore differently

Say these aloud:

- the erosion — “aqua, ewe, eaue, eau”
- the survival — “vīnum: wine, vine, vinegar”
- the sum — “com plus pānis: companion”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **three nouns** you can put on a table, each with the right article.
- **one rule for “some”** — *de* plus the article, contracting to **du** where it can. It is the first time French has asked you to say something English simply leaves out.
- **two opposite fates for one kind of word.** *aqua* dissolved into *eau*; *vīnum* is still legible in four English words. Everyday things wear down, traded things stay legible — which is a rule you can use on words you have not met yet.
- **a root that paid twice** — *pānis* gave French its bread and English its **companions**.

Before you move on

Give all three with their articles. (**le pain, l’eau, le vin.**) Why does only one of them elide? (**eau** begins with a **vowel sound**.) Ask

for some of each. (**du pain, du vin, de l'eau.**) What two words are inside **du**? (**de + le.**) Which Latin word wore down to a single vowel, and which one barely moved? (**aqua** → *eau*; **vīnum** → *vin.*)

Chapter 14

The Welded Teens

Modes:  voice (9)  Hands-free start: all 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count from eleven to sixteen in French, and say which half of each word is the digit and which is the ten.

*Six numbers French did not build. It inherited them from Latin already welded shut — *ūndecim*, *duodecim*, *trēdecim* — and wore them down to one syllable each. The -ze they all share is *decem*, the same ten already hiding in *dix* and in *décembre*, and the front of every one of them is its own digit: *deux* in *douze*, *six* in *seize*. The digit comes first and the ten comes second, which is a choice, and French is about to make the other one.*

14.1 onze — eleven

You can count to ten. The eleventh number is where you find out that French did not build its teens at all — it inherited them, already welded shut.

Sounds you'll need

- **nasal-on** — the **on** is a **nasal vowel**, the same one you have in **bonjour**.
- **z-voiced** — the **z** is buzzed, not hissed: your throat should vibrate.
- Together: **onze** = *ONZ*, one syllable.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

onze is Latin **ūndecim** — *ūnus* (“one”) plus *decem* (“ten”), fused into one word before French existed.

Notice what French did **not** do. English says *eleven*, which is its own strange word; German says *elf*. French could have said **dix-un**, “ten-one,” and it does not. It took the Latin compound whole and wore it down: *ūndecim* → *onze*, four syllables into one.

That is worth flagging now, because it will not last. French keeps this inherited style for exactly six numbers, and then abandons it in front of you.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “onze” — *ONZ*, the vowel through the nose, the *z* buzzed
- the count so far — “huit, neuf, dix, onze”
- what is inside it — “ūnus plus decem: one-ten”

Before you move on

How do you say eleven? (**onze**, *ONZ*.) What two Latin words are fused inside it? (**ūnus** and **decem** — “one” and “ten”.) Did French build this word out of *dix* and *un*? (**No** — it inherited *ūndecim* already joined.) Next: twelve, the same way.

14.2 douze — twelve

One welded number could be an accident. Two of them is a pattern, and this one lets you hear the join.

Sounds you’ll need

- vowel-ou — **ou** is a single pure **oo**, as in English *food*. Never two sounds.
- z-voiced — the same buzzed **z** as **onze**.
- Together: **douze** = *DOOZ*, one syllable.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

douze is Latin **duodecim** — *duo* (“two”) plus *decem* (“ten”). And this time you can see both halves survive into the French. Say **deux**, then say **douze**, and listen to the front of each: *deu-*, *dou-*. That is the same digit, and it did not disappear — it was only worn down. The back half is doing the same thing. **onze** and **douze** both end in **-ze**, and both come from a Latin word ending in *-decim*. Two words, one shared ending, and a strong hint about where that ending came from.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “douze” — *DOOZ*, the *ou* a single pure vowel
- the digit surfacing — “deux, douze”
- the pair — “onze, douze”; hear the shared ending

Before you move on

How do you say twelve? (**douze**, *DOOZ*.) Which small number can you hear at the front of it? (**deux**.) What Latin word is it from? (**duodecim**.) What ending do *onze* and *douze* share? (**-ze**.) Next: what that **-ze** actually is.

14.3 -ze — the ten you keep meeting

Onze and *douze* share an ending. Before you learn four more words that also share it, it is worth two minutes to find out what it **is** — because you have already met it twice, wearing other clothes.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The **-ze** on the end of *onze* and *douze* is Latin **decem**, “ten.” That is all it is. *ūn-decim* → *on-ze*. *duo-decim* → *dou-ze*. The Latin *-decim* has been ground down to a single buzzed consonant and a silent vowel, but it is still the word **ten**, still sitting in the back half of the

number, still telling you what the number is built on.

Now put it beside the other two places you have already met that same *decem*:

- **dix** — ten itself, worn down from *decem* at the front instead of the back
- **décembre** — the old **tenth** month, which kept *decem* almost intact
- **-ze** — the same ten, welded onto a digit and nearly erased

One Latin root, three disguises, and you now hold all three. This is the single most useful habit this book can give you: when a scrap of a word looks familiar, it usually is, and the long word is the one that tells you what the short one was.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three disguises — “dix, décembre, onze”
- the claim — “the -ze is decem; it means ten”
- the two you have — “onze, douze”; and hear the ten on the end of both

Before you move on

What is the **-ze** of *onze* and *douze*? (Latin **decem**, “ten”.) Name two other French words where you have already met that same *decem*. (**dix** and **décembre**.) Which of the three kept it most intact? (**décembre**.) Next: thirteen, with the ten now visible on the end.

14.4 treize — thirteen

With the **-ze** identified, the rest of the welded teens stop being words to memorise and start being sums you can read.

Sounds you'll need

- The **ei** is the open è you met in *père* and *frère* — *treh*, not *tray*.
- **z-voiced** — the buzzed **z** again.
- Together: **treize** = *TREHZ*, one syllable, with the throat **r** at the front.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

treize is Latin **trēdecim** — *trēs* (“three”) plus *decem* (“ten”).

Read it as a sum now rather than a word:

trei- is *trois*, worn down · **-ze** is *decem*, worn down

Say **trois**, then **treize**, and the front half answers for itself. You are not learning a thirteenth arbitrary noise; you are reading *three* and *ten* stuck together and then rubbed smooth.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “treize” — *TREHZ*, the open è
- the digit surfacing — “trois, treize”
- the three you have — “onze, douze, treize”

Before you move on

How do you say thirteen? (**treize**, *TREHZ*.) What are its two halves? (**trois** and the **-ze** that is **decem**.) Count from eleven. (*Onze, douze, treize*.) Next: fourteen, the longest of them.

14.5 quatorze — fourteen

Every teen so far has been one syllable. This one is two, and the reason is that it started out longer than any of them.

Sounds you'll need

- **quatorze** = *ka-TORZ*. Two syllables, weight on the second.
- The **qu** is a plain **k**, exactly as in **quatre** — never a *kw*.
- **z-voiced** — the buzzed **z** closes it, like all the others.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

quatorze is Latin **quattuordecim** — *quattuor* (“four”) plus *decem*. *Quattuordecim* is five syllables. *Quatorze* is two. French has thrown away more than half the word and still kept both ideas: **quator-** is the four, **-ze** is the ten.

Set it beside its own digit — **quatre**, *KATR* — and the family resemblance is obvious once you stop expecting the spelling to match. Both begin *quat-*; the number simply grew a syllable to carry the ten.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “quatorze” — *ka-TORZ*, the *qu* a plain *k*
- the digit surfacing — “quatre, quatorze”
- the four you have — “onze, douze, treize, quatorze”

Before you move on

How do you say fourteen? (**quatorze**, *ka-TORZ*.) How is the **qu** pronounced? (A plain **k**.) What Latin word is behind it? (*quattuordecim*.) Count from eleven. (*Onze, douze, treize, quatorze*.) Next: fifteen.

14.6 quinze — fifteen

Back to one syllable — and this is the teen whose Latin half you are most likely to already know from English.

Sounds you'll need

- nasal-in — the **in** is the nasal vowel you have in **pain** and **vin**.
- The **qu** is a plain **k** again.
- Together: **quinze** = *KANZ*, one syllable, the vowel through the nose.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

quinze is Latin **quīndecim** — *quīnque* (“five”) plus *decem*. The French digit **cinq** has travelled a long way from *quīnque*, so *quinze* does not obviously look like *cinq*. But the Latin **quīn-** is loud in English, and that is the way in:

- **quintet** — a group of five
- **quintuplet** — one of five
- **quintessence** — the *fifth* essence, the one the ancients added to earth, water, air and fire

So when *cinq* and *quinze* refuse to look related, go through English: *quintet* is the bridge between them.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “quinze” — *KANZ*, the vowel through the nose
- the bridge — “cinq, quintet, quinze”
- the five you have — “onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze”

Before you move on

How do you say fifteen? (**quinze**, *KANZ*.) Which English words carry the same *quīn-*? (**quintet**, **quintuplet**, **quintessence**.) Why is that useful here? (*cinq* and *quinze* **do not look alike**; the English word is the **bridge** between them.) Next: sixteen, the last of the welded ones.

14.7 seize — sixteen

The sixth and last of them. After this word the pattern you have spent five lessons learning simply stops — which is the next chapter’s whole subject.

Sounds you’ll need

- The **ei** is the open è, the same vowel as **treize**.
- **z-voiced** — the buzzed **z** one last time.
- Together: **seize** = *SEHZ*. Say **treize** and **seize** back to back: one consonant apart, and they rhyme exactly.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

seize is Latin **sēdecim** — *sex* (“six”) plus *decem*.

That is the sixth and final inherited compound. Latin had them beyond this point too, but French did not keep them, and you are about to see what it did instead.

Note also what **seize** is not. It is **not** *dix-six*. Nothing in the first six teens is built out of *dix* plus a digit — every one of them arrived from Latin already joined, and French merely wore them down. That distinction is the thing to hold on to going into the next chapter.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “seize” — *SEHZ*
- the rhyme — “treize, seize”
- all six — “onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize”

Before you move on

How do you say sixteen? (**seize**, *SEHZ*.) Which other teen rhymes with it? (**treize**.) Is it built from *dix* and *six*? (**No** — it came from Latin *sēdecim* already **fused**.) Count all six. (*Onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize*.) Next: which end of each word is the digit.

14.8 trei-ze — which half is which

You have six words and you know their ending is *ten*. One question is left, and it is the one that makes the next chapter make sense: **which end of the word is the digit?**

Grammar Lens: digit in front, ten behind

In all six, the **digit comes first** and the **ten comes second**.

Trēdecim is “three-ten,” **not** “ten-three.”

Each word is its own small number worn down, with the ten stuck on the back:

number	the digit in front	the ten behind
onze	on- ← <i>un</i>	-ze
douze	dou- ← <i>deux</i>	-ze
treize	trei- ← <i>trois</i>	-ze
quatorze	quator- ← <i>quatre</i>	-ze
quinze	quin- ← <i>cinq</i>	-ze
seize	sei- ← <i>six</i>	-ze

Say each pair slowly — *deux, douze; six, seize* — and the small number surfaces every time.

Hold on to the **order**, not just the halves. Digit-first is a choice, and a language can make the other one. French is about to.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the rule — “digit first, ten second”
- the six pairs — “un/onze, deux/douze, trois/treize, quatre/quatorze, cinq/quinze, six/seize”
- the shape of one — “trei- is three, -ze is ten”

Twice through: “onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize”

Before you move on

In *treize*, which half is the three and which is the ten? (**trei-** is the three; **-ze** is the ten.) So is 13 built as “three-ten” or “ten-three”?

(**Three-ten** — the **digit comes first.**) Which digit is hiding in *quatorze*? (***quatre.***) Next chapter: the number where French reverses that order and stops fusing altogether.

14.9 Practice — eleven to sixteen

Six words, learned one at a time. Run them as a block, then take each one apart again from memory.

Your turn: the run

Say these aloud:

- “onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize”
- from ten — “dix, onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize”
- backwards — “seize, quinze, quatorze, treize, douze, onze”

Twice through: “onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize”

Your turn: surface the digit

Say these aloud:

- each pair — “un/onze, deux/douze, trois/treize”
- the harder three — “quatre/quatorze, cinq/quinze, six/seize”
- the one that needs English — “cinq, quintet, quinze”

Your turn: the ten on the end

Say these aloud:

- the three disguises — “dix, décembre, -ze”
- one sum aloud — “trei- is three, -ze is ten, treize is thirteen”

What you've built this chapter

- **six numbers**, eleven to sixteen.
- **one ending explained** — the **-ze** is *decem*, the same ten you already had in **dix** and **décembre**. Three disguises, one root.
- **the order** — digit in front, ten behind. *Treize* is “three-ten.”
- **a way in when a word refuses** — *cing* and *quinze* do not look alike, and English **quintet** stands between them. Reach for the long formal English word whenever the short French one has worn past recognition.

Before you move on

Count eleven to sixteen without stopping. (*Onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize*.) What is the **-ze**? (Latin **decem**, “ten”.) Which comes first in these words, the digit or the ten? (The **digit**.) Which digit is in *quatorze*? (**quatre**.) Were any of these built out of *dix* plus a digit? (**No** — all six arrived from Latin already **fused**.)

Chapter 15

Where French Changes Its Mind

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count from seventeen to twenty in French, and name the two things that change at seventeen.

At exactly seventeen, French stops inheriting numbers and starts building them — and swaps the order of the parts while doing it. seize is six-ten, fused; dix-sept is ten-seven, built out of two words you already own. Most language change is too slow to point at; this seam sits between two consecutive numbers and you can say both sides of it aloud. Then vingt arrives as a single inherited word again, and it is the number French will later count in: quatre-vingts, four twenties.

15.1 dix-sept — seventeen

Six words in a row arrived from Latin already welded. Here is the seventh, and you can read it at sight — which is exactly the surprise.

Sounds you'll need

- **dix-sept** = *dees-SET*. The **x** of *dix* becomes an **s** sound here, and the **p** of *sept* is silent as always.
- **final-consonant** — the **t** of *sept* is pronounced. That is unusual for a final consonant in French, and *sept* keeps it in every position.
- Two words, one hyphen, one number.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

There is no Latin ancestor to trace here, and that is the point.

dix-sept is **dix** and **sept**, the two words you have had since the counting chapter, put side by side with a hyphen. Nothing has been worn down, nothing is hiding, nothing needs an etymology. It says **ten-seven** and it means seventeen.

Latin *did* have a fused word for this — *septendecim* — and French threw it away. After six inherited compounds the language simply stopped, and started building numbers out of parts the speaker already had.

You have just watched a language change its mind mid-count. The next lesson is about what exactly changed, because it is **two** things and not one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “dix-sept” — *dees-SET*, and the final *t* is heard
- the seam — “seize, dix-sept”; one is welded, one is built
- the parts — “dix, sept, dix-sept”

Before you move on

How do you say seventeen? (**dix-sept**, *dees-SET*.) What two words is it made of? (**dix** and **sept**.) Did French inherit this one from Latin the way it inherited *seize*? (**No** — Latin had *septendecim* and French **abandoned** it, building the number out of parts instead.) Next: the two things that changed at this exact number.

15.2 seize / dix-sept — the seam

Put the two words side by side — **seize**, then **dix-sept** — and something changed between them. Two things did, and most people only notice one.

Grammar Lens: strategy and direction, both at once

The obvious change is **strategy**. Up to sixteen the numbers are **fused** — single words inherited whole and worn down. From seventeen they are **transparent** — built in the open out of words you already have. The change nobody notices is **direction**, and it is a question of which half comes first:

number	shape	what comes first
seize	<i>sē-decim</i> , fused	the digit : six-ten
dix-sept	<i>dix + sept</i> , built	the ten : ten-seven

Seize is **six-ten**. *Dix-sept* is **ten-seven**. The two halves have swapped places. So at exactly one number, French changed **how** it makes the word and **which way round** the parts go — and it never went back. That is worth seeing because it is a rare thing to catch. Languages usually change too slowly to point at. Here the join is visible between two consecutive numbers, and you can say both sides of it out loud.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- across the seam — “seize, dix-sept”
- the first change — “fused, then built”
- the second change — “six-ten, then ten-seven”
- the summary — “at seventeen, both the method and the order flipped”

Before you move on

Name the **two** things that change between *seize* and *dix-sept*. (The **strategy** — fused becomes built; and the **direction** — digit-first becomes ten-first.) Which half comes first in *seize*? (The **digit**: six-ten.) And in *dix-sept*? (The **ten**: ten-seven.) Next: eighteen, which now costs you nothing.

15.3 dix-huit — eighteen

This is the first number in the book that costs you nothing. You already know the rule; this is just applying it.

Sounds you'll need

- **dix-huit** = *dee-ZWEET*. The **x** of *dix* buzzes into a **z** here, because *huit* begins with a vowel sound.
- **silent-h** — the **h** of *huit* is not said, which is why the *z* can carry straight across into it.
- The final **t** of *huit* **is** pronounced.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

dix + **huit**, ten and eight. Nothing more.

What is worth a moment is what Latin did here instead, because it is stranger than anything French does. For 18 and 19 Latin did not add — it **subtracted**. Eighteen was **duodēvigintī**: “two from twenty.” Nineteen was *undēvigintī*, “one from twenty.”

Every language descended from Latin dropped that. French, Spanish and Italian all count **up** to twenty rather than down from it. So the plain *ten-eight* in front of you is not a lazy simplification — it is the survivor of a competition, and the elegant subtraction trick is the thing that lost.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “dix-huit” — *dee-ZWEET*, the *x* buzzing into the vowel
- the pair — “dix-sept, dix-huit”; hear *dees-* then *dee-z-*
- what Latin said — “two from twenty”

Before you move on

How do you say eighteen? (**dix-huit**, *dee-ZWEET*.) Why does the *x* buzz here but hiss in *dix-sept*? (**huit** begins with a **vowel sound**; *sept* does not.) How did Latin build eighteen? (By **subtracting** —

duodē- vīgintī, “two from twenty”.) Did French keep that? (**No.**)
Next: nineteen.

15.4 dix-neuf — nineteen

The last of the built teens — and a word that quietly means two different things.

Sounds you’ll need

- **dix-neuf** = *dees-NUF*. The **x** hisses as an **s** here, the way it does in *dix-sept*, because *neuf* begins with a consonant.
- The **eu** is the rounded vowel you made in **sœur**: lips rounded, tongue forward.
- The final **f** is pronounced.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

dix + **neuf**, ten and nine.

The interesting part is **neuf** itself, which is two words wearing one coat:

- **neuf** = **nine**, from Latin *novem*
- **neuf** = **new**, from Latin *novus*

Those were distinct in Latin and French wore them into the same four letters. So *un livre neuf* is “a new book,” and *neuf livres* is “nine books,” and only the position tells you which.

They are not unrelated, either. The same *nov-* is behind English **novel**, **novice**, **innovate** and **November** — the old **ninth** month, which is the counting month you already met. *Novem* and *novus* are cousins from far enough back that nobody is quite sure which sense came first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “dix-neuf” — *dees-NUF*, the *f* heard

- all three built teens — “dix-sept, dix-huit, dix-neuf”
- the double word — “neuf is nine, and neuf is new”

Before you move on

How do you say nineteen? (**dix-neuf**, *dees-NUF*.) What are its two parts? (**dix** and **neuf**.) What else does **neuf** mean besides nine? (**New** — from *novus*, where the number is from *novem*.) Which month carries the same *nov*-? (**novembre**.) Next: twenty, and a different system again.

15.5 vingt — twenty

Three built numbers in a row, and then this — which is not built out of anything at all.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vingt** = *VA(N)*. The **in** is the nasal vowel you have in **vin** and **pain**.
- **silent-final** — the **g** and the **t** are both silent. Four written letters after the vowel, none of them heard.
- Say **vin** and **vingt** aloud: standing alone they are **identical**. Only the spelling and the sentence tell them apart.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

vingt is Latin **vīgintī**, and that is the whole story: an old, single, inherited word, like *dix* and unlike *dix-sept*. So the count you have just walked through has **three** systems in it, not two:

- 11–16 — inherited, **fused**, digit first
- 17–19 — **built**, transparent, ten first
- 20 — inherited again, a **single word** built from nothing

Twenty is not the end of a pattern. It is the start of a different one, because *vingt* is the number French will later count **in**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vingt” — $VA(N)$, everything after the vowel silent
- the homophones — “vin, vingt”; identical on their own
- the last four — “dix-sept, dix-huit, dix-neuf, vingt”

Before you move on

How do you say twenty? (**vingt**, $VA(N)$.) How many of its letters after the vowel are pronounced? (**None**.) Which word from the table chapter sounds exactly the same? (**vin**, wine.) Is *vingt* built out of smaller numbers? (**No** — it is a single inherited word, from *vīginti*.) Next: what that *vīginti* went on to do.

15.6 vīgintī — the number French counts in

Vingt looks like an ending. It is a beginning, and this lesson is here so that a famous French oddity is already explained before you meet it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Latin **vīgintī** did not only give French *vingt*. It gave English a word for an idea:

vigesimal — counting in **twenties**, the way *decimal* is counting in tens.

Most of Europe counts in tens. But a way of counting in **twenties** survived underneath French, and it surfaces in the higher numbers. Eighty in French is not “eight-ten.” It is:

quatre-vingts — literally **four twenties**

Four twenties is eighty. And ninety-nine, famously, is *quatre-vingt-dix-neuf* — “four twenties, ten, nine.”

You are not learning those numbers here. You are learning **why** they will look the way they do, so that when they arrive they are a consequence rather than a shock. English keeps one fossil of the same habit: a **score** is twenty, and “four score and seven years ago” is

quatre-vingt-sept in a different language.

So *vingt* is the base of a second counting system hiding inside a decimal one — which is a much better thing to know at twenty than at eighty.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the English word — “vigesimal: counting by twenties”
- the preview — “quatre-vingts, four twenties, eighty”
- the English fossil — “four score and seven”

Before you move on

What does **vigesimal** mean? (**Counting by twenties.**) What does *quatre-vingts* literally say, and what number is it? (“**Four twenties**” — **eighty.**) Which English word for twenty preserves the same habit? (A **score.**) Next: all ten numbers together.

15.7 Practice — across the seam, and up to twenty

You can now count to twenty. Run the whole thing, and listen for the place where the machine changes.

Your turn: the full count

Say these aloud:

- eleven to twenty — “onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze, seize, dix-sept, dix-huit, dix-neuf, vingt”
- from one, the whole way
- the four new ones alone — “dix-sept, dix-huit, dix-neuf, vingt”

Twice through: “dix-sept, dix-huit, dix-neuf, vingt”

Your turn: hear the seam

Say these aloud:

- the two words either side — “seize, dix-sept”
- what changed first — “fused, then built”
- what changed second — “six-ten, then ten-seven”

Your turn: the x that cannot decide

Say these aloud:

- hissing — “dix-sept, dix-neuf”; both follow a consonant
- buzzing — “dix-huit”; it follows a vowel sound
- the reason aloud — “the x buzzes into a vowel and hisses before a consonant”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **four numbers**, seventeen to twenty, and with them the whole count to 20.
- **a seam you can point at** — at seventeen French changed both its **strategy** and its **direction**, and never went back. Most language change is too slow to witness; this one sits between two consecutive numbers.
- **three systems in ten numbers** — inherited and fused, built and transparent, then a single inherited word again at *vingt*.
- **an oddity explained before you meet it** — *vīgintī* is why eighty will be **quatre-vingts**, four twenties.

Before you move on

Count from eleven to twenty without stopping. Which number is the seam, and what two things change there? (**Seventeen** — **fused becomes built**, and **digit-first becomes ten-first**.) Why does the *x* of *dix* buzz in *dix-huit* but hiss in *dix-neuf*? (***huit*** begins with a **vowel sound**.) What will *quatre-vingts* mean, and why? (“**Four**

twenties” — eighty; from *vīginti*, the **vigesimal** habit.)

Chapter 16

Colours

Modes: 🗣️ voice (8) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name four basic colours in French, put a colour after the noun it describes, and say which of them are not Latin.

Four colours with two different homelands. noir walked down from Latin niger and rouge from a root older than Latin — the same one behind English red, rust and German rot. But blanc and bleu are Frankish, Germanic words that displaced Latin ones inside a Romance language, which is the opposite of the usual traffic. albus did not die when blanc took its job; it stopped being a colour and became l'aube, the dawn. And the colour goes after its noun — le vin rouge — with bonjour as the exception the reader already says every day.

16.1 noir — black

Four colours in this chapter, and they do not have four similar stories. Start with the one that behaves exactly as you would expect, so the surprises stand out later.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-oi** — the **oi** is *wa*, one gliding vowel. It is the same **oi** you have in **trois** and **soir**.
- **r-uvular** — the final **r** is sounded here, made in the throat.
- Together: **noir** = *NWAR*, one syllable.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

noir is Latin **niger**, “black.” Nothing was borrowed and nothing is hiding: the word walked straight down from Rome into French, and did the same into its sisters — Spanish *negro*, Italian *nero*. English took *niger* too, but only as a metaphor. To **denigrate** someone is, literally, to **blacken** them — to darken a name rather than a thing. The colour stayed in the Romance languages; the insult is what crossed into English. So *noir* is the plain case. Hold on to that, because the next colour is not plain at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “noir” — *NWAR*, the *oi* a single gliding vowel
- the family — “niger, noir, negro, nero”
- the English one — “denigrate: to blacken a name”

Before you move on

How do you say black? (**noir**, *NWAR*.) What Latin word is it from? (**niger**.) What does **denigrate** literally mean? (To **blacken** — to darken someone’s name.) Next: white, which did not come from Latin at all.

16.2 blanc — white

Every word in this book so far has come down from Latin. This one did not, and the direction it came from is the opposite of what usually happens.

Sounds you’ll need

- **nasal-an** — the **an** is the nasal vowel you have in **janvier**.
- **silent-final** — the **c** at the end is **not** pronounced.
- Together: **blanc** = *BLA(N)*, one syllable, nothing after the nose.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Latin had a perfectly good word for white: **albus**. French does not use it.

blanc is **Frankish** — a **Germanic** word, from **blank*, meaning not “white” exactly but “**shining, gleaming, flashing**.” The Franks are the people who gave France its name, and they gave it its word for white as well.

That direction is the surprising part. Latin words pour into Germanic languages constantly; English is more than half built of them. Traffic the other way, a Germanic word displacing a Latin one **inside** a Romance language, is much rarer.

Why did *albus* lose? Most likely because *blank* was more **vivid**. *Albus* is a flat, plain white; *blank* is a white that **shines**. Colour words are replaced by the more dramatic option surprisingly often — the exciting word wins and then calms down into the ordinary one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “blanc” — *BLA(N)*, the *c* silent
- the pair — “noir, blanc”
- the origin — “Frankish blank: shining”
- the two stories — “noir walked down from Rome, blanc walked in from the north”

Before you move on

How do you say white? (**blanc**, *BLA(N)*.) Is the final **c** sounded? (**No.**) Which language did it come from? (**Frankish** — Germanic, not Latin.) What did **blank* actually mean? (“**Shining**, gleaming.”) What was the Latin word it displaced? (*albus*.) Next: where *albus* went instead.

16.3 l’aube — the white that stopped being a colour

Blanc took the job. That does not mean *albus* was thrown away — words that lose an argument usually go and do something else.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Latin **albus** is still all around you. It simply stopped being the word for the colour, and survives inside words for **things that are white**:

- **l’aube** — the **dawn**: the sky going white. French, and pronounced *lohb*
- **l’aubépine** — the **hawthorn**, literally the “**white thorn**”
- **album** — English, from a *blank white tablet* you wrote on
- **albino** — English, someone white-skinned

That is a pattern worth naming, because it will keep happening. When a newer word takes over a plain everyday meaning, the older one does not vanish. It gets pushed into the **specific** — a time of day, a particular tree, a technical term — and stays there for centuries, unnoticed.

So French has two whites after all. One you say when you mean the colour, and one you say without knowing you are saying it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “l’aube” — *lohb*, the dawn
- the white inside it — “albus: the sky going white”
- the English survivors — “album, albino”
- the two whites — “blanc for the colour, aube for the hour”

Before you move on

What does **l'aube** mean, and what is white about it? (The **dawn** — the sky going white.) Which Latin word is inside it? (*albus*.) Name two English words that kept the same *albus*. (**album**, **albino**.) What happens to a word when a newer one takes its everyday job? (It survives in the **specific** — a time, a tree, a technical term.) Next: red, which is older than Latin.

16.4 rouge — red

Noir came from Latin and *blanc* from the Franks. This one goes back further than either — further than Latin itself.

Sounds you'll need

- vowel-ou — the **ou** is the pure **oo** you have in **douze**.
- soft-j — the **g** here is the soft *zh* of *measure*, the same sound as the **j** in **janvier**.
- Together: **rouge** = *ROOZH*, one syllable. English borrowed the word whole for makeup and kept the French sound with it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

rouge is Latin **rubeus**, “reddish.” But *rubeus* is itself inherited, from a Proto-Indo-European root ***h₁rewd^h**- so old that its children are scattered across the whole family:

- Latin *ruber*, *rubeus* → French **rouge**, and English **ruby**, **rubric**
- English **red**, **rust**, **ruddy**
- German **rot**

So *rouge* and **red** are not lookalikes that happen to mean the same thing. They are **actual cousins**, separated for something like five thousand years and still saying the same colour.

That is not an accident of this one word. **Red** is one of the oldest colours any language names — after black and white, it is almost always the third colour a language gets a word for, and often the only

other one for a long time. A word that old survives everywhere because it was never not needed.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “rouge” — *ROOZH*, the soft *g*
- the cousins in a row — “rouge, red, rot”
- the Latin ones — “ruber, ruby, rubric”
- the three you have — “noir, blanc, rouge”

Before you move on

How do you say red? (**rouge**, *ROOZH*.) How is the **g** pronounced? (Soft — the *zh* of *measure*.) Are *rouge* and English *red* borrowed from each other? (**No** — they are **cousins** from the same Proto-Indo-European root.) Name two more of that root’s children. (**rust**, **ruddy**, **ruby**, **rubric**, German **rot** — any two.) Next: blue, which went abroad and came home.

16.5 bleu — blue

The fourth colour, and the second one that is not Latin. Once is a curiosity; twice is a pattern about who was actually living in France.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vowel-eu** — the **eu** is the rounded front vowel you made in **sœur**: lips rounded, tongue forward.
- **silent-final** — there is no consonant after it to say.
- Together: **bleu** = *BLUH*, one syllable, and shorter than English speakers expect.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bleu is **Frankish** ***blāo** — Germanic again, borrowed exactly the way *blanc* was.

Then something neat happened. **English took *bleu* from French.** So English **blue** is a Germanic word that walked into France, spent centuries there changing its shape, and was then borrowed back into a Germanic language. It went abroad and came home wearing different clothes.

Meanwhile German never sent its copy anywhere: it still says **blau**, which is what **blāo* sounded like all along. Say **blau**, **bleu**, **blue** in a row and you are hearing one word at three stages of one journey.

(French has a second, more poetic blue as well — **azur**, ultimately from Arabic *lāzaward*, “*lapis lazuli*.” You have almost certainly seen it already, on the map: the **Côte d’Azur**.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bleu” — *BLUH*, lips rounded, and keep it short
- the round trip — “blau, bleu, blue”
- the two Frankish ones — “blanc, bleu”
- all four — “noir, blanc, rouge, bleu”

Before you move on

How do you say blue? (**bleu**, *BLUH*.) Which language did it come from? (**Frankish** — Germanic, like *blanc*.) What is odd about English **blue**? (It is a **Germanic** word that English borrowed **from French** — it went abroad and came back.) What did German keep? (**blau**.) Next: where the colour goes in the sentence.

16.6 le vin rouge — where the colour goes

You have four colours and a table full of nouns. Putting them together takes one rule, and English gets it the other way round.

Grammar Lens: the colour comes second

English puts the colour **in front** of the noun: *red wine, white bread*.
French puts it **behind**:

le vin rouge — the wine red

le pain blanc — the bread white

The order feels backwards for about a week and then stops feeling like anything. What makes it stick faster is noticing that you **already say the exception**.

bonjour is *bon* + *jour* — a good day, with the adjective in **front**. So French does both, and the split is not random: a small handful of very common, very short adjectives go before the noun — *bon, bonne*, and a few others you will meet — while nearly everything else, **colours included**, goes after.

That is the useful form of the rule. Not “French adjectives follow the noun,” which the word *bonjour* would immediately contradict, but: **the short common ones lead, and everything else follows.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two wines — “le vin rouge, le vin blanc”
- with bread — “le pain blanc”
- the exception you already own — “bonjour: bon comes first”
- the rule as one line — “short and common in front, everything else behind”

Twice through: “le vin rouge, le vin blanc”

Before you move on

How do you say “red wine”? (**le vin rouge** — the colour **second**.)
White bread? (**le pain blanc**.) Which everyday word puts its adjective **first**? (**bonjour** — *bon* + *jour*.) State the rule in one line.
(**Short, common adjectives go in front; everything else,**

colours included, goes after.) Next: the three colours on the flag.

16.7 bleu, blanc, rouge — the flag

Three of your four colours are the flag, and saying them in its order is the easiest way to keep them. There is also a joke buried in them.

Why it's said this way

The French flag is named by its colours, left to right:

bleu, blanc, rouge

Say it in that order and it comes as one unit rather than three words. French speakers say it that way constantly — *le drapeau bleu-blanc-rouge* — and it is by far the most common context in which all three appear together.

Now count where they came from:

- **bleu** — Frankish, Germanic
- **blanc** — Frankish, Germanic
- **rouge** — Latin, from a root older than Latin

So the **tricolour is two-thirds Germanic**. The flag of the most self-consciously Latin nation in Europe names itself with two borrowed Germanic words and one inherited one, and no one notices, because a word stops being foreign the moment everybody uses it.

That is the honest summary of this chapter: of four basic colours, **half** came from the north. Half of French's most everyday vocabulary is not doing what the label "Romance language" would lead you to expect.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the flag — "bleu, blanc, rouge"
- all four colours — "noir, blanc, rouge, bleu"

- the sources — “Latin, Frankish, Latin, Frankish”
- the finding — “the tricolour is two-thirds Germanic”

Twice through: “bleu, blanc, rouge”

Before you move on

Name the flag’s colours in order. (**bleu, blanc, rouge.**) Which two of them are Germanic borrowings? (*bleu* and *blanc.*) So what fraction of the tricolour is Germanic? (**Two-thirds.**) And of the chapter’s four colours? (**Half.**) Next: all four, put to work.

16.8 Practice — four colours and where they came from

Four words, and then the thing that makes them worth more than four words: each one has a passport.

Your turn: the four

Say these aloud:

- “noir, blanc, rouge, bleu”
- the flag order — “bleu, blanc, rouge”
- the two nasal ones — “blanc”; and the two that end in a vowel sound — “bleu”

Twice through: “noir, blanc, rouge, bleu”

Your turn: put them on nouns

Say these aloud:

- “le vin rouge, le vin blanc”
- “le pain blanc”
- the order out loud — “the noun, then the colour”
- the exception — “bonjour”

Your turn: where each one came from

Say these aloud:

- “noir — Latin niger; denigrate”
- “blanc — Frankish blank, shining”
- “rouge — Latin rubeus; red, rot, ruby”
- “bleu — Frankish blao; blau, bleu, blue”
- the one that changed jobs — “albus became l’aube, the dawn”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **four colours**, and the flag as a set.
- **word order** — the colour goes **after** the noun, and *bonjour* is the exception you already said before you knew it was one.
- **half of them are not Latin.** *blanc* and *bleu* are Frankish, which runs against the usual direction of traffic: Latin words flood into Germanic languages, not the reverse.
- **a word that lost and survived anyway** — *albus* gave up the colour and kept the dawn. That is what usually happens to a displaced word, and it is worth looking for.

Before you move on

Give the four colours. (**noir, blanc, rouge, bleu.**) Which two are Germanic? (***blanc*** and ***bleu.***) Say “red wine.” (**le vin rouge** — the colour second.) Which Latin word for white did French drop, and where did it end up? (***albus*** — in **l’aube**, the dawn, and in English *album* and *albino.*) Are *rouge* and *red* borrowed from each other? (**No** — **cousins**, from one Proto-Indo-European root.)

Chapter 17

To Have, and How Old You Are

Modes: 🗣️ voice (14) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 14 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can use all six forms of avoir, and ask and answer how old someone is the way French does it — by having years rather than being them.

The verb French leans on hardest, taken one person at a time. Its three singular forms are written ai, as and a and sound the same, which is why French keeps the subject pronouns Spanish drops; its plural endings -ons and -ez survived and are unmistakable. Then the sentence the verb exists for: J'ai vingt ans, "I have twenty years". Never être, and ans cannot be dropped — and every Romance language on the continent agrees while every Germanic one does not.

17.1 j'ai — I have

The verb French leans on hardest starts here, with the form you will say most — and it is one sound long.

Sounds you'll need

- elision — it is **j'ai**, never *je ai*. Before a vowel **je** drops its **e**, the same move that turns *le eau* into **l'eau**.
- The **ai** is a single vowel, close to English *eh*.
- Together: **j'ai** = *zhay*. One syllable, and the whole of "I have."

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

j'ai is Latin **habeō**, “I have.”

Say those two aloud: *ha-be-o*, then *zhay*. Three syllables become one, and not one consonant of the Latin survives into the vowel.

French does this harder than any of its sisters. Italian kept **ho**, Spanish kept **he** — both still a whole syllable with a consonant. French kept a vowel. It is the same appetite that ground *aqua* down to **eau**, and you will see it again every time a very common word looks like nothing.

The rule of thumb is worth having now: **the more often a word is said, the more of it wears away**. That is why the most useful words in a language are usually its least recognisable ones.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “j'ai” — *zhay*, one syllable
- the erosion — “habeō, ho, he, j'ai”
- a whole sentence — “J'ai un frère”

Before you move on

How do you say “I have”? (**j'ai**, *zhay*.) Why is it not *je ai*?

(**Elision** — *je* drops its **e** before a vowel.) What Latin word is it from? (**habeō**.) What do Italian and Spanish still keep that French does not? (A whole **syllable** — *ho*, *he*.) Next: the same verb, said to one person.

17.2 tu as — you have

The second form of the verb, and the first sign that this paradigm is easier to say than it looks to read.

Sounds you'll need

- **silent-final** — the **s** of **as** is **not pronounced**.
- **tu as** = *tü ah*. The **u** of *tu* is the tight front-rounded vowel; the **as** is a bare open *ah*.

- Say **j'ai** and **tu as** back to back and notice how little work the verb is doing in either.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

as is the **tu** form — the one you use with a friend, a child, or anyone you would call by their first name. It is the same *tu* you met when you learned which “you” to pick.

The written **s** is a signal to the eye and nothing to the ear. That is the normal state of affairs in French verbs: the endings are alive on the page and almost dead in the mouth. It is why the pronoun is not optional — *as* on its own would tell a listener nothing about who has something.

Keep that in mind as the paradigm fills in. You are learning six written forms and rather fewer sounds.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “tu as” — *tü ah*, the *s* silent
- the pair — “j’ai, tu as”
- with a noun — “Tu as un frère”

Before you move on

How do you say “you have” to a friend? (**tu as**, *tü ah*.) Is the **s** pronounced? (**No.**) Why can you not drop the pronoun? (The verb form alone **does not say who** — the pronoun carries it.) Next: he and she.

17.3 il a, elle a — he has, she has

The third form, and the shortest verb you will ever meet: one letter.

Sounds you'll need

- **a** is a bare open *ah* — the same sound as **tu as**, with nothing written after it.
- **il a** = *eel ah*. **elle a** = *el ah*.
- All three singular forms are now in your mouth, and the next lesson is about what they have in common.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

a is the form for **il** (he) and **elle** (she), and it is a single letter carrying an entire verb.

You already know the two pronouns from the articles: **le** and **la** split the world into masculine and feminine, and **il** and **elle** do the same for people. French has no separate word for *it* — a table is *elle*, a book is *il*, because the noun's gender decides.

One thing to notice for later. When French turns this into a question by putting the verb first, two vowels would collide — *a il ?* — so a **t** is pushed in between them: **a-t-il ?**, “has he?” That **t** means nothing at all. It is there purely so the mouth has something to land on.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “il a, elle a” — *eel ah, el ah*
- the three singulars — “j'ai, tu as, il a”
- the question shape — “a-t-il ?”; the *t* is only there for the mouth

Before you move on

How do you say “he has”? (**il a**.) And “she has”? (**elle a**.) How many letters is the verb? (**One**.) What is the **t** doing in *a-t-il*? (**Nothing** — it keeps two vowels from colliding.) Next: why those three forms are harder to hear than to read.

17.4 ai · as · a — three spellings, one ear

You have the three singular forms. Say them one after another and listen to how much difference there actually is.

Grammar Lens: the endings are for the eye

Written, the three singular forms are **ai**, **as**, **a** — three different words. Spoken, **as** and **a** are the same bare *ah*, and **ai** is a single vowel too. The written endings differ; your ear has almost nothing to work with. This is not a quirk of *avoir*. It is the central fact about French verbs, and it has one large consequence: **the pronoun is compulsory**. Spanish can say *tengo* and drop the *yo*, because *-o* means “I” out loud. French cannot drop the *je*, because the ending that would have carried it went silent centuries ago. So French kept the pronoun and Spanish did not, and the two languages ended up in different places for the same reason: **what the ear can still hear decides what the sentence must carry**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three verb forms bare — “ai, as, a”; hear how close they are
- them with their pronouns — “j’ai, tu as, il a”
- the consequence — “the pronoun does the work the ending stopped doing”

Twice through: “j’ai, tu as, il a”

Before you move on

Write the three singular forms. (**ai**, **as**, **a**.) How many distinct sounds are there? (Effectively **one** — a bare vowel.) Why can French not drop its subject pronouns the way Spanish can? (Because the **endings are silent** — the pronoun is the only thing left that says **who**.) Next: the plural, where the endings come back to life.

17.5 nous avons — we have

Three forms that sound alike, and then this: an ending you can actually hear.

Sounds you'll need

- **nous avons** = *noo-za-VO(N)*. The **s** of *nous* wakes up and buzzes into the vowel — that is the liaison you already know.
- **nasal-on** — the **-ons** ending is a nasal vowel; the **n** is the nose, not a consonant.
- Weight on the last syllable, as almost always in French.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

avons is Latin **habēmus**, “we have.”

Here the paradigm turns around. The three singular endings wore away to nothing; **-ons** did not. It is a full syllable, it is unmistakable, and it belongs to **nous** and nothing else.

That pattern holds across French verbs: **-ons** for *nous*, **-ez** for *vous*. Once you have those two you can hear the plural coming in any verb in the language, regular or not. *avoir* is one of the most irregular verbs French has, and it still obeys this.

So the difficulty is not spread evenly. The singular is a listening problem and the plural is not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nous avons” — *noo-za-VO(N)*, the *s* buzzing across
- the contrast — “il a” then “nous avons”; one is a vowel, one is a syllable
- the ending alone — “-ons is always nous”

Before you move on

How do you say “we have”? (**nous avons**, *noo-za-VO(N)*.) Which ending marks *nous*? (**-ons**.) Why is this form easier to hear than *il a*? (The **plural endings survived** where the singular ones went silent.) Next: the other you.

17.6 vous avez — you have

The second plural ending, and a form you will use with strangers far more often than with crowds.

Sounds you'll need

- **vous avez** = *voo-za-VAY*. The same buzzing liaison as *nous avons*.
- **vowel-e-acute** — the **-ez** is the bright, narrow *ay* of **février**. The **z** is silent.
- Say **nous avons**, **vous avez** together: *-ons*, *-ez*, the two plural endings of nearly every French verb.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

avez is Latin **habētis**, and it goes with **vous**.

vous is two things at once. It is the plural “you” — several people. And it is the polite “you” for **one** person, which is the use you will need first and most: a shopkeeper, a stranger, anyone you have not been invited to call *tu*.

So *vous avez* is what you say to one person you are being careful with. Getting this wrong is one of the few grammar mistakes in French that a listener hears as a mistake about **them** rather than about the language, which is why *tu* and *vous* is worth more attention than most endings.

The verb form does not change between the two meanings. Only who you are looking at does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vous avez” — *voo-za-VAY*
- the two plural endings — “nous avons, vous avez”
- the two jobs — “vous to a group, vous to one stranger”

Before you move on

How do you say “you have” politely? (**vous avez**, *voo-za-VAY*.)
 What are the two jobs *vous* does? (**Plural you**, and **polite you** to one person.) Which ending marks *vous*? (**-ez**.) Next: the last form, and the odd one.

17.7 ils ont, elles ont — they have

The sixth and last form, and the one that does not resemble the other five.

Sounds you'll need

- **ils ont** = *eel-ZO(N)*. The **s** of *ils* buzzes across into the vowel.
- **nasal-on** — **ont** is one nasal vowel; the **n** and **t** are both silent.
- **elles ont** = *el-ZO(N)*, identical but for the first vowel.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ont is Latin **habent**, and it is the odd one out: every other form of *avoir* has an **a** in it, and this one does not.

There is a trap here worth meeting before you fall into it. **ils ont** is “they have.” **ils sont** is “they are.” One consonant apart, and both extremely common. The way to keep them apart is the liaison: *ils ont* buzzes — *eel-z-o(n)* — while *ils sont* hisses, *eel so(n)*. The buzz means *have*.

That is the whole paradigm. Six forms, and you now have all of them:
j'ai · tu as · il a · nous avons · vous avez · ils ont

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ils ont” — *eel-ZO(N)*, the buzz

- the trap — “ils ont” then “ils sont”; buzz means have
- all six in order

Before you move on

How do you say “they have”? (**ils ont**, *eel-ZO(N)*.) What does *ils sont* mean instead? (**They are**.) How do you tell them apart by ear? (**ils ont** buzzes; **ils sont** hisses.) What is unusual about *ont* among the six forms? (It is the only one with **no a** in it.) Next: where the whole verb came from.

17.8 habēre — the root you already met

You have all six forms of *avoir*. You have also, without being told, already learned its root — in a different verb, several chapters ago.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

avoir is Latin **habēre**, “to have.”

Now recall **habiter**, “to live somewhere.” That is Latin **habitāre** — and *habitāre* is just *habēre* run through a pattern that means “keep doing it.” To *habitāre* a place is to **keep having** it.

So *avoir* and *habiter* are the same verb twice: one wore down to a vowel, the other kept the *h*, the *b* and the *t* because it was said far less often. The two French verbs sitting at opposite ends of the same root are a compact demonstration of the rule you met with *j’ai*: frequency is what erodes a word.

English borrowed the Latin whole and shows the root undisguised every time:

- **habit** — what you *have* regularly
- **inhabit** — to *have* a place; the exact twin of *habiter*
- **exhibit** — to *hold* out
- **prohibit** — to *hold* back

Four English words, one French verb you use constantly, and one French verb you met learning to say where you live — all the same handful of Latin letters.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the root — “habēre”
- the two French verbs — “avoir, habiter”
- the English four — “habit, inhabit, exhibit, prohibit”
- the twins — “habiter, inhabit”

Before you move on

What Latin verb is *avoir* from? (**habēre**.) Which other French verb you already know comes from it? (**habiter** — from *habitāre*, “to keep having a place”.) Which English word is *habiter*’s exact twin? (**inhabit**.) Why did *avoir* wear down so much further than *habiter*? (It is said **far more often** — frequency erodes a word.) Next: all six forms, together.

17.9 Practice — the whole of avoir

Six forms, learned one at a time. This is the first time they stand together — and a paradigm you have already built is a recap, not a wall.

Your turn: the six in order

Say these aloud:

- “j’ai, tu as, il a, nous avons, vous avez, ils ont”
- the singulars alone — “j’ai, tu as, il a”
- the plurals alone — “nous avons, vous avez, ils ont”

Twice through: “j’ai, tu as, il a, nous avons, vous avez, ils ont”

Your turn: the two halves sound different

Say these aloud:

- the three that blur — “ai, as, a”
- the two that do not — “-ons, -ez”
- the trap — “ils ont, ils sont”; buzz for have, hiss for are

Your turn: use it

Say these aloud:

- “J’ai un frère”
- “Tu as une sœur”
- “Nous avons du pain”
- the root — “avoir, habiter, inhabit”

What you’ve built so far

- **six forms** of the verb French leans on hardest, one lesson each.
- **a listening fact** — the singular endings are silent, so French keeps its subject pronouns where Spanish drops them.
- **a root that pays twice** — *habēre* gave French *avoir* and *habiter*, and English *habit*, *inhabit*, *exhibit*, *prohibit*.

Before you move on

Give all six forms without stopping. Which three sound effectively the same? (**ai, as, a.**) Which two endings can you always hear? (**-ons** and **-ez.**) How do you hear the difference between *ils ont* and *ils sont*? (The **buzz** — *ont* takes a liaison **z**, *sont* hisses.) What Latin verb is behind all of it? (***habēre***.)

17.10 un an — a year

One small word, and it unlocks the single most common question anyone will ask you in a new language.

Sounds you'll need

- **nasal-an** — **an** is a **nasal vowel**, the same one in **blanc** and **janvier**. The **n** is the nose, not a consonant.
- **silent-final** — the plural **ans** adds a written **s** and no sound at all.
- **un an** = *a(n)-NA(N)*: the **n** of *un* links across into the vowel.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

an is Latin **annus**, “year,” and English kept it whole in a whole shelf of words:

- **annual** — happening each year
- **anniversary** — literally the year **turning** (*annus* + *vertere*, “to turn”)
- **annals** — a record kept year by year
- *per annum* — English never even translated this one

You have met *annus*’s neighbours already: the months came out of the same Roman calendar, and *janvier* stands at the door of exactly this word.

French also has a second word for year, **année**, and the difference is real but small: *an* counts years, *année* describes them as a stretch of time. For counting — which is what the next lesson does — you want **an**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “un an” — *a(n)-NA(N)*, both vowels through the nose
- the plural — “deux ans, dix ans”; the *s* is silent
- the English family — “annual, anniversary, annals”

Before you move on

How do you say “a year”? (**un an.**) What Latin word is it? (**annus.**) Does the plural **ans** sound different from **an**? (**No** — the **s** is silent.) What does *anniversary* literally say? (The **year turning.**) Next: what French does with *avoir* and *ans* together.

17.11 j’ai vingt ans — having your years

Here is the first thing French lets you say that English cannot say the same way at all.

Grammar Lens: age is something you have

English **is** its age: *I am twenty.* French **has** it:

J’ai vingt ans. — literally, “I *have* twenty years.”

Two things follow, and both are absolute.

The verb is *avoir*, never *être*. *Je suis vingt ans* is not a stylistic choice; it is simply wrong, and it is the single most common thing an English speaker gets wrong in their first month.

And *ans* cannot be dropped. English says “I’m twenty” with no noun at all. French must name the years: *J’ai vingt* on its own means nothing.

One sound to get right. **vingt** normally ends in silence — you learned it as *VA(N)*, with the **g** and **t** both dead. Put **ans** after it and the **t** **wakes up**: *vin-t-a(n)*. That is liaison, doing what it always does — reviving a buried consonant when a vowel follows it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “J’ai vingt ans” — with the liaison, *vin-t-a(n)*
- the rule — “avoir, never être”
- the buried **t** waking — “vingt” alone, then “vingt ans”
- your own age, with the numbers you have

Twice through: “J’ai vingt ans”

Before you move on

How does French say “I am twenty”? (**J’ai vingt ans** — “I *have* twenty years”.) Which verb, and which is wrong? (**avoir**; **être** is wrong.) Can you drop *ans* the way English drops “years”? (**No.**) What happens to the **t** of *vingt* before *ans*? (It **wakes up** — *vin-t-a(n)*, a liaison.) Next: how to ask.

17.12 Quel âge as-tu ? — asking someone’s age

You can answer the question. Now you can ask it — and this is a phrase worth taking whole rather than building.

Sounds you’ll need

- **Quel âge as-tu ?** = *kel AHZH ah-tü.*
- **circumflex** — the hat on **â** is the gravestone you met on **août**: it marks a lost **s**. Older French wrote *aage*, and before that Latin had *aetāticum*.
- The **g** of *âge* is the soft *zh* of **rouge**.
- The polite form is **Quel âge avez-vous ?** — *kel AHZH ah-vay-VOO.*

The exchange

Take it as one unit, the way you took *Comment vous appelez-vous ?*

— **Quel âge as-tu ?** — “What age do you *have*?”

— **J’ai vingt ans.** — “I *have* twenty years.”

Notice the question uses **avoir** as well. The whole exchange is built on having, on both sides — which is what makes it a pair worth memorising together rather than two separate facts.

And **âge** is a word you already own in English. *Age* came into English from French, hat and all, having lost its *s* on the way: Latin *aetāticum* → *aage* → **âge** → English **age**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Quel âge as-tu ?” — *kel AHZH ah-tü*
- the polite one — “Quel âge avez-vous ?”
- both halves — “Quel âge as-tu ? J’ai vingt ans.”
- the hat’s meaning — “â marks a lost s, like août”

Twice through: “Quel âge as-tu ? J’ai vingt ans.”

Before you move on

How do you ask a friend their age? (**Quel âge as-tu ?**) And a stranger? (**Quel âge avez-vous ?**) Which verb does the **question** use? (**avoir** — the same as the answer.) What does the circumflex on **â** mark? (A **lost s**.) Next: who else in Europe does it this way.

17.13 “having” your years — who else does it

French is not being strange here. It is on one side of a line that runs straight across Europe, and the line is exactly where you would draw it.

Why it’s said this way

Ask the same question in six languages and count the verbs.

language	“I am 20”	verb
French	<i>j’ai vingt ans</i>	have
Spanish	<i>tengo veinte años</i>	have
Italian	<i>ho venti anni</i>	have
Portuguese	<i>tenho vinte anos</i>	have
German	<i>ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt</i>	be
English	<i>I am twenty</i>	be

A clean split, and not a coincidental one: every **Romance** language on that list *has* its years, and every **Germanic** one *is* them.

French treats age as something you **carry**: a count of years in your

possession, which grows. English treats it as something you **are**, a property like tall or tired. Neither is more logical. What matters is that the choice is inherited rather than reasoned: French did not decide this, it received it, along with the rest of what Latin left behind. And it means the mistake you are most likely to make — *je suis vingt ans* — is you importing your own family's habit into another one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four that have — “j'ai, tengo, ho, tenho”
- the two that are — “ich bin, I am”
- the line — “Romance has its years; Germanic is its years”
- the French one again, correctly — “J'ai vingt ans”

Before you move on

Which language family uses **have** for age? (**Romance** — French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese.) Which uses **be**? (**Germanic** — German, English.) Is either one more logical? (**No** — the choice is **inherited**, not reasoned.) Which error does that make an English speaker likely to commit? (*Je suis vingt ans* — importing English's *be*.) Next: all of it together.

17.14 Practice — to have, and how old you are

A verb and a sentence. Run the verb first, then use it for the thing it will earn its keep on.

Your turn: the paradigm, cold

Say these aloud:

- all six — “j'ai, tu as, il a, nous avons, vous avez, ils ont”
- backwards — “ils ont, vous avez, nous avons, il a, tu as, j'ai”

- the trap — “ils ont, ils sont”

Twice through: “j’ai, tu as, il a, nous avons, vous avez, ils ont”

Your turn: the exchange

Say these aloud:

- “Quel âge as-tu ?”
- “J’ai vingt ans” — with the liaison, *vin-t-a(n)*
- the polite pair — “Quel âge avez-vous ?”
- your own age

Your turn: use the verb on what you own

Say these aloud:

- “J’ai un frère, j’ai une sœur”
- “Nous avons du pain et du vin”
- the root pair — “avoir, habiter”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **the whole of *avoir***, six forms, one lesson each, and a paradigm you built rather than one you were handed.
- **why French keeps its pronouns** — the singular endings went silent, so *je*, *tu* and *il* carry what the verb stopped saying.
- **age is something you have** — *J’ai vingt ans*, never *je suis*, and *ans* is compulsory. Every Romance language on the continent agrees with French, and every Germanic one disagrees.
- **one root, two verbs, four English words** — *habēre* gave *avoir* and *habiter*, plus *habit*, *inhabit*, *exhibit*, *prohibit*.

Before you move on

Give the six forms of *avoir*. Ask a friend their age. (**Quel âge as-tu ?**) Answer with your own. Which verb must you never use for age? (**être.**) Can *ans* be left out? (**No.**) Which other French verb shares *avoir*'s root? (**habiter.**) How do you hear *ils ont* against *ils sont*? (The **buzz** against the **hiss.**)

Chapter 18

The Compound Past

Modes: ⇄ voice (12) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 12 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can build and use French's everyday past tense, and recognise the second past tense that only appears in writing.

French's everyday past is avoir plus a participle that never moves, so it costs one new form rather than six. It exists because habeo litteras scriptas once meant plain possession — 'I have letters, written ones' — and hardened into a tense, which is also why a participle still agrees when its object comes first. Then the other past: il parla, which you read in every novel and never hear. It is the same inherited tense Spanish says every day as habló, and it retreated into writing across a connected block of France, southern Germany and northern Italy while the languages at the western edge kept theirs.

18.1 parlé — the past participle

Before French can talk about the past it needs one new form of the verb, and for the verbs you already have it is the smallest change imaginable.

Grammar Lens: -er becomes -é

Take an **-er** verb and put an accent where the **r** was:

parler → parlé · habiter → habité · travailler → travaillé

That form is the **past participle**. On its own it is not a tense and not

even really a verb — it is closer to an adjective, and *parlé* means something like “spoken,” the way *written* or *broken* work in English. That is worth holding on to, because it explains everything this chapter does next. You are not learning a past tense yet. You are learning a **part**, and the tense gets built out of it in the next lesson. All three of your **-er** verbs behave identically. There is no list to learn and no exception in this class at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the swap — “parler, parlé”
- the other two — “habiter, habité; travailler, travaillé”
- what it is — “spoken, lived, worked: adjectives, not tenses”

Before you move on

What is the past participle of *parler*? (**parlé**.) What changes? (The **-er** becomes **-é**.) Is *parlé* a past tense on its own? (**No** — it is closer to an **adjective**, “spoken.”) Give the participles of *habiter* and *travailler*. (**habité, travaillé**.) Next: what to build with it.

18.2 j’ai parlé — the past built from “have”

You have both halves of French’s everyday past tense already. This lesson only puts them next to each other.

Grammar Lens: avoir, then the participle

The recipe is two words:

avoir (conjugated) + **past participle**

So, with *parlé*:

- **j’ai parlé** — I spoke, I have spoken
- **tu as parlé** — you spoke

- **il a parlé** — he spoke
- **nous avons parlé** — we spoke
- **ils ont parlé** — they spoke

Only *avoir* changes. The participle sits there, identical in every line. So this is not six new forms — it is the verb you spent last chapter on, with one unchanging word after it.

Notice too that French makes no distinction English insists on. *J'ai parlé* is both “I spoke” and “I have spoken”; there is no separate form for the two. Where English has two past tenses to choose between, French conversation mostly has this one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the recipe — “avoir, then the participle”
- the run — “j’ai parlé, tu as parlé, il a parlé, nous avons parlé, ils ont parlé”
- another verb — “j’ai travaillé, j’ai habité”
- the two English meanings — “I spoke, I have spoken; French has one form”

Twice through: “j’ai parlé, tu as parlé, il a parlé”

Before you move on

What are the two parts of the compound past? (***avoir* conjugated**, then the **past participle**.) Which part changes with the person? (**Only *avoir*.**) Say “we worked.” (**Nous avons travaillé.**) How many English tenses does *j’ai parlé* cover? (**Two** — “I spoke” and “I have spoken”.) Next: a spelling trap you cannot hear.

18.3 parler · parlé · parlez — one sound, three jobs

Say the infinitive, the participle and the *vous* form out loud, one after the other. Now try to hear a difference.

Grammar Lens: your ear gets no help at all

parler, parlé and parlez are pronounced **exactly the same**: *par-LAY*.

Three different jobs, three different spellings, one sound:

- **parler** — to speak (the infinitive)
- **parlé** — spoken (the participle)
- **parlez** — you speak (the *vous* form)

This is the same phenomenon you met with *ai*, *as* and *a*, and it has the same cause: French endings survive on the page and die in the mouth. But it lands harder here, because these three are **different parts of speech**, and only the sentence around them says which one you heard. The good news is that the sentence always does. *Vous parlez* has a pronoun in front of it. *J'ai parlé* has *avoir* in front of it. **Parler** has nothing in front of it, or a verb like *vouloir*. In practice you never have to decide — which is why French speakers are untroubled by a distinction that looks impossible written down.

For **writing**, though, you do have to choose, and choosing wrongly is the single most common spelling mistake native French speakers make.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three — “parler, parlé, parlez”; one sound
- each in its frame — “vous parlez”, “j’ai parlé”
- the rule of thumb — “what comes before it tells you which”

Before you move on

How many of *parler*, *parlé* and *parlez* sound different? (**None** — all three are *par-LAY*.) What tells you which one you are hearing? (**What comes before it** — a pronoun, *avoir*, or nothing.) Which is the participle? (**parlé**.) Next: the verbs that do not end in *-er*.

18.4 fini · vendu — the other two classes

Every verb you have met so far ends in **-er**. That is by far the biggest group, and it is not the only one.

Grammar Lens: three classes, three vowels

French verbs are sorted by how the infinitive ends, and each group makes its participle with its own vowel:

infinitive ends in	participle ends in	example
-er	-é	<i>parler</i> → <i>parlé</i>
-ir	-i	<i>finir</i> → <i>fini</i>
-re	-u	<i>vendre</i> → <i>vendu</i>

finir (“to finish”) and *vendre* (“to sell”) are the standard examples, and they are here as **examples of the pattern** rather than words to add to your vocabulary — neither has appeared in this book yet. What you want from this lesson is the shape: when you meet a verb, its infinitive ending already tells you what its participle will look like. That is three facts, not three hundred. And **-er** is the group that matters most in practice: it holds the overwhelming majority of French verbs, and it is the only group still taking new members — every verb French invents or borrows becomes an *-er* verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three endings — “é, i, u”
- the three pairs — “parler parlé, finir fini, vendre vendu”
- the useful half — “-er is the big one, and the only one still growing”

Before you move on

What vowel ends the participle of an **-ir** verb? (**-i**.) And an **-re** verb? (**-u**.) And **-er**? (**-é**.) Which class is by far the largest? (**-er** — and it is the only one that still takes new verbs.) Next: where those three endings came from.

18.5 -ātum · -ītum · -ūtum — where the endings came from

Three participle vowels, and two of them are inherited. The third is French tidying up after itself, which is a different kind of fact.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Latin marked its participles with a **-t-** and a vowel in front of it:

- **parlé** ← *-ātum*
- **fini** ← *-ītum*
- **vendu** ← *-ūtum*

French wore away the **-t-** and the ending, and kept the vowel. English, which borrowed from Latin rather than inheriting it, kept the **-t-** instead — you can see it whole in **finite**, **acute**, **statute**. Same suffix, two salvage strategies: French saved the vowel, English saved the consonant.

Now the third one, which is the interesting one. **-ūtus** was rare in Latin. It turns up in a handful of words — *minūtus* (small, hence *minute*), *tribūtus* (assigned, hence *tribute*) — and nothing like a whole class.

French and Italian took that small, scrappy group and spread it across an entire conjugation. So **-é** and **-i** are straight inheritance, and **-u** is largely the language tidying up by analogy: a pattern noticed in a few words and then applied on purpose to many.

That is worth separating from ordinary etymology. Most of what this book shows you is erosion — words wearing down. This is the opposite force: speakers **regularising**, making a language tidier than they received it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three Latin endings — “-ātum, -ītum, -ūtum”
- what English kept — “finite, acute, statute”; the *t* survived
- the odd one — “-ūtus was rare, and French spread it”
- the two forces — “erosion wears words down; analogy tidies them up”

Before you move on

What did French keep from the Latin participle ending, and what did English keep? (French kept the **vowel**; English kept the **-t-**, as in *finite, acute, statute*.) Which of the three French endings is **not** straight inheritance? (**-u** — *-ūtus* was **rare** in Latin and French spread it over a whole class.) What is that process called? (**Analogy** — speakers regularising.) Next: why this tense exists at all.

18.6 habeō litterās scriptās — the buried possessive

There is an obvious question about this tense that is worth asking: why *have*? What does owning something have to do with the past?

Grammar Lens: it was never a tense to begin with

Latin could say:

habeō litterās scriptās — “I *have* letters, written ones.”

Read that as Latin, not as French. It is **not** a past tense. It is *habēre* in its plain, ordinary sense — **I possess some letters** — with *scriptās* as an **adjective** describing them, agreeing with *litterās* in gender and number the way any Latin adjective would.

The sentence says nothing about who did the writing, and nothing about when. It says: I own letters, and their condition is *written*. Then centuries pass. The phrase gets said constantly, the possession fades out of it, and what is left is the doing: *I wrote*. A construction

about **owning** an object hardened into a construction about **having done** an action.

This happens to be one of the best-documented examples of the whole process, and you can watch it happen in the surviving texts. It is also why English “I have written” exists — English built the same thing, from the same starting point, independently.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the Latin — “habeō litterās scriptās”
- what it meant — “I have letters, written ones”
- what it became — “I wrote”
- the shift in one line — “possession hardened into a tense”

Before you move on

What did *habeō litterās scriptās* originally mean? (“**I have letters, written ones**” — plain possession.) What part of speech was *scriptās*? (An **adjective**, describing the letters.) What did the phrase turn into? (A **past tense** — “I wrote”.) Why does French build its past out of *have*? (Because the construction **began** as one about **having**.) Next: the fossil that construction left behind.

18.7 les lettres que j’ai écrites — the fossil

The possessive is gone from the meaning. It is not gone from the spelling, and the place it survives is one of the strangest rules in French.

Grammar Lens: the participle still agrees, when the object goes first

Normally the participle never changes:

J’ai écrit les lettres. — “I wrote the letters.” *écrit*, plain.

Move the object in front of the verb, though, and the participle **agrees**

with it — feminine, plural, exactly as an adjective would:

Les lettres que j’ai écrites. — “The letters that I wrote.” *écrites*.

That **-es** is the two-thousand-year-old adjective ending from *habeō litterās scriptās*, still doing the job it was doing in Latin. The meaning moved on; the agreement stayed behind.

Two things make this bearable. First, you can almost never **hear** it — *écrit* and *écrites* sound the same, so it is a writing rule far more than a speaking one. Second, it now has an explanation instead of being arbitrary: the participle agrees when the thing it describes comes **before** it, which is where an adjective could still see it.

French schoolchildren spend years on this rule and are taught it as a list of conditions. It is really one fact with a very long memory.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the plain order — “J’ai écrit les lettres”
- the object first — “Les lettres que j’ai écrites”
- what the *-es* is — “an adjective ending, two thousand years old”
- the consolation — “you cannot hear it”

Before you move on

When does the past participle agree with the object? (When the object comes **before** the verb.) Why does it agree at all? (Because it was an **adjective** first, describing the thing that was possessed.) Can you hear the agreement in *écrites*? (**No** — it is a writing rule.) Next: all of it, together.

18.8 Practice — the past you actually say

One tense, built from two things you already had. Run it, then take it apart again.

Your turn: build it

Say these aloud:

- “j’ai parlé, tu as parlé, il a parlé, nous avons parlé, vous avez parlé, ils ont parlé”
- with your other verbs — “j’ai travaillé, nous avons habité”
- what moves and what does not — “avoir changes; the participle never does”

Twice through: “j’ai parlé, tu as parlé, il a parlé”

Your turn: the three endings

Say these aloud:

- “é, i, u”
- the pairs — “parler parlé, finir fini, vendre vendu”
- the Latin — “-ātum, -ītum, -ūtum”; and English “finite, acute, statute”

Your turn: the sound trap and the fossil

Say these aloud:

- the three that sound alike — “parler, parlé, parlez”
- the old meaning — “I have letters, written ones”
- the fossil — “Les lettres que j’ai écrites”

What you’ve built so far

- **a past tense**, made of a verb you already knew and one unchanging word.
- **three participle endings**, one per verb class, two inherited and one spread by analogy.
- **an explanation for the *have***: the construction began as plain possession — *I have letters, written ones* — and hardened into a

tense.

- **a fossil you can point at:** the agreement in *écrites* is an adjective ending that has outlived the grammar that required it.

Before you move on

Say “we spoke.” (**Nous avons parlé.**) Which half changes with the person? (**avoir.**) Give the three participle vowels. (**-é, -i, -u.**) Which three forms of *parler* sound identical? (**parler, parlé, parlez.**) When does the participle agree? (When the **object comes first.**) Next: the other past tense — the one you will read and never say.

18.9 il parla — the past you read but never say

French has a **second** past tense. You will meet it on the first page of almost any novel and never once hear it in a conversation.

Grammar Lens: recognise it, do not produce it

It is called the **passé simple**, and it is one word where the compound past is two:

meaning	passé simple	passé composé
he spoke	<i>il parla</i>	<i>il a parlé</i>
they spoke	<i>ils parlèrent</i>	<i>ils ont parlé</i>
he had	<i>il eut</i>	<i>il a eu</i>

You do **not** need to produce these, and you should not try. Nobody says them. Using one out loud sounds roughly like announcing “thus spake he” in an English café.

What you need is to **recognise** them, because they carry the past tense of essentially all French literature. A reader who stalls at *il parla* stalls on page one of everything.

So this is the first thing in this book that is deliberately **half-learned**, and that is a real distinction worth making: some things you learn to say, and some you learn only to understand. Treating those as the same job is what makes beginners feel they must master everything before reading anything.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “il parla ... il a parlé”; same meaning, two registers
- the plural pair — “ils parlèrent ... ils ont parlé”
- where you meet it — “in a novel, not a conversation”

Before you move on

What is *il parla*? (The **passé simple** — “he spoke”.) Where will you meet it? (In **writing**, especially novels — never in speech.) Do you need to produce it? (**No** — recognition only.) What is the everyday equivalent? (***il a parlé***.) Next: who else kept this tense alive.

18.10 il parla · habló · falou — the same tense, four fates

The tense French retired to its libraries is a tense other people use to order coffee.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

il parla comes from the plain Latin perfect, handed straight down with no rebuilding at all. Which means it is the **same tense** as these:

language	“he spoke”	status
French	<i>il parla</i>	books only
Spanish	<i>habló</i>	everyday speech
Portuguese	<i>falou</i>	everyday speech
Italian	<i>parlò</i>	regional

One Latin ancestor, four different fates. A Spaniard saying *habló* and a French novelist writing *il parla* are using the **same inherited form**, and only one of them sounds archaic doing it.

That is worth sitting with, because it undoes an assumption. A tense is not formal or informal, literary or everyday, by its nature. **Register is not a property of a form; it is a property of what a particular community of speakers happens to have kept.**

French did not decide *il parla* was fancy. It just stopped saying it, and the books did not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the sisters — “il parla, habló, falou, parlò”
- the split — “one of them is literary; the others are lunch”
- the finding — “register is not in the form, it is in the speakers”

Before you move on

What Latin tense is *il parla*? (The plain **perfect**, inherited directly.) Which languages still say it every day? (**Spanish** — *habló* — and **Portuguese** — *falou*.) So what makes a tense “literary”? (**Not the form** — what its speakers kept using.) Next: what pushed it out, and where else that happened.

18.11 the same retreat, three times over

French pushed its old past tense into books and replaced it with a compound built on *have*. It is not the only language that did.

Why it's said this way

language	the simple past	what replaced it in speech
French	<i>passé simple</i>	<i>passé composé</i> — <i>j'ai parlé</i>
German	<i>Präteritum</i>	<i>Perfekt</i> — <i>ich habe gesagt</i>
Italian	<i>passato remoto</i>	<i>passato prossimo</i> — <i>ho parlato</i>

Three languages, two Romance and one **Germanic**, each built a compound past out of “have,” and each let that compound push the inherited simple past out of conversation and into writing. The obvious reading is that this is a natural drift any language might

undergo. The better reading is geographical. **France, southern Germany and northern Italy form one connected block**, and the change spread through it by **contact**, over the same few centuries — carried by people who lived near each other, across language boundaries that were never barriers to anything. Linguists call that an **areal** change: one that travels by neighbourhood rather than by descent. And the evidence is at the edges. **Spanish and Portuguese**, out at the western rim, largely **did not get it** — they kept their simple past in everyday speech, which is why *habló* is still ordinary. Though Spain's Spanish has begun drifting the same way, with *he hablado* taking ground: the change reaching the edge, late. So the map explains what the family tree cannot. Italian and Spanish are close relatives that behave differently here, and French and German are distant relatives that behave the same — because what mattered was who was standing next to whom.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three retreats — “passé simple, Präteritum, passato remoto”
- the three replacements — “j’ai parlé, ich habe gesagt, ho parlato”
- the shape — “a connected block: France, southern Germany, northern Italy”
- the edge — “Spanish and Portuguese kept theirs”

Before you move on

Which three languages made the same swap? (**French, German, Italian.**) Was it three separate inventions? (**No** — one change spreading by **contact** across a connected block.) What is that kind of change called? (**Areal.**) Which languages at the edge kept their simple past? (**Spanish and Portuguese.**) Next: everything together.

18.12 Practice — two pasts, and why

One tense to say and one to recognise. Run both, and keep the jobs separate.

Your turn: the one you say

Say these aloud:

- “j’ai parlé, tu as parlé, il a parlé, nous avons parlé, vous avez parlé, ils ont parlé”
- “j’ai travaillé, nous avons habité”
- the three endings — “é, i, u”

Twice through: “j’ai parlé, nous avons travaillé”

Your turn: the one you read

Say these aloud:

- the pairs — “il parla ... il a parlé”; “ils parlèrent ... ils ont parlé”
- the sisters — “il parla, habló, falou, parlò”
- the job — “recognise it; do not say it”

Your turn: the two histories

Say these aloud:

- where the tense came from — “I have letters, written ones”
- the fossil — “Les lettres que j’ai écrites”
- the three retreats — “passé simple, Präteritum, passato remoto”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **the past tense you will actually use**, built from *avoir* and a participle that never moves.
- **three participle endings**, and the fact that one of them was spread by analogy rather than inherited.

- **an origin:** the tense began as plain possession and hardened, which is why it uses *have* at all — and why a participle still agrees when its object comes first.
- **a second past you only read**, and the reason it is only read: not because the form is fancy, but because a block of neighbouring languages stopped saying theirs at roughly the same time, and the ones at the edge did not.

Before you move on

Say “they worked.” (**Ils ont travaillé.**) Which part of the compound past changes? (*avoir.*) Which three forms of *parler* are homophones? (***parler, parlé, parlez.***) What is *il parla*, and what do you do with it? (The **passé simple** — **recognise** it, never say it.) Why does the participle agree in *les lettres que j’ai écrites*? (It was an **adjective** first, and the object comes **before** it.)

Chapter 19

To Be, and the Three Verbs Inside It

Modes: 🗣️ voice (12) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 12 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can use all six forms of être, and explain why it has no pattern to find.

The most irregular verb in French, and the irregularity turns out to have a shape. There is no pattern in être because être is THREE verbs: es- from esse for the present and infinitive, fu- from fui for the passé simple — the same root as English be — and ét- from stāre, 'to stand', which supplied a whole limb of participles and the imperfect. The patching is called suppletion, and English does it too, with go and went. Spanish inherited the same two Latin verbs and made the opposite choice: it kept ser and estar apart and made you pick.

19.1 je suis — I am

The partner of *avoir*, and the most irregular verb in French. That irregularity is not carelessness; it is age.

Sounds you'll need

- **je suis** = *zhuh SWEE*. The **s** at the end is silent.
- The **ui** is a single glide: start at the tight **u** of *tu* and slide straight into *ee*.
- Do not hear an English *swiss*; there is no *s* at the end.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

suis is Latin **sum**, “I am.”

Before you go looking for a pattern in this verb: **there is not one.** *être* is the most irregular verb in French, and it is irregular for the same reason English *be / am / is / was* is. These are among the **oldest word-shapes in Europe**, said millions of times a day for three thousand years, and constant use does not regularise a word — it protects it. Rare verbs get tidied up by analogy; the commonest ones are said too often for anyone to forget them, so they keep whatever shape history left them with.

So the six forms are six things to learn, and that is the honest situation. What this chapter can give you instead of a pattern is an **explanation** — because the irregularity turns out to have a shape once you know where the pieces came from.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “je suis” — *zhuh SWEE*, the final *s* silent
- a whole sentence — “Je suis fatigué”
- the Latin — “sum, suis”

Before you move on

How do you say “I am”? (**je suis**, *zhuh SWEE*.) Is the final **s** pronounced? (**No.**) What Latin word is it? (**sum**.) Why is this verb so irregular? (It is **very old and very common** — constant use protects a shape rather than tidying it.) Next: the same verb, to a friend.

19.2 tu es — you are

After *suis*, the shortest form in the verb — and one that is easy to swallow entirely.

Sounds you'll need

- **tu es** = *tü ay*. Two letters, one vowel sound.
- The **s** is silent, as it was in **tu as**.
- Careful: **tu es** and **tu as** differ only in that vowel — *ay* against *ah*. Say them back to back until the difference is deliberate.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

es is Latin **es**, unchanged. Latin said *es* for “you are” and French still does, which for a form this heavily used is unusual — most such words are ground down past recognition.

The pair to watch is not Latin, though. It is **tu es** against **tu as**: “you are” and “you have,” one vowel apart, both extremely common, both with a silent **s**. English keeps them far apart; French does not.

That is the practical difficulty of this verb. Not the etymology — the fact that its forms are short, unstressed, and easily confused with *avoir*’s.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “tu es” — *tü ay*
- the pair to keep apart — “tu es, tu as”
- both verbs together — “je suis, j’ai”

Before you move on

How do you say “you are” to a friend? (**tu es**, *tü ay*.) Which other very common form does it nearly collide with? (**tu as**, “you have”.) What is the difference? (Only the **vowel** — *ay* against *ah*.) What Latin word is *es*? (**es** — unchanged.) Next: he and she.

19.3 il est, elle est — he is, she is

You have said this one already, many times, without knowing it was part of a verb.

Sounds you'll need

- **il est** = *ee-LAY*. The **s** and **t** are both silent, and the **l** of *il* runs into the vowel.
- Before a vowel the buried **t** wakes: **est-il ?** = *eh-TEEL*.
- **elle est** = *el-AY*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

est is Latin **est**, also unchanged — and it is very probably the single most frequently said word-form in French.

You already own it. **il est trois heures**, “it is three o’clock,” is this exact form; so is every time you have said what time it was. The clock chapter handed you a piece of *être* several chapters before the verb arrived, which is the ordinary way a language teaches itself: the commonest forms turn up inside fixed phrases long before anybody explains them.

Note also that **il** here is not “he.” In *il est trois heures* it refers to nothing at all — French requires a subject even when there is nobody to be one. That is the same reason the pronoun cannot be dropped: the sentence needs the slot filled.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “il est, elle est”
- what you already knew — “il est trois heures”
- the three singulars — “je suis, tu es, il est”

Before you move on

How do you say “he is”? (**il est**, *ee-LAY*.) Where have you said this form before? (**Telling the time** — *il est trois heures*.) Who is *il* in that sentence? (**Nobody** — French needs the subject slot filled even when there is no subject.) Next: the plural, and a form with no French shape at all.

19.4 nous sommes — we are

Every verb you have met marks *nous* with **-ons**. Watch what this one does.

Sounds you'll need

- **nous sommes** = *noo SOM*. The **s** of *nous* buzzes across into the vowel.
- The final **-es** is silent; the word ends on the **m**.
- Compare **nous avons**, which ends in a nasal. This one does not.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sommes is Latin **sumus**.

And notice what is missing. Every other verb you have met marks *nous* with **-ons**: *nous avons*, *nous parlons*. This verb does not. There is no **-ons** here at all, and no way to derive *sommes* from anything. That is the shape of this verb's irregularity: it does not bend the rules, it predates them. The **-ons** ending is a regularity French built up over centuries, and *être* was already too well-worn and too heavily used to be dragged into it.

So *sommes* is not an exception to a rule. It is a survival from before the rule existed.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nous sommes” — *noo SOM*
- the missing ending — “nous avons, nous parlons, nous sommes”
- the reason — “it predates the rule, it does not break it”

Before you move on

How do you say “we are”? (**nous sommes**, *noo SOM*.) Which usual ending is missing? (**-ons**.) Why? (*être* is **older than that regularity** and was too common to be pulled into it.) What Latin word is it? (**sumus**.) Next: the form that keeps a hat.

19.5 vous êtes — you are

The politeness form, and the one that wears its history on the page.

Sounds you'll need

- **vous êtes** = *voo-ZET*. The **s** of *vous* buzzes into the vowel.
- **circumflex** — the hat on **ê** marks a **lost s**, the same gravestone you met on **août** and **âge**.
- The final **-es** is silent.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

êtes is Latin **estis**, “you are” — and you can read the erosion straight off the page.

estis → *estes* → **êtes**. The **s** after the first vowel fell silent and then fell out of the spelling, and the circumflex was put there to mark where it had been. This is the third time you have met that hat doing exactly this job, and by now it should be a reflex: **see a circumflex, try putting an s back**.

Do it here and *êtes* becomes *estes*, which is visibly Latin *estis*. Do it on **août** and you get *aoust*. Do it on **âge** and you get *aage*, from *aetaticum*.

The infinitive works the same way: **être** was *estre*, from Vulgar Latin **essere*. The hat is not decoration on any of them.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vous êtes” — *voo-ZET*
- put the *s* back — “êtes, estes, estis”
- the same trick on the infinitive — “être, estre”
- the two plurals — “nous sommes, vous êtes”

Before you move on

How do you say “you are” politely? (**vous êtes**, *voo-ZET*.) What does the circumflex mark? (A **lost s**.) Put it back — what do you get? (**estes**, from Latin *estis*.) And on the infinitive *être*? (**estre**.) Next: the last form, and the one you must not confuse with *avoir*.

19.6 ils sont, elles sont — they are

The sixth form, and the one you were warned about two chapters ago.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ils sont** = *eel SO(N)*. The **on** is nasal; the **t** is silent.
- Here is the pair to drill: **ils sont** *hisses*, **ils ont** *buzzes*. *eel-so(n)* against *eel-zo(n)*.
- That single consonant is the whole difference between **they are** and **they have**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sont is Latin **sunt**.

You now have both of the verbs French is built on, and their *ils* forms are one sound apart. That is worth two minutes of drilling on its own, because the two sentences it distinguishes are both things you will say constantly.

The full set, and you built every piece of it:

je suis · tu es · il est · nous sommes · vous êtes · ils sont

Six forms and no pattern — which is what the next three lessons are about, because the *reason* there is no pattern turns out to be more interesting than a pattern would have been.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ils sont” — *eel SO(N)*, hissing
- the pair — “ils sont, ils ont”; hiss for are, buzz for have

- all six — “je suis, tu es, il est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont”

Before you move on

How do you say “they are”? (**ils sont**, *eel SO(N)*.) How do you hear it against *ils ont*? (**A hiss** against a **buzz**.) Give all six forms of *être*. Is there a pattern in them? (**No** — and the next lessons explain why.) Next: where these forms actually came from.

19.7 *esse* — the first stem

Six forms with no pattern between them. Put them beside their Latin and something appears — not a pattern, but a **seam**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Every present form of *être* comes from Latin *esse*, “to be”:

- **je suis** ← *sum* · **nous sommes** ← *sumus* · **ils sont** ← *sunt*
- and the two short ones, **tu es** ← *es*, **il est** ← *est*, arrived practically untouched

Say each pair aloud and the irregularity stops looking random. The **s**- is there every time, and the forms are **as scattered in Latin as they are in French** — *sum, es, est, sumus, estis, sunt* is not a tidy paradigm either. French did not break this verb. It **received** it broken, and Latin had received it broken too.

The infinitive comes from the same place, by a detour. Classical Latin’s infinitive was *esse*, which is short and odd; Vulgar Latin rebuilt it on the ordinary pattern as ***essere**, and **essere* → *estre* → **être**. So one stem, **es-**, accounts for the present tense and the infinitive. That is most of what you have learned so far. The rest of the verb comes from somewhere else entirely.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pairs — “sum suis, sumus sommes, sunt sont”

- the stem — “es-, for the present and the infinitive”
- the rebuild — “esse, essere, estre, être”

Before you move on

Which Latin verb are all the present forms from? (*esse*.) Was Latin’s version regular? (**No** — *sum, es, est, sumus, estis, sunt* is already scattered; French inherited the mess.) Where does the infinitive *être* come from? (Vulgar Latin ***essere**, a rebuild of *esse*.) Next: a part of the verb that is not from *esse* at all.

19.8 je fus — the second stem

The past of this verb does not begin with an **s**. That is not a sound change. It is a different verb.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The *passé simple* of *être* — the literary past you learned to recognise — is **je fus, il fut**.

There is no way to get *fus* from *suis*, and nobody has ever tried. It comes from Latin **fuī**, and *fuī* comes from Proto-Indo-European ***b^huH-**, “to grow, to become.”

That root went somewhere you will recognise. ***b^huH-** is also the source of English **be**. So English’s *be* and French’s *fus* are the same ancient word, and neither of them is related to French *suis* — which is the cousin of English *is* and *am*.

English has exactly the same patchwork, and nobody notices because it is their own: **am** and **is** from one root, **be** from another, **was** and **were** from a third. French is doing what English does. It is only visible here because it is somebody else’s language.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the form — “je fus, il fut”
- the root — “fuī, from ***b^huH-**: to grow, to become”

- the surprise — “that root is English *be*”
- the English patchwork — “am, is, be, was: three roots”

Before you move on

What is *je fus*? (The **passé simple** of *être* — “I was”.) Is it related to *suis*? (**No** — different root entirely.) Which Latin word is it from? (***fuī***.) Which English word comes from the same root? (**be**.) Does English do the same thing? (**Yes** — *am/is, be, and was* come from **three** different roots.) Next: the third stem, and it is a verb about standing.

19.9 été — the third stem

Two stems so far. The third is the largest, and it is not a form of “to be” in any language — it is a verb about **standing**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The past participle of *être* is **été**. It has nothing to do with *suis* and nothing to do with *fus*. It comes from Latin ***stāre***, “**to stand**.” And it is not one stray form. **Every** *être* form beginning **ét-** comes from the standing verb:

- **été** — the past participle ← *stātum*
- **étant** — the present participle ← *stantem*
- **j’étais, il était** — the imperfect ← *stābam*

That is a whole limb of the verb, borrowed wholesale from a different one.

The idea is not far-fetched. “How are you?” is *how do you stand?* in more languages than not — English still says *how do you stand on this*, and *standing* means status. A verb for standing drifting into a verb for being is one of the best-worn paths in language.

Stāre left French other things too, outside *être*: **rester** ← *re-stāre*, “to stay,” and **coûter** ← *constāre*, “to cost.” What it did **not** do in French is survive as a separate verb meaning “to be.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the participle — “été”
- the limb — “été, étant, j’étais”: all from *stāre*
- the meaning — “to stand”
- its other children — “rester, coûter”

Before you move on

What is the past participle of *être*? (**été**.) Which Latin verb is it from? (***stāre***, “to **stand**”.) Which other *être* forms come from the same place? (Every one beginning **ét-** — *étant, j’étais, il était*.) Name two French verbs outside *être* from *stāre*. (**rester, coûter**.) Next: the name for what this verb is doing.

19.10 suppletion — three verbs in a trench coat

You have three stems and three different origins. There is a name for this, and having the name makes it stop being strange.

Grammar Lens: a paradigm filled in from elsewhere

Lay out what *être* is made of:

- **es-** — the present tense and the infinitive, from *esse*
- **fu-** — the *passé simple*, from *fuī*
- **ét-** — the participles and the imperfect, from *stāre*

One verb, three ancestors, and the joins are invisible unless somebody points at them.

The name for this is **suppletion**: one verb’s paradigm filled in with pieces of another. It is not a French disease and not a sign of decay. It happens to the **most used verbs in every language**, and only to them — a verb has to be extremely common for speakers to tolerate a completely unpredictable form, and extremely common verbs are also the ones people reach for when another verb is missing a form.

English does it constantly and you have never thought about it:

- **go / went** — *went* was stolen outright from *wend*
- **am / is / be / was** — the same three-way patchwork as *être*
- **good / better** — *better* is not from *good* at all

So the answer to “why is *être* so irregular?” is now complete. It is irregular because it is old, common, and **assembled from three verbs**. There was never a pattern to find, and the time you might have spent hunting for one is better spent on the six forms themselves.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three stems — “es-, fu-, ét-”
- the word — “suppletion”
- the English case — “go, went; and went was taken from wend”
- the conclusion — “no pattern, because it is three verbs”

Before you move on

Name *être*’s three stems and what each covers. (**es-** present and infinitive, **fu-** the *passé simple*, **ét-** participles and imperfect.) What is the name for a paradigm filled in from another verb?

(**Suppletion.**) Give an English example. (*go/went*, or *am/be/was*, or *good/better*.) Which verbs does it happen to? (The **most used ones** — only they are common enough to survive it.) Next: what Spanish did with the same two verbs.

19.11 être / ser · estar — the same two verbs, twice

Stāre should have rung a bell. If you have ever looked at Spanish, you have met it wearing its own name.

Why it's said this way

Spanish has **two** verbs for “to be,” and choosing between them is famously the hardest thing about beginner Spanish:

- **ser** ← *esse*
- **estar** ← *stāre*

Those are the **same two Latin verbs** French has. French did not get a different inheritance; it made a different decision with the same one.

- **Spanish** kept them **apart** as two verbs, and made every speaker choose between them for the rest of their life.
- **French** kept **one** verb, *être* ← *esse*, and quietly **swallowed** a large limb of *stāre* — the *ét-* forms — into it.

Neither language invented anything. They took the same two words and resolved the overlap in opposite directions, and the result is that a French speaker never thinks about *stāre* while a Spanish speaker thinks about it every day.

This is worth carrying beyond this chapter, because it is the general shape of how related languages differ. They rarely differ because one has something the other lacks. They differ because both inherited the same crowded set of options and **tidied it up differently**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the Spanish pair — “ser, estar”
- their sources — “ser from *esse*, estar from *stāre*”
- the French answer — “one verb, *être*, which absorbed the *ét-* limb”
- the finding — “same two words, opposite solutions”

Before you move on

Which two Latin verbs lie behind Spanish *ser* and *estar*? (*esse* and *stāre*.) Are they the same two behind French *être*? (**Yes** — the identical inheritance.) What did each language do? (**Spanish kept them apart** as two verbs; **French kept one** and absorbed *stāre*'s *ét-* forms.) Why do related languages usually differ? (They inherited the **same options** and tidied them differently.) Next: all six forms, together.

19.12 Practice — the whole of être

Six forms and three ancestors. Run the forms first; the history is what makes them stay.

Your turn: the six

Say these aloud:

- “je suis, tu es, il est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont”
- backwards — “ils sont, vous êtes, nous sommes, il est, tu es, je suis”
- two sentences — “Je suis français”, “Je suis fatigué”

Twice through: “je suis, tu es, il est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont”

Your turn: the two verbs side by side

Say these aloud:

- the buzz and the hiss — “ils ont, ils sont”
- the vowel pair — “tu as, tu es”
- both verbs from the top — “j’ai ... je suis”

Your turn: the three stems

Say these aloud:

- “es- from esse: the present and the infinitive”

- “fu- from *fuī*: the passé simple, and English *be*”
- “ét- from *stāre*: to stand”
- the name — “suppletion”; and “go, went”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **the second verb the language rests on**, six forms, one lesson each.
- **an explanation instead of a pattern.** There is no pattern in *être* because it is **three verbs**: *esse*, *fuī* and *stāre*, patched into one paradigm.
- **a word for that** — **suppletion** — and the knowledge that English does exactly the same with *go/went* and *am/be/was*.
- **a comparison that generalises.** Spanish kept *ser* and *estar* apart; French kept one verb and absorbed the other’s limb. Related languages usually differ not by what they inherited but by **how they tidied it**.

Before you move on

Give all six forms of *être*. How do you hear *ils sont* against *ils ont*? (**Hiss** against **buzz**.) Name the three stems and their sources. (**es-** ← *esse*, **fu-** ← *fuī*, **ét-** ← *stāre*.) What is the process called? (**Suppletion**.) Which Spanish verb is *stāre*? (***estar***.)

Chapter 20

The Past That Takes être

Modes: ⇄ voice (10) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 10 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can choose between avoir and être in the past, and say what the participle agrees with and why.

A short closed list of verbs refuses avoir and takes être, and it is easier as a shape than a list: arriving and leaving, in space or in life. Two corrections come with it — motion verbs like courir take avoir, because motion is not transition, and five verbs switch to avoir the moment they take an object, which shows the rule is about the sentence rather than the verb. Then the agreement, which is audible for once: elle est morte. And underneath avoir’s rule, être’s rule and the pronominal rule sits one fact — the participle was an adjective, and it agrees with whatever it described.

20.1 je suis allé — the past built from “be”

You built a past tense out of *avoir*. Now meet the verbs that will not have it.

Grammar Lens: some verbs take être instead

The recipe is the same shape as before, with the other verb in front:

être (conjugated) + **past participle**

aller, “to go,” is the headline case. Its past is **not** *j’ai allé*. It is:

- **je suis allé** — I went
- **tu es allé** — you went

- **il est allé** — he went
- **nous sommes allés** — we went
- **ils sont allés** — they went

Say *j'ai allé* to a French speaker and it will land as clearly wrong, the way *I have went* lands in English.

So you now have two past tenses that are really one tense with two auxiliaries, and the only question a verb ever raises is: **which one?** For the vast majority it is *avoir*, and this chapter is about the short list that says otherwise — what is on it, what is deceptively not on it, and the visible thing that happens to the participle when *être* is used.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “je suis allé, tu es allé, il est allé”
- the contrast — “j’ai parlé ... je suis allé”
- the error, so you can hear it — “j’ai allé is wrong, like *I have went*”

Twice through: “j’ai parlé ... je suis allé”

Before you move on

How do you say “I went”? (**Je suis allé.**) Which auxiliary does *aller* take? (**être.**) What is wrong with *j’ai allé*? (**The wrong auxiliary** — it sounds like *I have went.*) Which auxiliary do most French verbs take? (**avoir.**) Next: which verbs are on the short list.

20.2 aller · venir · naître · mourir — the shape of the list

Textbooks give this as a list to memorise, usually a dozen verbs long. It is much easier to hold as a shape.

Grammar Lens: arriving and leaving

The verbs that take *être* are these: *aller* (go), *venir* (come), *partir* (leave), *arriver* (arrive), *entrer*, *sortir*, *monter*, *descendre*, *naître* (be born), *mourir* (die), *rester* (stay), *tomber* (fall).

Read them as a **shape** and the list stops needing memorising:

going, coming, being born, dying — arriving and leaving, in space or in life.

Every one of them is about **crossing a threshold**. Entering or leaving a place; entering or leaving the world; going up, going down, falling, staying put at the end of a movement. They are not verbs about **doing** something. They are verbs about **ending up somewhere**. Hold on to that phrasing, because it is what makes the next two lessons make sense. It is also why the participle behaves the way it does: if the verb describes where you **ended up**, the participle is describing **you** — and you will see it agree with you accordingly.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four corners — “going, coming, born, dying”
- the shape — “arriving and leaving, in space or in life”
- the test — “not doing something; ending up somewhere”
- “je suis allé, je suis venu, je suis resté”

Before you move on

Give the shape of the *être* list in one line. (**Arriving and leaving, in space or in life** — going, coming, being born, dying.) What do all these verbs have in common? (They cross a **threshold** — they are about **ending up somewhere**, not about doing something.)

Name three. (*aller, venir, partir, naître, mourir, rester, tomber* — any three.) Next: the verbs that look like they belong and do not.

20.3 j'ai couru — not every motion verb qualifies

“Verbs of motion take *être*” is the rule most learners are given, and it will mislead you within a week.

Grammar Lens: moving is not arriving

These are all motion verbs, and every one of them takes **avoir**:

- **marcher** (walk) — *j'ai marché*
- **courir** (run) — *j'ai couru*
- **nager** (swim), **danser** (dance), **voyager** (travel)

You can run for an hour and arrive nowhere. That is the whole distinction. The *être* verbs are not about **movement**; they are about **arriving, leaving and changing state** — crossing a threshold, as the last lesson put it.

Courir describes what your legs did. *Partir* describes that you are no longer here. The first is an activity; the second is a change in where you are, and it is the change that takes *être*.

So correct the rule in your head now, before it costs you anything: **not motion — transition.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the avoir ones — “j’ai marché, j’ai couru, j’ai dansé”
- against the être ones — “je suis parti, je suis arrivé”
- the corrected rule — “not motion, transition”
- the test — “you can run for an hour and arrive nowhere”

Before you move on

Which auxiliary does *courir* take? (**avoir** — *j’ai couru*.) But is it not a motion verb? (**Yes** — which is why “motion verbs take *être*” is the **wrong rule**.) State the right one. (**Transition, not motion** — arriving, leaving, changing state.) Next: the verbs that use both.

20.4 je suis monté / j'ai monté les valises

A handful of verbs sit on both sides of the line, and which side they are on depends on the sentence rather than the verb.

Grammar Lens: an object flips the auxiliary

monter, descendre, sortir, rentrer and **passer** take *être* when they stand alone, and *avoir* the moment they take a **direct object**:

Je suis monté. — “I went up.” No object; *être*.

J'ai monté les valises. — “I took the suitcases up.” An object; *avoir*.

This looks like an extra rule to memorise. It is the opposite: it is the rule you already have, doing exactly what it said it would.

Je suis monté describes **where I ended up** — a transition, so *être*.

J'ai monté les valises describes **something I did to the suitcases** — an action on an object, so *avoir*. The verb has not changed its meaning much; what has changed is whether the sentence is about a transition or about an action, and that is the only thing the auxiliary has ever cared about.

So these verbs are not exceptions. They are the clearest demonstration that the rule is about the **sentence**, not the verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “Je suis monté ... J'ai monté les valises”
- the same for going out — “Je suis sorti ... J'ai sorti le chien”
- the reason — “transition takes *être*; an action on an object takes *avoir*”
- the conclusion — “what decides it is the sentence, not the verb”

Before you move on

Which auxiliary in *je suis monté*? (*être* — no object, a transition.) And in *j’ai monté les valises*? (*avoir* — a **direct object**.) Is this a new rule? (**No** — it is the same rule: transition takes *être*, an action on an object takes *avoir*.) Next: what happens to the participle.

20.5 elle est allée — the participle agrees

With *avoir*, the participle almost never moved. With *être* it moves every time, and this is the one agreement in French you can actually hear.

Grammar Lens: it agrees with the subject

French	English
Il est allé .	He went.
Elle est allée .	She went.
Ils sont allés .	They went.
Elles sont allées .	They (f.) went.

The participle takes the **subject’s** gender and number — exactly like an adjective.

And the reason is the same fossil you already met. *Elle est allée* began as a plain description: “**she is gone**,” with *gone* describing **her**, in the same way *elle est fatiguée* describes her. It was never an action she performed on something. It was a **state she was in** — which is precisely the shape of every verb on this list. So the participle agreed with her, and it still does.

One practical note. With *aller* you cannot hear the difference: *allé* and *allée* are identical aloud. But some of these verbs end in a consonant, and then you can — *il est mort* against *elle est morte*, where the **t** wakes up. That makes this the rare French agreement rule that is not purely a spelling problem.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four — “il est allé, elle est allée, ils sont allés, elles sont allées”

- one you can hear — “il est mort, elle est morte”
- the reason — “she is gone: gone describes her”
- the parallel — “elle est fatiguée, elle est allée”

Before you move on

With *être*, what does the participle agree with? (The **subject**.) Say “she went.” (**Elle est allée**.) Why does it agree? (It began as a **description of her** — “she is gone” — so it behaved like an **adjective**.) Which example lets you **hear** the agreement? (*il est mort* against *elle est morte*.) Next: the one rule under both auxiliaries.

20.6 une seule règle — both halves are the same fact

You now have two agreement rules that look unrelated. They are one rule, and seeing that is worth more than either of them.

Grammar Lens: the participle agrees with whatever it described

auxiliary	the participle agrees with	because it was...
<i>avoir</i>	a preceding object — <i>les lettres que j’ai écrites</i>	“I have letters, written ”
<i>être</i>	the subject — <i>elle est allée</i>	“she is gone ”

Two rules, two different targets — and one explanation covering both. The participle **was an adjective**, and an adjective agrees with the thing it describes. That is all either rule says.

- With *avoir*, the thing described was the **object you possessed**: the letters are the written ones. So the participle agrees with the object — and only when the object comes first, because that is where an adjective could still reach it.
- With *être*, the thing described was the **subject**: she is the gone

one. So the participle agrees with her.

Both are the same sentence-shape from Latin, one built on *habēre* and one built on *esse*, and in both the participle is doing an adjective's job. French textbooks teach these as two chapters and a long list of exceptions. They are one idea with a two-thousand-year memory, and once you have the idea most of those exceptions write themselves.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the avoir case — “les lettres que j’ai écrites”
- the être case — “elle est allée”
- the single rule — “the participle agrees with whatever it described”
- the two old sentences — “I have letters written ... she is gone”

Before you move on

With *avoir*, what does the participle agree with? (A **preceding object**.) With *être*? (The **subject**.) State the one rule underneath both. (The participle **was an adjective** and agrees with **whatever it described**.) Why does the *avoir* rule need the object to come first? (Because that is where an **adjective could still reach it**.) Next: the verbs that take *être* and ignore its rule.

20.7 je me suis levé — the pronominal family

The *être* list was short and closed. Here is one more family that takes *être*, and it has no end to it.

Grammar Lens: all of them, without exception

A **pronominal** verb is one carrying the little reflexive pronoun you met when you learned to give your name — the *me* of *je m’appelle*, the *se* of *s’appeler*.

Every one of them takes *être* in the past. No list, no shape to memorise, no exceptions:

je me suis levé — I got up

elle s'est lavée — she washed

Notice the word order: the reflexive pronoun comes **before** the auxiliary, not after it. *Je **me** suis levé*, not *je suis me levé*. That gives you two ways into *être*, and they work differently. The verbs from the earlier list are a **closed set** you can hold as a shape. The pronominals are an **open class** identified by their form — if it has a *me*, *te* or *se*, it takes *être*, and you never have to ask. But be careful with what comes next. They take *être*, and they do **not** follow *être*'s agreement rule.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “je me suis levé”
- “elle s'est lavée”
- the word order — “je *me* suis levé”; the pronoun comes first
- the rule — “if it has me, te or se, it takes *être*”

Before you move on

Which auxiliary do pronominal verbs take? (***être*** — **all** of them.) How do you recognise one? (It carries **me**, **te** or **se**.) Where does that pronoun sit? (**Before the auxiliary** — *je me suis levé*.) Is this a closed list like the earlier one? (**No** — it is an **open class**.) Next: the trap in their agreement.

20.8 elle s'est lavée — the auxiliary lies about the rule

Pronominal verbs take *être*. Now watch them ignore *être*'s agreement rule completely.

Grammar Lens: être on the outside, avoir underneath

They agree with a **preceding direct object** — which is *avoir*'s rule, not *être*'s. Usually that object **is** the reflexive pronoun, and sometimes it is not:

Elle s'est lavée. — She washed **herself**. *se* is the direct object, and it comes first, so the participle agrees.

Elle s'est lavé les mains. — She washed **her hands**. The object is *les mains*, and it **follows**, so there is no agreement.

Elles se sont parlé. — They spoke **to each other**. *se* is **indirect** — you speak *to* someone — so there is no agreement.

Which is, satisfyingly, the rule you already had. Nothing new has been introduced: the participle agrees with a preceding **direct** object, exactly as it did in *les lettres que j'ai écrites*.

The lesson to take is about **appearances**. The auxiliary looks like *être* and the agreement behaves like *avoir*, and if you let the first tell you about the second you will get it wrong every time. The auxiliary is not what decides agreement; it never was. What decides it is what the participle is describing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- agreement — “Elle s'est lavée”
- no agreement, object after — “Elle s'est lavé les mains”
- no agreement, indirect — “Elles se sont parlé”
- the warning — “the auxiliary looks like être; the agreement is avoir's”

Before you move on

Which agreement rule do pronominal verbs follow? (*avoir*'s — a **preceding direct object**.) Why does *elle s'est lavée* agree?

(*se* is the direct object and comes first.) Why does *elle s'est lavé les mains* not? (The object is *les mains* and it follows.) Why does *elles se sont parlé* not? (*se* is indirect — you speak *to* someone.) Next: the group that escapes even this.

20.9 elles se sont souvenues — the verbs with no other form

One small group escapes even the rule you just learned, and it escapes for a reason you can work out rather than memorise.

Grammar Lens: no object to be an object of

A few verbs exist **only** in pronominal form. There is no plain version of them at all:

- **se souvenir** — to remember
- **s'enfuir** — to flee
- **s'évanouir** — to faint

There is no *souvenir quelqu'un*, no *enfuir quelque chose*. The *se* is not doing a job you could describe as direct or indirect, because there is no non-reflexive verb for it to be the object **of**. It is simply part of the word.

So the previous lesson's test cannot be run on them, and they fall back to agreeing with the **subject**:

Elles se sont souvenues. — They remembered.

Which is where this chapter's whole argument lands. The agreement is not decided by the auxiliary, and not by a list of verb types. It is decided by **what the participle is describing** — and when there is no object in the picture at all, the only thing left for it to describe is the subject.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three — “se souvenir, s’enfuir, s’évanouir”
- the example — “Elles se sont souvenues”
- the reason — “no plain verb, so the *se* is not an object of anything”
- the landing — “what is left for the participle to describe is the subject”

Before you move on

What is special about *se souvenir*? (It exists **only** in pronominal form — there is no plain *souvenir* verb.) So what does its participle agree with? (The **subject** — *elles se sont souvenues*.) Why can the direct-object test not be applied? (There is **no non-reflexive verb** for *se* to be the object of.) Next: all of it together.

20.10 Practice — which auxiliary, and what agrees

Two questions cover this whole chapter: which auxiliary, and what does the participle describe. Run both.

Your turn: which auxiliary

Say these aloud:

- the contrast — “j’ai parlé ... je suis allé”
- the shape of the list — “arriving and leaving, in space or in life”
- the trap — “j’ai couru, j’ai marché”; motion is not transition
- the switch — “je suis monté ... j’ai monté les valises”

Twice through: “je suis allé, je suis venu, je suis resté”

Your turn: what the participle agrees with

Say these aloud:

- the four — “il est allé, elle est allée, ils sont allés, elles sont allées”
- the audible one — “il est mort, elle est morte”
- the avoir side — “les lettres que j’ai écrites”
- the single rule — “it agrees with whatever it described”

Your turn: the pronominals

Say these aloud:

- “je me suis levé”
- the three cases — “elle s’est lavée; elle s’est lavé les mains; elles se sont parlé”
- the group with no plain form — “elles se sont souvenues”

What you’ve built this chapter

- **a second auxiliary**, and a short closed list that is easier as a shape than a list: **arriving and leaving, in space or in life**.
- **two corrections to the rule you would have been given**. *Motion* verbs do not take *être* — **transition** verbs do; and five verbs switch the moment they take an object, which shows that what decides the auxiliary is the **sentence**, not the verb.
- **an agreement you can hear** — *il est mort, elle est morte*.
- **one rule under everything**: the participle was an adjective, and it agrees with whatever it described. *Avoir*’s rule, *être*’s rule and the pronominal rule are that one fact seen from three angles.

Before you move on

Say “she went.” (**Elle est allée.**) Which auxiliary does *courir* take, and why? (***avoir*** — it is **motion**, not **transition**.) What flips *monter* to *avoir*? (A **direct object**.) Which agreement rule do

pronominal verbs follow? (*avoir*'s — a preceding direct object.) **State the one rule under all of it.** (The participle agrees with whatever it described.)

Chapter 21

Head and Hand

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖐️ **Hands-free start:** none of the 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the head and the hand in French with the right article, and point out the Latin manus hiding inside English manual, manufacture and maintain.

Say la main with its nasal -ain, then run the manus family out loud — manual, manuscript, maintenir — and land on manufacture, ‘made by hand’, now the name for the opposite.

21.1 la tête — “the head”

The first body part, and one of the best etymologies in French. The word for *head* is not the Latin word for head.

You’ll want to know: The word

la tête — the head. Feminine, so **la**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Latin’s word for “head” was **caput**. You can see it surviving all over Europe:

Portuguese	<i>cabeça</i>
Spanish	<i>cabeza</i>
Italian	<i>capo</i> (now “chief, boss”)
English	captain, capital, decapitate

French has *caput* too, and in two layers. **Inherited**, worn down by use: **chef** (“chief,” originally “head”), **chapitre**, **cap** (a headland), **achever** (“to finish” — to bring to a head). **Re-borrowed** later, straight from written Latin: **capital, capitaine, décapiter**.

What French does *not* use it for is the thing on your shoulders.

Tête comes from Latin *testa*: an **earthenware pot**, a shell, a potsherd.

Why it’s said this way

Soldiers’ slang. Roman troops called the skull a *testa* the way English speakers say someone got hit on the **noggin** — a noggin being a small mug. It was a joke, it spread, and eventually the joke *replaced the real word* in Gaul and Italy.

So a French speaker saying *j’ai mal à la tête* is, historically, saying “my pot hurts.”

Testa is still visible in English **test** — which began as the shallow pot an alchemist used to assay metals.

Sounds you’ll need

Look at the accent: **tête**. Chapter W01 taught what a circumflex records — a letter that used to be there, almost always an **s**.

testa → Old French **teste** → modern **tête**

The *s* stopped being pronounced, and the accent was put in to mark the grave. That is why English, which borrowed from Old French *before* the *s* fell, still has it in **test**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la tête”

- “j’ai mal à la tête” — “my head hurts”
- the joke — “*testa* = a **pot**”
- the receipt — “*teste* → *tê-te*”

Before you move on

Say “the head.” (*La tête* — feminine.) Does it come from Latin *caput*? (**No** — from *testa*, an **earthenware pot**.) Why a pot? (Roman soldiers’ **slang** for the skull, which replaced the proper word.) Where did *caput* survive in French? (**Inherited** in *chef*, *chapitre*, *cap*, *achever*; **re-borrowed** in *capital*, *capitaine*, *décapiter* — just never for the head itself.) What does the circumflex on *tête* record? (**A lost s** — *teste*, still visible in English **test**.) Next: the hand.

21.2 la main — “the hand”

Where *tête* abandoned its Latin ancestor, this one kept it — and then lent it to English several dozen times over.

You’ll want to know: The word

la main — the hand. **Feminine**, and worth flagging: it ends in a consonant and still takes *la*. French gender is not predictable from the ending, which is why this book always gives you the article.

The *-ain* is the nasal vowel of *pain*, the bread — say them together: *pain*, *main*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Main comes from Latin *manus*, “hand.” That word is inside an enormous number of English words, and once you see it you cannot unsee it:

English	literally
manual	done by hand
manufacture	made by hand (<i>manus</i> + <i>facere</i> “to make”)
manuscript	written by hand (<i>manus</i> + <i>scribere</i>)
maintain	hold in the hand (<i>manū tenēre</i>)
manage	to handle — via Italian <i>maneggiare</i> , of horses
manoeuvre	work by hand (<i>manū operārī</i>)
Manufacture is the one worth pausing on. It means “made by hand” — and it now names precisely the thing that <i>isn’t</i> .	

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Maintenir / English **maintain** is Latin *manū tenēre*, “to hold in the hand” — a hand, plus the verb *tenēre*, “to hold.”

So *maintenance* — the least romantic word in any office — is literally **keeping something in hand**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la main” — and hear *pain*, *main*
- “j’ai mal à la main”
- the family — “manual, manuscript, maintain — all a **hand**”
- the irony — “**manufacture** = made by hand”

Before you move on

Say “the hand.” (*La main* — **feminine**, despite the consonant ending.) What Latin word is it from? (***Manus***.) Give three English words built on it. (*Manual*, *manufacture*, *manuscript*, *maintain*, *manage*, *manoeuvre*.) What does *manufacture* literally mean? (“**Made by hand**” — now the name for the opposite.) And *maintenir*? (*Manū tenēre*, “**hold in the hand**.”) Next: the rest of

the body.

Chapter 22

Yes and No

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can answer yes or no in French, send non through my nose as a nasal vowel, and recognise the ne ... pas pair that carries negation inside a sentence.

The oui / non pair said back to back, non's -on nasal placed against bon and bonjour, and the ne ... pas frame named as the sentence-level negation to come.

22.1 oui — yes

Where Spanish kept Latin's word for yes, French built a brand-new one — and named half a country after it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

oui = **yes**. Just two sounds, *wee*.

Its Romance cousins (Spanish *sí*, Italian *sì*) come from Latin *sīc* “thus.” **French took a different road entirely.** *oui* comes from Old French **oīl**, and *oīl* is a squeezed-down Latin phrase:

hoc ille (“this [is] it”) → *o-īl* → **oui**

You answered “yes” by saying, in effect, “*that’s the one.*”

Why it's said this way

This mattered so much it became a map. In the Middle Ages France was divided by how people said *yes*:

- the **north** said *oïl* → the **langue d'oïl** (which became modern French)
- the **south** said *oc* → the **langue d'oc** — still visible in the region name **Languedoc**, and in the language **Occitan**

One little answer-word, drawn as a border.

Grammar Lens: The other “yes,” *si*

French keeps a **second** yes — **si** — for one special job: contradicting a **negative**. When someone says something *isn't* so and you insist it *is*, you answer **si**, not *oui*:

Tu ne viens pas ? (“You’re not coming?”) — **Si !** (“Yes I am!”)

(That *si* is the Latin *sīc* the Spanish *sí* also comes from — French kept it only for this contradicting move.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “oui” — *wee*
- the origin — “hoc ille → oïl → oui”: *that’s the one*
- the contradiction — “Tu ne viens pas ? — Si !”

Before you move on

How do you say yes in French? (**oui**.) What Latin phrase is it worn down from? (**hoc ille**, “this is it,” via *oïl*.) What were the *langue d'oïl* and *langue d'oc* named after? (The two medieval words for **yes**.) When do you answer **si** instead of *oui*? (To **contradict a negative** — *Tu ne viens pas ? — Si !*)

22.2 non — no / not

After French’s home-grown *oui*, its **no** is the family word, shared straight with Spanish — but said the French way, through the nose.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

non = **no**. It comes from Latin **nōn**, the same source as Spanish *no* and Italian *no*:

Latin <i>nōn</i>	→
Spanish	no
Italian	no
French	non

Spanish dropped the *n* and left a clean *no*. French **kept** the *n* — but turned it into a **nasal vowel**: you don’t quite touch your tongue to say the final *n*, you send the vowel through your nose. That’s the sound written **-on** in *non*, *bon*, *bonjour* — you’ve met it before.

Grammar Lens: The seed of French negation

The word that actually carries negation inside a French sentence isn’t *non* but its **unstressed twin**, **ne** — both worn down from the same Latin *nōn*. Modern French usually reinforces *ne* with a second word, giving the pair *ne ... pas*:

Je ne parle pas français = “I do **not** speak French.”

For now, **non** on its own is your answer-word. In *ne ... pas*, the **ne** is *non*’s cousin from *nōn*; the **pas** was added later — it originally meant “a step” (Latin *passus*), as in “not walk a *step*” — and simply stuck. That fuller sentence negation is something you’ll build later.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “non” — nasal, through the nose, like the *-on* in *bon*
- the pair with yes — “oui / non”
- the family — Latin *nōn* → Spanish *no*, French *non*

Before you move on

How do you say no in French? (**non**.) What Latin word is it from, and which Spanish word is its twin? (**nōn**; Spanish **no**.) What did French do to the *n* that Spanish dropped? (Kept it as a **nasal vowel** — the *-on* sound.) What pair does full French negation usually wrap around the verb? (**ne ... pas**.)

Chapter 23

Please

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can say please in French and choose between *s’il vous plaît* and *s’il te plaît* depending on who I am speaking to.

Say s’il vous plaît with its silent final -t, take it apart into ‘if it pleases you’, then switch to s’il te plaît for a friend. The chapter’s only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

23.1 s’il vous plaît — please

French doesn’t order you to do things — it asks, very politely, *if it would please you*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

s’il vous plaît = **please** — but taken apart it’s a tiny sentence:

s’ (*si*, “if”) + **il** (“it”) + **vous** (“you”) + **plaît** (“pleases”) → “if it pleases you.”

You’re not demanding; you’re checking whether the favour would please them. It’s the polite indirectness Spanish also uses in *por favor* (“for a favour”) — same courtesy, built a different way.

The verb **plaît** is from Latin **placēre**, “to please” — which English borrowed wholesale: **please**, **pleasure**, **pleasant**, and (via “calm, pleasing”) even **placid**.

Grammar Lens: Formal and familiar

French chooses the word for “you” by who you’re talking to — and *please* comes in both:

- **s’il vous plaît** — *vous*, the **formal** / **plural** you (a stranger, an elder, a room). Often written **SVP**.
- **s’il te plaît** — *te*, the **familiar** you (a friend, a child).

Two sounds to respect: the final **-t** of *plaît* is **silent** (*pleh*), and *plaît* itself carries the *ai* = *eh* you’ve met.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “s’il vous plaît” — final t silent, *see voo pleh*
- taken apart — “if it pleases you”
- familiar — “s’il te plaît” to a friend

Before you move on

How do you say please in French? (**s’il vous plaît**.) What does it literally mean? (“**If it pleases you.**”) Which Latin verb is *plaît* from, and what English words come from it? (**placēre** — *please*, *pleasure*, *placid*.) When do you say **s’il te plaît** instead? (To someone you address as **tu** — a friend or child.)

Chapter 24

Sorry

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can apologise in French and pick between *je suis désolé(e)*, *pardon* and *excusez-moi* for the situation I am actually in.

Say je suis désolé(e) knowing it literally means 'I am desolate', then place pardon as the quick reflex and excusez-moi as the attention-getter. The chapter's only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

24.1 je suis désolé(e) — “I’m sorry” (literally “I am desolate”)

You already know *s’il vous plaît*, “please” — “if it pleases you.” French’s “sorry” is, secretly, a much bigger word than it sounds: *désolé* is the same word as English **desolate**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- *je suis* = “I am.”
- *désolé* (feminine *désolée*) = “sorry,” but literally “**made utterly alone / devastated.**” It comes from Latin *dēsōlāre*, “to make solitary” — *dē-* (“thoroughly, completely”) + *sōlus* (“alone”), the very root of English **sole**, **solo**, **solitary**, and **desolate** itself.

So *je suis désolé(e)* literally says “**I am desolate**” — French reaches

for a word of real devastation to say a plain “sorry,” the way English keeps “terribly sorry” as an option rather than a requirement.

Why it’s said this way

French keeps two more courtesy words for different jobs:

- **pardon** — a quick, all-purpose “sorry / pardon me” (bumping someone, a small slip). It comes from **pardonner**, Latin **per-** (“thoroughly”) + **dōnāre** (“to give”) — “to give completely,” i.e. to forgive. The neat part isn’t that French and Spanish coined this separately — it’s that they **didn’t have to**: **perdōnāre** was already one word in Late Latin, so French *pardonner* and Spanish *perdón/perdonar* are simply two children of the *same* inherited word, not two languages independently landing on the same idea.
- **excusez-moi** — “**excuse me**,” from **excuser** < Latin **ex-** (“out of, free from”) + **causa** (“cause, charge”) — literally “to free from a charge.” Reach for this to get someone’s **attention**, not to apologize for a real fault.

Je suis désolé(e) carries the most **regret**; **pardon** is the quick, light reflex; **excusez-moi** is for getting attention. Native speakers slide between all three by feel.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “désolé” — sorry / desolate — then “je suis désolé,” I am sorry
- the quick one — “pardon”
- the attention one — “excusez-moi”

Before you move on

What does **désolé** literally mean, and what English word is it identical to? (“**Made utterly alone**” — the same word as English **desolate**.) What is **pardon** built from, and why does **Spanish perdón** look just like it? (**Per-** “thoroughly” + **dōnāre** “to give” — both simply inherited the *same* already-formed Latin

word, **perdōnāre**.) What's **excusez-moi** for? (**Getting someone's attention**, not apologizing for a real fault.)

Chapter 25

Weather

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can talk about the weather in French — *quel temps fait-il, il fait chaud, il fait froid, il pleut.*

Use le temps in both its senses, build the weather with faire (il fait chaud / il fait froid), and say il pleut with the Latin pl- cluster French kept intact. The chapter’s only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

25.1 le temps, il pleut — the same Latin word, a different fate for “rain”

You’ve seen Spanish’s *tiempo* mean both “time” and “weather” at once, from Latin *tempus*. French has the exact same word, the exact same double meaning — because this widening happened within Latin itself, before French and Spanish went their separate ways.

The two words: le temps — time and weather

le temps = both “**time**” and “**weather**” — from Latin **tempus**, same as Spanish’s *tiempo* (English kept only the “time” half: **temporal, tempo**). So **quel temps fait-il ?** (“what’s the weather like?”) is literally “**what time does it make?**” — the identical construction inside Spanish’s *¿qué tiempo hace?*

Grammar Lens: il fait chaud / il fait froid

Il fait chaud. — “It’s hot.” — literally “it **makes** hot.” **Il fait froid.** — “It’s cold.” — literally “it **makes** cold.”

Same *hacer*-style periphrasis as Spanish, just with French’s own **faire** (“to make/do”).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Il pleut. — “It’s raining.” — from **pleuvoir** ← Latin **pluere**, “to rain” — the **same** Latin verb behind Spanish’s *llueve*. But here’s the honest difference: Spanish underwent the **pl-** → **ll-** shift (*pluere* → *llover*), while French kept the **pl-** cluster fully intact — *pleuvoir* still visibly starts with *pl-*, just like the Latin original. So the same Latin verb took two different sound-change paths in its two daughters: one eroded the cluster, one preserved it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le temps” — time, or weather, depending on context
- “il fait chaud. il fait froid.” — it’s hot/cold
- “il pleut” — it’s raining, *pl-* kept intact from Latin

Before you move on

What two things does **le temps** mean, and where does this polysemy come from? (“**Time**” and “**weather**” — from Latin *tempus*, already double-sensed before French/Spanish split apart.) Does French’s *il pleut* show the same *pl-* → *ll-* shift as Spanish’s *llueve*? (**No** — French kept the *pl-* cluster intact; only Spanish underwent that shift.)

Chapter 26

Dog and Cat

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a dog and a cat in French and say why chien is the regular descendant of canis while chat is a word that travelled out of Egypt.

Say chien and check its ca- → cha- shift against champ and chanter, then say chat and place it beside Spanish gato and Italian gatto as one inherited cattus. The chapter's only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

26.1 chien, chat — the regular one, and the well-traveled one

You've met Spanish's *perro*, a genuine unsolved mystery, and Latin's own *canis/fēlēs→cattus* history. French's two animal words tell a cleaner story: one is perfectly regular, the other is the same well- documented word you already know.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

chien (“dog”) comes straight from Latin **canis** (accusative *canem*) — and unlike Spanish, French kept it. Two separate, regular changes are stacked here: the initial **c→ch** is the same **ca- → cha-** palatalization you can check against other Latin words — **campus → champ** (“field”), **cantāre → chanter** (“to sing”); the **a→ie** in the middle is a different, later shift specific to words like *canem* (known as Bartsch’s Law — the outcome is completely regular and undisputed, even though

the precise phonetic trigger is still debated). Put together, *chien* is a fully **regular** sound change, following French’s own rules predictably — a genuinely different story from Spanish, where the expected descendant (*can*) got pushed aside by the still-unexplained *perro*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

chat (“cat”) continues **cattus**, the same Late Latin word — most likely ultimately **Afro-Asiatic** (compare Nubian *kadis*) — that spread along Roman trade routes as domestic cats themselves spread out of **Egypt**. This is the identical word behind Spanish’s *gato* and Italian’s *gatto* — French, Spanish, and Italian all independently inherited the exact same Late Latin replacement for Classical *fēlēs*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “chien” — dog, the regular descendant of *canis*
- “champ, chanter” — the same *ca-* → *cha-* shift, in field and to sing
- “chat” — cat, the same word as Spanish’s *gato*, from Egypt via Rome

Before you move on

Is *chien* a regular or irregular descendant of Latin *canis*? (**Regular** — the same *ca-* → *cha-* shift as *champ* and *chanter*.) Does French show the same *perro*-style mystery Spanish does for “dog”? (**No** — French kept the expected Latin word.) What word does *chat* continue, and where did that word most likely originate? (**Cattus**, most likely **Afro-Asiatic**, traveling with the cat out of **Egypt**.)

Chapter 27

Green and Yellow

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

***By the end of this chapter:** I can name green and yellow in French, and say how solid the claimed link between jaune and German gelb actually is.*

Say vert as the ordinary Romance inheritance from viridis, say jaune as galbinus ‘yellow-green’, and state the jaune / gelb cousinhood as probable rather than certain. The chapter’s only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

27.1 vert, jaune — the expected inheritance, and a hidden PIE-level cousin

French’s green word is exactly what you’d expect. Its yellow word hides something you won’t expect at all — a secret cousin sitting inside German.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

vert (“green”) ← Latin **viridis** — and this is genuinely the **standard** source of “green” across nearly every Romance language: Spanish *verde*, Italian *verde*, Portuguese *verde*, Catalan *verd*. No surprise here — a clean, shared inheritance.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

jaune (“yellow”) ← Latin **galbinus**, which literally meant “yellow-green” — an extended form of **galbus**, from **Proto-Indo-European** **ghel-*, “to shine” (with derivatives covering green, yellow, and gold alike — the same root gives Greek *khlōros*, “greenish-yellow”). Here’s the genuinely surprising part: this **same PIE root**, **ghel-*, is also usually cited as the source of **German’s** **gelb** and **English’s** **yellow** — by a completely separate, Germanic path (Proto-Germanic **gelwaz*). Honesty check, though: the *galbus*→**ghel-* link itself is **less secure** than it looks — some modern Latin scholarship treats *galbus*’s origin as unknown rather than confirming the connection. So *jaune* and *gelb* are **probably** cousins at the Proto-Indo-European level, despite one reaching French through Latin and the other reaching German directly through Germanic — just don’t treat that link as airtight.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vert” — green, the standard Romance word
- “jaune” — yellow, literally “yellow-green”
- the probable cousin — “jaune, gelb” — likely the same ancient PIE root, two completely different paths, though the link isn’t airtight

Before you move on

Is **vert** a typical or unusual Romance word for “green”? (**Typical** — the standard source across nearly all Romance languages.) What did Latin **galbinus**, the source of *jaune*, literally mean? (“**Yellow-green.**”) What German word is usually called *jaune*’s deep PIE cousin, and how solid is that link? (**Gelb** — both usually traced to PIE **ghel-*, “to shine,” though modern Latin scholarship treats *galbus*’s origin as genuinely unknown, so the connection is probable, not certain.)

Chapter 28

Taking, Asking, Helping, Loving

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say that I take, ask, help and like or love in French, break prendre's stem the way its plural requires, and know that je t'aime bien is weaker than je t'aime rather than stronger.

Run the chapter's four verbs together with je — je prends, je demande, j'aide, j'aime — then turn aimer over: one verb covers like and love, the thing named decides which, and adding bien downgrades it. Reaches back past the chapter to re-say le chien and le chat from Chapter 22, le vert from Chapter 23, and the s'il vous plaît request from Chapter 19.

28.1 prendre — “to take,” the verb your hand does

You already have **la main**, the hand. Here is the verb that hand performs — and it turns out to be hiding inside a surprising number of English words you use without thinking.

You'll want to know: the word

prendre — to take. Said *PRAHN-druh*: the *-en-* is the **nasal** vowel of *an*, sent through the nose, not a clean *en*.

Je prends le pain. — I take the bread.

The *-ds* of *je prends* is **silent**. You say *prahn*, and stop.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

prendre ← Latin **prehendere**, “to grasp, to seize,” which Romans themselves shortened to **prendere**. That short form is the one French inherited — and English borrowed the family repeatedly:

- **prehensile** — a tail that grasps.
- **apprehend** — to seize (*ad-* “toward” + grasp); **reprehensible**, something to be seized back on.
- **prison** ← Latin *prehensiō*, “**a seizing**” — a jail is, literally, a taking-hold.
- **surprise** — French *sur-* “over” + *prendre*: an **over-taking**.
- **enterprise**, something undertaken; **apprentice**, one who takes on.
- **impregnable** — from Old French *imprenable*, “**not takeable**.” Nothing to do with pregnancy.

Manus gave you a hand that **holds** — *manual*, *maintain*. *Prendere* gives you the hand that **closes**.

Grammar Lens: the stem that doubles

Prendre is irregular, and its irregularity is one clean rule: the stem **loses** its *d*, and in the *ils* form it **doubles its n**. Say the six:

- **je prends** — *prahn*
- **tu prends** — *prahn*
- **il prend** — *prahn* (all three identical to the ear)
- **nous prenons** — *pruh-NOHN*, and the nasal is **gone**
- **vous prenez** — *pruh-NAY*, nasal gone again
- **ils prennent** — *PREN*, a doubled *n* and a flat *e*

So the nasal survives in the singular and dies in the plural. That is the whole verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “prendre” — *PRAHN-druh*, nasal in the middle
- “je prends le pain” then “nous prenons le pain” — nasal, then no nasal
- “je prends la main” — I take the hand, the *manus* you already have
- the family — “prehensile, apprehend, prison, surprise” — all a **grasp**

Before you move on

Say “I take the bread.” (*Je prends le pain* — and the *-ds* is silent.) What happens to the nasal in *nous prenons*? (It **disappears**; the stem flattens to *pruh-*.) What did Latin *prehendere* mean, and what is a *prison* literally? (**To grasp**; a prison is “**a seizing**.”) And the hand that does the taking? (*La main*.)

28.2 demander — “to ask,” and the trap it sets in English

Prendre was taking. This one is the opposite move: putting a question out. And it is the word most likely to make you sound furious when you meant to sound polite.

You’ll want to know: the word

demandeur — to ask. Said *duh-mahn-DAY*: the *-an-* is that same nasal from *prendre*, and the *-er* ending is a clean *ay*.

Je demande l’heure. — I ask the time.

It is an ordinary **-er** verb, so nothing in it breaks: *je demande, tu demandes, il demande, nous demandons, vous demandez, ils demandent*. Only *nous* and *vous* are audible; the other four all sound *duh-MAHND*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

demander ← Latin **dēmandāre**, “to hand over, to entrust” — *dē-* plus **mandāre**. And *mandāre* is itself two words: *manus*, “**hand**,” plus *dare*, “**to give**.” Giving into the hand.

So the *manus* you met in *la main* is sitting inside this verb too:

- **mandate** — what was placed in someone’s hands to carry out.
- **command** — *com-* + *mandāre*: to entrust an order; and **commandment**, ten of them.
- **mandatory** — handed over as an obligation; **remand**, handed back.

One family, two very different jobs: *manual* is work done **by** the hand, *mandate* is a charge given **into** it.

Why it’s said this way

Careful. French **demander** means simply “**to ask**.” It is neutral, everyday and perfectly polite. English **demand** is forceful — a thing you insist on.

Je demande l’heure is “I’m asking the time,” not “I demand the time.” The English word drifted toward force; the French one never did. Translate *demander* as **ask**, every time, and you will never be rude by accident.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “demander” — *duh-mahn-DAY*, nasal in the middle
- “je demande l’heure” — I **ask** the time, not demand it
- “je prends, je demande” — take, then ask
- the family — “mandate, command, mandatory” — a **hand** and a **giving**

Before you move on

Say “I ask the time.” (*Je demande l’heure.*) Does *demander* carry the force of English *demand*? (**No** — it is the ordinary, polite word for asking.) What two Latin words are inside *mandāre*, and which one do you already know? (**Manus** “hand” — the source of *la main* — plus **dare**, “to give.”)

28.3 aider — “to help,” and the English word that is really the same word

You can ask for something now. This is the verb for what you hope the other person then does — and it is one of the rare cases where the English cousin is not a distant relative but the very same word, spelled shorter.

You’ll want to know: the word

aider — to help. Said *ay-DAY*: the *ai-* is a plain *ay*, the *-er* ending is another *ay*. Two of them in a row.

Vous m’aidez. — You are helping me.

Another ordinary **-er** verb: *j’aide*, *tu aides*, *il aide*, *nous aidons*, *vous aidez*, *ils aident*. The *j’* is the elision you already make in *j’ai*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

aider ← Latin **adiūtāre**, a repeated-action form of **adiuvāre** — *ad-* “toward” plus **iuvāre**, “to help.” English took the same verb through French and clipped it:

- **aid** — the noun and verb; **aide**, a person who is your help.
- **aide-de-camp** — literally a “camp helper,” an officer’s assistant.
- **adjutant**, the officer who assists; **adjuvant**, a substance in medicine that helps another one work.

Two honesty notes. English **help** is **Germanic** and has no connection to *aider* whatsoever. And **juvenile** is *not* in this family: that is Latin *iuvenis*, “young,” a different word that merely resembles *iuvāre*.

Grammar Lens: asking for it politely

Put the verb together with the courtesy you already have:

Vous m’aidez, s’il vous plaît. — Help me, please. **Tu m’aides, s’il te plaît.** — the same request, to a friend.

The register has to match on **both** halves. *Vous* takes *s’il vous plaît*; *tu* takes *s’il te plaît*. Mixing them — *tu m’aides, s’il vous plaît* — is the mistake a beginner makes most, and a French ear catches it instantly.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “aider” — *ay-DAY*, two *ay* sounds
- “j’aide” then “vous aidez”
- “vous m’aidez, s’il vous plaît” — both halves formal
- “tu m’aides, s’il te plaît” — both halves familiar
- “je demande, vous aidez” — I ask, you help

Before you move on

Ask a stranger for help, politely. (*Vous m’aidez, s’il vous plaît.*) And a friend? (*Tu m’aides, s’il te plaît* — both halves change together.) What Latin verb is *aider* from, and which English word is the same word? (**Adiūtāre**; English **aid**.) Is English *help* related? (**No** — it is Germanic, unrelated.)

28.4 aimer — one verb for “like” and “love,” and the word that weakens it

Three verbs so far: *je prends*, *je demande*, *j’aide*. The fourth does a job English needs **two** words for — and the way you soften it is the opposite of what you would guess.

You'll want to know: the word

aimer — to like **and** to love. Said *ay-MAY*: the *ai-* is *ay*, the *-mer* is *may*.

J'aime le chien. — I like the dog. **J'aime le chat.** — I like the cat.

An ordinary **-er** verb: *j'aime, tu aimes, il aime, nous aimons, vous aimez, ils aiment*. French does not choose between “like” and “love” — the **thing you name** does. A dog, a colour, a food: that reads as *like*. A person: *love*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

aimer ← Latin **amāre**, “to love,” and English is full of it:

- **amateur** — one who does a thing **for love**, not for money.
- **amorous**, full of love; **enamoured**, in it; **paramour**, beside it.
- **amiable** and **amicable** — from *amīcus*, “friend”; **amity** between nations.

An honest stop, though: unlike *viridis* behind **vert**, *amāre* has **no agreed ancestor** beyond Latin. It is often guessed to be a nursery word, a baby's *amma*, but that is a guess. The trail genuinely ends at Latin.

Why it's said this way

Je t'aime. — I love you. Full strength. **Je t'aime bien.**
— I like you. **Much** weaker.

Every English speaker gets this backwards. *Bien* means “well,” so *je t'aime bien* looks like it ought to be **more**. It is **less**. Adding *bien* — or *beaucoup* — downgrades love to friendly liking, which is exactly why *je t'aime bien* is the polite way to turn someone down.

With a thing, no such danger: *j'aime bien le chat* is simply “I quite like the cat.” The trap only bites when the object is a **person**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “j’aime le chien” then “j’aime le chat” — liking, because they are animals
- “j’aime le vert” — I like green
- “je t’aime” then “je t’aime bien” — love, then only liking
- the four verbs — “je prends, je demande, j’aide, j’aime”
- “vous m’aidez, s’il vous plaît” — the request, once more
- “aimer, amateur, amiable” — the *amāre* family, which stops at Latin

Before you move on

Which is stronger, *je t’aime* or *je t’aime bien*? (***Je t’aime*** — *bien* makes it **weaker**.) Say “I like the dog” and “I like green.” (*J’aime le chien. J’aime le vert.*) What does *amateur* literally mean, and how far back does *amāre* go? (One who does it **for love**; the trail **stops at Latin**.) Say the chapter’s four verbs with *je*. (*Je prends, je demande, j’aide, j’aime.*)

Chapter 29

Verbs of the Mind

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I understand, think, read and write in French, and take *comprendre* apart into *com-* plus *prendre* — so understanding, in French, is grasping.

Say the chapter's four with *je* — *je comprends, je pense, je lis, j'écris* — and take *écrire* apart into *scribere* 'to scratch' plus the propped-up *é-* that also made *école* and *étoile*. Reaches back past the chapter to *la main* and *manus* from Chapter 17, which meet *écrire* inside the single word *manuscript*, and to *prendre* and *aimer* from Chapter 24.

29.1 *comprendre* — “to understand,” which is just taking, together

This is the cheapest verb you will ever learn, because you already own all of it. *Prendre* was “to take.” Put *com-* in front, and French tells you what it thinks understanding actually is.

You'll want to know: the word

comprendre — to understand. Said *kohn-PRAHN-druh*: two nasals in a row, *kohn* then *prahn*.

Je comprends. — I understand. **Vous comprenez ?** — Do you understand?

The *-ds* of *je comprends* is silent, exactly as in *je prends*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

comprendre is **com-** (“together, with”) + **prendre** (“to take”), and Latin had already built it: **comprehendere**, “to grasp several things at once.” Nothing has been added since. To understand, in French, is to **get your hand around the whole of it**.

English took the long Latin form and the short French one both:

- **comprehend** — the full Latin spelling, straight through.
- **comprehensive** — having taken everything in; **comprehension**.
- **comprise** — from French *compris*, “taken together”: what a thing takes in.

And you can hear the metaphor still alive in English: we say we **grasp** an idea, or that a point is **over our heads** — out of reach of the hand.

Grammar Lens: the same verb, so the same forms

Because *comprendre* is *prendre* with a prefix, it breaks in exactly the same places. Nothing new to memorise — say the six and hear the nasal die in the plural, just as before:

- **je comprends** — *kohn-PRAHN*
- **tu comprends** — *kohn-PRAHN*
- **il comprend** — *kohn-PRAHN* (three identical to the ear)
- **nous comprenons** — *kohn-pruh-NOHN*, nasal gone from the stem
- **vous comprenez** — *kohn-pruh-NAY*
- **ils comprennent** — *kohn-PREN*, the doubled *n* again

This is worth more than one verb. Every French verb built on *prendre* behaves this way, so the pattern you drilled once now pays out repeatedly.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “je prends” then “je comprends” — the second is the first, plus *com-*
- “nous prenons, nous comprenons” — both lose the nasal
- “vous comprenez ?” then answer “oui” and then “non”
- “comprendre, comprehend, comprise” — one family, two spellings

Before you move on

What two pieces is *comprendre* made of, and what does the whole literally mean? (*Com-* “together” + *prendre* “to take” — **to take together**.) Say “we understand.” (*Nous comprenons* — nasal gone, like *nous prenons*.) Someone asks *vous comprenez ?* — give both possible answers. (*Oui* or *non*.)

29.2 penser — “to think,” which began as weighing

Understanding, you saw with *comprendre*, is grasping. This verb says thinking is **weighing** — and once you know that, half a dozen English words you use in money and medicine suddenly line up behind it.

You’ll want to know: the word

penser — to think. Said *pahn-SAY*: the *-en-* is the nasal you have been making since *prendre*, and *-er* is a clean *ay*.

Je pense. — I think. **Vous pensez ?** — Do you think so?

A completely regular **-er** verb after the strain of *comprendre*: *je pense*, *tu penses*, *il pense*, *nous pensons*, *vous pensez*, *ils pensent*. Four of the six sound identical — *pahns* — and only *nous* and *vous* stand out.

Sounds you'll need

Two nasals sit close together in French and beginners flatten them into one. Hold them apart by saying them back to back:

- **non** — the **-on** nasal, rounded, lips pushed forward.
- **pense** — the **-en** nasal, unrounded, mouth wider and flatter.

Same trick every time: your **lips** tell the two apart, not your tongue.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

penser ← Latin **pēnsāre**, “to weigh carefully,” a repeated-action form of **pendere**, “to weigh, to hang.” Roman weighing was done by hanging things from a balance, which is why one root covers both. English inherited the whole scale:

- **pensive** — weighing something in your mind.
- **compensate** — to weigh one thing **against** another until they balance; **expense** and **expend**, money **weighed out**; **dispense**, weighed apart.
- **pension** — originally a weighing-out, a payment; **poise**, a balance held.
- **suspend** and **pendant** — the hanging half of the same root.

The prettiest cousin is a flower. French **pensée** means “**a thought**” — and English borrowed it, sound and all, as **pansy**.
One honest note: English **think** is **Germanic** and is not related to any of this. The two words mean the same thing and share no history.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “penser” — *pahn-SAY*
- “non, pense” — the round nasal, then the flat one
- “je pense” then “je comprends” — I think, I understand

- “penser, pensive, compensate, pansy” — all a **weighing**

Before you move on

Say “I think” and “do you think so.” (*Je pense. Vous pensez ?*)
 What did Latin *pēnsāre* mean, and name three English cousins. (**To weigh** — *pensive, compensate, expense, pension, poise*.) What flower is French for “a thought”? (The **pansy**, from *pensée*.) Which of *non* and *pense* has the rounded lips? (**Non** — *pense* is flat and wide.)

29.3 lire — “to read,” which used to mean “to pick up”

A short word with an enormous family behind it. Before *lire* meant reading, its Latin ancestor meant **gathering** — and that older sense is why a dozen English words that seem unrelated turn out to be relatives.

You’ll want to know: the word

lire — to read. Said *leer*, with the throaty French **r** at the end.

Je lis le français. — I read French.

Lire is irregular, and its stem grows an **s** in the plural. Say the six:

- **je lis** — *lee*, the *-s* silent
- **tu lis** — *lee*
- **il lit** — *lee* (three identical again)
- **nous lisons** — *lee-ZOHN*, and there is the *s*
- **vous lisez** — *lee-ZAY*
- **ils lisent** — *LEEZ*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

lire ← Latin **legere**, whose first meaning was “**to gather, to pick out**.” Reading was a later use of it: your eye picks the letters up off the page one after another. Both senses left English words behind. The reading half:

- **legible**, able to be picked out; **lecture**, “a reading”; **lesson**, from *lectiō*, the passage read aloud.
- **legend** — literally “**things which must be read**.”

The gathering half, which is the surprise:

- **collect** — gather together; **select**, gather apart; **elect**, pick out; **neglect**, fail to pick up at all.
- **elegant** — originally “choosy,” someone who picks well; **diligent**; **intellect**, what picks between things.

One honest limit. Greek’s **legein** — the *-logy* in every science name — is a **cousin**, not a parent: it descends from the same ancient root alongside Latin *legere*, rather than from it. And French **le livre**, “book,” is not in this family at all; that is Latin *liber*, a separate word.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “lire” — *leer*, throaty *r*
- *Say it*: “je lis” then “nous lisons” — the *s* appears
- [YOU READ ALOUD, gathering the words one by one: “le chien, le chat”]
- *Say it*: “je lis le français” then “je pense”
- *Say it*: “legible, lecture, collect, elect, elegant” — all a **picking out**

Before you move on

Say “I read French” and “we read.” (*Je lis le français. Nous lisons* — the *s* only appears in the plural.) What did Latin *legere* mean first? (**To gather, to pick out** — reading came second.) Which of

collect, elegant and *book* is **not** in this family? (**Book** — French *livre* is from *liber*, a different word.) Now read these two aloud. (*Le chien, le chat.*)

29.4 écrire — “to write,” born from a scratch

You can think, understand and read. The last of the four is the one that puts something back out — and its French spelling still carries a repair job the language did more than a thousand years ago.

You’ll want to know: the word

écrire — to write. Said *ay-KREER*: the *é* is a sharp *ay*, then the throaty *r* at the end, as in *lire*.

J’écris le français. — I write French.

Irregular, and the stem grows a **v** in the plural:

- **j’écris** — *ay-KREE*
- **tu écris** — *ay-KREE*
- **il écrit** — *ay-KREE*
- **nous écrivons** — *ay-kree-VOHN*, and there is the *v*
- **vous écrivez** — *ay-kree-VAY*
- **ils écrivent** — *ay-KREEV*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

écrire ← Latin **scribere**, “**to scratch, to incise**.” A Roman wrote by scratching a stylus across wax, and the verb never forgot it. English took the Latin form whole:

- **scribe, script, scripture, scribble.**
- **describe** — scratch it down; **prescribe, subscribe, inscribe.**

Now the *é*. Latin *scribere* began with **sc-**, and a French-speaking

mouth could not start a word that way, so it propped one up with a vowel in front: *scribere* → *escrire* → **écrire**. The same repair ran through the whole language — *schola* became *école*, *spatha* became *épée*, *stella* became *étoile*. That accent is not decoration: it is standing where an *s* used to be.

And the best cousin belongs to both halves of this chapter.

Manuscript is *manus* + *scribere* — “**scratched by hand**.” **La main** and *écrire* meet inside one English word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “écrire” — *ay-KREER*
- “j’écris” then “nous écrivons” — the *v* appears in the plural
- the four of this chapter — “je comprends, je pense, je lis, j’écris”
- “j’écris à la main” — I write by hand; that is *manuscript*, taken apart
- “j’aime lire” then “j’aime écrire” — I like reading, I like writing
- “je prends le pain, et j’écris” — the taking verb, still there
- “lire, écrire” — gathering off the page, scratching onto it

Before you move on

Say “I write” and “we write.” (*J’écris. Nous écrivons* — the *v* arrives in the plural.) What did *scribere* literally mean, and why does *écrire* start with an *é*? (**To scratch**; French propped a vowel in front of Latin’s *sc-*, the same repair that made *école* and *étoile*.) Pull *manuscript* apart. (*Manus* “**hand**” — your *la main* — plus *scribere*, “scratched”: **written by hand**.) Now say the four verbs of this chapter with *je*. (*Je comprends, je pense, je lis, j’écris*.)

Chapter 30

Hearing, Sleeping, Walking, Running

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say that I hear, sleep, walk and run in French, use ça marche for “that works,” and say why entendre carries English’s intend inside it while the Latin verb for hearing ended up in English instead.

Run the chapter’s four verbs together with je — j’entends, je dors, je marche, je cours — then use courir’s spelling to settle why canis became chien while currere stayed hard at the front: the ca- shift only ever struck c before a. Reaches back past the chapter to le chien and its palatalization from Chapter 22, le chat from the same chapter, il fait chaud and il pleut from Chapter 21, and the ne ... pas negation from Chapter 18.

30.1 entendre — “to hear,” and the stretching inside it

You can think and understand. Now the ear — and French’s word for it is English’s *intend*.

You’ll want to know: the word

entendre — to hear. Two nasal *an* sounds in a row, then the *-dre* of *prendre*: say it *ahn-TAHN-druh*.

J’entends le chien. — I hear the dog.

The *-ds* of *j'entends* is silent, as in *je prends*.

Grammar Lens: the nasal that stays put

Prendre's nasal dies in the plural. *Entendre* looks like its twin and does the opposite — the stem never moves:

- **j'entends** — *jahn-TAHN*
- **tu entends** — *ahn-TAHN*
- **il entend** — *ahn-TAHN* (three identical to the ear)
- **nous entendons** — *ahn-tahn-DOHN*, nasal still there
- **vous entendez** — *ahn-tahn-DAY*
- **ils entendent** — *ahn-TAHND*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

entendre ← Latin **intendere** — **in-** “toward” plus **tendere**, “to stretch.” To *intendere* was to stretch a thing out and aim it: a bowstring, a journey, your attention. English kept the family — **intend**, plainest of them, plus **intent**, **intense**, **tension**, a **tent** (a stretched skin), **extend** and **pretend**.

Set your three mind-verbs together: French pictures each as a different thing the body does.

- **comprendre** — to **grasp together**, built on *prendre*.
- **penser** — to **weigh**, from *pēnsāre*.
- **entendre** — to **stretch toward**.

Why it's said this way

From its oldest French records *entendre* already covers a span at once: to hear, to attend, to understand, to intend. Nothing arrived late.

What happened since is that the other senses fell away and hearing took the word outright — because Latin's verb for hearing, **audire**, wore down in French to *ouïr* and stopped being usable. English kept that family instead: **audio**, **audience**, **audible**, **audition**.

The abandoned senses survive in phrases French never rebuilt:

- **entendu** — “understood,” “agreed.”
- **s’entendre** — to hear one another, and so to **get along**.
- **l’entente** — an understanding between parties, borrowed into English whole in *Entente Cordiale*.

So the two languages split one Latin pair: French hears with the verb English uses for intending, and English hears with the verb French let go.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “entendre” — *ahn-TAHN-druh*, two nasals
- “j’entends le chien”
- “nous prenons” then “nous entendons” — one flattens, one holds
- “j’écris, je comprends, j’entends”
- the three pictures — stretching, grasping, weighing
- “intend, tension, tent” — all a stretching

Before you move on

Say “I hear the dog” and “we hear.” (*J’entends le chien. Nous entendons* — and unlike *nous prenons*, nothing flattens.) What did *intendere* mean, and which English verb is its plainest survival? (**To stretch toward; intend.**) Why did French hand hearing to this verb? (Latin’s *audire* wore down to *ouïr* and fell out of use — English kept the *audire* words instead.) What does *s’entendre* mean? (**To get along.**)

30.2 dormir — “to sleep,” and the room named after it

After a verb that changed jobs, here is one that never changed. *Dormir* is Latin’s word for sleeping, handed on almost untouched — and it hides one trap.

You'll want to know: the word

dormir — to sleep. Said *dor-MEER*, with the throaty French **r** in the middle and at the end.

Le chat dort. — The cat is sleeping.

French has no separate “is sleeping” form. *Il dort* covers both “he sleeps” and “he is sleeping”; the plain present does all the work.

Grammar Lens: the m that goes missing

The stem is *dorm-*, and in the singular French throws the **m** away. Listen for where it comes back:

- **je dors** — *dor*
- **tu dors** — *dor*
- **il dort** — *dor* (three identical, the *m* gone)
- **nous dormons** — *dor-MOHN*, and there it is
- **vous dormez** — *dor-MAY*
- **ils dorment** — *DORM*

One rule, and you have the whole verb: singular loses the last stem consonant, plural gets it back. A small family of *-ir* verbs shares the shape, so learning it once is worth more than one verb.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

dormir ← Latin **dormīre**, “to sleep.” Spanish kept *dormir*, Italian *dormire*, Portuguese *dormir* — the verb crossed into its daughter languages untouched, which is rarer than it sounds. English has no inherited descendant; it borrowed the family later, through French:

- **dormitory** ← *dormitōrium*, a sleeping place; French wore the identical word down to **dortoir**.
- **dormant** — Old French *dormant*, “sleeping”; a dormant volcano is asleep.
- **dormer** — a roof window, from Old French *dormeor*, because

the room behind it was where you slept.

And an honest stop. The **dormouse** looks like the best cousin of the lot and is not one. The story needs an Anglo-Norman word for “sleeper” that nobody has found in a text, and *dormouse*’s real origin is unknown. A guess in circulation, not an etymology.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “dormir” — *dor-MEER*, throaty *r*
- “je dors” then “nous dormons” — the *m* vanishes, then returns
- “le chat dort” — the cat, the travelling word out of Egypt
- “j’entends le chat” then “le chat dort”
- “dormir, dormitory, dormant” — one Latin verb, borrowed back
- “je comprends” then “je dors”

Before you move on

Say “the cat is sleeping” and “we sleep.” (*Le chat dort. Nous dormons* — the *m* is silent in the singular and audible in the plural.) Where does *dormitory* come from? (Latin *dormitōrium*, “a **sleeping place**” — and French wore the same word down to *dortoir*.) Is the **dormouse** in this family? (**No** — that is folk etymology; the word’s real origin is unknown.) And *chat* — an inherited Latin word, or a traveller? (**A traveller**, from *cattus*, moving with the cat itself out of Egypt.)

30.3 marcher — “to walk,” and the step hiding inside French negation

You can hear and you can sleep. Now move. This verb does a second job too, used dozens of times a day.

You'll want to know: the word

marcher — to walk. Said *mar-SHAY*: the *-er* is a clean *ay*, and the *ch* is *sh*, never *k*.

Je marche. — I walk.

After *dormir*'s vanishing *m*, this one asks nothing: an ordinary **-er** verb. *Je marche, tu marches, il marche, nous marchons, vous marchez, ils marchent* — four of the six sound identical, just *marsh*.

Why it's said this way

Marcher is also the everyday verb for a thing **working**. A machine, a plan, an arrangement: if it functions, it walks.

Ça marche. — “That works.” Also “Fine,” “Deal,” “Sounds good.” **Ça ne marche pas.** — “That doesn't work.”

There is your *ne ... pas* from the answer-word *non*, round a real verb at last. And *ça marche* alone is an agreement, two words long. *Entendre* once held several jobs and shed all but hearing. *Marcher* holds two right now.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Here the honest answer is that nobody is certain. Old French *marchier* first meant “**to trample, to tread on**,” and two accounts compete:

- Frankish **markōn**, “to mark, to press a step in” — preferred by most reference works.
- Late Latin *marcāre*, from **marcus**, “**a hammer**” — a blow and a tread being one motion.

Three consequences, in falling order of certainty:

- English **march**, the verb, is borrowed straight **from** *marcher*. Secure whichever origin is right.
- English **mark** is Germanic, from Old English *mearc*. A relative **only if** the Frankish account holds — conditional, not a fact.

- French **la marche**, a borderland, with **marquis** and German **margrave**, comes from the Germanic **noun** *marka*, “boundary” — a separate arrival.

And one cousin you own already. The **pas** in *ne ... pas* began as Latin *passus*, “**a step**.” *Je ne marche pas* is, underneath, “I do not walk a step.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “marcher” — *mar-SHAY*, *sh* not *k*
- “je marche” then “nous marchons”
- “ça marche” — that works, that’s fine
- “non”, then “je ne marche pas” — and *pas* is a **step**
- “j’entends, je dors, je marche”
- “nous dormons, nous marchons” — one stem shifts, one never does

Before you move on

Say “I walk” and “that works.” (*Je marche. Ça marche.*) What are the two competing origins? (Frankish **markōn**, “*to press a step in,*” or Latin **marcus**, “*a hammer.*” *Genuinely unsettled.*) Which English word is certainly related, and which only might be? (*March, borrowed straight from marcher; mark only if the Frankish account is right.*) What did *pas* mean before it meant “not”? (*A step.*)

30.4 courir — “to run,” and why it is not *chourir*

Hearing, sleeping, walking — and now the fastest of the four. Its Latin root is one of the busiest in English, and its spelling settles a question the dog raised.

You'll want to know: the word

courir — to run. Said *koo-REER*, throaty at both *rs*.

Le chien court. — The dog runs.

Grammar Lens: the same endings, a different stem

Courir takes *dormir*'s singular endings — **-s, -s, -t**, all silent:

- **je cours** — *koor*
- **tu cours** — *koor*
- **il court** — *koor*
- **nous courons** — *koo-ROHN*
- **vous courez** — *koo-RAY*
- **ils courent** — *KOOR*

But the resemblance stops there. *Dormir* **sheds** a consonant in the singular: *dorm-* becomes *dor-*. *Courir* sheds nothing — its stem *cour-* has nothing spare to lose.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Marcher left a choice between a Frankish verb and a Latin hammer. This one leaves none. **courir** ← Latin **currere**, “to run,” which English mined harder than almost any other verb:

- **current** and **currency** both run; a **cursor** runs across a screen; a **course** is a run, a **corridor** a running-place.
- **courier**, one who runs; **curriculum**, literally “**a running**.”
- **concur**, run together; **occur**, run up against; **excursion**.

Now the spelling question. *Chien* came from *canis*, and its **c** turned into **ch** — the shift that made *champ* and *chanter*. So why is this verb not *chourir*? Because that shift only struck **c** before **a**. *Currere* had **c** before **u**, untouched, so the *k* survived. One rule, two regular outcomes. One honest limit. Latin **carrus**, “wagon,” gave English **car** and **cargo**, and descends from the same very old root. But Latin borrowed

carrus from Gaulish: a cousin by another road, not a word built out of *currere*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the chapter's four with *je* — “j’entends, je dors, je marche, je cours”
- “le chien court” then “le chat dort”
- “il fait chaud, je cours”
- “il pleut, je ne cours pas”
- “je dors, nous dormons” then “je cours, nous courons” — one sheds
- “chien” then “courir” — *ch* before *a*, *k* before *u*
- “current, course, courier, curriculum” — every one a running
- “ça marche” — the agreement, two words

Before you move on

Say the chapter's four verbs with *je*. (*J’entends, je dors, je marche, je cours.*) What does **curriculum** literally mean? (**A running** — from *currere*.) Why did *canis* become *chien* while *currere* stayed hard? (The shift only hit **c** before **a**.) Which of the four began as a **stretching**? (**Entendre** — *intendere*, to stretch toward.) Now: “the dog runs” and “it is hot.” (*Le chien court. Il fait chaud.*)

Chapter 31

Sitting, Standing, Opening, Closing

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can sit down, get up, open and close in French, hold both accepted paradigms of s’asseoir apart, say why French needs two pieces — se lever and debout — where English has one verb “to stand,” and know that ouvrir takes marcher’s endings despite its -ir spelling.

Say the chapter’s four with je — je m’assieds, je me lève, j’ouvre, je ferme — drill ouvrir and fermer as one pair now that both carry the same endings, and take fermer apart into firmāre, ‘to make firm’, the verb that gave Italian fermare ‘to stop’ and Spanish firmar ‘to sign’. Reaches back past the chapter to open and close la main from Chapter 17, to close because il pleut from Chapter 21, and to ask in both registers and then apologise, from Chapters 19 and 20.

31.1 s’asseoir — “to sit down,” a verb you do to yourself

You have walked and you have run. Now stop. French does not say “I sit” — it says “**I seat myself**,” and that extra word is one you own.

You’ll want to know: the word

s’asseoir — to sit down. Said *sah-SWAHR*.

Je m’assieds. — I sit down. Said *juh mah-SYAY*.

The **m’** is the *me* inside *je m’appelle*: French treats sitting as something you do **to yourself**, so the pronoun is not optional.

Keep two ideas apart. *S’asseoir* is the **movement**, lowering yourself into a chair. **Je suis assis** is the **state** after it, “I am seated.” English lets *sit* cover both; French makes you choose.

Grammar Lens: one verb, two accepted sets

The only verb in this book with **two** correct answers, both in dictionaries. Learn this series whole:

- **je m’assieds** — *mah-SYAY*
- **tu t’assieds** — *tah-SYAY*
- **il s’assied** — *sah-SYAY* (three identical to the ear)
- **nous nous asseyons** — *noo-zah-say-YOHN*
- **vous vous asseyez** — *voo-zah-say-YAY*
- **ils s’asseyent** — *sah-SAY*

Then recognise the rival singulars **je m’assois**, **tu t’assois**, **il s’assoit** — ordinary spoken French. Their plurals (*assoyons*, *assoyez*) are much rarer in France, so the series above is the safer one to own. Since 1990 the infinitive may also be spelled **s’asseoir**. Nothing here is wrong; the language never chose.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

s’asseoir ← Vulgar Latin **adsedēre**, a remaking of Classical **adsidēre** — **ad-** “at” plus **sedēre**, “**to sit**.” Latin had built the compound; French only wore it down. And *sedēre* is everywhere in English:

- **sedentary**, sitting work; a **session**, “a sitting”; **sediment**, what sits at the bottom.
- **reside**, sit back; **preside** and **president**, sitting in front; **assiduous**, sitting at a task.
- **siege** — an army sitting down before a city; **possess**, **obsess**,

subsidy.

- A bishop's **see** is his *sedēs*, his **seat**.

Dormir English only borrowed. This root it owns from birth too: **sit**, **seat** and **settle** come down the Germanic road from the same source.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “s’asseoir” — *sah-SWAHR*
- “je m’assieds” then “nous nous asseyons”
- “je m’appelle” then “je m’assieds” — the same little *m’*
- “je m’assieds” then “je suis assis” — movement, then state
- “je marche, je cours, je m’assieds, je dors”
- “j’entends” — the ear needs no chair
- “sedentary, session, siege” — every one a sitting

Before you move on

Say “I sit down” and “we sit down.” (*Je m’assieds. Nous nous asseyons.*) Why is the pronoun there? (French sits you **yourself** down — the same *m’* as in *je m’appelle*.) What is a **siege**, literally? (**A sitting** — an army sitting down before a city.) Which English words are cousins of *sedēre* by birth rather than borrowing? (**Sit**, **seat**, **settle**.) Now the pair: “je cours” and “je dors.”

31.2 se lever, debout — standing, which French says in two pieces

You sat down. Getting up is harder, because French has **no single verb** for “to stand.” It splits the idea in two.

You'll want to know: the movement

se lever — to get up, to rise. Said *suh luh-VAY*.

Je me lève. — I get up. Said *juh muh LEV*.

Reflexive, as *s'asseoir* is: you raise **yourself**. After that verb's two paradigms this is a relief — an ordinary **-er** verb with one habit. Silent ending, and the *e* takes a **grave accent**; spoken ending, and it flattens:

- **je me lève** — *LEV*
- **tu te lèves** — *LEV*
- **il se lève** — *LEV*
- **nous nous levons** — *luh-VOHN*, flat
- **vous vous levez** — *luh-VAY*, flat
- **ils se lèvent** — *LEV*

You'll want to know: the state

debout — standing, upright. Said *duh-BOO*.

Je suis debout. — I am standing.

Se lever is the **movement**, *debout* the **state** — the split between sitting down and being seated. *Debout* is no verb: attach it to *être*.

And it is transparent once opened: **de + bout**, “**on end**.” A *bout* is a tip or end, so standing is being set on your end. French did once have a plain verb for standing, *ester*; it survives only in a courtroom phrase, which is why the language builds this from pieces.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

lever ← Latin **levāre**, “to raise” — built on **levis**, “**light in weight**.” To raise a thing is to lighten it. Hence **elevate**, **elevator**, **levitate**, **levity**; a **lever**, which lightens a load; **alleviate**, **relieve**, **relief**; **leaven**.

So two of this book's verbs come from one corner of Roman thought. *Penser* is *pēnsāre*, “**to weigh**”; *lever* is *levāre*, “to make **light**.” Thinking weighs, rising un-weighs, and *sedere* just sits there.

One correction. **Bout** comes from *bouter*, “to strike,” taken from Frankish — and its English relative by **descent** is **beat**. *Butt* looks closer but is a later **borrowing** back out of French.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “se lever” — *suh luh-VAY*
- “je me lève” then “nous nous levons” — sharp, then flat
- “je m’assieds” then “je me lève” — down, then up
- “je suis debout” — the state, on *être*
- “je me lève et je cours”
- “je pense” then “je me lève” — weighing, then lightening
- “elevate, lever, relief” — all a raising

Before you move on

Say “I get up” and “we get up.” (*Je me lève. Nous nous levons* — the accent appears only when the ending is silent.) How does French say “I am standing”? (***Je suis debout*** — a state pinned to *être*, not a verb, and *debout* is *de* + *bout*, “**on end**.”) *Penser* came from weighing; what does *lever* come from? (***Levis***, “**light in weight**”.) And the opposite movement? (*Je m’assieds*.)

31.3 ouvrir — “to open,” an -ir verb wearing -er endings

You can sit and rise. Now something for the hand. This verb is French conjugation’s small trap: spelled like one family, behaving like another.

You'll want to know: the word

ouvrir — to open. Said *oo-VREER*.

J'ouvre la main. — I open my hand.

French says *la main* where English says “my hand”; with your own body the article does the work. And listen to that nasal — *pain, main* — the same *-ain* you have been making since the bread.

Grammar Lens: the endings it should not have

Ouvrir ends in **-ir**, so you would expect it to run like *dormir*. It does not. It takes the endings of **marcher**, an *-er* verb, exactly:

- **j'ouvre** — *JOOVR*
- **tu ouvres** — *OOVR*
- **il ouvre** — *OOVR*
- **nous ouvrons** — *oo-VROHN*
- **vous ouvrez** — *oo-VRAY*
- **ils ouvrent** — *OOVR*

Four identical to the ear, *nous* and *vous* audible: the shape of *je marche, nous marchons*. A small group of *-ir* verbs does this, and *ouvrir* is the one you meet most. The spelling promises one thing; listen to what the verb does.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Latin's verb for opening was **aperīre**, which *ouvrir* does not look much like — because the word was remodelled on the way into popular Latin **operīre**. The likeliest cause is the pull of its own opposite, *cooperīre*, “to cover,” which became French **couvrir**. Opening and covering ended up rhyming and have stayed matched since. The meaning stayed *aperīre*'s; only the shape moved. English collected both ends:

- from *aperīre* — an **aperture**; an **aperitif**, the drink that **opens** a meal.

- from Old French *ovrir* — **overt**, its past participle “opened,” and **overture**, *ouverture*.
- from the covering half — **curfew**, Old French *cuevrefeu*, “**cover-fire**,” the bell that said to bank the hearth.

Set that beside the hand. *Maintenir* is *manū tenēre*, “**to hold in the hand**” — and *ouvrir la main* releases that grip.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ouvrir” — *oo-VREER*
- “j’ouvre la main” — and hear *pain*, *main*
- “je marche, nous marchons” then “j’ouvre, nous ouvrons” — one shape
- “je m’assieds, je me lève, j’ouvre la main”
- “je suis debout et j’ouvre la main”
- “maintenir” then “ouvrir” — holding in the hand, then letting go
- “aperture, apéritif, overt, overture” — every one an opening

Before you move on

Say “I open my hand” and “we open.” (*J’ouvre la main. Nous ouvrons.*) Which endings does *ouvrir* borrow, despite its spelling? (The **-er** set — *marcher*’s.) What is an **apéritif**, literally? (**The opener** — the drink that opens a meal.) Why does *ouvrir* not look like Latin *aperīre*? (It was **reshaped** to match its own opposite, the verb for covering.)

31.4 fermer — “to close,” which in French means “to make firm”

The last of the four, and the opposite of the one before it. French chose an unexpected picture: to close a thing is to make it **firm**.

You'll want to know: the word

fermer — to close. Said *fer-MAY*.

Je ferme la main. — I close my hand. **Il pleut. Je ferme.**
— It's raining. I'm closing up.

A regular **-er** verb: *je ferme, tu fermes, il ferme, nous fermons, vous fermez, ils ferment*.

Grammar Lens: two opposites, one set of endings

Ouvrir borrowed the *-er* endings against its own spelling. *Fermer* owns them outright. So the two opposites conjugate in step, and drill as one pair:

- **j'ouvre / je ferme**
- **nous ouvrons / nous fermons**
- **ils ouvrent / ils ferment**

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

fermer ← Latin **firmāre**, “to make firm,” from **firmus**, “**firm**.” A Roman door was not closed, it was **secured**. English took the adjective and left the verb: **firm**, **affirm**, **confirm**, **infirm** and the **infirm**ary, the **firmament** — the sky as a solid vault. Probably also **farm**. Old French *ferme* meant a **fixed rent**, from Medieval Latin *firma*, “a fixed payment,” so a farm began as a lease and not a field. Etymologists call this history a confused one, because Old English *feorm*, “food-rent,” sat nearby and may have pulled on it. Likely, not clean.

The best part is the split. One Latin verb, three languages, three jobs:

- French **fermer** — to **close**.
- Italian **fermare** — to **stop**.
- Spanish **firmar** — to **sign**, because a signature makes a paper firm.

And Spanish and Portuguese do not close with this verb at all. Their words come from Latin's **bolt**. So French shuts a door by making it solid while its neighbours slide a bar across.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “fermer” — *fer-MAY*
- “j’ouvre la main” then “je ferme la main”
- the chapter’s four — “je m’assieds, je me lève, j’ouvre, je ferme”
- “je suis debout et je ferme”
- “il pleut, je ferme”
- “vous fermez, s’il vous plaît” then “tu fermes, s’il te plaît” — formal, then familiar
- “je suis désolé, je ferme” — the apology before the refusal
- “fermer, firm, affirm, confirm” — all a making-firm

Before you move on

Say the chapter’s four with *je*. (*Je m’assieds, je me lève, j’ouvre, je ferme.*) What did *firmāre* mean, and what is a French door doing when it closes? (**Making firm** — being **secured**, not barred.) One Latin verb, three languages: Italian and Spanish? (*Fermare*, “to **stop**”; *firmar*, “to **sign**”). Now close politely in both registers, then apologise. (*Vous fermez, s’il vous plaît. Tu fermes, s’il te plaît. Je suis désolé.*) And the hand? (*J’ouvre la main, je ferme la main.*)

Chapter 32

Coffee, Tea, Milk, Sugar

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask for coffee, tea, milk or sugar in French, and trace each word to the road it travelled to get there — one unbroken, one forked, one never borrowed, one from Sanskrit.

Ask for sugar, trace sucre to Sanskrit śárkarā through Arabic sukkar, and set the chapter’s four masculine drink-words beside l’eau’s lone feminine exception. Reaches back past the chapter to Chapter 18’s si, the answer that contradicts a negative, and to the langue d’oïl / langue d’oc split behind oui itself.

32.1 le café — coffee, one word the whole road agrees on

You already know how to ask nicely — **s’il vous plaît**. Now something worth asking for: the first of four everyday words for what’s on the table.

You’ll want to know: the word

le café — coffee. Masculine.

Un café, s’il vous plaît. — “A coffee, please.”

Café also names the **place** you drink it, exactly the way English *cafe* does — one word, two jobs, in both languages at once.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

café comes from Ottoman Turkish **kahve**, which comes from Arabic **qahwa**. Arabic lexicographers record *qahwa* as an older word for **wine** — it only attached to the coffee bean once the drink spread out of Yemen, in the fifteenth century.

From Ottoman *kahve*, the word crossed into Europe through Italian **caffè** — and stopped there. French **café**, English **coffee**, German **Kaffee**, Italian **caffè** itself: every one of these is the *same* borrowing, taken at a different stop on a *single* road out of the Ottoman Empire. Nobody translated it; everybody just repeated it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le café” — masculine
- “un café, s’il vous plaît”
- the road — “qahwa, kahve, caffè, café” — one word, four stops
- the surprise — “qahwa once meant **wine**”

Before you move on

Say “coffee, please.” (*Un café, s’il vous plaît.* — masculine.) What Arabic word is *café* from, and what did it mean before coffee existed? (*Qahwa* — “**wine**.”) Name the road it travelled. (**Arabic qahwa** → **Ottoman kahve** → **Italian caffè** → **French café**, with English *coffee* and German *Kaffee* the same borrowing at other stops.) Is *s’il vous plaît* the right register here? (**Yes** — spoken, to someone you don’t know well.)

32.2 le thé — tea, the word that took the other road

You just saw *café* travel Europe as one word, unchanged at every stop. Tea took the opposite kind of trip — it **split**.

You'll want to know: the word

le thé — tea. **Masculine.**

Un thé, s'il vous plaît. — “A tea, please.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

China writes “tea” with one character everywhere, but doesn't say it the same way everywhere. In Mandarin it's **chá**. In the **Hokkien** of the south-eastern coast — the Amoy dialect — it's **tê**.

Traders who bought the leaf overland or through Mandarin-speaking ports carried home **chá**: it travelled into Persian, into Arabic, into Hindi. Dutch traders bought their tea specifically at **Amoy**, in Hokkien territory, and carried home **tê** instead — which became Dutch **thee**, then French **thé**, English **tea**, German **Tee**.

So *café* and *thé* make a matched pair with opposite stories: *café* is one word repeated unchanged at every stop; *thé* is the *same original word*, worn into two different shapes depending which Chinese port a trader happened to deal with.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le thé” — masculine
- “un café, un thé” — both masculine, both borrowed
- the fork — “chá overland, tê by Dutch ship”
- the pair — “café: one road. thé: two.”

Before you move on

Say “tea, please.” (*Un thé, s'il vous plaît.* — masculine.) What Chinese dialect gave French *thé* its shape, and by what route? (**Hokkien** **tê**, carried by **Dutch** ships from the port of **Amoy**.) What's the overland word that *chá*-family languages use instead? (**Chá**, into **Persian**, **Arabic**, **Hindi**.) How is *thé*'s story different from *café*'s? (*Café* stayed **one word** everywhere; *thé* **split in two** depending on the port.)

32.3 le lait — milk, the word French never had to borrow

Café and *thé* both crossed an ocean to reach French. This word never left home.

You'll want to know: the word

le lait — milk. **Masculine**, like *café* and *thé*.

Du lait, s'il vous plaît. — “Some milk, please.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

lait comes from Latin *lac* (stem *lact-*) — a word Latin-speakers in Gaul simply kept saying, generation after generation, until it wore down into *lait*. No port, no trade route: this one was **inherited**, not borrowed, unlike *café*'s single road or *thé*'s forked one. English shows the same split *tête* showed for “head”: the **inherited**, everyday English word for this drink is **milk** — and it has **nothing to do with** *lac*. *Milk* descends from a completely different Proto-Indo-European root, one meaning “to milk a cow.” English only meets *lac*'s stem *lact-* in **learned** words borrowed straight from written Latin much later: **lactic**, **lactose**, **lactate**. So French *lait* and English *lactic* are close cousins; French *lait* and English *milk* are not related at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le lait” — masculine
- “un café, un thé, du lait” — three drinks, one gender
- the cousins — “lait, lactic, lactose”
- the non-cousins — “lait and milk share no root at all”

Before you move on

Say “milk, please.” (*Du lait, s’il vous plaît.* — masculine.) Is *lait* borrowed, like *café* and *thé*, or inherited straight from Latin? (**Inherited** — from *lac*, stem *lact-*.) Which English words are close cousins of *lait*? (**Lactic, lactose, lactate** — learned borrowings of the same stem.) Is English *milk* one of those cousins? (**No** — a completely different, unrelated root.)

32.4 le sucre — sugar, the longest road of the four

Coffee took one road, tea forked into two, milk never left home. Sugar’s road is the longest of all — and it ends the chapter with a whole table’s worth of masculine drink-words.

You’ll want to know: the word

le sucre — sugar. Masculine.

Du sucre, s’il vous plaît. — “Some sugar, please.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sucre ← Old French **çucrer** ← Arabic **sukkar** ← Persian **shakar** ← Sanskrit **śárkarā**, which first meant “**grit, gravel**” — crystallized sugar looked like gravel to whoever named it first. *Sucre* passed through Arabic just like *café* did, but through a **different** Arabic word (*sukkar*, not *qahwa*): a shared **language of transmission**, not a shared root. Where *lait* is inherited straight from Latin, *sucre* is borrowed — from **further back** than *café* or *thé*, all the way to Sanskrit.

Grammar Lens: a lean, and its one loud exception

Four drink-words, four **masculine** articles: *le café*, *le thé*, *le lait*, *le sucre*. Not a rule to trust — a lean: French tends to make plain substances masculine. This lean has a loud exception: **l’eau**, “water,” is **feminine**. You still learn each word with its article, the promise this book has kept since *la main*.

Why it's said this way

The **si** you learned — the “yes” for contradicting a negative — fits this table exactly:

Vous ne voulez pas de sucre ? — Si, un peu. (“You don’t want sugar? — Yes, a little.”)

Plain **oui** here would agree you *don’t* want it; *si* is what pushes back. That same *oui* once mattered enough to **split a country** — *langue d’oïl* in the north, *langue d’oc* in the south.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le sucre” — masculine
- all four — “le café, le thé, le lait, le sucre”
- the exception — “l’eau” — feminine, against the lean
- the contradiction — “Vous ne voulez pas de sucre ? — Si !”

Before you move on

Say “sugar, please.” (*Du sucre, s’il vous plaît.* — masculine.) Trace *sucre* back to Sanskrit. (**Sukkar** ← **shakar** ← **śárkarā**, “**grit, gravel.**”) Do *café* and *sucre* share a root? (**No** — a language of transmission, Arabic, not a root; *qahwa* and *sukkar* are different words.) What is the lean about French drink-words, and what breaks it? (**Masculine by default** — broken by *l’eau*, feminine.) When do you answer **si** instead of **oui**? (**Contradicting a negative** — the same word-pair that once **split France** into *langue d’oïl* and *langue d’oc*.)

Chapter 33

The People You Introduce

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can introduce a friend, name my family, name a child and name any person, using French's four different relationships between grammatical gender and the person meant, and elide *le* or *la* to *l'* before a vowel.

Say la personne, always feminine even naming a man, then line the chapter's four words up by how each one handles gender: l'ami changes, la famille is fixed, l'enfant is one spelling with two articles, la personne is fixed regardless of sex. Reaches back to Chapter 18's non for a sound contrast (personne's double -nn- blocks the nasal non has) and to its ne ... pas negation, which personne itself joins as "nobody."

33.1 l'ami, l'amie — the friend, and why the article gives way

The café chapter handed you *le lait* and *le sucre*, and three more things to ask for. Now the people you'd ask them with — starting with the one whose name teaches French's most useful spelling rule.

You'll want to know: the word

un ami — a (male) friend. **une amie** — a (female) friend. Same sound, *ah-MEE*; the feminine just adds a silent **-e**. A regular swap: the article and ending follow **who the friend is**.

Grammar Lens: why it's l'ami, not le ami

Say **le ami** out loud: two vowels collide, *eu*h then *a*h, and French won't stand for it. So **le** and **la** both drop their vowel before a word that starts with one, and glue on with an apostrophe: **l'ami**, **l'amie** — one form for both genders once the article elides. This is the *exact* same move as *l'eau* — French never tolerates *le* or *la* sitting next to another vowel sound. It also happens to a pronoun you already use daily: *je ai* became **j'ai** by the identical rule.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ami ← Latin **amicus**, “**friend**” — built on the verb **amāre**, “to love.” English kept the adjective whole in **amicable**, **amiable**, and **amity** (“friendship” between nations). A French *ami* is, at the root, someone you **love**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “un ami, une amie” — the regular swap
- “l'ami, l'amie” — never *le ami*
- the family — “l'eau, j'ai, l'ami” — one rule, three words
- “amicable, amiable, amity” — all built on **amāre**, to love

Before you move on

Give “a friend” for a man and for a woman. (**un ami, une amie.**) Why do you say *l'ami* instead of *le ami*? (**Two vowels can't sit together** — the article **elides**, the same rule behind *l'eau* and *j'ai*.) What Latin verb is *ami* built on, and what does it mean? (**Amāre**, “to love.”)

33.2 la famille — the family, feminine no matter who's in it

L'ami changes shape with who it names. This word never does — whoever is in the family, the word itself stays exactly as it

is. (And before you had *l'ami*, you already had *le sucre* — every one of this book's nouns keeps its article.)

You'll want to know: the word

la famille — the family. **Feminine**, fixed — no elision here, since *famille* starts with a consonant: **la famille**, never *l'famille*.

The double **-ll-** after **i** is not said like an English L: **famille** is *fah-MEE-yuh*, the *-ille* landing as a **y**-sound, the *l* itself silent. You'll meet this **-ille** spelling again.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

famille ← Latin **familia**, “the household” — built on **famulus**, “servant, slave.” Roman *familia* named **everyone under one roof**: parents, children, and the servants who worked there, all together. It broadened to mean “blood relatives” only because relatives usually *were* the people sharing that roof. Where *ami* is built on **loving** someone, *famille* is built on **living with** them.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la famille” — feminine, no elision
- the sound — “fa-MI-yuh,” not “fa-MILL”
- the contrast — “un ami: loving. la famille: living together.”

Before you move on

Say “the family.” (**La famille** — feminine.) Why doesn't it elide to *l'famille*? (**It starts with a consonant** — elision only happens before a vowel.) What did Latin *familia* originally include besides relatives? (**The household's servants**, from *famulus*.)

33.3 l'enfant — the child, one word for both

La famille stays fixed no matter who's in it. This member of it does something different again: **one spelling**, for a boy or a girl alike.

You'll want to know: the word

l'enfant — the child. Starts with a vowel, so the article **elides** again, exactly like *l'ami*: **un enfant** (a boy), **une enfant** (a girl) — but the *word itself* never changes. Only **un/une** tells you which.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

enfant ← Latin *īnfāns*, “**not speaking**” — **in-** “not” + **fāns**, “speaking” (from *fārī*, “to speak”). Literally, a baby too young to talk. But Romans already stretched *īnfāns* to cover children well past babyhood long before French existed, and French *enfant* simply inherited that wider sense — it didn't narrow English **infant** into something broader. The two words split apart in a different way: English kept the narrow, original “not-yet-speaking” sense for its borrowing, while French's everyday word carried the older, already-widened Latin meaning forward.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “un enfant, une enfant” — one spelling, two articles
- the elision — “l'enfant,” never *le enfant*
- “in- + fari” — not speaking
- the family so far — “l'ami, la famille, l'enfant”

Before you move on

How do you tell a boy child from a girl child in French, if the word itself never changes? (**The article** — *un enfant* / *une enfant*.) What does *enfant* literally mean, and where does that meaning come from? (“**Not speaking**” — *in-* + *fārī*, “to speak.”) Does French narrow Latin's meaning or keep it wide? (**Keeps it wide** — Latin had already stretched *īnfans* past babyhood.)

33.4 la personne — the person, and the mask behind the word

L'ami changes with its friend; *l'enfant* doesn't, but its article does. This last one is the strangest of the four: it never changes at all — **not even for a man**.

You'll want to know: the word

la personne — the person. **Always feminine** — grammatically, whether you mean a man, a woman, or anyone at all:

Cet homme est une bonne personne. — “That man is a good person.”

Homme is masculine; *personne* describing him stays **feminine** regardless. Grammatical gender here has come loose from the person's actual sex entirely — further even than *ami*, which at least tracks who's meant.

Sounds you'll need

Personne looks like it should rhyme with **non**'s nasal *-on* — it doesn't. Double **-nn-** blocks the nasal: **non** is nasal, said through the nose, but **personne** ends oral, *pehr-SUN*, the vowel staying in the mouth. One consonant, doubled, is the difference between a nasal ending and a plain one.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

personne ← Latin **persona**, a **theatrical mask** — from Etruscan **phersu**, most likely from Greek **prósōpon**, “face.” A tidy but doubted story derives it from *per-* + *sonāre*, “sound through” (the mask an actor's voice rang through); linguists reject it on the vowel length, so treat it as folk etymology, not fact.

Pair *personne* with **ne** and it flips to “**nobody**” — *je ne vois personne* = “I see **nobody**.” Behind an empty mask, no one at all.

Grammar Lens: four people, four kinds of gender

The chapter's four words, side by side:

- *l'ami* / *l'amie* — **changes** with who's meant; elides either way.

- **la famille** — **fixed** feminine, whoever's in it; no elision.
- **l'enfant** — **one** spelling; only **un/une** shows which; elides.
- **la personne** — **fixed** feminine, even naming a man.

Four different relationships between gender and the person named — none of them the “normal” case. Each is its own rule, learned with the word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la personne” — always feminine
- “cet homme est une bonne personne”
- the contrast — “non” nasal, “personne” not
- the flip — “je ne vois personne” — nobody

Before you move on

Is *personne* ever masculine, even describing a man? (**No** — **always feminine**, grammatically.) Why doesn't *personne* nasalize like *non*? (**Double -nn-** blocks it.) What does *ne ... personne* mean, and what does that use share with *ne ... pas*? (“**Nobody**” — the same negation frame built around *ne*.) Is *persona* really built on “sounding through”? (**Probably not** — a folk etymology; the real root is likely Etruscan *phersu*, “**mask**.”)

Chapter 34

Cheese, Butter, Salt, Egg

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask for cheese, butter, salt or an egg in French, and say why *un œuf* keeps its final *f* while *les œufs* drops it.

*Ask for an egg, hold *un œuf*'s pronounced *f* against *les œufs*' silent one, and place *œuf* beside English *egg* as genuine cousins rather than a borrowing. Reaches back past the chapter to *le sel*, *le beurre* and *le fromage*, and to Chapter 29's elision rule, which *l'œuf* needs exactly as *l'ami* did.*

34.1 le fromage — cheese, named for its mould

You can name *la personne* and *l'enfant* now. The *café* chapter asked politely for a drink; this chapter asks for what goes with it — starting with a word every other Romance language names completely differently.

You'll want to know: the word

le fromage — cheese. Masculine.

Du fromage, s'il vous plaît. — “Some cheese, please.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

fromage ← Medieval Latin **formāticum**, “a thing made in a mould” — built on **forma**, “shape, mould.” Cheesemakers press curds into a mould to set their shape, and French named the finished cheese for **that step**.

Classical Latin’s actual word for cheese was **caseus** — and that word is what survives in Spanish **queso** and Portuguese **queijo**, as well as English **casein** and Old English **cyse**, the ancestor of **cheese** itself. So French *fromage* and English *cheese* are **not** cousins: French walked away from *caseus* entirely and named the cheese for its mould instead, while Spanish, Portuguese and English all kept the old word for the curd.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le fromage” — masculine
- “du fromage, s’il vous plaît”
- the mould — “forma → fromage”
- the split — “fromage and cheese are not cousins; queso, queijo and cheese all come from caseus”

Before you move on

Say “cheese, please.” (*Du fromage, s’il vous plaît.* — masculine.) What Latin word is *fromage* built on, and what did it mean? (**Forma**, “**shape, mould.**”) Which Romance languages kept the older word for cheese instead, and what is it? (**Spanish queso**, **Portuguese queijo** — from Latin **caseus**, also behind English **casein** and **cheese.**)

34.2 le beurre — butter, one loanword twice

Fromage took a French road all its own. This word, French and English took **together** — the exact same borrowing, not two.

You'll want to know: the word

le beurre — butter. Masculine.

Du beurre, s'il vous plaît. — “Some butter, please.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

beurre ← Latin **būtyrum** ← Greek **boútūron**, usually broken down as **boûs** “cow” + **tyrós** “cheese” — “cow-cheese.” But butter wasn’t a Greek or Roman product; both cultures were oil cultures, and most likely imported both the substance and the word from further east, possibly from Scythian traders. Treat “cow-cheese” as a **folk reshaping** of a foreign word into familiar Greek pieces, not a certain compound.

Either way, English **butter** borrows the *identical* Latin word French **beurre** does. This isn’t two languages separately naming the same thing — it’s **one loanword, arriving twice**.

Why it’s said this way

The courtesy words you already have fit right here:

Désolé, il n’y a plus de beurre. — “Sorry, there’s no more butter.”

Désolé — real regret, for running out. If you’d only bumped the butter dish, **pardon** would do instead; to get someone’s attention before asking for it at all, **excusez-moi**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le beurre” — masculine
- “du beurre, s’il vous plaît”
- “beurre, butter” — one word, borrowed twice
- “désolé, il n’y a plus de beurre”

Before you move on

Say “butter, please.” (*Du beurre, s’il vous plaît.* — masculine.) Is “cow-cheese” a safe etymology for *boûturon*? (**Not certain** — likely a Greek reshaping of a foreign word, since butter wasn’t native to Greece or Rome.) Is French *beurre* related to English *butter* by common descent or by borrowing? (**Borrowing** — the same Latin word, taken by both languages.) When would you reach for *pardon* instead of *désolé*? (**A small, quick slip** — not real regret.)

34.3 le sel — salt, a real cousin and a fake legend

Beurre was one word borrowed twice. This one is different again — a genuine family relative of its English counterpart, plus a famous story about it that isn’t actually true.

You’ll want to know: the word

le sel — salt. Masculine.

Du sel, s’il vous plaît. — “Some salt, please.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sel ← Latin **sal**, stem **sal-** — **inherited**, like *lait*, not borrowed like *café* or *sucre*. English **salt** is a genuine **cousin**: both words descend from the same Proto-Indo-European root, ***sal-**, inherited separately down the Latin and Germanic branches. Unlike *lait* and *milk*, which share no root at all, *sel* and *salt* really are family.

Latin **salārium** — English **salary** — is built on this same *sal*. You may have heard that Roman soldiers were literally paid in salt, which is where “salary” supposedly comes from. That claim appears in **no ancient source**; no Roman writer says it. *Salārium* genuinely is built on *sal* — that part is real — but the vivid soldiers-and-salt story attached to it later, and belongs with folk etymology, not fact.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le sel” — masculine

- “du sel, s’il vous plaît”
- the real cousins — “sel, salt — one PIE root, two branches”
- “beurre, fromage, sel” — three foods, all masculine

Before you move on

Say “salt, please.” (*Du sel, s’il vous plaît.* — masculine.) Is *sel* related to English *salt* by common descent or by borrowing? (Common descent — both from PIE **sal-*, a genuine cousin pair.) Is the “soldiers paid in salt” story behind *salary* true? (No — it appears in no ancient source; *salārium* really is built on *sal*, but the legend is later.)

34.4 l’œuf — the egg, that loses its consonant only in the plural

Fromage, beurre, sel — three foods, three masculine articles. The fourth starts with a vowel, so this chapter closes the way it began: with the elision rule from *l’ami*.

You’ll want to know: the word

l’œuf — the egg. **Masculine**, and it elides — never *le œuf*.

Un œuf, s’il vous plaît. — “An egg, please.” Said with a clear final **f**: *un-EUF*.

Now the plural: **les œufs**. Spelled with the same *-fs*, but the **f** **disappears entirely** — *lay-ZEU*, not *lay-ZEUFs*. One noun, and its final consonant survives in the singular only to vanish in the plural.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

œuf ← Latin **ovum**, from a Proto-Indo-European word for “egg,” ***h₂ōwyóm**. English **egg** descends from the *same* root, by the Germanic road (Old Norse *egg*, from Proto-Germanic **ajja-*) — a real cousin pair, exactly like *sel* and *salt*, not a borrowing in either direction. The Latin-only learned family — **oval**, **ovary**, **ovum** itself — are the ones English took straight from written Latin, sitting beside

its own native *egg*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “l’œuf” — masculine, elided
- “un œuf” — f pronounced
- “les œufs” — f silent
- the cousins — “œuf, egg — same PIE root, two branches”

Before you move on

Say “an egg, please,” then “the eggs.” (*Un œuf, s’il vous plaît* — f pronounced; *les œufs* — f silent.) Why does *l’œuf* elide? (**Vowel-initial** — same rule as *l’ami*.) Is *œuf* borrowed from Latin *ovum*, or a genuine cousin of it? (**A cousin** — both from PIE **h₂ōwyóm*, like English *egg*.) Name the chapter’s four foods with their articles. (*Le fromage, le beurre, le sel, l’œuf* — all masculine.)

Chapter 35

Eyes, Nose, Mouth, Stomach

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the eye and its irregular-looking plural *yeux*, the nose, the mouth and the stomach in French, extending Chapter 17's head and hand.

Say j'ai mal au ventre, take ventriloquist apart as "belly-speaker," and close the chapter's own four words (l'œil/les yeux, le nez, la bouche, le ventre) beside Chapter 17's head and hand. Reaches back past the chapter to la main's nasal -ain, contrasted with ventre's own different nasal vowel, and further back to le café, l'ami and l'œuf, one word from each of this book's four newest chapters.

35.1 l'œil, les yeux — the eye, and a plural that only looks broken

You have the head and the hand. This chapter fills in the rest of the body it left for later — starting above the mouth.

You'll want to know: the word

l'œil — the eye. **Masculine**, and it elides — never *le œil*. Its plural is completely different in **shape**: **les yeux**.

Tête, remember, is feminine even though it never looks like a body part should tell you its gender; *œil* is masculine, on the same body, right above it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

œil ← Vulgar Latin **oclus** (from **oculus**, “eye”) — a heavily worn singular. **Yeux** ← Latin’s plural **oculōs**, and *that* development is completely **regular** sound change, the ordinary path *oculōs* was always going to take.

So *les yeux* doesn’t break the rules — *œil* does. The singular eroded further and faster than the plural did, and the two paths simply arrived looking unrelated. French has a small family of nouns built this way — *le ciel* / *les cieux* (“sky/skies”), *le travail* / *les travaux* (“work/works”) — an odd-looking plural is often the **regular** one, standing next to a singular that took the shortcut.

Why it’s said this way

You may remember *tête* itself came from **testa**, a soldier’s joke for “pot” that replaced the real Latin word for head. *Œil* never had that kind of accident — it’s simply the ordinary, expected descendant of *oculus*, sitting on the very pot the joke was about.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “l’œil” — one eye, masculine
- “les yeux” — both eyes, different shape
- “la tête, l’œil” — feminine pot, masculine eye
- the family — “le ciel/les cieux, œil/yeux” — same pattern

Before you move on

Say “the eye” and “the eyes.” (**L’œil, les yeux.**) Which form is the *regular* sound outcome of Latin — *œil* or *yeux*? (**Yeux** — from *oculōs*; *œil* is the one that eroded further.) What other French noun changes shape the same way between singular and plural? (**Le ciel / les cieux**, or **le travail / les travaux.**) What was *tête* originally a soldier’s joke for? (**A pot.**)

35.2 le nez — the nose, another real cousin

Below the eye, the nose — and a third pair of true cousins, joining *sel/salt* and *æuf/egg*.

You'll want to know: the word

le nez — the nose. **Masculine**, final **z** **silent**: *NAY*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

nez ← Latin **nāsus**, from PIE ***nas-**. English **nose** descends from the *same* root, down the Germanic branch — a genuine cousin, exactly the pattern *sel/salt* and *æuf/egg* already showed you.

English **nasal** is a *different* kind of relative: a **learned** borrowing of the Latin word itself, sitting beside native *nose* the same way *lactic* sits beside native *milk*. One root, French *nez* and English *nose* both inherited; one root, English separately borrowed as *nasal*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le nez” — silent z
- “l’œil, le nez” — eye, nose
- the cousins — “nez, nose — same PIE root”
- the borrowing — “nasal,” taken later, straight from Latin

Before you move on

Say “the nose.” (**Le nez** — masculine, silent z.) Is *nez* related to English *nose* by inheritance or by borrowing? (**Inheritance** — both from PIE **nas-*, a **genuine cousin pair**.) **Where does English *nasal* fit?** (A learned borrowing of the Latin word, alongside native *nose* — the same relationship as *lactic* beside *milk*.)

35.3 la bouche — the mouth, which used to mean “cheek”

Tête wasn’t Latin’s word for head. This one wasn’t Latin’s word for mouth, either.

You’ll want to know: the word

la bouche — the mouth. **Feminine.**

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Classical Latin’s real word for “mouth” was **ōs**. But Latin’s vowel lengths eventually stopped being pronounced, and short **os** “**bone**” and long **ōs** “**mouth**” **collapsed into the same sound**. Faced with that collision, speakers reached for a slangy stand-in instead: **bucca**, which had meant “**cheek**” — much the way an English speaker might call a mouth a “cheek” in passing. The slang stuck, and **bucca** became French’s ordinary word for mouth: **bouche**.

English kept *bucca*’s **original** sense in one narrow technical word, **buccal** (“of the cheek,” used mostly by dentists) — never demoted to “mouth” the way French’s everyday word was.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “la bouche” — feminine
- “le nez, la bouche” — nose, mouth
- the collision — “os ’bone’, ōs ’mouth’ — same sound”
- “bucca” — cheek, the slang that took over

Before you move on

Say “the mouth.” (**La bouche** — feminine.) What did Latin *bucca* originally mean? (“**Cheek.**”) Why did *bucca* replace the real Latin word for mouth, *ōs*? (**It collided in sound with os, “bone,”** once vowel length stopped being pronounced.) Which English word still keeps *bucca*’s original “cheek” sense? (**Buccal.**)

35.4 le ventre — the stomach, closing four chapters of everyday words

Eye, nose, mouth — three words down. One more, and this book's body vocabulary reaches all the way from the head and the hand to here.

You'll want to know: the word

le ventre — the stomach, the belly. **Masculine.**

J'ai mal au ventre. — “My stomach hurts.”

Say the nasal: **ven-**. It's a different vowel from *la main*'s *-ain*, even though both endings are written with a nasal consonant after the vowel — French has several distinct nasal vowels, and *main* and *ventre* use two of them.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ventre ← Latin **venter**, stem **ventr-**, “belly.” English kept two learned words on this stem: **ventral** (“of the belly,” the opposite of *dorsal*), and **ventriloquist** — *venter* + *loqui*, “to speak” — literally a “**belly-speaker**,” someone whose voice seems to come from the stomach rather than the mouth.

Grammar Lens: five chapters, tied off

Before you close the book on this run, three threads from earlier chapters, tied off here:

- **la tête** is **feminine**, was Roman soldiers' slang for a **pot**, and wears a circumflex that marks a **lost s**.
- **oui** once **split a country** into *langue d'oïl* and *langue d'oc*; its cousin **si** is the one you use to contradict a negative.
- and among this run's own new words — **le sel**, **la personne** — every one still carries the article that names its gender, exactly the promise this book made back at *la main*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “le ventre” — masculine
- “j’ai mal au ventre”
- “main, ventre” — two different nasal vowels
- “ventriloquist” — the belly-speaker
- the whole run — “le café, l’ami, l’œuf, le ventre” — four chapters, one thread

Before you move on

Say “my stomach hurts.” (*J’ai mal au ventre.*) What English word literally means “belly-speaker”? (**Ventriloquist** — *venter* + *loquē.*) Is *ventre*’s nasal the same vowel as *la main*’s? (**No** — a different nasal vowel, despite both being spelled with a nasal consonant.) Name the four body words this chapter added to the head and the hand. (*L’œil* (les yeux), *le nez*, *la bouche*, *le ventre.*)

Chapter 36

Asking a Question — Three Ways, and Which One to Use

Modes: 🗣️ voice (9) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask a question in French three ways — by raising my voice, with *est-ce que*, and by inversion — choose between them by how formal the moment is, and ask where, when, how, how much and why.

The one question word that agrees with its noun, closing a chapter that began with the question costing no new words at all.

36.1 une question — the question you make with your voice alone

You can say a great deal in French and cannot yet ask anything. This chapter fixes that, and the first way costs you no new words at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

French has three ways to ask a question. This is the first, the cheapest, and by far the commonest in speech — and it costs you **nothing new at all**.

Tu parles français. — You speak French. **Tu parles français ?** — You speak French?

The words are identical. The order is identical. The only

difference is that the second one rises at the end, and in writing, a question mark.

That is a real question, correct and unremarkable, and it is what a French speaker uses with friends, family, in a shop, all day. Note the space before the question mark — French puts a thin space before ?, !, : and ;, which English does not.

Why start here. Textbooks usually open with the formal inversion, which is the rarest of the three and the hardest to build. You can ask about anything you can already say, right now, by lifting your voice. Everything after this lesson is about *register* and *precision*, not about being understood.

Your turn

- *Say it: une question*
- *Ask:* the same question all three ways you know so far

Before you move on

How do you turn a French statement into a question with no new words? (**Raise your voice** at the end.) Is that correct French, or a shortcut? (**Correct**, and the commonest form in speech.) And what does French put before a question mark? (A **space**.)

36.2 *est-ce que* — the phrase that announces a question before it starts

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The second way. Put **est-ce que** in front of a statement and it becomes a question:

Est-ce que tu parles français ?

Nothing else moves. The statement stays exactly as it was; the phrase sits in front of it like a flag.

It is worth taking apart, because it looks like three words and behaves like one. Literally it is *est-ce que* = “is it that...” — French built a

question marker out of a tiny sentence, then wore it down until nobody hears the parts any more. A speaker says it as one word, roughly *ESS-kuh*.

When you would choose it. It is more neutral than the voice-only question and less formal than the inversion coming next — the safe middle. In writing, where your voice cannot rise, it is the ordinary way to ask.

English has no equivalent and does not need one, because English inverts instead: *do you speak...* That English **do** is doing the same job — a meaningless word inserted to mark a question — so the device is familiar even though the word is not.

Your turn

- *Say it: est-ce que*
- *Ask:* the same question all three ways you know so far

Before you move on

What does **est-ce que** do to a statement? (Turns it into a **question**, with nothing else moving.) What is it literally? (*Is it that...*) And which English word does the same job? (**Do**, as in *do you speak*.)

36.3 où — where

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

où — where

Où est la gare ? — Where is the station? **Tu vas où ?**
— Where are you going?

Both are correct. The question word can open the sentence or sit at the end where the answer would go, and the second is what you will hear far more in speech.

Now the accent, which is not decoration. French has two words spelled *o-u*:

- **ou** — *or*
- **où** — *where*

The grave accent is the **only** difference in writing, and in speech there is no difference at all: both are *oo*. This is the one place in French where an accent does nothing to the sound and everything to the meaning, which is why it is never optional.

You now hold the first question word, and with it a question you can actually use on the first day in a French city.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *où*
- *Ask:* the same question all three ways you know so far

Before you move on

What does **où** mean? (**Where.**) What is the same word without the accent? (**Or.**) And do they sound different? (**No** — the accent is meaning only.)

36.4 quand — when

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

quand — when

Quand est-ce que tu arrives ? — When do you arrive?

The **d** is silent. *Quand* is *kahn*, nasal, with nothing on the end — until the next word begins with a vowel, and then it comes back **as a t**:

Quand est-ce que... — *kahn-TESS-kuh*

That is **liaison**, and it is one of the things that makes fast French hard to cut into words: the consonants at the ends of words are silent alone and audible in company. Nobody writes it down; every speaker does it.

Latin **quando** is the ancestor, and it is worth spending: Spanish *cuándo*, Italian *quando*, Portuguese *quando* — and the *qu-* on all of them is the same Latin question-word opening you see in English **query**, **question** and **quest**.

Your turn

- *Say it: quand*
- *Ask: the same question all three ways you know so far*

Before you move on

What does **quand** mean? (**When.**) Is the *d* pronounced? (**Not alone** — but it returns as a *t* before a vowel.) What is that called? (**Liaison.**)

36.5 comment — how

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

comment — how

You already say it. **Comment allez-vous ?** is *how are you*, and you learned it before you knew it contained a question word.

Comment tu dis ça ? — How do you say that?

Comment ? — on its own: *Sorry?* / *Pardon?*

That last one is worth having. Used alone it is how a French speaker asks you to repeat — politer than *quoi ?*, which is the blunt *what?* The origin is Latin **quomodo**, “in what manner”, and English took the same idea by a different road: **mode**, **modal** and **manner** are all from *modus*, the “how” half of it.

Your turn

- *Say it: comment*

- *Ask:* the same question all three ways you know so far

Before you move on

What does **comment** mean? (**How.**) Which phrase you already knew contains it? (*Comment allez-vous* — how are you.) And what does **Comment ?** alone mean? (**Sorry?** / **Pardon?**)

36.6 combien — how much and how many

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

combien — how much, how many

C'est combien ? — How much is it? **Combien de personnes ?** — How many people?

English splits this and French does not. *Much* for things you measure, *many* for things you count — French uses **combien** for both and lets the noun sort it out. One word fewer to choose between, and one of the rare places French is simpler than English.

Note **combien de** before a noun. The *de* is not optional and does not change for number: *combien de personnes*, *combien d'argent*.

C'est combien ? is the single most useful question in this chapter for a traveller, and it is three words long.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *combien*
- *Ask:* the same question all three ways you know so far

Before you move on

What does **combien** cover that English splits in two? (**How much** and **how many.**) What must follow it before a noun? (**de.**) And how do you ask a price? (*C'est combien ?*)

36.7 pourquoi — why

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

pourquoi — why

Take it apart: **pour** (“for”) + **quoi** (“what”). *For what?* French built its *why* out of two words you can already see, and English does the same thing in *what for?*

And the answer is built to match:

Pourquoi ? — Why? **Parce que...** — Because...

Par ce que is “by that which”. So the question is *for what* and the answer is *by that which* — a matched pair, and the reason this book teaches them together rather than one now and one later.

That gives you the last of the five question words, and with *parce que* you can now join two clauses into one sentence, which is more than a question: it is the beginning of connected speech.

Your turn

- *Say it: pourquoi*
- *Ask:* the same question all three ways you know so far

Before you move on

What is **pourquoi** made of? (**pour** + **quoi** — *for what*.) What answers it? (**Parce que...** — *because*.) And what is *parce que* literally? (*By that which*.)

36.8 parlez-vous — the third way to ask

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The third and last way. Swap the verb and the subject, and join them with a hyphen:

Tu parles français. → Parles-tu français ? Vous parlez français. → Parlez-vous français ?

This is **inversion**, and it is the form English used to have — *speak you French?* — and lost, keeping it only in *are you, have you, can you*.

Where the three ways differ is register, not meaning:

- **Tu parles français ?** — friends, family, shops. Commonest by far.
- **Est-ce que tu parles français ?** — neutral, and the default in writing.
- **Parlez-vous français ?** — formal, written, or deliberately polite.

A beginner is often taught inversion first and then sounds like a textbook in every conversation. It is the one you need to **recognise** immediately and can afford to **produce** last.

One sound rule: if the verb ends in a vowel and the subject begins with one, French inserts a **-t-** to keep them apart — *parle-t-il, a-t-elle*. It exists purely so two vowels do not collide.

Your turn

- *Say it: parlez-vous*
- *Ask: the same question all three ways you know so far*

Before you move on

What are the three ways to ask a question? (**Voice, est-ce que, inversion.**) Which is commonest in speech? (**Voice.**) Which should you learn to recognise first and produce last? (**Inversion.**) And why the *-t-* in *parle-t-il*? (To keep **two vowels apart.**)

36.9 quel, quelle — which

Recall the previous piece before adding another.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

quel — which, what

Every question word so far has been invariable. This one is not: **quel** is an **adjective**, and like every French adjective it agrees with the noun it asks about.

Quel jour ? — Which day? (*masculine*) **Quelle heure ?**
— What time? (*feminine*) **Quels livres ?** — Which
books? (*masculine plural*) **Quelles questions ?** — Which
questions? (*feminine plural*)

All four sound identical. *Kell*, every time. The agreement is entirely written — which makes it a spelling problem rather than a speaking one, and it is one of the commonest places a French exam takes marks off.

You already use one of these without thinking: **Quelle heure est-il ?** — what time is it. *Heure* is feminine, so *quelle* takes two *ls* and an *e*. That is the fifth and last way this chapter teaches you to ask. Three structures, five question words, and one adjective that agrees.

Your turn

- *Say it: quel, quelle*
- *Ask: the same question all three ways you know so far*

Before you move on

Why does **quel** change and *où* does not? (**Quel** is an **adjective** and agrees with its noun.) Do the four forms sound different? (**No** — all *kell*.) So what kind of problem is it? (A **spelling** one.)

Chapter 37

Want, Can, Must

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I want, what I can do and what I must do, put any verb I already know behind vouloir, pouvoir or devoir without changing it, and choose je voudrais over je veux when I am asking rather than stating.

Three verbs that between them open a sentence for every verb the reader already owns – and the point at which correct French used at the wrong moment is named as a harder mistake to hear than a grammatical one.

37.1 vouloir — to want

Put **est-ce que** in front of a statement and it becomes a question.
Hold that; you will need it in a moment.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

vouloir — to want. Here are the singular forms, which is what you need first:

Say it as a chant, three beats:

je veux — tu veux — il veut

I want, you want, he wants. And notice what your ear reports: **all three sound identical.** *veux, veux, veut* — the spelling distinguishes them and the mouth does not. That is why French keeps the subject pronoun in front: without *je* or *tu*, nothing tells a listener who wants what.

Then a *want* needs something wanted, and it follows directly:

- **Je veux un café.** — I want a coffee.
- **Tu veux le pain ?** — Do you want the bread?

Why it's said this way

Now the part a phrasebook will not tell you, and the reason this word needs a warning where *parler* did not.

Je veux is blunt in a request. Said to a waiter or a shopkeeper it lands close to English *I want*, which is to say it lands badly. It is perfectly ordinary elsewhere — *je veux dire* is “I mean”, and *je veux bien* is a cheerful “gladly” — so the problem is not the word, it is the counter. French has a softened form built for exactly this, and it is the one you should reach for by default:

je voudrais — *I would like*

Same verb, different shape. **Je voudrais un café** is what a French speaker actually says across a counter, and it is no harder to say than *je veux*.

So learn both, and learn when each belongs. *Je veux* is for a want you are simply stating — to a friend, to a child, about yourself. **Je voudrais is for asking anyone for anything.** If you are unsure which you are doing, you are asking, and you want *voudrais*.

Your turn

- *Say it: je veux, tu veux, il veut* — and hear that all three are the same sound
- *Say it: je voudrais un café*, as though to a stranger behind a counter
- *Ask: est-ce que tu veux un café ?*

Before you move on

Give the three singular forms. (**Veux, veux, veut** — all said the same.) You are ordering coffee from someone you have never met: which form do you use? (**Je voudrais**, never *je veux*.)

37.2 pouvoir — can

Say *je voudrais un café*. That was a want, softened.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

pouvoir — **to be able**, and in practice **can**. The singular:
Same chant, three beats:

je peux — tu peux — il peut

I can, you can, he can. The same pattern you just met: **all three sound alike**, and the pronoun carries the person.

That final *t* is silent — until you invert. **Peut-il ?** wakes it, and needs no added *-t-* the way *parle-t-il* did, because this verb already has one. *Peux, peux, peut* — and note it rhymes with nothing in *vouloir*, but behaves identically.

What follows *pouvoir* is a **plain, unchanged verb**:

- **Je peux parler français.** — I can speak French.
- **Tu peux aider ?** — Can you help?

Nothing happens to *parler* or *aider*. They arrive in the dictionary form and stay there, which makes this one of the cheapest structures in French: every **plain** verb you know can be put behind *peux* with no change at all.

One group does change, and you already own two of them. A verb that carries *se* keeps it, and the *se* matches the person: **je peux m'asseoir, tu peux te lever**. The verb itself is still untouched; only its little pronoun follows you.

Why it's said this way

The reason *pouvoir* matters early has little to do with ability. Asking someone to do something by telling them to do it is abrupt in French, as it is in English. What French reaches for instead is a **question about ability** — the same move English makes with *can you*:

Tu peux fermer la porte ? — Can you close the door?

Nobody is really asking whether the other person is capable. The question is the politeness, and it is why *pouvoir* buys you more than a translation would suggest.

For a stranger, soften it the same way *vouloir* softened into *voudrais* — the identical shift, on this verb:

Pourriez-vous fermer la porte ?

Your turn

- Say it: *je peux, tu peux, il peut* — again, one sound between them
- Say it: *je peux parler français*
- Ask: *tu peux aider ?*

Before you move on

What happens to the verb that follows *peux*? (**Nothing** — it stays in its dictionary form.) Why does a beginner need *pouvoir* early? (Because **asking whether someone can** is how French makes a polite request.)

37.3 devoir — must

Say *je peux parler français*. The second verb did not change.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

devoir — to have to, must. The singular, and by now you can predict the shape of the problem:

je dois — tu dois — il doit

I must, you must, he must. All three sound alike again. Three verbs in a row have done this, which is the point worth carrying away: in the French present singular, the three persons are routinely one sound, and the pronoun is what tells them apart. This is not a quirk of these three words.

The exceptions are the three verbs you learned earliest, and they are exceptions because they are used constantly: *suis / es / est, ai / as /*

a, vais / vas / va. Everywhere else, expect one sound.

A plain verb follows, exactly as after *peux*:

- **Je dois partir.** — I must leave.
- **Tu dois entendre.** — You must hear.

Why it's said this way

devoir comes from Latin *dēbēre*, **to owe** — and it never stopped meaning that. The same French verb still does both jobs:

- **Je dois partir.** — I must leave.
- **Je te dois dix euros.** — I owe you ten euros.

One word, two obligations — and the order matters. The owing came first: the Latin verb meant *to owe*, and the sense of *must* grew out of it, exactly as English *ought* grew out of *owed*.

That Latin *dēbēre* is also where English gets **debt**, **debit** and **due** — so a word you have never seen has been sitting in your own vocabulary all along, spelled differently and meaning the half of *devoir* that involves money.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *je dois, tu dois, il doit*
- *je dois partir*
- *je te dois dix euros* — the same verb, the other meaning

Before you move on

What two things does *devoir* mean? (**Must**, and **to owe**.) Which English words share its Latin root? (**Debt**, **debit**, **due**.)

37.4 Practice — want, can, must

Say *je dois partir*.

What you've built

Three verbs, one shape between them. Say each chant in turn:

je veux — tu veux — il veut

je peux — tu peux — il peut

je dois — tu dois — il doit

Every chant is three forms that sound identical, and between the three chants you have wanting, being able, and having to.

And all three do the same structural thing: **a plain verb follows, unchanged.**

- **Je veux partir.** — I want to leave.
- **Je peux partir.** — I can leave.
- **Je dois partir.** — I must leave.

That is the payoff, and it is larger than three words. Every verb you have learned in this book — *parler, aider, fermer, ouvrir, écrire, lire, dormir* — can be dropped in behind any of these three with **no change of any kind**. You have not learned three expressions. You have learned three openings, and you already own everything that goes after them.

Why it's said this way

One caution carried forward, because it is the difference between sounding capable and sounding rude.

- Stating a want to a friend: **je veux**.
- Asking anyone for anything: **je voudrais**.
- Asking someone else to act: **tu peux...?** or **vous pouvez...?**

The blunt form is not wrong French. It is correct French used at the wrong moment, which is a harder mistake to hear and an easier one to make.

Your turn

- *Say it: je veux partir, je peux partir, je dois partir*
- *Say it: the same three with parler français instead of partir*
- *Ask: vous pouvez fermer la porte ?*

Before you move on

What happens to a verb placed after *veux*, *peux* or *dois*? (**Nothing** — it stays in its dictionary form.) You want to ask a stranger to close a window: which of the three do you start with? (***Vous pouvez...***)

Chapter 38

Five Ways to Point

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say that something exists, say what it is, hand somebody over, point at a noun, and answer the question where.

Everything the book owns is pointed at five ways: it exists, it is a thing, it is handed over, it is pointed at in front of its noun, and it is somewhere. One Latin word runs under four of the five – ecce, ‘behold’, which fused into ce, ici, voici and voila and then vanished inside all of them.

38.1 il y a — “there is,” built out of “it has there”

Say **il a** and **il est**. You have both verbs whole, and you still cannot say that something exists.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the three ways to ask a question — voice, *est-ce que*, inversion

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

il y a — there is, there are.

Said *eel-ya*, three words run into two syllables.

Il y a du pain. — There is some bread.

Il y a un café. — There is a café.

Word for word it says **it has there**. The **il** stands for nobody — the same empty *il* as in *il est trois heures* — the **a** is *avoir*, and the **y** is the piece worth stopping on.

That **y** is Latin **ibi**, “there,” and it survives in French almost nowhere else. Spanish welded the same *ibi* onto its own *ha* and got **hay**; French kept the two apart and writes them still. Two languages, one Latin adverb, one idea — and only French leaves the seam visible.

One shape covers both numbers. **Il y a un café** and **il y a deux cafés** use the identical phrase, so there is no *there are* to learn separately.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *il y a* — *eel-ya*
- with the partitive you already own — “Il y a du pain, du vin, de l’eau.”
- with a count — “Il y a un café” and “Il y a deux cafés”, the same phrase twice
- the three pieces, slowly — *il ... y ... a*
- with the chain from the last chapter, the second verb unchanged — “Je veux du pain” and “Il va y avoir du pain”

Before you move on

What does *il y a* say word for word? (**It has there.**) What is the **y**? (**Latin *ibi*, “there”** — the same word inside Spanish *hay*.) Does it change for plural? (**No.**) Say “there is some bread.”

38.2 c’est — “this is,” and the pointing phrase inside it

Il y a says a thing exists. It cannot say **what** the thing is. Say **il est** and **l’eau**, and watch the apostrophe do its usual work.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

c'est — this is, that is. · **ce sont** — these are, those are.

ce is the pointing word, **est** is *être*, and the **e** of *ce* falls out in front of a vowel exactly as *le* becomes *l'*:

C'est du café. — That's coffee. · **C'est mon frère.** —
That's my brother.

For a plural French switches the verb and stops eliding, because *sont* opens with a consonant:

Ce sont des cafés. — Those are cafés.

ce is Latin **ecce hoc** — *behold this* — a whole phrase worn down to two letters over fifteen centuries. The *ecce* half is still doing work elsewhere in this language, and the next two lessons will show where.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *c'est* — one syllable, *say*
- the table — “C'est du pain. C'est du fromage. C'est du café.”
- people — “C'est mon frère. C'est ma sœur.”
- the plural — “Ce sont des cafés.”
- the pair — “Il y a un café” against “C'est un café”

Before you move on

What two words are inside *c'est*? (**Ce** and **est**.) What happens for a plural? (**Ce sont**, with no elision.) What Latin phrase is *ce*? (**Ecce hoc** — “behold this”.) What does *il y a* do that *c'est* does not? (**Say a thing exists without saying what it is.**)

38.3 ici, là, là-bas — three distances

You can ask **où ?**. You have had no way at all to answer it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ici — here. · **là** — there. · **là-bas** — over there, further off.

Où est le café ? — Ici.

ici is Latin **ecce hic**, “behold here” — the same **ecce**, “behold,” that is buried inside **c’est**. French said its pointing word so often that it fused into several separate everyday words and then disappeared inside each of them; two more of them arrive in the next lesson.

là-bas is **là** plus **bas**, “low” — *there below*. The picture is of something further down a road, and it marks the far end of a three-step scale English can only manage with two words and a gesture.

The accent on **là** is doing real work: it separates the adverb from **la**, the article. Same letter, same sound, and the grave mark is the only difference on the page.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three, near to far — “ici, là, là-bas”
- the question and its answer — “Où est le café ? — Ici.”
- “Le pain est là.”
- “Il y a un café là-bas.”
- the pair the accent separates — “la” the article, “là” the place
- with what it is — “C’est le café. Il est là.”

Before you move on

Say the three distances. (**Ici, là, là-bas.**) What is *là-bas* made of? (**Là** plus **bas**, “low” — *there below*.) What does the accent on *là* separate it from? (**The article la.**) Answer *où est le pain ?* three

ways.

38.4 **voici** — “here is,” and introducing somebody else

You can give your own name, ask for somebody else’s, and shake hands afterwards. Say all three. Then notice that you have never been able to introduce a third person.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

voici — here is, here are. · **voilà** — there is, there are.

Voici ma mère. — This is my mother.

Voilà mon père. — That’s my father.

Both are frozen commands. **voici** is **vois** + **ci**, “see here”; **voilà** is **vois** + **là**, “see there”. Nobody hears an order in them any more, and the verb inside has not been conjugated for centuries.

The **ci** and the **là** are the two words you took last lesson, and the *vois* in front of them carries the same Latin **ecce**, “behold,” that is buried inside *ce* and *ici*. So French points four ways off one ancient root — *ce*, *ici*, *voici*, *voilà* — and each of the four froze at a different moment. Between them and *c’est*, you can now hand somebody over:

Voici ma sœur. — **Enchanté.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *voici* and *voilà*
- the household — “Voici ma mère. Voici mon père.”
- “Voici mon frère. Voici ma sœur.”
- “Voici mon ami.” then the reply, “Enchanté.”
- the four pointing words in one breath — “ce, ici, voici, voilà”

- your own name, then somebody else's — “Je m'appelle...”, “Voici...”

Before you move on

What two words are frozen inside *voici*? (**Vois** and **ci** — “see here”.) And inside *voilà*? (**Vois** and **là**.) Introduce your mother, and answer yourself. (**Voici ma mère.** — **Enchanté.**)

38.5 ce, cet, cette, ces — pointing at a noun

Say **le, la, les**. Those say *the*. Nothing you own says *this* in front of a noun — *c'est* and *voici* both need a whole sentence.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ce, cet, cette, ces — this, that, these, those, standing in front of a noun.

The choice follows the article you already know, one for one:

the noun takes	you say
<i>le</i>	ce pain
<i>le</i> , before a vowel	cet ami
<i>la</i>	cette mère
<i>les</i>	ces cafés

Only the second line is new machinery, and it is machinery you have already met from the other side. *Le ami* is impossible, so French writes **l'ami**. *Ce ami* is impossible for the identical reason — and here French borrows a **t** instead of eliding, giving **cet ami**.

The result is a small trap for the ear: **cet ami** and **cette amie** are pronounced exactly alike, and only the sentence around them says which was meant.

All four are Latin **ecce iste**, “behold that one” — the same **ecce** inside *ce*, *voici* and *voilà*, welded this time to a different second half.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the article first, then the pointer — “le pain, ce pain”

- “la mère, cette mère”
- “les cafés, ces cafés”
- the borrowed *t* — “l’ami, cet ami”
- the animals — “ce chien, ce chat”
- the two that sound alike — “cet ami”, “cette amie”

Before you move on

Which shape goes in front of a *le*-word? (*Ce*.) A *la*-word? (*Cette*.) A plural? (*Ces*.) Why does *cet* exist? (**To keep two vowels apart**, the same job the apostrophe does in *l’ami*.) Which two of the four sound identical? (*Cet* and *cette*.)

38.6 Voici tout — the chapter, run cold

One Latin word is inside four things you learned this chapter.
Name it, then name the four.

Your turn: the table, pointed at five ways

Everything the book has put on a table, pointed at five different ways. Say each line before you read the next.

Say these aloud:

- it exists — “Il y a du pain, du vin, de l’eau.”
- what it is — “C’est du fromage. C’est du café. C’est du lait.”
- handed over — “Voici le thé. Voici le sel. Voici le sucre.”
- pointed at — “ce beurre, cet œuf, cette eau, ces cafés”
- the loan and the inheritance side by side — *café* and *thé* came from far away; *pain*, *vin* and *lait* never left

Your turn: the distant band — people, animals, the body

Now reach back. Every person, every animal and every part of the body this book has taught, introduced or pointed at.

Say these aloud:

- the household, handed over — “Voici ma mère, mon père, mon frère, ma sœur”
- the four Latin cousins those keep — *mater, pater, frater, soror*
- “Voici mon ami. Voici l’enfant. Voici la famille.” then “Enchanté.”
- the two animals, pointed at — “ce chien, ce chat”
- the body — “cette tête, cette main, ce nez, cet œil, cette bouche, ce ventre”
- the one that needed a borrowed *t*, and why — “cet œil”

Your turn: where

- *Say it*: “Où est le café ?” then all three answers — “Ici. Là. Là-bas.”
- *Say it*: “Il y a un café là-bas.”
- *Ask*: the same question the other two ways you know

Before you move on

Which phrase says a thing exists without saying what it is? (*Il y a.*) Which says what it is? (*C’est.*) Which hands it to somebody? (*Voici.*) Which points at it in front of its noun? (*Ce, cet, cette, ces.*) And what single Latin word is buried in *ce, ici, voici* and *voilà*? (*Ecce* — “behold”.)

Chapter 39

Where Two Words Melt Into One

Modes: 🔄 voice (5) 👁 eyes (1) 🖐 Hands-free start: first 3 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say to, at, of and from, and I know which four combinations of preposition and article melt into a single word.

Every noun the book owns is put in somebody's hands and put somewhere. Two prepositions and four articles make eight combinations, four of which melt – and the rule that decides which is the one du already showed: le and les contract, la and l' do not. The u inside au was an l, which is the same eight-century-old change that made chevaux out of cheval.

39.1 à — one letter, and the accent that saves it

Say **il a** and **il y a**. The **a** in both is the verb. This lesson takes the other one.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the three question words you took last — *comment, combien, pourquoi*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

à — to, at.

à **Paris** — to Paris, in Paris. · à **trois heures** — at three o'clock.

Latin **ad** gave it, and the **d** wore off, leaving a single letter. English

kept the same *ad* in a hundred borrowed words — *advance*, *admit*, *adhere* — where it still means *toward*.

The grave accent has one job and no other: it separates this word from **a**, the verb. Same letter, same sound, and only the mark on the page says which is meant. French does this three times over — *a/à*, *ou/où*, *la/là* — and you have already met the third.

You have owned the clock since it was taught and had no way to say **at** a time. Now you have one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two *as* — the verb “il a”, the preposition “à Paris”
- the clock, at last — “à trois heures”, “à midi”, “à minuit”
- the three pairs the accent separates — “a/à”, “ou/où”, “la/là”
- ask for a time, then answer — “Quelle heure est-il ? — À midi.”
- the three modals, each pointed at a time — “Je veux partir à midi. Je peux partir à midi. Je dois partir à midi.” — and the second verb never moving

Before you move on

What Latin word is **à**? (**Ad.**) What is the accent for? (**To separate it from a, the verb** — nothing else.) Say “at midday” and “at three o’clock.”

39.2 de — “of,” and the word already hiding in *du*

Say **du pain**. You were told two words are inside it. Name them.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

de — of, from.

le café de Paris — the café of Paris. · **le frère de**

Marie — Marie’s brother.

That second line is worth a moment. French owns nothing with an apostrophe: it says **the brother of Marie**, and it has said so since Latin. English is the odd one here — the possessive **’s** is a Germanic survival that Latin’s daughters never had, so *Marie’s brother* is the outlier and *le frère de Marie* is the ordinary European shape. Before a vowel it elides, exactly as *le* does:

le livre d’Anne — Anne’s book.

And you have been saying **de** since the food chapter without meeting it alone: *du pain* is **de** + **le**, and *de l’eau* is **de** with nothing to contract.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- possession, the French way — “le frère de Marie”, “la mère de Anne”
- elided — “le café d’Anne”
- the two you already had — “du pain”, “de l’eau”
- the pair — “à Paris” and “de Paris”

Before you move on

How does French say “Marie’s brother”? (**Le frère de Marie** — of Marie.) Which language invented the apostrophe possessive? (**English**, and none of Latin’s daughters has one.) What two words are inside *du*? (**De** and **le**.)

39.3 au, aux — where à and le melt together

De plus *le* gave you **du**. Predict what *à* plus *le* gives before you read on.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

au = **à** + **le**. · **aux** = **à** + **les**.

au café — to the café. · **aux cafés** — to the cafés.

à la maison — no contraction, because *la* is not *le*.

Two of the four combinations melt and two do not, and the split is the same one *du* already showed you: **le** and **les** contract, **la** and **l'** stay apart.

The *u* in **au** was an *l*. French turned **al** into **au** across the whole language, and once you have seen it you find it everywhere:

older shape	modern
<i>bel</i>	beau
<i>cheval</i>	chevaux
<i>journal</i>	journaux

So the **x** on *aux* and the *x* on *chevaux* are the same story, and a plural that looks irregular is an *l* that turned into a *u* eight centuries ago.

The **x** of *aux* is silent alone and comes back as a **z** before a vowel — *aux amis* is *oh-ZAH-mee*, the liaison you have had since the numbers.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four — “au café”, “aux cafés”, “à la maison”, “à l’eau”
- the pair that melt the same way — “du café”, “au café”
- the liaison — “aux amis”, *oh-ZAH-mee*
- the *l* that became a *u* — “bel, beau; cheval, chevaux”

Before you move on

What is *au* made of? (**À** plus *le*.) And *aux*? (**À** plus *les*.) Which two never contract? (**La** and **l'**.) What was the *u* of *au* before it was a *u*? (**An l**, the same one inside *chevaux*.)

39.4 de la — the half of the partitive that was missing

Say “some bread” and “some water”. Both are yours. Now try “some milk” — *le lait* is a *le*-word, but **la viande**, meat, is not.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

de la — some, in front of a *la*-word.

du lait — some milk. · **de la viande** — some meat. ·
de l’eau — some water.

Three shapes, one rule, and it is a rule you already own from two other places: **de** plus the article, contracting only where *le* and *les* contract. That is worth stating plainly, because it looks like three separate things to memorise and is one:

the noun takes	some...
<i>le</i>	du
<i>la</i>	de la
<i>l’</i>	de l’

The food chapter taught the first and third and stopped, because every noun on its table happened to be a *le*-word or a vowel-word. The middle line was never missing from the language, only from the table.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three shapes — “du lait, de la viande, de l’eau”
- the table you already had — “du pain, du vin, du fromage”
- the two drinks — “du café, du thé”
- article first, then the partitive — “le lait → du lait”
- pointed at, then measured — “ce lait”, then “du lait”; “cette eau”, then “de l’eau”

Before you move on

Which shape goes with a *la*-word? (*De la.*) With a *le*-word? (*Du.*)
 Why does *de la* not contract? (**Only *le* and *les* ever contract** — the same rule behind *du* and *au*.)

39.5 des — the plural of *un*, and the last shape of *some*

un café is *a café*. Say the plural. English drops the word entirely — *cafés* — and French cannot.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

des — some; and the plural of **un** and **une**.

un café → **des cafés** · **une amie** → **des amies**

Il y a des cafés. — There are cafés.

des is **de** + **les**, contracted exactly as *du* is *de* + *le*. So it completes two systems at once and adds no new machinery to either. Here English is the language with the hole. English has *a* and no plural of it, so it says *books*, *cafés*, *friends* with nothing in front. French will not leave the slot empty, and a sentence with a bare plural noun in it sounds unfinished to a French ear. That is the single commonest mistake an English speaker makes in French, and it is a missing word rather than a wrong one. The **s** is silent, and it comes back as a **z** before a vowel: *des amies* is *day-ZAH-mee*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- singular then plural — “un café, des cafés”
- “un chien, des chiens; un chat, des chats”
- the liaison — “des amies”, *day-ZAH-mee*

- existence and identity, in the plural — “Il y a des cafés.” “Ce sont des amis.”
- all four shapes of *some* — “du, de la, de l’, des”

Before you move on

What two words are inside *des*? (***De*** and ***les***.) What is the plural of *un café*? (***Des cafés***.) What does English put in that slot? (**Nothing** — it has no plural of *a*.) Say all four shapes of *some*.

39.6 Au café — the chapter, run cold

Two prepositions and four articles make eight combinations. Four melt into one word and four do not. Say which four melt, and say the one rule that decides it.

Your turn: the four that melt

Say these aloud:

- *à* melting — “au café”, “aux cafés”
- *de* melting — “du pain”, “des amis”
- the four that stay apart — “à la maison”, “à l’eau”, “de la viande”, “de l’eau”
- the two liaisons — “aux amis”, “des amis”

Your turn: the distant band — everything, placed and possessed

Every noun the book owns, put in somebody’s hands and put somewhere. Say these aloud:

- the table, possessed — “le pain de Marie, le vin de Paris, le café d’Anne”
- the table, in the plural — “des œufs, des cafés, du sel, du sucre, du beurre”

- the household, possessed — “la mère de Marie, le frère d’Anne, la sœur de Paul”
- the animals — “le chien de l’enfant, le chat de l’ami”
- the clock, at last with a preposition — “à midi”, “à minuit”, “à trois heures”
- put it all together — “Il y a des cafés là-bas. C’est le café de Marie. Je suis au café.”

Before you move on

Which two articles contract, and which two never do? (**Le** and **les** contract; **la** and **l’** do not.) Name the four melted words. (**Au, aux, du, des.**) How does French say “Marie’s bread”? (**Le pain de Marie.**) And what does English have that French does not need? (**An apostrophe.**)

Chapter 40

Two Ideas, One Sentence

Modes: 🔄 voice (6) 🔄 Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the order a French sentence holds to, and join two thoughts with and, or, but and because.

Every verb the book owns is given a reason. The chapter also names the sentence shape the reader has been building for thirty-odd chapters without being told what it was, and says why French is stricter about word order than Latin ever was: Latin's endings said who did what, French wore them off, and position had to take the job.

40.1 sujet, verbe, objet — the order that carries the meaning

You have been building French sentences for thirty-odd chapters and nobody has said what shape they are. Say **je parle français** and **parlez-vous français ?** and notice that only one of the two moves anything.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the phrase that says a thing exists — *il y a*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The doer comes first, the verb second, and what is done to comes third.

Marie mange le pain. — Marie eats the bread.

Turn those three around and you change who eats whom. French depends on the order, and the dependence has a cause. Latin did not depend on it. *Maria panem edit* and *panem Maria edit* mean the same thing, because **panem** carries an ending that says *this is the thing being eaten* wherever it stands. French wore those endings off — *panem* became *pain*, and the *-em* that did the work went with it. Once the endings were gone, something had to say who did what, and position took the job. So French is **stricter** about word order than its own parent was, and the strictness is the price of the simpler nouns. Two places already break the order, and you own both: a question by inversion puts the verb first, and *voici* and *voilà* have no subject at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the plain order — “Marie mange le pain.”
- turn it round and hear the meaning turn — “Le pain mange Marie.”
- “Je parle français.”
- the doer named by a possessive phrase — “Le frère de Marie mange le pain.”
- the two shapes that break the order — “Parlez-vous français ?” and “Voici le café.”

Before you move on

What order does a French sentence hold to? (**Doer, verb, done-to.**) Why is French stricter about it than Latin? (**Latin’s endings said who did what; French wore them off**, so position had to take over.) Name the two shapes you own that break the order.

40.2 et — “and,” and the one *t* that never wakes

You have said **et vous ?** and **et toi ?** many times as glue in a conversation. It has never been a word of its own.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

et — and.

du pain et du vin — bread and wine.

Latin **et**, unchanged in two thousand years, and the same word inside English **etcetera**.

It hides one genuine oddity. Every other final **t** in French comes back to life before a vowel — *quand est-ce que* is *kahn-TESS-kuh*, and you met that liaison with the numbers. The **t** of **et** never does:

du pain et un café — *pan ... ay ... uh café*, with a clean break.

Nobody can say why this one word refuses. It is old enough that grammarians record the exception and do not explain it, and it is worth knowing because the liaison you would naturally make there is the one liaison a French ear will notice as wrong.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *et*, and the break after it — “du pain et un café”
- the table joined — “du pain et du vin”, “du café et du lait”
- the household joined — “mon frère et ma sœur”
- with the plural — “des cafés et des amis”

Before you move on

What Latin word is *et*? (**Et**, unchanged.) What does its **t** do before a vowel? (**Nothing** — it is the one final *t* in French that never comes back.) Say “bread and a coffee” with the break in the right place.

40.3 ou — “or,” and the accent that is the only difference

You own **où**, “where.” Say it. This lesson takes the word that is spelled the same and means something else entirely.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ou — or. • **où** — where.

du café ou du thé ? — coffee or tea?

The two have nothing to do with each other. **ou** is Latin **aut**, “or”; **où** is Latin **ubi**, “where.” Two unrelated words wore down until they landed on the same three letters, and French put a grave accent on one of them to keep the page readable.

That is now the third such pair you have seen, and they work the same way every time: **a/à**, **la/là**, **ou/où**. The accent carries no sound at all in any of the three — it is punctuation for the eye.

Spoken French makes no distinction whatever. *Où est le café ?* and *ou est le café* are the same noise, and only the sentence settles it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the choice — “du café ou du thé ?”
- “du pain ou du vin ?”, “un chien ou un chat ?”
- the two joiners together — “du pain et du vin”, “du pain ou du vin”
- all three accent pairs — “a/à, la/là, ou/où”

Before you move on

Which Latin word is *ou*? (**Aut.**) And *où*? (**Ubi.**) Do they sound different? (**No** — the accent is for the eye.) Name the other two pairs the accent keeps apart. (**A/à** and **la/là**.)

40.4 mais — “but,” and the Latin word for *more*

Et adds. *Ou* offers a choice. Neither can say that the second half disagrees with the first.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

mais — but.

Ça va bien, mais je suis fatigué. — I’m well, but I’m tired.

Said *may*: the **ai** is the *e* sound you met in *lait*, and the **s** is silent. **mais** is Latin **magis**, which meant **more** — and that is worth a moment, because the same word is still doing the older job next door. Spanish inherited *magis* as **más** and it still means *more*; French inherited it and drifted it into *but*.

The road between the two is short. “*He is clever, more he is lazy*” is not far from “*he is clever, but he is lazy*” — a *more* used to add a second, competing fact turns into a contrast if you use it that way for long enough. One Latin adverb, two daughters, two different parts of speech.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *mais* — *may*, the *s* silent
- “Ça va bien, mais je suis fatigué.”
- “Il y a du café, mais il n’y a pas de thé.”
- the three joiners in a row — “et, ou, mais”

Before you move on

What did *mais* mean in Latin? (**More** — *magis*.) Which language still uses that word for *more*? (**Spanish**, as *más*.) Say the three joiners.

40.5 *parce que* — “because,” and the three words inside it

You can ask *pourquoi ?*. Nothing you own can answer it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

parce que — because.

Pourquoi ? — Parce que je suis fatigué.

Three words are welded in there: ***par*** (“by”), ***ce*** (“this”) and ***que*** (“that”). *By this that...* — a phrase that pointed forward at the reason about to be given, said so often that the first two fused and the third stayed loose.

English built its own the same way. ***Because*** is ***by*** + ***cause***, and the seam is still faintly visible if you look. Two languages, two prepositions, two pointing words, one job.

Before a vowel the ***que*** elides, exactly as *le* and *de* do:

parce qu’il est tard — because it’s late.

And the ***ce*** inside it is the same *ce* you took two chapters ago — the fourth place that one small pointing word has turned up.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the question and its answer — “*Pourquoi ? — Parce que je suis fatigué.*”
- elided — “*parce qu’il est tard*”
- the three pieces, slowly — *par ... ce ... que*
- all four joiners — “et, ou, mais, *parce que*”

Before you move on

What three words are inside *parce que*? (***Par***, ***ce***, ***que*** — “by this that”.) How did English build *because*? (***By*** plus ***cause*** — the same

trick.) What happens to *que* before a vowel? (**It elides** — *parce qu'il.*)

40.6 Deux idées — the chapter, run cold

Say the four joiners. Then say what French lost that made its word order compulsory.

Your turn: joined, chosen, contrasted, explained

Say these aloud:

- joined — “du pain et du vin”, “du café et du lait”
- chosen — “du café ou du thé ?”, “de l’eau ou du vin ?”
- contrasted — “Ça va bien, mais je suis fatigué.”
- explained — “Pourquoi ? — Parce que je suis fatigué.”
- all four in one breath — “et, ou, mais, parce que”

Your turn: the distant band — every verb, given a reason

Every verb this book owns can now carry a reason. Say the sentence, then say why.

Say these aloud:

- “Je parle français, parce que j’habite à Paris.”
- “Je travaille, mais je suis fatigué.”
- the verbs of the page — “Je lis et j’écris.”
- the verbs of the body — “Je marche ou je cours.”
- “J’entends, mais je ne comprends pas.”
- with the three modals — “Je veux dormir, parce que je suis fatigué.”
“Je peux prendre le café.” “Je dois travailler.”
- “J’aime le café, mais je demande du thé.”

Before you move on

Which joiner was Latin for *more*? (***Mais***, from *magis*.) Which one has three words inside it? (***Parce que***.) Which one's *t* never makes a liaison? (***Et***.) And which two are kept apart only by an accent? (***Ou*** and ***où***.)

Chapter 41

Three More Ways to Use a Verb

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can give a command, say what is about to happen, run the second regular verb family, drop the *ne* the way speakers do, and use *on*.

*Every verb the book owns is commanded, put in the near future and refused. The imperative costs almost nothing because *voici* and *voilà* have been frozen commands since the pointing chapter, and the near future costs nothing at all because it walks into the modal chain the reader already owns – a fourth verb in a slot built for three.*

41.1 Parle ! — the command, and the pronoun that goes missing

French insists on a subject pronoun in every sentence — you were told why: the endings are silent, so *je*, *tu* and *ils* carry the person alone. There is one place it lets the pronoun go.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the four melted words — *au*, *aux*, *du*, *des*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

To tell somebody to do something, take the **tu** form and drop the **tu** — and, for an *-er* verb, drop the **-s** as well.

tu parles → **Parle !** · **tu écoutes** → **Écoute !**

vous parlez → **Parlez !** — the polite one, unchanged.

The lost **-s** is a spelling rule and nothing more: it was silent anyway, so the command sounds identical to the form it came from. Only the page changes.

And you have been doing this since the pointing chapter without being told. **voici** and **voilà** are **vois** — the command form of *voir*, “see” — welded to *ci* and *là*. The shape was in your mouth before it had a name.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the form, then the command — “tu parles → Parle !”
- “Écoute !” and the polite “Écoutez !”
- the *-er* verbs you own — “Travaille ! Habite ! Aime ! Demande ! Marche !”
- the command you have said all along — “Voici”, and the *vois* inside it

Before you move on

How do you build a command? (**Take the *tu* form, drop the pronoun** — and the *-s* on an *-er* verb.) Does it sound different from *tu parles*? (**No** — the *s* was silent.) Which word you have said for two chapters is a frozen command? (***Voici***.)

41.2 je vais partir — the future made out of “go”

Aller is yours, and so is the rule that a second verb after *vouloir*, *pouvoir* or *devoir* never changes. Put those two together before you read on.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

aller + an unchanged second verb says the thing is about to happen.

Je vais partir. — I’m going to leave.

Je vais travailler. — I’m going to work.

The second verb sits in its dictionary form and stays there, exactly as it does after *je veux*, *je peux* and *je dois*. So this is not a new construction; it is a fourth verb walking into a chain you already own. What makes it worth a lesson is that English does the identical thing and nobody notices. *I am **going to** leave* has no walking in it at all — the verb of motion has been emptied out and pointed at time. French emptied its own verb of motion the same way, separately, and the two languages arrived at the same idiom by the same road. Spoken French uses this far more than the one-word future that grammars teach first. It is the ordinary way to talk about tomorrow.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Je vais partir.” and “Je vais travailler.”
- with the verbs of the page — “Je vais lire. Je vais écrire.”
- “Je vais dormir. Je vais marcher.”
- the chain, four verbs deep — “je veux dormir, je peux dormir, je dois dormir, je vais dormir”

Before you move on

What two pieces make the near future? (***Aller* plus a verb in its dictionary form.**) What does English use for the same job? (***Going to*** — its own emptied verb of motion.) Say “I’m going to read.”

41.3 finir — the second regular family

parler gave you the biggest verb family in French. **dormir** was irregular and had to be learned as itself. There is a second **regular** family between them, and it also ends in *-ir*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

finir — to finish.

Latin **finire**, from **finis**, “end” — the same root inside English **final**, **finish**, **finite** and **define**.

Said *fee-NEER*, with the *r* sounded, which is where it differs from an *-er* infinitive: *parler* ends in a clean *ay* and *finir* ends in a real *r*.

Grammar Lens: the plural grows a syllable

In the singular the stem is **fini-**; in the plural an extra **-iss-** appears before the ending.

Singular: **je finis, tu finis, il finit** — all three the same noise, which is the ordinary French silence you have met on *parle, parles* and *parlent*.

Plural: **nous finissons, vous finissez, ils finissent** — an extra syllable in every one, and that syllable is what tells the ear a plural is happening.

The **-iss-** is a fossil. Latin had a suffix **-isc-** that meant *begin to*, and **finire** picked it up as **finiscere**, “to begin to end.” The starting sense wore away completely; the syllable stayed. So *nous finissons* is carrying a meaning the verb has not had for fifteen hundred years.

Dozens of everyday verbs run this pattern — *choisir, grandir, réussir* — and every one of them adds the same syllable in the same three places.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the infinitive, with its *r* sounded — “finir”
- the three singular forms, all one noise — “je finis, tu finis, il finit”
- the plural, hearing the extra syllable — “nous finissons, vous finissez, ils finissent”
- the three infinitive endings side by side — “parler, finir, dormir”
- with the near future — “Je vais finir.”

Before you move on

What appears in the plural of *finir*? (**An extra -iss-**.) What did that syllable once mean? (**Begin to** — Latin's *-isc-*.) Name the three infinitive endings you now own. (**-er, -ir**, and the irregular *-ir* of *dormir*.)

41.4 je sais pas — the *ne* that speech leaves out

Say **je ne comprends pas**. Two words wrap the verb. In ordinary speech one of them is usually gone.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

In speech the **ne** drops and the **pas** carries the negative alone.

written: **Je ne sais pas**. · said: **Je sais pas**.

This is not slang and it is not careless. It is what most French speakers do most of the time, and a learner who says every *ne* sounds like a written page read aloud.

The reason it can happen at all is in the history of **pas**. That word was the noun for a **step**: *je ne marche pas* first meant *I do not walk a step*, with the step there for emphasis, exactly as English says *not a bit* or *not a jot*. French did the same with *point* (a dot) and *mie* (a crumb). Then the emphasiser took over. **Pas** spread to every verb, lost its meaning entirely, and ended up carrying the negation by itself — after which the original **ne** became the optional half. The word that was decoration is now the load bearer, and the word that did the work is the one that falls off.

Write both. Say one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- written, then spoken — “Je ne sais pas.” / “Je sais pas.”
- “Je ne comprends pas.” / “Je comprends pas.”

- with this chapter's verb — “Je ne finis pas.” / “Je finis pas.”
- the step that is no longer a step — *pas*, the noun
- the answer-words you keep — “non” and the one that contradicts a negative, “si”

Before you move on

Which half of the negative does speech drop? (**The *ne*.**) What was *pas* before it was a negative? (**A step** — a noun, put in for emphasis.) Which two other nouns did French use the same way? (***Point*** and ***mie*.**)

41.5 on — the pronoun that was a word for *man*

You own six subject pronouns and none of them can say *people in general*. Say **personne**, then take the pronoun built out of a word like it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

on — one, people, they — and in everyday speech, **we**.

On parle français ici. — French is spoken here. / People speak French here.

On y va. — Let's go. (Literally: *one goes there*.)

It takes the same ending as *il* and *elle*, so nothing new has to be learned to use it: **on parle**, **on finit**, **on va**.

on is Latin **homo**, “man,” worn down to two letters. Two neighbours did the identical thing with their own words: German turned *Mann* into the pronoun **man**, and English turned *one* into the pronoun **one** — *one does not do such things*. Three languages, three words for a person, all promoted to mean *anybody at all*.

What French then did that the others did not is let it take over **nous**. *On y va* is what people actually say for *let's go*, and *nous* survives mostly in writing. So the pronoun for nobody in particular has quietly become the pronoun for **us**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *on* — one syllable, nasal
- “On parle français ici.”
- the one everybody says — “On y va.”
- with this chapter’s verbs — “On finit.” “On va travailler.”
- with the dropped *ne* — “On sait pas.”
- the three cousins — French *on*, German *man*, English *one*

Before you move on

What Latin word is *on*? (***Homo***, “man”.) Which ending does it take? (**The same as *il*** — *on parle*.) What does it stand in for in everyday speech? (***Nous*** — “we”.) Say “let’s go.”

41.6 On y va ! — the chapter, run cold

Three of the five things in this chapter are shapes a verb can take and two are words. Sort them, then say which shape leaves the pronoun out and which word replaces one.

Your turn: every verb, three ways

Every verb the book owns, commanded, put in the near future, and refused.

Say these aloud:

- commanded — “Parle ! Travaille ! Écoute ! Marche ! Demande !”
- about to happen — “Je vais lire. Je vais écrire. Je vais dormir. Je vais courir.”
- refused, in speech — “Je comprends pas. J’entends pas. Je finis pas.”
- the false friend, still false — *demander* asks, it does not demand
- the one that means both walk and work — *marcher*

Your turn: the distant band — *on*, and the whole table

The whole table, with *on* in front of it and the joiners between.

Say these aloud:

- “On va au café. On prend du pain et du fromage.”
- “Il y a du café et du thé, mais il n’y a pas de lait.”
- “On finit le pain, parce qu’on a faim.”
- the whole table in the plural — “des œufs, du sel, du sucre, du beurre, de l’eau”
- “On parle français ici, mais on parle anglais là-bas.”
- the three cousins of *on* — French *on*, German *man*, English *one*

Before you move on

How do you build a command? (**The *tu* form without its pronoun** — and without its *-s* on an *-er* verb.) What two pieces make the near future? (***Aller* plus a plain verb.**) What grows in the plural of *finir*? (**An extra *-iss-*.**) Which half of the negative does speech drop? (**The *ne*.**) And what was *on* in Latin? (***Homo*, “man”.**)

Chapter 42

What the Ear Cannot Hear

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I know why a written consonant at the end of a French word is silent, what the plural and the feminine do about it, and what happens to some after a negative.

One sound rule and the four spellings that hang off it. The chapter names the thing the reader has been working around since the numbers – a final consonant is silent – and then shows the plural, the feminine, the -x plural and the negative partitive as four consequences of it rather than four separate facts.

42.1 la consonne finale — the rule under half this book

Say **quand**, **et**, **parlez**, **des**. Four words, four written consonants at the end, and not one of them sounded. Nobody has yet said why.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the joiner Latin used for *more* — *mais*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

A consonant written at the end of a French word is normally **not pronounced**.

Petit is puh-TEE. *Grand* is grahn. *Trois* is trwah. *Beaucoup* is boh-KOO. The letter is on the page and not in the mouth.

Those letters were once sounded. Old French said the *t* of *petit* and the *s* of *trois*, and over centuries the mouth dropped them while the spelling stayed where it was. Every silent consonant in French is a fossil of a sound the language used to make.

Two things bring them back to life, and you own both:

- **Liaison.** Before a vowel the consonant wakes up — *des amis* is *day-ZAH-mee*, *quand est-ce que* is *kahn-TESS-kuh*. You met this on the numbers.
- **A following -e.** Add an *-e* and the consonant is no longer final, so it is no longer silent. That is the next lesson.

There are exceptions worth naming, and the shortest way to hold them is the word **CaReFuL** — *c*, *r*, *f*, *l* are the four consonants that usually **do** sound at the end: *avec*, *bonjour*, *neuf*, *il*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- silent — “petit, grand, trois, beaucoup”
- woken by a vowel — “des amis”, “quand est-ce que”
- the four that usually sound — “avec, bonjour, neuf, il”
- the one *t* that never wakes — “et un café”
- a silent letter you have been pointing with — “ces cafés”, where the *s* is heard only before a vowel
- the accent that is not a sound either — “là”, “là-bas”

Before you move on

What happens to a consonant written at the end of a French word? (**It is normally silent.**) What wakes it? (**A following vowel** — liaison.) Which four usually sound anyway? (**C, r, f, l** — *careful*.) And which word refuses to make its liaison at all? (**Et.**)

42.2 le pluriel en -s — written, and never heard

A final consonant is silent. A plural is written with a final **s**.
Put the two facts together before you read on.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

A French noun takes **-s** in the plural, and that **-s** is silent.

le café → **les cafés** — *luh ka-FAY* → *lay ka-FAY*

Say those two aloud and listen. The noun did not change at all. Only the article in front of it did.

That is the whole reason the article system matters so much here. **le**, **la**, **les**, **un**, **une**, **des** are not ornament — they are the **only** place a French listener can hear that more than one thing is meant. Drop the article, as English does with a bare plural, and a French sentence becomes genuinely ambiguous.

The **-s** does come back before a vowel, as a **z**: *les amis* is *lay-ZAH-mee*. So the plural is audible exactly when the next word begins with a vowel and inaudible otherwise, which is one more reason liaison is not optional politeness.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair, listening for no difference — “le café, les cafés”
- “le chien, les chiens; le chat, les chats”
- the plural that IS audible — “les amis”, *lay-ZAH-mee*
- with *des* — “des cafés, des chiens, des œufs”
- the article carrying the whole load — “le” against “les”

Before you move on

Is the plural **-s** pronounced? (**No** — it is a final consonant.) Then what tells a listener a plural is meant? (**The article** — *les*, *des*.) When does the **-s** come back? (**Before a vowel**, as a **z**.)

42.3 petit, petite — the ending that wakes the letter before it

Say **bon** and **bonne**. You have had both since page one, and the difference between them has never been named.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The feminine of an adjective adds **-e**. That **-e** is itself silent — and it makes the consonant in front of it audible.

petit — *puh-TEE*. · **petite** — *puh-TEET*.

grand — *grahn*. · **grande** — *grahnd*.

Nothing is added to the sound at the end. What changes is that the *t* and the *d* stop being final, so the rule from two lessons ago no longer silences them.

This is worth holding on to, because it makes the feminine **easier to hear than to see**. A French listener knows *petite* from *petit* instantly — one ends in a consonant and one does not — while a reader has to notice a letter that is never said.

The colours behave the same way, and you already own three of them: *vert* is *vair* and *verte* is *vairt*; *blanc* and *blanche*; *noir* and *noire*, where the *r* was already sounding and nothing changes at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair, hearing the *t* arrive — “petit, petite”
- “grand, grande”
- the colours — “vert, verte; blanc, blanche”
- the one that does not change — “noir, noire”
- with a noun behind it — “le vin blanc”, “la maison blanche”
- the pair you have had since page one — “bon, bonne”

Before you move on

Is the feminine *-e* pronounced? (**No.**) Then what does it do? (**It stops the consonant before it being final**, so that consonant sounds.) Is the feminine easier to hear or to see? (**To hear** — the difference is a whole consonant.)

42.4 les bateaux — the plural that is not irregular

You were told that the *u* in **au** was once an *l*. That fact has been waiting two chapters to pay for itself.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Nouns ending in **-eau** and **-eu** take **-x** in the plural instead of **-s**, and nouns already ending in **-s**, **-x** or **-z** take nothing.

le bateau → **les bateaux** · **le cheveu** → **les cheveux**
· **le fils** → **les fils**

The **x** is silent, exactly as the **s** is, so once again the article carries the whole plural.

Two of the three lines are the same story you already have. **Cheval** became **chevaux** because *-als* turned into *-aus*, and French wrote that *-aus* as *-aux*. That is the change that made **au** out of *à + le* — an *l* softening into a *u* somewhere around the twelfth century, right across the language.

So *chevaux* is not an irregular plural at all. It is a perfectly regular plural of a word whose *l* melted, and the strange-looking *x* is a spelling convention for a *u-s* that got there honestly.

The third line is simpler still: a word that already ends in *s*, *x* or *z* has nowhere to put another one, so it does not try. **Le fils** and **les fils** are the same six letters.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “le bateau, les bateaux”

- “le cheveu, les cheveux”
- the invariable — “le fils, les fils”
- the *l* that melted — “cheval, chevaux” and “à le, au”
- with the indefinite — “des bateaux, des cheveux”

Before you move on

Which endings take *-x*? (*-eau* and *-eu*.) Which take nothing at all? (**Words already ending in *s*, *x* or *z*.**) Why is *chevaux* not really irregular? (**Its *l* melted into a *u*,** the same change that made *au*.)

42.5 pas de pain — where the partitive collapses

Say the four shapes of *some*: **du, de la, de l’, des**. Now negate one of them and watch all four become the same word.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

After a negative, **du, de la, de l’** and **des** all become a bare **de**.

J’ai du pain. → Je n’ai pas de pain.

Il y a des cafés. → Il n’y a pas de cafés.

Je bois de l’eau. → Je ne bois pas d’eau.

Four shapes, one replacement, and it elides before a vowel like everything else.

The reason is in what the partitive was doing. **Du pain** means *an amount of bread* — the article was measuring. A negative says the amount is **zero**, and there is nothing left to measure, so the measuring article drops out and only the bare *de* remains.

This does **not** happen to *le, la* and *les*. **Je n’aime pas le café** keeps its article, because that sentence is about coffee in general rather than a quantity of it. So the collapse is a test: if the article was measuring an amount, it goes.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “J’ai du pain.” / “Je n’ai pas de pain.”
- “Il y a du lait.” / “Il n’y a pas de lait.”
- elided — “Je ne bois pas d’eau.”
- the one that keeps its article — “Je n’aime pas le café.”
- with the *ne* dropped, as speech does — “Y a pas de pain.”
- where you are going, and what is not there — “Je vais au café, mais il n’y a pas de café.”
- about to happen, and refused — “Je vais prendre du pain.” / “Je ne vais pas prendre de pain.”

Before you move on

What do *du*, *de la*, *de l’* and *des* become after a negative? (**A bare *de*.**) Why? (**The article was measuring an amount, and the negative makes the amount zero.**) Which articles do **not** collapse? (***Le*, *la*, *les*.**)

42.6 Ce qu’on n’entend pas — the chapter, run cold

One rule about sound runs under this whole chapter. State it. Then name the two things that bring a silent consonant back.

Your turn: silent, and woken

Say these aloud:

- silent — “petit, grand, trois, beaucoup”
- woken by a vowel — “des amis”, “quand est-ce que”, “six ans”, “dix ans”, “neuf ans”
- the four that sound anyway — “avec, bonjour, neuf, il”
- the one *t* that refuses — “et un café”

Your turn: the distant band — everything, in the plural and the feminine

Every noun the book owns, made plural — and listen for how little changes.

Say these aloud:

- the table — “les cafés, les pains, les œufs”
- the household and the animals — “les frères, les sœurs, les enfants, les chiens, les chats, les amis”
- the body — “les mains, les têtes, les nez, les bouches” — and the one that goes its own way, “l’œil, les yeux”
- the colours, masculine then feminine — “vert, verte; blanc, blanche; noir, noire; bon, bonne”
- the ones that never change in the feminine — “rouge, bleu, jaune”
- the article doing all the work — “le café” against “les cafés”

Your turn: and none of it

Say these aloud:

- the four shapes, then their one negative — “du, de la, de l’, des” → “pas de”
- “Il n’y a pas de pain. Il n’y a pas de lait. Il n’y a pas d’eau.”
- as speech says it — “Y a pas de café.”

Before you move on

Why is the plural *-s* silent? (**Because every final consonant is.**) Why is the feminine *-e* audible even though it is silent? (**It stops the consonant before it being final.**) Why is *chevaux* not irregular? (**Its *l* became a *u*.**) And what do all four partitives become after a negative? (**A bare *de*.**)

Chapter 43

Standing Alone

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask who and what, and use the pronouns that stand on their own instead of leaning on a verb.

*Every person and every thing the book owns is asked about and answered. One accident runs under three of the chapter's four pairs: a pronoun that lived unstressed in front of a verb wore down, and the one that stood alone kept its weight – which is why French has *que* and *quoi*, *je* and *moi*, *tu* and *toi*, and only one *elle*.*

43.1 qui — “who,” the word Latin barely changed

Five question words are yours — *où*, *quand*, *comment*, *combien*, *pourquoi*. Every one of them asks about a circumstance. None of them can ask about a **person**.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the pronoun that was Latin for *man* — *on*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

qui — who.

Qui est-ce ? — Who is it? · **Qui est là ?** — Who's there?

Latin **quis**, and almost nothing has happened to it. That is unusual:

most French words are half the length of their Latin parents — *aqua* to *eau*, *calidus* to *chaud* — and this one lost a single consonant in two thousand years.

The **qu-** is the same opening that starts *quand*, *quel* and *combien*'s cousins, and English carries it in the borrowed words **query**, **question** and **quest**.

One thing to watch: **qui** never elides. *Qui est* stays two clean words where *que* would have become *qu'*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *qui* — one syllable, *kee*
- “Qui est-ce ?” and “Qui est là ?”
- ask, then answer with what you own — “Qui est-ce ? — C’est ma mère.”
- “Qui est ici ? — Voici mon ami.”
- asked about several people, with the plural you cannot hear — “Qui sont les amis ?”
- the six question words together — “qui, où, quand, comment, combien, pourquoi”

Before you move on

What Latin word is *qui*? (**Quis**, one letter shorter.) Does it elide before a vowel? (**No** — *qui est*, two clean words.) Ask who somebody is and answer with your mother.

43.2 que — “what,” and the word that always elides

You have said **que** twice already without meeting it: inside **est-ce que** and inside **parce que**. Say both.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

que — what.

Qu'est-ce que c'est ? — What is it?

qui and **que** are Latin **quis** and **quid** — the *who* and the *what* of one pronoun, kept as a pair. French has both halves where English rebuilt its own from a different root.

Unlike *qui*, **que** always elides before a vowel, and that is why the commonest question in French looks so alarming on the page.

Qu'est-ce que c'est is four ordinary words: *que* + *est-ce* + *que* + *c'est* — “what is it that this is.” Said aloud it is three syllables, *kess-kuh-SAY*, and it is the first thing a learner should be able to say without thinking.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the big one, slowly, then fast — “Qu'est-ce que c'est ?” → *kess-kuh-SAY*
- the four pieces — *que, est-ce, que, c'est*
- ask and answer — “Qu'est-ce que c'est ? — C'est du pain.”
- the pair — “Qui est-ce ?” against “Qu'est-ce que c'est ?”
- ask about an action — “Qu'est-ce que tu finis ?” and the plural that grows a syllable, “Qu'est-ce que vous finissez ?”

Before you move on

Which of the pair elides? (*Que*.) What four words are inside *qu'est-ce que c'est*? (*Que, est-ce, que, c'est*.) Which asks about a person and which about a thing?

43.3 **quoi** — “what,” standing on its own two feet

Say **que**. Now try to say it alone, as a one-word question. It cannot be done — the word is too light to stand up.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

quoi — what, when it has to carry weight.

Quoi ? — What? · **De quoi ?** — Of what? · **À quoi ?**
— To what?

que and **quoi** are the same Latin **quid**, twice. One of them spent centuries unstressed in front of a verb and wore down to a single silent-*e* syllable; the other spent those centuries alone or after a preposition, where it had to be heard, and kept its weight.

So the split is not a rule somebody invented. It is one word that lived two different lives in two different positions.

The practical test is short: **que** leans on something and **quoi** does not. After a preposition — *de*, *à* — only *quoi* will do.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- alone — “Quoi ?”
- after a preposition — “De quoi ?”, “À quoi ?”
- the pair — “Qu’est-ce que c’est ?” against “C’est quoi ?”
- all three pronouns — “qui, que, quoi”

Before you move on

Which of the two can stand alone? (*Quoi*.) Which one follows a preposition? (*Quoi*.) What single Latin word are both? (*Quid* — worn two ways by two positions.) Say all three pronouns.

43.4 moi et toi — the pronouns that can stand alone

Je and **tu** cannot stand alone either — they must lean on a verb. You have seen that happen to *que* in the last lesson, and the same accident produced the same result here.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

moi — me. · **toi** — you, informally.

Moi ? — Me? · **Et toi ?** — And you? · **C'est moi.** —
It's me.

You have said **et toi ?** and **et vous ?** for a long time as a fixed piece of conversation. This is the word inside it.

je and **moi** are one Latin pronoun, **tu** and **toi** are another, and each split for the reason *que* and *quoi* split: the form that lived unstressed in front of a verb wore down, and the form that stood alone or after a preposition kept its weight. Three pairs, one accident.

The polite twin of *toi* is **vous**, which does both jobs and does not split — *et vous ?* is the same word as the *vous* in *vous parlez*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- alone — “Moi ?” “Toi ?”
- the phrase you already had — “Ça va bien, et toi ?”
- politely — “Et vous ?”
- “C'est moi.” “C'est toi.”
- the three pairs the same accident made — “je/moi, tu/toi, que/quoi”
- in the order a sentence holds to, doer first — “Moi, je parle français.”

Before you move on

Which form of *je* stands alone? (**Moi.**) And of *tu*? (**Toi.**) Which earlier pair split the same way? (**Que** and **quoi.**) What is the polite word that does not split? (**Vous.**)

43.5 lui et elle — the third pair, and the one that did not split

Je became *moi*, *tu* became *toi*. Predict what *il* becomes, then predict what *elle* becomes.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

lui — him, standing alone. · **elle** — her, and also *she*.

C'est lui. — It's him. · **C'est elle.** — It's her.

Only half the prediction comes true. **il** does split, into **lui** — and **elle** does not split at all. The same four letters do both jobs: *elle parle* and *c'est elle*.

Nothing decided that except which syllables happened to carry stress in Latin. *Ille* gave *lui*, *ille* gave *il*, and *illa* gave one *elle* that was heavy enough already. The masculine split and the feminine did not, and the language has lived with the asymmetry ever since.

That same *ille* family is where **le**, **la** and **les** came from, so the article and the pronoun in front of you are cousins several times over.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “C'est lui.” “C'est elle.”
- the four that stand alone — “moi, toi, lui, elle”
- the feminine doing both jobs — “elle parle” and “c'est elle”
- ask and answer — “Qui est-ce ? — C'est lui.”
- the cousins — “il, elle, le, la”, all from one Latin family
- offer a choice between them — “C'est lui ou c'est elle ?”
- the plural that takes an *x* — “les cheveux de lui”, and “les bateaux”

Before you move on

What does *il* become when it stands alone? (**Lui**.) And *elle*? (**Elle** — it does not change.) Which Latin family gave *il*, *elle*, *le* and *la*? (**Ille**, **illa**, **illi** — one family.) Say the four standing pronouns.

43.6 Qui est-ce ? — the chapter, run cold

One accident made three of this chapter's pairs. Name the accident, then name the three pairs.

Your turn: asking about people and things

Every person and every thing the book owns, asked about and answered.

Say these aloud:

- about people — “Qui est-ce ? — C’est ma mère. C’est mon père. C’est mon frère. C’est ma sœur.”
- “Qui est-ce ? — C’est mon ami. C’est l’enfant.”
- about things — “Qu’est-ce que c’est ? — C’est du pain. C’est du café. C’est du fromage.”
- the short spoken version — “C’est quoi ?”
- the three ways to ask, all still yours — voice, *est-ce que*, inversion

Your turn: the distant band — standing alone

The leaning pronouns and the standing ones, side by side.

Say these aloud:

- leaning — “je suis, tu es, il est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont”
- standing — “moi, toi, lui, elle”
- the pairs — “je/moi, tu/toi, il/lui” — and the one that did not split, “elle”
- the same accident on a question word — “que/quoi”
- the phrase you have had all along — “Ça va bien, et toi ?” and politely, “Et vous ?”
- the pronoun that took over from *nous* — “On y va.”
- contrasted — “Moi, oui, mais toi, non.”

Before you move on

Which question pronoun never elides? (*Qui.*) Which one always does? (*Que.*) Which one stands alone and follows a preposition? (*Quoi.*) And which of the four standing pronouns is the same word as its leaning twin? (*Elle.*)

Chapter 44

How Much, and What to Call People

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say a lot, a little, very and enough, and address somebody the way French expects.

Combien ? has had no possible answer since it was taught, and now it has four. The chapter also finishes the bare-de rule: a quantity word is already measuring, so the measuring article drops – which is the same reason the partitive collapses after a negative, one chapter earlier.

44.1 beaucoup — “a beautiful blow”

You can say *some* four ways and *none* one way. You have no way at all to say **a lot**.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the four partitives collapsing after a negative — *pas de*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

beaucoup — a lot, much, many.

beaucoup de café — a lot of coffee. · **beaucoup d’amis** — a lot of friends.

Note what follows it: a bare **de**, exactly as after a negative. Any word of quantity in French takes *de* and never *du* or *des*, for the same reason

— the quantity word is already doing the measuring, so the measuring article drops out.

beaucoup is **beau** + **coup**, “a beautiful blow.” *Coup* is Latin **colaphus**, a punch on the ear, and English borrowed it far more politely as *coup d’état* and *a coup*. A word from a fistfight became the ordinary French for *a lot* — the promotion any word earns by carrying emphasis often enough.

The **p** is silent, as final consonants are: *boh-KOO*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *beaucoup* — *boh-KOO*, the *p* silent
- “beaucoup de café”, “beaucoup de pain”, “beaucoup d’amis”
- the three shapes of the same *de* — “du café”, “pas de café”, “beaucoup de café”
- the two words inside it — *beau* and *coup*
- asked and explained — “Qu’est-ce que c’est ? — Beaucoup de café, parce que j’ai beaucoup d’amis.”

Before you move on

What follows *beaucoup*? (A bare ***de*** — never *du* or *des*.) Why? (The quantity word is already measuring, so the article drops.) What two words are inside it? (***Beau*** and ***coup*** — a beautiful blow.)

44.2 un peu — the other end of the scale

Beaucoup de café. Say it, and say what has to follow any word of quantity.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

un peu — a little.

un peu de café — a little coffee. · **un peu d’eau** — a

little water.

The same bare **de** follows it, because the same reasoning applies: the quantity is already stated.

peu is Latin **paucus**, “few,” and English has it twice — in **paucity**, borrowed from the Latin directly, and buried in **poor**, which came through French from *pauper*. So the everyday French word for *a little* and the English word for *scarcity* are one Latin adjective that travelled by two roads.

un peu is also the standard modest answer to a question about what you can do:

Vous parlez français ? — Un peu.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair, both ends of the scale — “beaucoup de café”, “un peu de café”
- “un peu de pain”, “un peu d’eau”
- the modest answer — “Vous parlez français ? — Un peu.”
- asked short — “C’est quoi ? — Un peu de pain.”

Before you move on

What follows *un peu*? (**A bare de**, as after *beaucoup*.) What Latin word is *peu*? (**Paucus**, “few” — English *paucity*.) Answer *vous parlez français ?* modestly.

44.3 très — “very,” and the line it crosses

Beaucoup and *un peu* measure a **thing** and both take *de*. This one measures a **quality**, and it takes nothing at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

très — very, in front of an adjective or an adverb.

très bien — very well. · **très bon** — very good.

No *de*, ever. That is the whole difference: *beaucoup* and *un peu* stand in front of a **noun** and need the bare *de*; *très* stands in front of an **adjective** and needs nothing.

très is Latin **trans**, “across, beyond” — the *trans* of *transport* and *translate*. To say a thing is *très bon* is to say it has gone **across a line** into another category, which is what every intensifier in every language is trying to do.

The **s** is silent and comes back as a **z** before a vowel: *très intéressant* is *tray-zan-tay-ress-AHN*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “très bien”, “très bon”
- the feminine — “très bonne”
- the contrast — “beaucoup de café” against “très bon”
- the liaison — “très intéressant”
- the answer everybody gives — “Ça va ? — Très bien, merci.”
- as a command — “Parle très bien !” and “Écoute !”
- standing alone — “Moi, très bien. Et toi ?”
- the weather, measured — “Il fait très chaud.” “Il pleut”, and *le temps*, which is both the time and the weather
- the colours, measured — “très vert”, “très jaune”, and the German cousin *gelb* that *jaune* is not

Before you move on

What does *très* stand in front of? (**An adjective or an adverb** — never a noun.) Does it take *de*? (**No.**) What Latin word is it? (***Trans***, “across”.)

44.4 assez — “enough,” and “rather”

Three quantity words are yours. Two take *de* and one does not. Say which is which before you read on.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

assez — enough; and also *rather*, *fairly*.

assez de café — enough coffee. · **assez bon** — rather good.

It does both jobs, and which one it is doing depends on what follows it: before a **noun** it takes *de* and means *enough*; before an **adjective** it takes nothing and means *rather*.

So *assez* behaves like *beaucoup* in one position and like *très* in the other, which makes it the word that ties the chapter together.

assez is Latin **ad satis**, “to enough.” That *satis* is the root inside English **satisfy**, **saturate** and **satiate** — so to be *satisfied* is literally to have been given **enough**.

The **z** is silent, like every final consonant, and unlike *très* it does not usually come back before a vowel.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- with a noun — “assez de café”, “assez de pain”
- with an adjective — “assez bon”, “assez bien”
- all four, in order of size — “un peu, assez, beaucoup” and, for a quality, “très”
- the Latin inside it — *ad satis*, and English *satisfy*

- about to happen — “Je vais prendre assez de pain.”
- about him — “Lui ? Assez bien.”

Before you move on

When does *assez* take *de*? (**Before a noun**, where it means *enough*.) And when does it take nothing? (**Before an adjective**, where it means *rather*.) What Latin phrase is it? (*Ad satis* — “to enough”.) Which English words share that root?

44.5 Monsieur, Madame — “my lord” and “my lady”

You have said **bonjour** since page one and **vous** since the second chapter. A bare *bonjour* to a stranger in France is slightly abrupt, and the word that fixes it is one you have never met.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Monsieur — sir. · **Madame** — madam. ·
Mademoiselle — miss.

Bonjour, Monsieur. · **Bonjour, Madame.**

Two possessives fused into titles. **Monsieur** is **mon sieur**, “my lord,” and **Madame** is **ma dame**, “my lady” — the same *dame* inside English *dame* and *damsel*, and the *sieur* is a worn-down *seigneur*, from Latin **senior**, “the elder.”

The spelling records a word the mouth stopped saying centuries ago. **Monsieur** is pronounced *muh-SYUH*: the *n* has gone nasal-free, the *s* is silent, and the ending is the *eu* vowel. Nothing about the sound follows from the letters, which is why it is worth learning as a noise first and a spelling second.

Where English attaches a surname — *good morning, Mr Dubois* — French attaches the bare title far more often. **Bonjour, Madame** to a shopkeeper is ordinary and expected; the surname is not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the noise, not the spelling — “Monsieur”, *muh-SYUH*
- the greeting, completed — “Bonjour, Monsieur.” “Bonjour, Madame.”
- at night — “Bonsoir, Madame.”
- thanking and leaving — “Merci, Monsieur.” “Au revoir, Madame.”
- introducing — “Voici Madame Dubois.”
- the two possessives inside them — *mon sieur*, *ma dame*
- closing a conversation — “Je finis, Monsieur.” and “Nous finissons, Madame.”
- the courtesy words, each with a title — “S’il vous plaît, Monsieur.” “Je suis désolé, Madame.” “Oui, Monsieur.”
- admitting it politely — “Je ne comprends pas, Monsieur.” and the stem it borrows from *prendre*

Before you move on

What two words are inside *Monsieur*? (**Mon** and **sieur** — “my lord”.) And inside *Madame*? (**Ma** and **dame**.) How is *Monsieur* said? (*Muh-SYUH* — the *s* silent.) Greet a shopkeeper properly.

44.6 Combien ? — the chapter, run cold

Four measures. Three take a bare *de* in at least one position and one never does. Sort them, then say the one rule that decides it.

Your turn: the answers combien was waiting for

Combien ? has had no answer since it was taught. Now it has four.

Say these aloud:

- the whole table, measured — “beaucoup de café, un peu de lait, assez de pain, pas de vin”
- “beaucoup de fromage, un peu de sucre, assez de sel, pas de beurre”
- with the plural — “beaucoup d’œufs”, “pas d’œufs”
- the four shapes of *de* in one breath — “du café, pas de café, beaucoup de café, un peu de café”

Your turn: the distant band — qualities, measured

Every adjective the book owns, intensified — and no *de* anywhere.

Say these aloud:

- “très bon, très bien, assez bon”
- the feminine — “très bonne”, and the consonant it wakes
- the colours — “très rouge, très blanc, assez noir, très vert”
- with the noun behind — “un vin très rouge”, “un pain très blanc”
- the everyday exchange — “Ça va ? — Très bien, merci.”

Your turn: and the person you are talking to

Say these aloud:

- the greeting completed — “Bonjour, Monsieur.” “Bonsoir, Madame.”
- “Merci, Madame.” “Au revoir, Monsieur.”
- “Qui est-ce ? — C’est Madame Dubois.” then “Voici Madame Dubois.”
- written, then as speech says it — “Je ne sais pas, Monsieur.” / “Je sais pas.”

Before you move on

Which of the four measures refuses *de*? (**Très.**) Which one takes it before a noun and not before an adjective? (**Assez.**) Why do quantity words take a bare *de* at all? (**They are already measuring**, so the measuring article drops.) And what two words are inside *Monsieur*?

Chapter 45

Reading — Instructions, a Form, and a First Paragraph

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read a French instruction, a line off a form, and a whole paragraph, without translating word by word.

Sixty-three words of French in a row with no new word in them, including the sentence that admits it did not follow everything and carries on anyway.

45.1 (reading) — six things you would be told

Every line below you have heard and said. Not one is new.

What is new is that nobody says them first.

Read this

Parle ! Écoute ! On y va ! Un peu Beaucoup Merci

Read down the list once, without stopping.

Again, and notice that three of them end in an exclamation mark and three do not. French puts a space before it, which English does not.

Why it's said this way

Parle ! and **Écoute !** are the same verbs you conjugate, with the ending taken off and nothing put in its place. That is the whole

imperative.

An instruction you can only recognise by ear is one somebody has to say to you. On a page it waits, which is why a classroom is the first place a beginner reads rather than listens.

Six lines, and half of them are one word.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six lines, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

What does French put before an exclamation mark? (**A space.**)

45.2 (reading) — six lines off a form

The last lesson gave you things somebody says. These are things somebody writes down.

Nothing here is new.

Read this

Nom : Marie Âge : vingt ans Lundi : le travail Mardi : un
livre Une heure Dix minutes

Read down once, without stopping.

Again — and notice the colon. French puts a space before that too, and the space is the clearest signal on the page that a label has ended.

Why it's said this way

A form is the first thing a beginner can read end to end. It puts the label before the value every time, and it never asks for a verb.

That is why the last two lines are the hardest, not the first four. **Une heure** and **Dix minutes** have no label in front of them, so nothing tells you what they are for until you have read them.

Six lines, and four of them do half your work.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six lines, once, in order, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

Which two lines have no label? (**Une heure** and **Dix minutes.**)
What does French put before a colon? (**A space.**)

45.3 (reading) — the first paragraph

Six instructions, then six lines off a form. Now a whole paragraph.

Sixty-three words, and not one of them is new.

Read this

Bonjour ! Je m'appelle Marie. J'habite à Paris. J'ai un frère et une sœur. Je bois du café et je mange du pain. Le jour, je vais au travail. Je travaille beaucoup, mais j'aime ça. Le soir, je lis un livre. Le livre est très bon. Je ne comprends pas tout, mais ça va. Demain, je vais parler français. Merci et au revoir.

Read it once without stopping. Do not translate as you go — let the sentences arrive.

Now read it again, and notice how little work it took.

Why it's said this way

Look at what is holding it together, because it is not vocabulary.

Et adds. **Mais** holds two true things apart, and it does it twice here — once about work and once about understanding. Each of those was a chapter, and none of them is longer than four letters.

Notice the tenth line especially. **Je ne comprends pas tout, mais ça va.** Somebody has admitted they did not follow everything, and the paragraph carries on. That is the most useful sentence on this page. This is the first whole paragraph the book has asked you to hold at once, and it works because everything in it was paid for.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the paragraph aloud, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many words in that paragraph were new? (**None.**)
Which word appears twice and turns the sentence both times?
(**Mais.**)

Chapter 46

Writing — My Own Line

Modes: ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can write one line about myself from a closed supply of known words, with nothing to copy, and put every accent on.

Complete FR-W02-ma-propre-ligne: subject, verb and the rest, chosen rather than copied, with the accents checked before anything else.

46.1 Your own line — the first writing with no model

Everything you have written so far had something to reach for — a shape, a word, a sound.

This does not. You choose the words, from a supply that is closed: only what this book has taught you.

Writing — controlled composition

Write **one line** about yourself. Subject, verb, then the rest — the order you already know.

One thing to decide deliberately rather than by accident before you start: **the accents are letters, not decoration.**

An acute on an **e** is not a flourish on the same letter; it makes a different sound and, often enough, a different word. A hand that writes French without accents has not written French untidily — it has written something else and hoped the reader would guess.

Write the line. Then read it back and check the accents **before** you check anything else.

Before you move on

Are French accents decoration? (**No** — they are part of the letter.)
And what did you choose here that the earlier lessons chose for you?
(**The words.**)

Chapter 47

Writing — With A Clock

Modes: ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can complete the DELF A1 writing paper's two parts inside its published thirty minutes, and write past the forty-word floor rather than up to it.

Complete FR-W03-avec-la-montre: ten minutes for the form and twenty for the message, then count the words against a floor that has no ceiling.

47.1 The same writing, with a clock

You wrote your own line with as long as you liked.

A task you can only do untimed is not yet a task you can do.

Writing — timed production

What France Éducation international publishes. The DELF A1 writing paper runs **30 minutes** and holds **two** parts: a form to complete, and a personal message of **at least forty words**.

Those numbers are read out of `task-shapes/a1.json`, which transcribes the published materials. Note what is *not* there: the paper publishes a **minimum** for the message and no maximum. Forty is a floor, not a target.

Ten minutes for the form, starting now. Fill every field.

Now **twenty minutes** for the message. Forty words is the floor; write past it rather than up to it.

Stop when the time is up, even mid-word.

Before you move on

Count your words. **Under forty and the task has not been done** — this is the one number on the paper that is a hard floor rather than guidance.

Now the rule worth carrying out of this lesson, because it changes how you should study rather than how you should write today.

DEL F A1 passes on **50 out of 100 overall** — and **any single skill below 5 out of 25 is eliminatory**. A candidate with 45 across three papers and 4 in the fourth does not pass, whatever the total says.

So the paper that decides your result is **the one you are worst at**, not the average of four. If that is writing, no amount of reading practice repairs it.

Chapter 48

Writing — Four Lines, And The Joiner That Moves Nothing

Modes: ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can write four connected lines to a named reader, joining with **et** and **mais** and giving a reason with **parce que**, keeping ordinary word order after it.

Complete FR-W04-quatre-lignes: four lines to one reader, at least one joined with **et** or **mais** and one with **parce que**, then check the words after **parce que** are in ordinary order.

48.1 Four lines, and the joiner that moves nothing

The last lesson asked for writing **finished on time**. This one asks for writing that **holds together**.

Pick one person who will read it.

What to know first

Connected writing is not **longer** writing. Four short lines can be connected; one long line can fail to be. What makes it connected is that a sentence stops standing on its own.

You hold three joiners. **et** adds. **mais** sets against. **parce que** gives the reason.

And here is the thing to notice, which is easiest to see by contrast. In German, the word for *because* drags the verb to the end of its clause: the join is visible in the word order. **French does nothing of the kind.**

After **parce que**, the words stand in exactly the order they would have stood in on their own — subject, verb, the rest. Nothing moves.

That makes French easier to *write* and harder to *hear*. Nothing in the shape of the second clause tells you a reason has started; only the two little words do. Which is why **parce que** has to be written in full, and why it is two words rather than one.

Writing — connected composition

Write **four lines** to the person you picked.

At least one must use **et** or **mais**. At least one must use **parce que** — both words, spelled out.

Use only words you already write. This lesson adds no vocabulary; the whole exercise is the joining.

Before you move on

Cover your first line and read the second alone. Does it still make sense without the first? If it does, you wrote a **list** — which is where you were one lesson ago.

Then find your **parce que** line and read the words after it. They should be in ordinary order. If you moved something, you were remembering a different language's rule.

Pronunciation — a reference, not a chapter

A **reference**, not a chapter. Each lesson tells you the sounds you need for its word and links here for more. French spelling hides more sound than Spanish does — silent letters, nasal vowels, liaison — so this page is worth dipping into, but never a gate to pass before Lesson 1.

Ids (e.g. **silent-final**) are cited in each lesson’s frontmatter **sounds**: field.

The big three habits (unlearn Spanish/English here)

- **silent-final** — **most final consonants are silent**. *salut* → *sa-LU* (no *t*); *vous* → *voo* and *les* → *lay* (no *s*). Common exceptions kept: final *c*, *r*, *f*, *l* (the word “CaReFuL”). *bonjour*’s *r* is pronounced.
- **liaison** — a normally-silent final consonant **reconnects** onto a following vowel: *vous* + *avez* → *vou-zavez*. Comes later; just know it exists.
- **nasal** — some vowels are **nasal**: air through the nose, and the *n/m* itself goes silent. *bon* is not “bon” but a nasal *bõ*; *bien* is a nasal *byẽ*. See below.

Vowels

- **vowel-ou** — **ou** = *oo* as in *food*: *jour* (*zhoor*), *vous*, *bonjour*.

- **vowel-u** — **u** = a front-rounded *ee* with rounded lips (say *ee*, then purse your lips): *salut, tu*. No English equivalent; not *oo*.
- **vowel-oi** — **oi** = *wa*: *soir (swahr), bonsoir, moi (mwah)*.
- **vowel-e-acute** — **é** = a crisp *ay* (no glide): *enchanté*.
- **vowel-e-grave** — **è / ê** = an open *eh* as in *bed*: *très*.

Nasal vowels

- **nasal-on** — **on / om** = nasal *ō* (like *song* without the *g*): *bon, bonjour, bonsoir, nom*.
- **nasal-in** — **in / ain / ien** = nasal *ẽ*: *bien (byẽ), matin, bientôt*.
- **nasal-an** — **an / en** = nasal *ã*: *enchanté (ã-shã-TAY), comment*.
- **double-n-blocks-nasal** — a doubled *nn/mm* **cancels** the nasal and the vowel goes back through the mouth: *bon (bõ)* vs. *bonne (bun)*.

Consonants that differ

- **j-zh** — **j** = the soft *zh* of *measure*: *jour (zhoor), je (zhuh)*.
- **soft-g** — **g** before *e/i* = the same *zh*: *âge*.
- **r-uvular** — **r** = a soft guttural sound at the back of the throat, not the Spanish tap/trill nor the English *r*: *bonjour, soir*.
- **h-silent** — **h** is always silent (as in Spanish): *heure* → *euhr*.
- **ch-sh** — **ch** = English *sh*: *enchanté (ã-shã-tay)*.
- **gn** — **gn** = the *ny* of *canyon* (= Spanish *ñ*): *signe*.

Accents & spelling marks

- **accent-marks** — French accents mostly change **vowel quality**, not stress: *é* (closed *ay*), *è/ê* (open *eh*), *à/û* (distinguish words), *ç* (soft *s*). Unlike Spanish, they do **not** mark which syllable is stressed — French stresses the **last** syllable of a group, lightly and evenly.

Glossary

This glossary collects every word and phrase taught in the book. Pronunciation appears when it differs from the written form; chapter numbers show where each entry is introduced.

(s')appeler

to call / to call oneself

Introduced in Chapter 2.

à

to, at — one letter, Latin *ad*, and the accent that keeps it apart from the verb *a*

Introduced in Chapter 39.

à bientôt

see you soon (literally “to well-soon”)

Introduced in Chapter 4.

à demain

see you tomorrow (literally “to tomorrow”)

Introduced in Chapter 4.

à plus tard

see you later (literally “to more late”)

Introduced in Chapter 4.

aider

to help — English *aid* arriving by the Latin road, while English *help* came by the Germanic one; the two words are unrelated

Introduced in Chapter 28.

aimer

to like AND to love — one French verb where English keeps two, so the strength comes from what follows it, and adding *bien* makes it WEAKER

Introduced in Chapter 28.

aller

to go (and, oddly, “to be” in “how are you?”)

Introduced in Chapter 3.

août

August — the month renamed for the emperor Augustus

Introduced in Chapter 10.

assez

enough, and rather — one word doing both jobs, and it takes *de* before a noun and nothing before an adjective
Introduced in Chapter 44.

au revoir

goodbye (literally “until the seeing-again”)
Introduced in Chapter 4.

avril

April — perhaps the opening month
Introduced in Chapter 9.

beaucoup

a lot — a beautiful blow, two words fused, and the *p* that never sounds
Introduced in Chapter 44.

bien

well / good / fine
Introduced in Chapter 1.

blanc

white — a Germanic word in a Latin language, running against the traffic
Introduced in Chapter 16.

bleu

blue — a Germanic word that went to France, changed clothes, and came back
Introduced in Chapter 16.

bleu, blanc, rouge

the flag, in order — and two of its three colours are loanwords
Introduced in Chapter 16.

bon / bonne

good (adjective)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

bonjour

hello / good day
Introduced in Chapter 1.

bonne nuit

good night (going to bed)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

bonsoir

good evening
Introduced in Chapter 1.

c’est

this is, that is — *ce plus est*, with the elision you have been hearing since *l’eau*
Introduced in Chapter 38.

chien, chat

dog and cat — chien is the REGULAR, expected descendant of canis (unlike Spanish's mysterious perro); chat continues cattus, the same Egypt-to-Rome story as Spanish's gato

Introduced in Chapter 26.

cinq

five

Introduced in Chapter 6.

combien

how much and how many — one word where English needs two

Introduced in Chapter 36.

comme ci, comme ça

so-so (literally “like this, like that”)

Introduced in Chapter 3.

comment

how

Introduced in Chapter 2.

comment

how — a word you have been using since your first lesson

Introduced in Chapter 36.

comment ça va ?

how are you? — the neutral everyday question

Introduced in Chapter 3.

comment vous appelez-vous?

what's your name? (literally “how do you call yourself?”)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

comprendre

to understand — literally com- + prendre, “to take together,” so in French understanding IS grasping, and the verb conjugates exactly like the one it is built from

Introduced in Chapter 29.

courir

to run — Latin currere, the root under current, course, courier and curriculum, and the verb that shows why chien palatalized its c and courir did not

Introduced in Chapter 30.

de

of, from — the word already inside du, and the one that does what English does with an apostrophe

Introduced in Chapter 39.

de rien

you're welcome (literally “of nothing”)

Introduced in Chapter 3.

décembre

December — the month that still says “ten”

Introduced in Chapter 10.

demander

to ask — an ordinary, polite, everyday word, and one of the sharpest false friends French holds for an English speaker

Introduced in Chapter 28.

deux

two

Introduced in Chapter 6.

devoir

must — the third of the set, and the one with a debt inside it

Introduced in Chapter 37.

dimanche

Sunday — the Lord’s day

Introduced in Chapter 7.

dix

ten

Introduced in Chapter 6.

dix-huit

eighteen — free, once you have the rule

Introduced in Chapter 15.

dix-neuf

nineteen — the last number before the system changes again

Introduced in Chapter 15.

dix-sept

seventeen — the number where French stops inheriting and starts building

Introduced in Chapter 15.

dormir

to sleep — Latin dormīre, unchanged in French, and the source of dormitory and dormant, though not of the dormouse

Introduced in Chapter 30.

douze

twelve — the second welded teen, and the one that shows the pattern

Introduced in Chapter 14.

écrire

to write — Latin scribere, “to scratch,” with a propped-up é- that French added in front of every borrowed sc-, sp- and st- word

Introduced in Chapter 29.

enchanté(e)

pleased to meet you (literally “enchanted”)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

entendre

to hear — from a Latin verb meaning “to stretch toward,” so English’s intend is its closest surviving cousin, and French still keeps the older sense in *entendu* and *s’entendre*

Introduced in Chapter 30.

et

and — Latin *et* unchanged, and a *t* that never joins to the next word

Introduced in Chapter 40.

et demie

half past — literally “and a half”

Introduced in Chapter 8.

et quart

quarter past — literally “and a quarter”

Introduced in Chapter 8.

être / ser • estar

the same two Latin verbs, and the opposite solution — Spanish kept them apart

Introduced in Chapter 19.

fermer

to close — from Latin *firmāre*, “to make firm,” so a French door is not shut but made fast; the same verb gave Italian “to stop” and Spanish “to sign”

Introduced in Chapter 31.

février

February — the month of the purification festival

Introduced in Chapter 9.

finir

to finish — and the second regular family, which grows an extra syllable in the plural

Introduced in Chapter 41.

habiter

to live / to dwell (a second -er verb — same pattern)

Introduced in Chapter 5.

heure

hour (feminine)

Introduced in Chapter 8.

huit

eight

Introduced in Chapter 6.

ici, là, là-bas

here, there, over there — three distances, and the same *ci* and *là* already frozen inside *voici* and *voilà*

Introduced in Chapter 38.

il a, elle a

he has, she has — the verb worn down to a single letter

Introduced in Chapter 17.

il est ... heures

“it is ... o’clock” — the frame that tells the time

Introduced in Chapter 8.

il est, elle est

he is, she is — the most frequently said word in the language

Introduced in Chapter 19.

il y a

there is, there are — literally it has there, and the y is a Latin word for there that survives nowhere else

Introduced in Chapter 38.

ils ont, elles ont

they have — the form that refuses to look like the rest

Introduced in Chapter 17.

ils sont, elles sont

they are — the hiss against ils ont’s buzz

Introduced in Chapter 19.

j’ai

I have — one syllable, one vowel, and all that is left of Latin habeo

Introduced in Chapter 17.

j’ai vingt ans / I am twenty

a clean split down Europe — Romance HAS its years, Germanic IS its years

Introduced in Chapter 17.

janvier

January — the month of Janus, god of doorways

Introduced in Chapter 9.

je

I

Introduced in Chapter 2.

je m’appelle...

my name is... (literally “I call myself”)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

Je parle français

“I speak French” — your first full sentence (français = French)

Introduced in Chapter 5.

je suis

I am — from Latin sum, and one of the oldest word-shapes in Europe

Introduced in Chapter 19.

je suis désolé(e)

I’m sorry (literally “I am desolate”)

Introduced in Chapter 24.

jeudi

Thursday — the day of Jupiter

Introduced in Chapter 7.

jour

day (le jour — masculine)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

juillet

July — the month renamed for Julius Caesar

Introduced in Chapter 10.

juin

June — the month of Juno, queen of the gods

Introduced in Chapter 9.

l’ami, l’amie

friend — masculine or feminine by a regular swap, and the reason le/la elides to l’ before a vowel

Introduced in Chapter 33.

l’automne

autumn — the season English borrowed whole

Introduced in Chapter 11.

l’eau

water — the most worn-down word French ever took from Latin

Introduced in Chapter 13.

l’enfant

child — one spelling for both genders, the article alone showing which; literally “not yet speaking”

Introduced in Chapter 33.

l’été

summer — literally “the heat”

Introduced in Chapter 11.

l’hiver

winter — literally “the wintry season”

Introduced in Chapter 11.

l’œil, les yeux

eye — masculine, with a plural that looks irregular but is the REGULAR outcome of Latin oculus; œil’s own singular is the piece that changed

Introduced in Chapter 35.

l’œuf, les œufs

egg — masculine, a genuine cousin of English egg, and the one French noun whose final consonant vanishes only in the plural

Introduced in Chapter 34.

la bouche

mouth — feminine, and originally the Latin word for cheek, not mouth at all

Introduced in Chapter 35.

la famille

family — feminine and fixed, whoever is in it, and once meant the household's servants

Introduced in Chapter 33.

la lune

the Moon (feminine)

Introduced in Chapter 7.

la main

the hand — feminine despite ending in a consonant, and the root of half the words you know

Introduced in Chapter 21.

la mère

mother — and the reason English calls physical stuff “matter”

Introduced in Chapter 12.

la personne

person — feminine no matter who is meant, even a man, and secretly “nobody” when it stands next to *ne*

Introduced in Chapter 33.

la sœur

sister — the one family word that broke the pattern

Introduced in Chapter 12.

la tête

the head — from Latin for a clay pot

Introduced in Chapter 21.

le / la / les

the (masculine / feminine / plural)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

le beurre

butter — masculine, and the same borrowed word as English butter, not two separate coinages

Introduced in Chapter 34.

le café

coffee — masculine, and the one drink-word nearly all of Europe borrowed along the same single road

Introduced in Chapter 32.

le frère

brother — and the friar who is one

Introduced in Chapter 12.

le fromage

cheese — masculine, and named for its MOULD rather than for the milk it's made from

Introduced in Chapter 34.

le lait

milk — masculine, and the one drink in this chapter French did not have to borrow

Introduced in Chapter 32.

le nez

nose — masculine, a silent final z, and another genuine cousin of its English counterpart

Introduced in Chapter 35.

le pain

bread — and the companion who is, literally, someone you share it with

Introduced in Chapter 13.

le père

father — one of the oldest words anyone can reconstruct

Introduced in Chapter 12.

le printemps

spring — literally “the first time”

Introduced in Chapter 11.

le sel

salt — masculine, cousin of English salt by common descent, and the source of a salary story no ancient writer actually tells

Introduced in Chapter 34.

le sucre

sugar — masculine, closing a chapter where every drink-word is; the fourth and longest road of the four

Introduced in Chapter 32.

le temps, il pleut

weather — le temps means BOTH “time” and “weather,” the SAME Latin tempus polysemy as Spanish’s tiempo; il pleut keeps Latin’s pl- UNCHANGED, unlike Spanish’s llueve

Introduced in Chapter 25.

le thé

tea — masculine, and the drink whose name split in two depending which Chinese port a trader dealt with

Introduced in Chapter 32.

le ventre

stomach — masculine, nasal like la main but through a different vowel, and the word that closes four chapters of everyday nouns

Introduced in Chapter 35.

le vin

wine — the word that refused to wear down, in any language

Introduced in Chapter 13.

lire

to read — from a Latin verb that first meant “to gather,” which is why reading, electing, collecting and being elegant all turn out to be the same act
Introduced in Chapter 29.

lui et elle

him and her, standing alone — where elle is the same word twice and lui is not
Introduced in Chapter 43.

lundi

Monday — the Moon’s day
Introduced in Chapter 7.

mai

May — the month of Maia, goddess of growth
Introduced in Chapter 9.

mais

but — Latin magis, more, which stayed more in Spanish and became but only here
Introduced in Chapter 40.

marcher

to walk — and also to work, so ça marche is the most useful two words in the chapter; its own origin is genuinely unsettled between a Frankish verb and a Latin hammer
Introduced in Chapter 30.

mardi

Tuesday — the day of Mars
Introduced in Chapter 7.

mars

March — the war-god’s month, and the old start of the year
Introduced in Chapter 9.

me

me / myself (reflexive and object pronoun)
Introduced in Chapter 2.

merci

thank you
Introduced in Chapter 3.

mercredi

Wednesday — the day of Mercury
Introduced in Chapter 7.

midi

noon — literally “the day’s middle”
Introduced in Chapter 8.

minuit

midnight — literally “the night’s middle”
Introduced in Chapter 8.

moi et toi

me and you, standing alone — the heavy twins of *je* and *tu*, split by stress exactly as *quoi* split from *que*
Introduced in Chapter 43.

moins le quart

quarter to — literally “minus the quarter”
Introduced in Chapter 8.

Monsieur, Madame

sir and madam — my lord and my lady, worn down, and the two words French uses where English uses a surname
Introduced in Chapter 44.

neuf

nine
Introduced in Chapter 6.

noir

black — the straightforward one, straight down from Latin
Introduced in Chapter 16.

non

no / not
Introduced in Chapter 22.

nous avons

we have — and the ending is finally something you can hear
Introduced in Chapter 17.

nous sommes

we are — and the only plural that keeps the regular ending
Introduced in Chapter 19.

novembre

November — the month that still says “nine”
Introduced in Chapter 10.

nuit

night (*la nuit* — feminine)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

octobre

October — the month that still says “eight”
Introduced in Chapter 10.

on

one, people, and in practice we — a noun for man that turned into a pronoun
Introduced in Chapter 41.

onze

eleven — and not “ten-one”, which is the whole surprise
Introduced in Chapter 14.

ou

or — the same three letters as the question word for where, kept apart by one accent
Introduced in Chapter 40.

où

where — and the accent that separates it from a completely different word
Introduced in Chapter 36.

oui

yes
Introduced in Chapter 22.

ouvrir

to open — an -ir verb that takes -er endings, from a Latin verb reshaped to look like its own opposite, and the source of English overt and overture
Introduced in Chapter 31.

parce que

because — three words fused into two, par ce que, 'by this that'
Introduced in Chapter 40.

parler

to speak / to talk (your first regular -er verb)
Introduced in Chapter 5.

passé simple · Präteritum · passato remoto

three languages, one retreat — and it spread by contact, not coincidence
Introduced in Chapter 18.

penser

to think — from a Latin verb meaning “to weigh,” which is why English pensive, ponder, compensate, expense and even the flower pansy all sit in one family
Introduced in Chapter 29.

pourquoi

why — and the answer word that is built to match it
Introduced in Chapter 36.

pouvoir

can — the verb that turns a demand into a request
Introduced in Chapter 37.

prendre

to take — the grasping verb English borrowed a dozen times over, from prehensile to prison to surprise
Introduced in Chapter 28.

quand

when — and a silent d that comes back to life
Introduced in Chapter 36.

quatorze

fourteen — the longest of the welded teens, and the least worn
Introduced in Chapter 14.

quatre

four
Introduced in Chapter 6.

que

what — the partner of qui, and the one that always elides
Introduced in Chapter 43.

Quel âge as-tu ?

asking someone's age — a fixed phrase you can use whole
Introduced in Chapter 17.

qui

who — Latin quis, unchanged in twenty centuries, and the shortest question in French
Introduced in Chapter 43.

quinze

fifteen — and the fortnight the French count in
Introduced in Chapter 14.

quoi

what, standing on its own — the stressed twin of que, and the one that survives after a preposition
Introduced in Chapter 43.

rouge

red — and English red is not a lookalike but an actual cousin
Introduced in Chapter 16.

s'asseoir

to sit down — a verb you do to yourself, from Latin sedēre, and the one French verb that ships with two accepted sets of forms
Introduced in Chapter 31.

s'il vous plaît

please (literally “if it pleases you”)
Introduced in Chapter 23.

salut

hi / bye (informal)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

samedi

Saturday — the Sabbath day
Introduced in Chapter 7.

se lever, debout

to stand — French has no single verb for it, so the movement is se lever (“to lighten yourself”) and the state is être debout, literally “on end”
Introduced in Chapter 31.

seize

sixteen — the last word French inherited already welded
Introduced in Chapter 14.

sept

seven
Introduced in Chapter 6.

septembre

September — the month that still says “seven”

Introduced in Chapter 10.

six

six

Introduced in Chapter 6.

soir

evening (le soir — masculine)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

travailler

to work (a third -er verb — and the origin of “travel”)

Introduced in Chapter 5.

treize

thirteen — three-ten, with both halves now legible

Introduced in Chapter 14.

très

very — Latin *trans*, ‘across’, which crossed over into an intensifier and takes no *de* at all

Introduced in Chapter 44.

trois

three

Introduced in Chapter 6.

tu / vous

you (familiar / formal)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

tu as

you have — the informal one, and it sounds exactly like the last one

Introduced in Chapter 17.

tu es

you are — two letters, and it sounds like a single vowel

Introduced in Chapter 19.

un

one — and, at the same time, “a/an”

Introduced in Chapter 6.

un an, des ans

a year — and the annual, the anniversary and the annals inside it

Introduced in Chapter 17.

un peu

a little — the opposite end of the same scale, and the same bare *de* after it

Introduced in Chapter 44.

vendredi

Friday — the day of Venus

Introduced in Chapter 7.

vert, jaune

green and yellow — vert is the standard, expected Latin viridis descendant shared by nearly every Romance language; jaune comes from a Latin word that literally meant “yellow-GREEN,” and is usually said to share its ultimate PIE root with German’s gelb, though that particular link is less secure than it first appears
Introduced in Chapter 27.

vingt

twenty — a single inherited word again, and the base French will later count in
Introduced in Chapter 15.

voici

here is — a frozen command, see here, and the word that lets you introduce somebody who is not you
Introduced in Chapter 38.

vouloir

to want — and why je voudrais is the form you will actually use
Introduced in Chapter 37.

vous avez

you have — plural, and polite to one person
Introduced in Chapter 17.

vous êtes

you are — and the circumflex marks the s that used to be there
Introduced in Chapter 19.

Review Questions

Try these without looking ahead. Every prompt comes from the same canonical lesson data as its chapter. Answers begin in the next section.

Chapter 1

1.1 salut — *let your eye and hand meet one known word*

Which written letter stays silent at the end of salut?

1.2 salut — *one supported copy*

Copy the visible word salut once, then report how many letters you wrote.

1.3 salut — *look, hide, write, compare*

After hiding the model for five seconds, write the casual greeting and then compare it.

1.4 *One heard greeting — write what you know*

From the heard cue sa-LU alone, write the known casual greeting.

Chapter 22

22.1 oui — *yes*

French has two words for yes. Which one contradicts a negative?

Chapter 45

45.1 (*reading*) — *six things you would be told*

Which line tells you to listen?

45.2 (*reading*) — *six lines off a form*

How old is she?

45.3 (*reading*) — *the first paragraph*

Where does she live?

Answer Key

The first response is the canonical display answer. When a question accepts other authored forms, they appear underneath.

Chapter 1

1.1 salut — *let your eye and hand meet one known word*

Answer: t

Also accepted: the final t; final t

1.2 salut — *one supported copy*

Answer: salut — five letters

Also accepted: salut; 5; five

1.3 salut — *look, hide, write, compare*

Answer: salut

1.4 *One heard greeting — write what you know*

Answer: salut

Chapter 22

22.1 oui — *yes*

Answer: si

Also accepted: si!

Chapter 45

45.1 (*reading*) — *six things you would be told*

Answer: ecoute

Also accepted: Écoute; Écoute !; listen

45.2 (*reading*) — *six lines off a form*

Answer: twenty

Also accepted: vingt; vingt ans; 20

45.3 (*reading*) — *the first paragraph*

Answer: paris

Also accepted: à Paris

Index

Look up an English meaning, a dedicated language topic, or a chapter topic. Each linked reference opens the chapter where the material is introduced; the focus labels name only explicitly typed lesson sections.

A

a clean split down Europe — Romance HAS its years, Germanic IS its years *j'ai vingt ans / I am twenty*

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 17, p. 187

a little — the opposite end of the same scale, and the same bare de after it *un peu*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 44, p. 399

a lot — a beautiful blow, two words fused, and the p that never sounds *beaucoup*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 44, p. 399

a year — and the annual, the anniversary and the annals inside it *un an, des ans*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

ai · as · a — three spellings, one ear

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 17, p. 187

aller · venir · naître · mourir — the shape of the list

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

and — Latin et unchanged, and a t that never joins to the next word *et*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 40, p. 367

April — perhaps the opening month *avril*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 9, p. 105

Asking a Question — Three Ways, and Which One to Use

chapter topic; Chapter 36, p. 333

asking someone's age — a fixed phrase you can use whole *Quel âge as-tu ?*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 17, p. 187

-ātum · -ītum · -ūtum — where the endings came from

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 18, p. 205

au, aux — where *à* and *le* melt together

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 39, p. 359

au printemps, en été — saying you are *in* a season

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 11, p. 125

August — the month renamed for the emperor Augustus *août*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 10, p. 115

autumn — the season English borrowed whole *l'automne*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 11, p. 125

B

because — three words fused into two, *par ce que*, 'by this

that' *parce que*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 40, p. 367

black — the straightforward one, straight down from Latin *noir*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 16, p. 175

**blue — a Germanic word that went to France, changed clothes,
and came back *bleu***

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 16, p. 175

**bread — and the companion who is, literally, someone you share
it with *le pain***

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 13, p. 145

Bread, Water, Wine

chapter topic; Chapter 13, p. 145

brother — and the friar who is one *le frère*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 12, p. 133

but — Latin *magis*, more, which stayed more in Spanish and

became but only here *mais*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 40, p. 367

butter — masculine, and the same borrowed word as English

butter, not two separate coinages *le beurre*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 34, p. 321

C

ç — the little tail that softens *c*

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 43

can — the verb that turns a demand into a request *pouvoir*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 37, p. 343

ce, cet, cette, ces — pointing at a noun

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 38, p. 351

Cheese, Butter, Salt, Egg

chapter topic; Chapter 34, p. 321

cheese — masculine, and named for its MOULD rather than for the milk it's made from *le fromage*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 34, p. 321

child — one spelling for both genders, the article alone showing which; literally “not yet speaking” *l'enfant*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 33, p. 315

coffee — masculine, and the one drink-word nearly all of Europe borrowed along the same single road *le café*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 32, p. 309

Coffee, Tea, Milk, Sugar

chapter topic; Chapter 32, p. 309

Colours

chapter topic; Chapter 16, p. 175

Comment vas-tu ? / Comment allez-vous ?

grammar topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 3, p. 31

D**day (le jour — masculine)** *jour*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

de la — the half of the partitive that was missing

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 39, p. 359

December — the month that still says “ten” *décembre*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 10, p. 115

des — the plural of *un*, and the last shape of *some*

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 39, p. 359

Dog and Cat

chapter topic; Chapter 26, p. 269

dog and cat — chien is the REGULAR, expected descendant of canis (unlike Spanish's mysterious perro); chat continues cattus, the same Egypt-to-Rome story as Spanish's gato *chien, chat*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 26, p. 269

du pain, de l'eau — asking for *some*

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 13, p. 145

E**é è ê — the three hats on *e*, and the one that hides an *s***

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, usage and culture; Chapter 4, p. 43

egg — masculine, a genuine cousin of English egg, and the one French noun whose final consonant vanishes only in the

plural *l'œuf, les œufs*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 34, p. 321

eight *huit*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

eighteen — free, once you have the rule *dix-huit*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 15, p. 165

eleven — and not “ten-one”, which is the whole surprise *onze*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 14, p. 153

elle est allée — the participle agrees

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

elle s'est lavée — the auxiliary lies about the rule

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

elles se sont souvenues — the verbs with no other form

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

enough, and rather — one word doing both jobs, and it takes de before a noun and nothing before an adjective *assez*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 44, p. 399

esse — the first stem

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

est-ce que — the phrase that announces a question before it starts

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

été — the third stem

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

evening (le soir — masculine) *soir*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

eye — masculine, with a plural that looks irregular but is the REGULAR outcome of Latin *oculos*; *œil*'s own singular is the piece that changed *l'œil, les yeux*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 35, p. 327

Eyes, Nose, Mouth, Stomach

chapter topic; Chapter 35, p. 327

F

Family, and the Oldest Words We Have

chapter topic; Chapter 12, p. 133

family — feminine and fixed, whoever is in it, and once meant the household's servants *la famille*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 33, p. 315

Farewells

chapter topic; Chapter 4, p. 43

father — one of the oldest words anyone can reconstruct *le père*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 12, p. 133

February — the month of the purification festival *février*

explicit focus: pronunciation, usage and culture; Chapter 9, p. 105

fifteen — and the fortnight the French count in *quinze*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 14, p. 153

fini • vendu — the other two classes

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 205

five *cinq*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

Five Ways to Point

chapter topic; Chapter 38, p. 351

four *quatre*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

Four lines, and the joiner that moves nothing

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 48, p. 415

fourteen — the longest of the welded teens, and the least

worn *quatorze*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 14, p. 153

Friday — the day of Venus *vendredi*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 81

friend — masculine or feminine by a regular swap, and the

reason *le/la* elides to *l'* before a vowel *l'ami, l'amie*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 33, p. 315

G

good (adjective) *bon / bonne*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

good evening *bonsoir*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

good night (going to bed) *bonne nuit*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

goodbye (literally “until the seeing-again”) *au revoir*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 4, p. 43

Green and Yellow

chapter topic; Chapter 27, p. 271

green and yellow — vert is the standard, expected Latin *viridis* descendant shared by nearly every Romance language; *jaune* comes from a Latin word that literally meant “yellow-GREEN,” and is usually said to share its ultimate PIE root with German’s *gelb*, though that particular link is less secure than it first appears *vert, jaune*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 27, p. 271

Greetings

chapter topic; Chapter 1, p. 1

H

habēo litterās scriptās — the buried possessive

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 205

habēre — the root you already met

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

half past — literally “and a half” *et demie*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 8, p. 93

he has, she has — the verb worn down to a single letter *il a, elle a*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

he is, she is — the most frequently said word in the language *il est, elle est*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

Head and Hand

chapter topic; Chapter 21, p. 251

Hearing, Sleeping, Walking, Running

chapter topic; Chapter 30, p. 289

hello / good day *bonjour*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

here is — a frozen command, see here, and the word that lets you introduce somebody who is not you *voici*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 38, p. 351

here, there, over there — three distances, and the same *ci* and *là* already frozen inside *voici* and *voilà* *ici, là, là-bas*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 38, p. 351

hi / bye (informal) *salut*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

him and her, standing alone — where *elle* is the same word twice and *lui* is not *lui et elle*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 43, p. 391

hour (feminine) *heure*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 8, p. 93

how *comment*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 19

how — a word you have been using since your first**lesson** *comment*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

How Are You?

chapter topic; Chapter 3, p. 31

how are you? — the neutral everyday question *comment ça va ?*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 31

how much and how many — one word where English needs**two** *combien*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

How Much, and What to Call People

chapter topic; Chapter 44, p. 399

I**I** *je*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 19

I am — from Latin sum, and one of the oldest word-shapes in**Europe** *je suis*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

ï ë ü — the two dots that say “say me on my own”

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 4, p. 43

I have — one syllable, one vowel, and all that is left of Latin**habeō** *j’ai*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

I’m sorry (literally “I am desolate”) *je suis désolé(e)*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 24, p. 263

“I speak French” — your first full sentence (français =**French)** *Je parle français*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 55

il parla · habló · falou — the same tense, four fates

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 18, p. 205

il parla — the past you read but never say

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 205

Introducing Yourself

chapter topic; Chapter 2, p. 19

“it is ... o’clock” — the frame that tells the time *il est ... heures*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 8, p. 93

J

j'ai couru — not every motion verb qualifies

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

j'ai parlé — the past built from “have”

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 205

j'ai vingt ans — having your years

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 17, p. 187

January — the month of Janus, god of doorways *janvier*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 9, p. 105

je fus — the second stem

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

je me suis levé — the pronominal family

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

je sais pas — the *ne* that speech leaves out

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 41, p. 375

je suis allé — the past built from “be”

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

je suis monté / j'ai monté les valises

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

je vais partir — the future made out of “go”

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 41, p. 375

July — the month renamed for Julius Caesar *juillet*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 10, p. 115

June — the month of Juno, queen of the gods *juin*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 9, p. 105

L

l'aube — the white that stopped being a colour

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 16, p. 175

la consonne finale — the rule under half this book

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 42, p. 383

le pluriel en -s — written, and never heard

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 42, p. 383

le vin rouge — where the colour goes

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 16, p. 175

les bateaux — the plural that is not irregular

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 42, p. 383

les lettres que j'ai écrites — the fossil

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 205

M

March — the war-god’s month, and the old start of the year *mars*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 9, p. 105

May — the month of Maia, goddess of growth *mai*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 9, p. 105

me and you, standing alone — the heavy twins of je and tu, split by stress exactly as quoi split from que *moi et toi*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 43, p. 391

me / myself (reflexive and object pronoun) *me*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 19

midnight — literally “the night’s middle” *minuit*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 8, p. 93

milk — masculine, and the one drink in this chapter French did not have to borrow *le lait*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 32, p. 309

Monday — the Moon’s day *lundi*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 81

mother — and the reason English calls physical stuff “matter” *la mère*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 12, p. 133

mouth — feminine, and originally the Latin word for cheek, not

mouth at all *la bouche*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 35, p. 327

must — the third of the set, and the one with a debt inside

it *devoir*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 37, p. 343

my name is... (literally “I call myself”) *je m’appelle...*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 2, p. 19

N

night (la nuit — feminine) *nuit*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

nine *neuf*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

nineteen — the last number before the system changes

again *dix-neuf*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 15, p. 165

no / not *non*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 22, p. 257

noon — literally “the day’s middle” *midi*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 8, p. 93

nose — masculine, a silent final z, and another genuine cousin of its English counterpart *le nez*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 35, p. 327

November — the month that still says “nine” *novembre*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 10, p. 115

Numbers One to Ten

chapter topic; Chapter 6, p. 65

O

October — the month that still says “eight” *octobre*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 10, p. 115

of, from — the word already inside du, and the one that does what English does with an apostrophe *de*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 39, p. 359

one — and, at the same time, “a/an” *un*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

One heard greeting — write what you know

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

one, people, and in practice we — a noun for man that turned into a pronoun *on*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 41, p. 375

or — the same three letters as the question word for where, kept apart by one accent *ou*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 40, p. 367

P

Parle ! — the command, and the pronoun that goes missing

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 41, p. 375

parlé — the past participle

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 205

parler · parlé · parler — one sound, three jobs

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 205

parlez-vous — the third way to ask

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

pas de pain — where the partitive collapses

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 42, p. 383

père / father — one sound-law

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 12, p. 133

person — feminine no matter who is meant, even a man, and secretly “nobody” when it stands next to ne *la personne*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 33, p. 315

petit, petite — the ending that wakes the letter before it
 grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 42, p. 383

Please

chapter topic; Chapter 23, p. 261

please (literally “if it pleases you”) *s’il vous plaît*
 explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 23, p. 261

pleased to meet you (literally “enchanted”) *enchanté(e)*
 explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 19

Q

quarter past — literally “and a quarter” *et quart*
 explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 8, p. 93

quarter to — literally “minus the quarter” *moins le quart*
 explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 8, p. 93

quel, quelle — which

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

R

Reading — Instructions, a Form, and a First Paragraph
 chapter topic; Chapter 45, p. 407

red — and English red is not a lookalike but an actual
cousin *rouge*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 16, p. 175

S

salt — masculine, cousin of English salt by common descent, and
the source of a salary story no ancient writer actually tells *le sel*
 explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 34, p. 321

salut — let your eye and hand meet one known word
 script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

salut — look, hide, write, compare
 script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

salut — one supported copy
 script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

Saturday — the Sabbath day *samedi*
 explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 81

see you later (literally “to more late”) *à plus tard*
 explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 4, p. 43

see you soon (literally “to well-soon”) *à bientôt*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 43

see you tomorrow (literally “to tomorrow”) *à demain*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 4, p. 43

seize / dix-sept — the seam

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 15, p. 165

September — the month that still says “seven” *septembre*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 10, p. 115

seven *sept*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

seventeen — the number where French stops inheriting and starts building *dix-sept*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 15, p. 165

sir and madam — my lord and my lady, worn down, and the two words French uses where English uses a surname *Monsieur, Madame*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 44, p. 399

sister — the one family word that broke the pattern *la sœur*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 12, p. 133

Sitting, Standing, Opening, Closing

chapter topic; Chapter 31, p. 299

six *six*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

sixteen — the last word French inherited already welded *seize*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 14, p. 153

so-so (literally “like this, like that”) *comme ci, comme ça*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 3, p. 31

Sorry

chapter topic; Chapter 24, p. 263

spring — literally “the first time” *le printemps*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 11, p. 125

Standing Alone

chapter topic; Chapter 43, p. 391

stomach — masculine, nasal like la main but through a different vowel, and the word that closes four chapters of everyday nouns *le ventre*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 35, p. 327

sugar — masculine, closing a chapter where every drink-word is; the fourth and longest road of the four *le sucre*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 32, p. 309

sujet, verbe, objet — the order that carries the meaning

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 40, p. 367

summer — literally “the heat” *l’été*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 11, p. 125

Sunday — the Lord's day *dimanche*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 81

suppletion — three verbs in a trench coat

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 19, p. 221

T**Taking, Asking, Helping, Loving**

chapter topic; Chapter 28, p. 273

tea — masculine, and the drink whose name split in two depending which Chinese port a trader dealt with *le thé*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 32, p. 309

Telling the Time

chapter topic; Chapter 8, p. 93

ten *dix*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

thank you *merci*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 3, p. 31

The Compound Past

chapter topic; Chapter 18, p. 205

The Days of the Week

chapter topic; Chapter 7, p. 81

The First Verbs

chapter topic; Chapter 5, p. 55

the flag, in order — and two of its three colours areloanwords *bleu, blanc, rouge*

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 175

The Four Seasons

chapter topic; Chapter 11, p. 125

the hand — feminine despite ending in a consonant, and the rootof half the words you know *la main*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 21, p. 251

the head — from Latin for a clay pot *la tête*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 21, p. 251

the (masculine / feminine / plural) *le / la / les*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

The Months: Caesars and Counting

chapter topic; Chapter 10, p. 115

The Months: Gods and Beginnings

chapter topic; Chapter 9, p. 105

The months that are off by two

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

the Moon (feminine) *la lune*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 7, p. 81

The Past That Takes être

chapter topic; Chapter 20, p. 237

The People You Introduce

chapter topic; Chapter 33, p. 315

the same two Latin verbs, and the opposite solution — Spanish**kept them apart être / ser · estar**

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 19, p. 221

The same writing, with a clock

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 47, p. 413

The Welded Teens

chapter topic; Chapter 14, p. 153

there is, there are — literally it has there, and the y is a Latin**word for there that survives nowhere else il y a**

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 38, p. 351

they are — the hiss against ils ont's buzz ils sont, elles sont

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

they have — the form that refuses to look like the rest ils ont,**elles ont**

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

thirteen — three-ten, with both halves now legible treize

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 14, p. 153

this is, that is — ce plus est, with the elision you have been**hearing since l'eau c'est**

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 38, p. 351

three trois

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

three languages, one retreat — and it spread by contact, not**coincidence passé simple · Präteritum · passato remoto**

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 18, p. 205

Three More Ways to Use a Verb

chapter topic; Chapter 41, p. 375

Thursday — the day of Jupiter jeudi

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 81

to ask — an ordinary, polite, everyday word, and one of the**sharpest false friends French holds for an English****speaker demander**

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 28, p. 273

to, at — one letter, Latin ad, and the accent that keeps it apart**from the verb a à**

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 39, p. 359

To Be, and the Three Verbs Inside It

chapter topic; Chapter 19, p. 221

to call / to call oneself (s')appeler

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 19

to close — from Latin *firmāre*, “to make firm,” so a French door is not shut but made fast; the same verb gave Italian “to stop” and Spanish “to sign” *fermer*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 31, p. 299

to finish — and the second regular family, which grows an extra syllable in the plural *finir*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 41, p. 375

to go (and, oddly, “to be” in “how are you?”) *aller*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 31

To Have, and How Old You Are

chapter topic; Chapter 17, p. 187

to hear — from a Latin verb meaning “to stretch toward,” so English’s *intend* is its closest surviving cousin, and French still keeps the older sense in *entendu* and *s’entendre* *entendre*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 30, p. 289

to help — English aid arriving by the Latin road, while English *help* came by the Germanic one; the two words are

unrelated *aider*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 28, p. 273

to like AND to love — one French verb where English keeps two, so the strength comes from what follows it, and adding *bien* makes it **WEAKER** *aimer*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 28, p. 273

to live / to dwell (a second -er verb — same pattern) *habiter*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 55

to open — an -ir verb that takes -er endings, from a Latin verb reshaped to look like its own opposite, and the source of English *overt* and *overture* *ouvrir*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 31, p. 299

to read — from a Latin verb that first meant “to gather,” which is why reading, electing, collecting and being elegant all turn out to be the same act *lire*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 29, p. 281

to run — Latin *currere*, the root under *current*, *course*, *courier* and *curriculum*, and the verb that shows why *chien* palatalized its *c* and *courir* did not *courir*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 30, p. 289

to sit down — a verb you do to yourself, from Latin *sedēre*, and the one French verb that ships with two accepted sets of forms *s’asseoir*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 31, p. 299

to sleep — Latin *dormire*, unchanged in French, and the source of dormitory and dormant, though not of the dormouse *dormir*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 30, p. 289

to speak / to talk (your first regular -er verb) *parler*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 55

to stand — French has no single verb for it, so the movement is *se lever* (“to lighten yourself”) and the state is *être debout*,

literally “on end” *se lever, debout*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 31, p. 299

to take — the grasping verb English borrowed a dozen times

over, from prehensile to prison to surprise *prendre*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 28, p. 273

to think — from a Latin verb meaning “to weigh,” which is why English pensive, ponder, compensate, expense and even the

flower pansy all sit in one family *penser*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 29, p. 281

to understand — literally *com-* + *prendre*, “to take together,” so in French understanding IS grasping, and the verb conjugates

exactly like the one it is built from *comprendre*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 29, p. 281

to walk — and also to work, so *ça marche* is the most useful two words in the chapter; its own origin is genuinely unsettled

between a Frankish verb and a Latin hammer *marcher*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 30, p. 289

to want — and why *je voudrais* is the form you will actually

use *vouloir*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 37, p. 343

to work (a third -er verb — and the origin of “travel”) *travailler*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 5, p. 55

to write — Latin *scribere*, “to scratch,” with a propped-up *é-* that French added in front of every borrowed *sc-*, *sp-* and *st-*

word *écrire*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 29, p. 281

trei-ze — which half is which

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 14, p. 153

Tuesday — the day of Mars *mardi*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 81

twelve — the second welded teen, and the one that shows the pattern *douze*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 14, p. 153

twenty — a single inherited word again, and the base French will later count in *vingt*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 15, p. 165

two *deux*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 65

Two Ideas, One Sentence

chapter topic; Chapter 40, p. 367

U

une heure — one o'clock

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 8, p. 93

une question — the question you make with your voice alone

grammar topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

une seule règle — both halves are the same fact

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 237

V

Verbs of the Mind

chapter topic; Chapter 29, p. 281

very — Latin trans, 'across', which crossed over into an**intensifier and takes no de at all** *très*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 44, p. 399

vīgintī — the number French counts in

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 15, p. 165

W

Want, Can, Must

chapter topic; Chapter 37, p. 343

water — the most worn-down word French ever took from**Latin** *l'eau*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 13, p. 145

we are — and the only plural that keeps the regular ending *nous**sommes*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

we have — and the ending is finally something you can hear *nous**avons*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

Weather

chapter topic; Chapter 25, p. 267

weather — le temps means BOTH “time” and “weather,” the SAME Latin *tempus* polysemy as Spanish’s *tiempo*; *il pleut* keeps Latin’s *pl-* UNCHANGED, unlike Spanish’s *llueve le temps, il pleut*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 25, p. 267

Wednesday — the day of Mercury *mercredi*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 81

well / good / fine *bien*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

what’s your name? (literally “how do you call

yourself?”) *comment vous appelez-vous?*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 19

what, standing on its own — the stressed twin of que, and the one that survives after a preposition *quoi*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 43, p. 391

What the Ear Cannot Hear

chapter topic; Chapter 42, p. 383

what — the partner of qui, and the one that always elides *que*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 43, p. 391

when — and a silent d that comes back to life *quand*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

where — and the accent that separates it from a completely different word *où*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

Where French Changes Its Mind

chapter topic; Chapter 15, p. 165

Where Two Words Melt Into One

chapter topic; Chapter 39, p. 359

white — a Germanic word in a Latin language, running against the traffic *blanc*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 16, p. 175

who — Latin quis, unchanged in twenty centuries, and the shortest question in French *qui*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 43, p. 391

why — and the answer word that is built to match it *pourquoi*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 333

wine — the word that refused to wear down, in any language *le vin*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 13, p. 145

winter — literally “the wintry season” *l’hiver*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 11, p. 125

Writing — Four Lines, And The Joiner That Moves Nothing

chapter topic; Chapter 48, p. 415

Writing — My Own Line

chapter topic; Chapter 46, p. 411

Writing — With A Clock

chapter topic; Chapter 47, p. 413

Y**yes** *oui*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 22, p. 257

Yes and No

chapter topic; Chapter 22, p. 257

you are — and the circumflex marks the s that used to be**there** *vous êtes*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

you are — two letters, and it sounds like a single vowel *tu es*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 19, p. 221

you (familiar / formal) *tu / vous*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 19

you have — plural, and polite to one person *vous avez*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

you have — the informal one, and it sounds exactly like the last**one** *tu as*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 17, p. 187

you're welcome (literally “of nothing”) *de rien*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 3, p. 31

Your own line — the first writing with no model

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 46, p. 411

Z**-ze — the ten you keep meeting**

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 14, p. 153

Other**œ — one letter, not two**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 12, p. 133