



FRENCH · LEVEL 1

Lesson 1

Reading French, introducing yourself, and the first grammar foundations — with corrected exercises

● Pronunciation

● Introducing yourself

● Être & Avoir

● Articles & gender

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INTRODUCTION

Why French

French comes from spoken Latin and belongs to the Romance family, alongside Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian. It is spoken in France, in Walloon Belgium, in Romandy in Switzerland, in Monaco, in Luxembourg, in French-speaking Canada and across much of Africa — on five continents.

By total number of speakers (native and second language) French ranks among the world's top five languages. It is known for its musicality and for a particularly rich sound system, whose signature feature is the nasal vowel.

One point is worth knowing from the outset: **French is not a phonetic language**. What is written is not read literally — sometimes three letters produce a single sound, and whole endings stay silent. English speakers have an unexpected advantage here: roughly a third of English vocabulary comes from French, so you already recognize more words than you think.

Chapter 1 — Reading French

Chapter 2 — Introducing yourself

Chapter 3 — Articles and gender

Chapter 4 — Exercises

Allow one to two hours for a first pass, and come back to it: the exercises repay being done several times.

CHAPTER 1

Reading French

The first hurdle: French is written one way and read another. It looks daunting at first, but the rules are finite and repeat in every word. Once you have them, you read without hesitating.

1 Nasal vowels — the signature of French

ON in *Bonjour*, **EN** and **AN** in *Comment*, **IN** in *Cinq*: the vowel is pronounced through the nose and **the N is not heard separately**. English has no equivalent, so this one needs practice out loud.

Practise : Try: *Bonjour* · *Comment* · *Bonsoir*. No final N is sounded as such.

2 Letter groups with a single sound

OU → oo as in “food” (*Bonjour*) · **OI** → wa (*Bonsoir*) · **CH** → sh (*Château*) · **EAU** → o (*Bateau*) · **AI** → e as in “bed”.

Examples : *Château* (sha-TOH) — castle · *Bateau* (ba-TOH) — boat · *Eau* (oh) — water.

3 The letter C changes sound

C before **E** and **I** is read **s**: *Merci*. Before **A**, **O**, **U** it is read **k**: *Cadeau* — gift. Exactly the same rule as English “city” versus “cat”.

Familiar ground : **Ç** is always **s**: *Ça va*. The cedilla exists precisely to force the s sound before A, O, U.

4 The letters you never hear

H is never pronounced: *Hôtel*. Final **E** is usually silent: *Au revoir*. And the third-person plural ending **-ENT** is silent too: *Ils parlent* sounds like *Il parle*.

Good news : French writes far more than it pronounces — English does the same, so this will feel less strange to you than to most learners.

5 The accents on E

é (acute), è (grave) and ê (circumflex) are all read as **e**, with different openness. *Café*, *Mère*, *Être*. Without an accent, E is often not heard at all.

Don't worry : At first, read them simply as the e in “bed” — the nuance comes with practice.

Your first words and how they sound

Bonjour — hello, good day · **Salut** — hi, bye · **Bonsoir** — good evening

Bonne nuit — good night (at bedtime) · **Au revoir** — goodbye · **Merci** — thank you

Ça va ? — how are you? · **Comment ça va ?** — how are you doing?
(more formal)

Eight expressions, and you can already greet someone in French.

What really matters

→ French is not phonetic: what you write is not what you say — but the rules are finite.

→ Nasal vowels have no English equivalent: they are learned only by speaking aloud.

→ H, final E and the -ENT ending are never pronounced.

CHAPTER 2

Introducing yourself

First conversation: greeting someone, giving your name, asking for theirs. Three expressions are enough — plus two verbs that will follow you to the end of your learning.

1 Personal pronouns

Je (I) · **Tu** (you, informal) · **Il / Elle** (he / she) · **Nous** (we) · **Vous** (you, formal or plural) · **Ils / Elles** (they, male-or-mixed / all female).

Key difference : French distinguishes **tu** and **vous** where English has only “you”: *tu* for friends and family, *vous* for strangers, elders and any professional setting.

2 Être — to be

Je suis · Tu es · Il / Elle est · Nous sommes · Vous êtes · Ils / Elles sont. Irregular — learn it by heart.

Examples : *Je suis anglais. Tu es à Paris. Nous sommes amis.*

3 Avoir — to have

J'ai · Tu as · Il / Elle a · Nous avons · Vous avez · Ils / Elles ont. Irregular and unavoidable.

Classic trap : Watch out: French uses *avoir* where English uses “to be” for age — *j'ai 30 ans*, literally “I have 30 years”.

4 Reflexive verbs

French has reflexive verbs where English usually has none. The particle sits **before** the verb and changes with each person: **me, te, se, nous, vous, se**. *S'appeler* — to be called.

Conjugation : Je *m'appelle* · Tu *t'appelles* · Il *s'appelle* · Nous *nous appelons* · Vous *vous appelez* · Ils *s'appellent*.

5 Asking and answering

Comment tu t'appelles ? — what's your name? · Je *m'appelle Camille*. — my name is Camille. · *Ça va ?* — how are you? · *Ça va bien, merci*. — I'm fine, thanks.

Polite form : *Comment vous appelez-vous ?* is the polite form, with inversion — the standard shape of a formal question.

Your first conversation

— Bonjour ! Comment tu t'appelles ? — Je m'appelle Camille. Et toi ?
— Je m'appelle Yasmine. Ça va ? — Ça va bien, merci. Et toi ?
— Très bien. Au revoir ! — Au revoir !

Three exchanges, and you can hold an introduction conversation in French.

What really matters

→ French distinguishes *tu* and *vous* — choosing wrongly is the most visible beginner mistake.

→ Age uses *avoir*, not *être*: *j'ai 30 ans*, never “*je suis 30*”.

→ The reflexive particle precedes the verb and changes with every person.

CHAPTER 3

Articles and gender

This is where English speakers face something genuinely new: every French noun has a gender, and the article changes with it. There is no shortcut — but there is a habit that makes it painless.

1 Definite articles: LE, LA, LES

Where English has one word — **the** — French has three: **le** (masculine), **la** (feminine), **les** (plural, both genders). *Le chien* — the dog · *La maison* — the house · *Les chiens* — the dogs.

Key difference : The article is not optional in French: *j'aime le café* where English says simply “I like coffee”.

2 Indefinite articles: UN, UNE, DES

Un (masculine), **une** (feminine), **des** (plural). *Un chien* — a dog · *Une maison* — a house · *Des chiens* — some dogs.

Frequent mistake : *Des* is compulsory where English drops the article entirely: “I buy books” → *j'achète des livres*.

3 Before a vowel: L' and elision

Before a word starting with a vowel or a silent H, *le* and *la* become **l'**: *l'ami*, *l'école*, *l'hôtel*. The same happens with *je* → *j'* and *me* → *m'*.

Why : French avoids two vowels meeting — hence apostrophes everywhere.

4 Noun gender — the endings help

Many job titles come in pairs: **-EUR / -EUSE** (danseur / danseuse) · **-EUR / -RICE** (acteur / actrice) · **-TEUR / -TRICE** (traducteur / traductrice) · **-IER / -IÈRE** (boulangier / boulangère).

Remember : Some have a **single form** for both: *un / une artiste*, *un / une journaliste*, *un / une élève*.

5 Gender is not logical — and that's fine

La table, le livre, la voiture, le soleil, la lune. There is no rule connecting gender to meaning: a table is no more feminine than a book is masculine.

The best advice : Learn every new word **with its article**: never *maison*, always *une maison*. This single habit saves years of mistakes.

The vocabulary of this lesson

People: un ami / une amie · un copain / une copine · Français / Française · Anglais / Anglaise

Things: un chien (dog) · un chat (cat) · une maison (house) · un livre (book) · l'eau (water)

Expressions: D'accord (all right) · Ça marche (works for me) · Alors (so) · Donc (therefore) · Et (and)

Learn every noun with its article: that's the habit that makes the difference.

What really matters

- Where English has “the”, French has le, la and les — and the article is rarely optional.
- Des is compulsory where English drops the article: j'achète des livres.
- Gender follows no logic: learn each word together with its article.

CHAPTER 4

Exercises

Do them once without looking at the answers, then come back a few days later: spaced repetition is what makes the forms stick.

1 Pronunciation — read aloud

1. Bonjour 2. Hôtel 3. Château 4. Merci 5. Cadeau 6. Au revoir 7. Bonsoir 8. Eau

Answers : 1. nasal ON, no final N · 2. silent H · 3. CH = sh, EAU = o · 4. C before l = s · 5. C before A = k · 6. final E silent · 7. OI = wa · 8. just “oh”

2 Definite or indefinite?

1. J'ai ____ chien (a dog). 2. ____ maison de Marie est grande (the house). 3. Il y a ____ livres sur la table (books). 4. ____ ami de Paul (the friend).

Answers : 1. un · 2. La · 3. des · 4. L' (before a vowel)

3 Être or Avoir?

1. Je ____ anglais. 2. Nous ____ une maison. 3. Tu ____ à Londres. 4. Ils ____ des amis français. 5. J'____ trente ans.

Answers : 1. suis · 2. avons · 3. es · 4. ont · 5. ai (age always uses avoir)

4 Feminine of job titles

1. un acteur → 2. un boulanger → 3. un vendeur → 4. un traducteur
→ 5. un journaliste →

Answers : 1. une actrice · 2. une boulangère · 3. une vendeuse · 4. une traductrice · 5. une journaliste (single form)

5 Translate into French

1. My name is Mary. 2. What's your name? 3. I'm English. 4. We have a house. 5. Good evening, how are you?

Answers : 1. Je m'appelle Mary. · 2. Comment tu t'appelles ? · 3. Je suis anglais(e). · 4. Nous avons une maison. · 5. Bonsoir, ça va ?

How to work through this lesson

Day 1: read the whole lesson aloud and do the exercises without looking at the answers.

Day 3: redo exercises 2 and 3 — articles and the two verbs settle in through repetition.

Day 7: translate exercise 5 again, then introduce yourself aloud without reading.

Twenty minutes three times beats one hour once.

What really matters

→ Reading aloud is essential: French pronunciation is never learned by looking.

→ Articles are learned together with the noun, never separately.

→ Introducing yourself without reading is the real test of Lesson 1.

CONCLUSION

What you can do now

What you can do now

- ☐ Read French aloud: nasal vowels, letter groups, silent letters
- ☐ Greet someone according to the time of day, and say goodbye
- ☐ Introduce yourself and ask someone their name
- ☐ Conjugate Être and Avoir in the present tense
- ☐ Use definite and indefinite articles correctly

To practise this week

- ☐ Read the lesson aloud — nasal vowels are only learned by speaking
- ☐ Redo exercises 2 and 3 without looking at the answers
- ☐ Introduce yourself in French in front of a mirror: name, nationality, city

What comes next

- ☐ Lesson 2: the passé composé with Être and Avoir
- ☐ The cheat sheets — days and months, the prepositions dans and à, the partitive — download separately from domaformalis.com

The five things not to forget

1. French is not phonetic: H, final E and -ENT are never pronounced.
2. C is read **s** before E and I, **k** before A, O, U.
3. Tu for friends, vous for everyone else — get this wrong and it shows.
4. Age uses avoir: *j'ai 30 ans*, never “je suis 30”.
5. Learn every new word with its article: gender follows no logic.

These five points are enough for your first conversation in French.

This lesson follows and expands the course of Yasmine, a French and Spanish teacher based in Sofia. The explanations have been enriched (elision, nasal vowels, noun gender) and completed with corrected exercises so it can be worked through independently.

To go further, find the **cheat sheets** for this lesson on Domaformalis, and get in touch if you'd like live lessons with a teacher.

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