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**by Dodi-Katrin Schmidt, Michelle M. Williams,  
Dominique Wenzel, and Zoe Erotopoulos**



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## French For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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## *Dedication*

**Zoe:** To my family.

## *Acknowledgments*

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# Introduction

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**A**s society becomes increasingly more international and as we seek to become global citizens, knowing how to say at least a few words in other languages becomes more and more useful. The European Union is a great example of global citizenry as borders between the member countries become easier to cross. Furthermore, global business environments necessitate overseas travel. Thanks to numerous travel websites, finding a package deal for airfare and hotel stays makes travel abroad easier and more convenient than ever before. Moreover, the Internet allows us to have contact with people all over the world, making learning a foreign language a great asset.

Whether you are traveling overseas on business, exploring a different culture, or even connecting with your heritage, learning a little bit of the language has many advantages. Whatever your reason for wanting to learn some French, *French For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, can help. It gives you the skills you need for basic communication in French. We're not promising fluency here, but if you need to greet someone, purchase a ticket, ask for directions, make a hotel reservation, or order off a menu in French, you need look no further than this book.

Remember that everyday French is like everyday English. It makes use of simplified lingual forms which, although perfectly correct, avoid and ignore certain complicated verb tenses and moods such as, say, the future perfect or the subjunctive. In everyday French, you can express yourself adequately by following just a few easy-to-understand grammar rules and by knowing a minimum number of words. So you should find the lessons in this book to be fun and not the least bit overwhelming.

Now is playtime: **C'est la récréation** (seh lah rey-krey-ah-syohN).

## About This Book

*French For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, isn't like a class that you have to drag yourself to twice a week for a specified period of time. You can use this book however you want to, whether your goal is to learn some words and phrases to help you get around when you visit France or a francophone country, or you just want to be able to say "Hello, how are you?" to your French-speaking neighbor. Go through this book at your own pace, reading as much or as little at a time as you like. You don't have to trudge through the chapters in sequential order, either; just read the sections that interest you.

## Conventions Used in This Book

To make this book easy to navigate, we've set up some conventions:

- ✓ French terms are set in **boldface** to make them stand out.
- ✓ Pronunciation, set in parentheses, follows the French terms. Hyphens connect syllables in the same word as well as words that are linked by the French liaison (which you can find out all about in Chapter 3).
- ✓ Translation of the French terms is set in *italic* and follows the pronunciation.
- ✓ Because French nouns are typically preceded by an article, we include those articles in the word lists throughout this book, even though the English translation may not use the article. Furthermore, because articles indicate a noun's gender, they're helpful bits of information when you're learning a language. When the article is abbreviated (l'), however, you can't tell the gender. In those instances, we add a gender designation: (m) for masculine and (f) for feminine.
- ✓ Verb conjugations (lists that show you the forms of a verb) are given in tables in this order:
  - The "I" form
  - The "you" (singular, informal) form
  - The "he/she/it/one" form
  - The "we" form
  - The "you" (plural, and singular, formal) form
  - The "they" form.

Pronunciations follow in the second column. The example shown uses the verb **parler** (pahr-ley) (*to speak*). The conjugation starts with the French equivalent of *I speak* or *I am speaking*; *you speak*, or *you are speaking*, and so on.

### Conjugation

je parle  
tu parles  
il/elle/on parle  
nous parlons  
vous parlez  
ils/elles parlent

### Pronunciation

zhuh pahrl  
tew pahrl  
eel/ehl/ohN pahrl  
nooh parh-lohN  
vooh parh-ley  
eel/ehl parhl

So that you can make fast progress in French, this book includes a few elements to help you along:

- ✔ **Talkin' the Talk dialogues:** The best way to learn a language is to see and hear how it's used in conversation, so we include dialogues throughout the book. The dialogues come under the heading "Talkin' the Talk" and show you the French words, the pronunciation, and the English translation.
- ✔ **Words to Know blackboards:** Memorizing key words and phrases is also important in language learning, so we collect the important words in a chapter (or section within a chapter) in a chalkboard, with the heading "Words to Know."
- ✔ **Fun & Games activities:** If you don't have actual French speakers to practice your new language skills on, you can use the Fun & Games activities to reinforce what you learn. These games are fun ways to gauge your progress.

Also note that, because each language has its own way of expressing ideas, the English translations that we provide for the French terms may not be exactly literal. We want you to know the gist of what's being said, not just the words that are being said. For example, the phrase **C'est normal** (seh nohr-mahl) can be translated literally as *It's normal*, but the phrase really means *It's no big deal*. This book gives the second translation.

## Foolish Assumptions

To write this book, we had to make some assumptions about who you are and what you want from a book called *French For Dummies*. Here are the assumptions that we've made about you:

- ✔ You know no or very little French — or if you took French back in school, you don't remember much of it.
- ✔ You're not looking for a book that will make you fluent in French; you just want to know some words, phrases, and sentence constructions so that you can communicate basic information in French.
- ✔ You don't want to have to memorize long lists of vocabulary words or a bunch of boring grammar rules.
- ✔ You want to have fun and learn a little bit of French at the same time.

If these statements apply to you, you've found the right book!

## *How This Book Is Organized*

This book is divided by topic into parts and then into chapters. The following sections tell you what types of information you can find in each part.

### *Part I: Getting Started*

This part lets you get your feet wet by giving you some French basics: how to pronounce words, what the accents mean, and so on. We even boost your confidence by reintroducing you to some French words that you probably already know. Finally, we outline the basics of French grammar that you may need to know when you work through later chapters in the book.

### *Part II: French in Action*

In this part, you begin learning and using French. Instead of focusing on grammar points as many language textbooks do, this part focuses on everyday situations, such as asking for directions, shopping, dining, going out on the town, and making small talk.

### *Part III: French on the Go*

This part gives you the tools you need to take your French on the road, whether you're going to a local French restaurant or to a museum in France. This part covers all aspects of travel in French-speaking parts of the world, and it even has a chapter on how to handle emergencies.

### *Part IV: The Part of Tens*

If you're looking for small, easily digestible pieces of information about French, this part is for you. Here you can find ten ways to learn French quickly, ten useful French expressions to know, ten things never to say in French, and more.

## Part V: Appendixes

This part of the book includes important information that you can use for reference. Appendix A is a mini-dictionary in both French-to-English and English-to-French formats. If you encounter a French word that you don't understand or you need to say something in French that you can't find quickly elsewhere in the book, you can look it up here. Appendix B features verb tables, which show you how to conjugate regular verbs and then how to conjugate those verbs that stubbornly don't fit the pattern. Appendix C gives you the answer keys to all of the Fun & Games activities that appear in the book, and Appendix D lists the tracks that appear on the audio CD that comes with this book so that you can find the dialogues easily and follow along.

## Icons Used in This Book

You may be looking for particular information while reading this book. To make certain types of information easier to find, we've placed the following icons in the left-hand margins throughout the book:



This icon highlights tips that can make learning French easier.



This icon points out interesting information that you ought not forget.



To help you avoid linguistic, grammatical, and cultural faux pas, we use this icon.



Languages are full of quirks that may trip you up if you're not prepared for them. This icon points to discussions of these peculiar grammar rules.



If you're looking for information and advice about culture and travel, look for this icon. It draws your attention to interesting tidbits about the countries in which French is spoken.



The audio CD that comes with this book gives you the opportunity to listen to real French speakers so that you can get a better understanding of what French sounds like. This icon marks the Talkin' the Talk dialogues that you can find on the CD.

## *Where to Go from Here*

Learning a language is all about jumping in and giving it a try (no matter how bad your pronunciation is at first). So make the leap! Start at the beginning, pick a chapter that interests you, or listen to a few dialogues on the CD. Before long, you'll be able to respond **Oui!** (wee!) (*Yes!*) when people ask **Parlez-vous français?** (pahr-ley vooh frahN-seh?) (*Do you speak French?*).

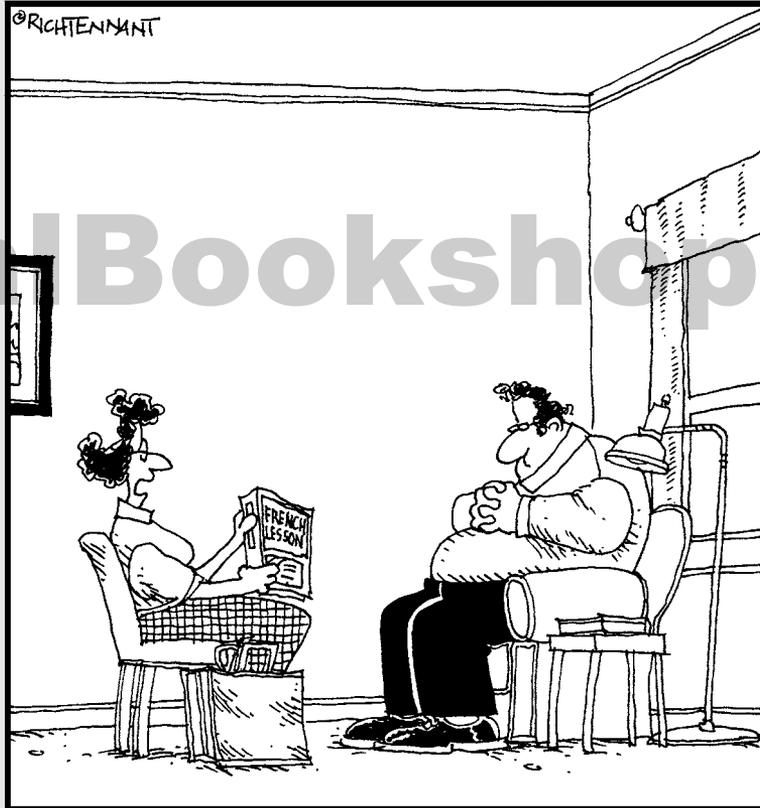
**Note:** If you've never been exposed to French before, you may want to read the chapters in Part I before you tackle the later chapters. Part I gives you some of the basics that you need to know about the language, such as how to pronounce the various sounds, some basic expressions and words, and the fundamentals of French sentence structure.

# Part I

## Getting Started

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant



"There are many French phrases that we all use every day. You're no doubt familiar with the term 'à la mode.'"

## *In this part . . .*

**Y**ou have to start somewhere, but we bet that you know a lot more French than you think. Don't think so? Then check out Chapter 1 and see how many French words and idioms you already use. Chapters 2 and 3 provide some basic background on French grammar and pronunciation, while Chapters 4 and 5 get you talking about yourself and your family. So get started and don't worry — We make it fun!

## Chapter 1

# The French You Already Know

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ French words that are identical or similar to their English counterparts
  - ▶ French words to watch out for
  - ▶ Idioms and popular expressions you may already know
- 

**L**earning a new language can be challenging. Not only do you need to know a whole new vocabulary, but you also need to twist your head around different grammar rules and your tongue around different pronunciation rules. But here's a little news that may make the task seem a little less daunting: You already know quite a few French words and expressions. How? Because the English language, being the borrower that it is, contains many French words and expressions, and French has absorbed some English words, too.

In this chapter, you get to explore some French words and phrases without having to know pronunciation or grammar rules (that info comes in Chapters 2 and 3). Here, we include French words that are spelled the same and mean the same as their English counterparts, as well as words that are close in meaning and spelling. But because not every French word that resembles an English word shares its meaning, we also tell you what words to watch out for. In addition, we include some French expressions that you probably already know and understand. By the end of this chapter, you may discover that you actually know more French than you previously thought.

## *The French You're Familiar With*

With just a narrow stretch of water between them, the English and the French have historically been pretty close, even if they haven't always been the friendly allies they are today. In fact, French was the language of the English court for a very long time — a fact that many people tend to forget. (The Normans who invaded England in 1066 with William the Conqueror were French, as were some of the most prominent people in English history).

What does this have to do with your learning French? Well today, about 35 percent of English vocabulary is of French origin. That being the case, you already know an impressive amount of French, whether you realize it or not. The only pitfall you have to watch out for is that sometimes the English words have a different meaning from their French counterparts, and they almost certainly have a different pronunciation.



French nouns are preceded by either definite or indefinite articles. The definite articles are **le** (masculine), **la** (feminine), **l'** (an abbreviation of either **le** or **la**), and **les** (plural); these are the equivalent to the English word *the*. The indefinite articles are **un** (masculine), **une** (feminine), and **des** (plural); these are all equivalent to the English words *a*, *an*, or *some*. As you learn French, knowing which articles go with what nouns helps you identify the noun's gender; that's why we include the articles with the nouns in the lists throughout this book. Because the abbreviated article **l'** obscures the noun's gender, we added the gender in parentheses. Finally, because the articles are not always used in English translations, we don't include them in the translations of the word lists: **l'université** (f) (lew-nee-vehr-see-tey) (*university*) and **le kiosque** (luh kyohhsk) (*kiosk*), for example.

## Friendly allies — *bons alliés*

Several French words are spelled the same and have the same meaning as their English counterparts. The only thing that may be different is the pronunciation (for more on pronunciation guidelines, head to Chapter 3). Take a look at these **bons alliés** (bohN-zah-lyey) (*friendly allies*):

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ✓ <b>l'art</b> (m) (lahr)                  | ✓ <b>excellent</b> (ehk-seh-lahN)     |
| ✓ <b>brave</b> (brahv)                     | ✓ <b>le garage</b> (luh gah-rahzh)    |
| ✓ <b>le bureau</b> (luh bew-roh)           | ✓ <b>le guide</b> (luh geed)          |
| ✓ <b>le client</b> (luh klee-yahN)         | ✓ <b>important</b> (aN-pohr-tahN)     |
| ✓ <b>le concert</b> (luh kohN-sehr)        | ✓ <b>le journal</b> (luh zhoohr-nahl) |
| ✓ <b>la condition</b> (lah kohN-dee-syohN) | ✓ <b>la machine</b> (lah mah-sheen)   |
| ✓ <b>content</b> (kohN-tahN)               | ✓ <b>le message</b> (luh mey-sahzh)   |
| ✓ <b>le courage</b> (luh kooH-rahzh)       | ✓ <b>le moment</b> (luh moh-mahN)     |
| ✓ <b>le cousin</b> (luh kooH-zahN)         | ✓ <b>la nation</b> (lah nah-syohN)    |
| ✓ <b>la culture</b> (lah kewl-tewr)        | ✓ <b>la nièce</b> (lah nyehs)         |
| ✓ <b>différent</b> (dee-fey-rahN)          | ✓ <b>l'orange</b> (f) (loh-rahNzh)    |
|  | ✓ <b>le parent</b> (luh pah-rahN)     |

- ✓ **possible** (poh-see-bluh)
- ✓ **principal** (praN-see-pahl)
- ✓ **probable** (proh-bah-bluh)
- ✓ **la question** (lah kehs-tyohN)
- ✓ **la radio** (lah rah-dyoh)
- ✓ **le restaurant** (luh rehs-toh-rahN)
- ✓ **la rose** (lah rohzh)
- ✓ **rouge** (roohzh)
- ✓ **la route** (lah rooht)
- ✓ **la science** (lah syahNs)
- ✓ **le secret** (luh suh-kreh)
- ✓ **le service** (luh sehr-vees)
- ✓ **le signal** (luh see-nyahl)
- ✓ **le silence** (luh see-lahNs)
- ✓ **la solitude** (lah soh-lee-tewd)
- ✓ **le sport** (luh spohr)
- ✓ **la station** (lah stah-syohN)
- ✓ **la statue** (lah stah-tew)
- ✓ **la suggestion** (lah sewg-zehh-styohN)
- ✓ **la surprise** (lah sewr-preez)
- ✓ **la table** (lah tah-bluh)
- ✓ **le taxi** (luh tah-ksee)
- ✓ **le tennis** (luh tey-nees)
- ✓ **le train** (luh traN)
- ✓ **urgent** (ewr-zhahN)
- ✓ **violet** (vyoh-leh)
- ✓ **le voyage** (luh voh-yahzh)
- ✓ **le zoo** (luh zook)

## *Kissing cousins*

Some French words, while not identical in spelling to their English counterparts, look very similar. These words also have similar meanings. Table 1-1 shows words that fit into this category.

**Table 1-1** Words Similar in Meaning, Slightly Different in Spelling

<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>
<b>l'acteur</b> (m) (lahk-tuhr)	<i>actor</i>	<b>l'hôtel</b> (m) (loh-tehl)	<i>hotel</i>
<b>l'adresse</b> (f) (lah-drehs)	<i>address</i>	<b>le kiosque</b> (luh kyohhsk)	<i>kiosk</i>
<b>l'aéroport</b> (m) (lah-eyr-oh-pohr)	<i>airport</i>	<b>la lampe</b> (lah lahmp)	<i>lamp</i>
<b>l'allée</b> (f) (lah-ley)	<i>alley</i>	<b>la lettre</b> (lah leh-truh)	<i>letter</i>

(continued)

**Table 1-1 (continued)**

<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>
<b>l'Américain</b> (m)/ <b>l'Américaine</b> (f) (lah-mey-ree-kaN/ lah-mey-ree-kehn)	<i>American</i>	<b>la mémoire</b> (lah mey- mwahr)	<i>memory</i>
<b>l'âge</b> (m) (lahzh)	<i>age</i>	<b>le miroir</b> (luh mee- rwahr)	<i>mirror</i>
<b>l'artiste</b> (m/f) (lahr-teest)	<i>artist</i>	<b>la musique</b> (lah mew- zeek)	<i>music</i>
<b>la banque</b> (lah bahNk)	<i>bank</i>	<b>la nationalité</b> (lah nah- syoh-nah-lee-tey)	<i>nationality</i>
<b>la cathédrale</b> (lah kah- tey-drahl)	<i>cathedral</i>	<b>nécessaire</b> (ney-sey- sehr)	<i>necessary</i>
<b>le chèque</b> (luh shehk)	<i>check</i>	<b>ordinaire</b> (ohr-dee- nehr)	<i>ordinary</i>
<b>la classe</b> (lah klahs)	<i>class</i>	<b>le papier</b> (luh pah-pyey)	<i>paper</i>
<b>la chambre</b> (lah shahN- bruh)	<i>chamber, bedroom</i>	<b>le poème</b> (luh poh-ehm)	<i>poem</i>
<b>la comédie</b> (lah koh- mey-dee)	<i>comedy</i>	<b>potentiel</b> (poh-tahN- syehl)	<i>potential</i>
<b>le congrès</b> (luh kohN- greh)	<i>congress</i>	<b>le problème</b> (luh proh- blehm)	<i>problem</i>
<b>la crème</b> (lah krehm)	<i>cream</i>	<b>le professeur</b> (luh proh- feh-suhr)	<i>teacher/ professor</i>
<b>la démocratie</b> (lah dey- moh-krah-see)	<i>democracy</i>	<b>le sénateur</b> (luh sey- nah-tuhr)	<i>senator</i>
<b>le développement</b> (luh dey-vlohp-mahN)	<i>development</i>	<b>le succès</b> (luh sew- kseh)	<i>success</i>
<b>la famille</b> (lah fah- meey)	<i>family</i>	<b>la terrasse</b> (lah teh- rahs)	<i>terrace</i>
<b>la géographie</b> (lah zhey- oh-grah-fee)	<i>geography</i>	<b>la tragédie</b> (lah trah- zhey-dee)	<i>tragedy</i>
<b>le gouvernement</b> (luh gooh-vehr-nuh-mahN)	<i>government</i>	<b>l'université</b> (f) (lew-nee- vehr-see-tey)	<i>university</i>
<b>l'histoire</b> (f) (lee- stwahr)	<i>history</i>	<b>la visite</b> (lah vee-zeet)	<i>visit</i>

## False friends — faux amis

Some French words are **faux amis** (foh-zah-mee) (*false friends*). They look similar to English words, but they don't have the same meaning. Misusing these words can be quite confusing. For example, if you tell someone that your young adult son or daughter is in a **collège** (koh-lehzh), they'd probably look at you — or your child — strangely because the French word **collège** means *middle school*, not *university*. The following list shows some of these easy-to-confuse words:

- ✓ **actuellement** (ahk-tew-ehl-mahN): This word means *now*, not *actually*. The French word for *actually* is **en fait** (ahN feht).
- ✓ **assister à** (ah-sees-tey ah): This word means *to attend*, not *to assist*. The French word for *to assist* is **aider** (ey-dey).
- ✓ **attendre** (ah-tahN-druh): This word means *to wait for*, not *to attend*. The French word for *to attend* is **assister à** (ah-sees-tey ah).
- ✓ **la bague** (lah bahg): This word means *ring* (the kind you wear on your finger), not *bag*. The French word for *bag* is **le sac** (luh sahk).
- ✓ **blessé** (bleh-sey): This word means *to wound* or *to hurt*. The French word for *to bless* is **bénir** (bey-ner).
- ✓ **la cave** (lah kahv): The French word **cave** means *cellar* in French. The word for *cave* is **la grotte** (lah grohht) in French.
- ✓ **le collègue** (luh koh-lehzh) means *middle school*; use the French word **l'université** (f) (lew-nee-vehr-see-tey) when you want to say *college*.
- ✓ **formidable** (fohr-mee-dah-bluh): This word means *wonderful* or *tremendous*, not *fearsome* or *daunting*. To say *formidable* in French, you use the word **redoutable** (ruh-dooht-tah-bluh).
- ✓ **la lecture** (lah leh-ktewr): This word means *a reading*, as in a reading of Balzac's novels. The word for *lecture* is **la conférence** (lah kohN-fey-rahNs).
- ✓ **la librairie** (lah lee-brey-ree): This word means *bookstore*, not *library*. The French word for *library* is **la bibliothèque** (lah bee-blee-oh-tehk).
- ✓ **la place** (lah plahs): This word means *square*, *seat at the theater*, or *seat on the bus*, not *place*. The French word for *place* is **le lieu** (luh lyuh) or **l'endroit** (m) (lahN-drwah).
- ✓ **rester** (reh-tey): This word means *to stay* or *to remain*, not *to rest*. The French word for *to rest* is **se reposer** (suh-ruh-poh-zey).
- ✓ **sympathique** (saN-pah-teek): This word means *nice*. To say *sympathetic* in French, you say **compatissant(e)** (kohN-pah-tee-sahN[t]).
- ✓ **la veste** (lah vehst): This word means *jacket* in French, not *vest* or *waistcoat*. The French word for *vest* is **le gilet** (luh zhee-leh).

## *Borrowed English words*

The preceding sections note quite a few English words that have been borrowed from French and that have retained their French meaning, even though the pronunciation is different.

But English isn't the only language that's nicked a few words. French has also borrowed many words from English and continues to do so in spite of the loud protest by purists who condemn this trend as a sign of cultural contamination and name it **franglais** (frahN-gleh): Here is a list of some of the terms borrowed from English and absorbed into the French language. Note the different pronunciation:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ✓ <b>le budget</b> (luh bewd-zheh)          | ✓ <b>le jet set</b> (luh jeht seht)            |
| ✓ <b>le business</b> (luh beez-nehs)        | ✓ <b>le manager</b> (luh mah-nah-jehr)         |
| ✓ <b>le camping</b> (luh kahN-peeng)        | ✓ <b>le marketing</b> (luh mahr-kuh-teeng)     |
| ✓ <b>le chewing-gum</b> (luh shweeng-gohhm) | ✓ <b>le parking</b> (luh pahr-keen)            |
| ✓ <b>les chips</b> (ley sheep[s])           | ✓ <b>le rock</b> (luh rohk) (as in rock music) |
| ✓ <b>le coca</b> (luh koh-kah)              | ✓ <b>le shopping</b> (luh shoh-peeng)          |
| ✓ <b>cool</b> (koohl)                       | ✓ <b>le steak</b> (luh stehk)                  |
| ✓ <b>le fast food</b> (luh fahst foohd)     | ✓ <b>le chat</b> (luh chaht)                   |
| ✓ <b>le hamburger</b> (luh ahm-boohr-guhr)  | ✓ <b>le tunnel</b> (luh tew-nehl)              |
|   | ✓ <b>le week-end</b> (luh wee-kehnd)           |

## *Talkin' the Talk*

Take a look at this conversation between two young French people making plans for their weekend. They're using several words borrowed from English.

- Thomas: **Sylvie, qu'est-ce que tu fais ce week-end?**  
 seel-vee, kehs-kuh tew feh suh wee-kehnd?  
*Sylvie, what are you doing this weekend?*

- Sylvie: **Oh, du shopping probablement. Tu veux venir avec moi?**  
oh, dew shoh-peeng proh-bah-bluh-mahN. tew vuh vuh-nee-rah-vehk mwah?  
*Oh, I'll probably go shopping. Do you want to come with me?*
- Thomas: **OK, cool, et après, on va aller manger dans un fast food.**  
oh-keh, kooH-ley-ah-preh, ohN vah ah-ley mahN-zhey dahN-zuhN fahst foohd.  
*OK, cool, and afterwards, we'll go eat in a fast food place.*
- Sylvie: **J'espère qu'on va trouver un parking!**  
zhehs-pehr kohN vah trooh-vey uhN pahr-keeng!  
I hope we'll be able to find a parking space!



## Quebec is pure French

The rules of good and pure French speech are especially enforced in Quebec. People in Quebec will easily understand your **français**, but you may be taken aback when you hear Quebecers talk about the following, where the French use the English word:

- ✓ **la fin de semaine** (lah faN duh suh-mehn) (*weekend*)
- ✓ **un hambourgeois** (uhN ahN-boohr-zhwah) (*hamburger*)
- ✓ **le magasinage** (luh mah-gah-zee-nazh) (*shopping*)
- ✓ **la mise en marché** (lah mee-zahN mahrshey) (*marketing*)
- ✓ **le stationnement** (luh stah-syoh-nuh-mahN) (*parking*)

Quebec's purism is easily explained:

- ✓ The proximity of the United States south of its border, plus the English-speaking majority in Canada threatens the French cultural identity of Quebec's 7.5 million inhabitants. For Quebecers, their language constitutes a rampart against the all-powerful presence of the English — spoken by 300 million people — surrounding them.
- ✓ People who lived mostly in rural isolation for 300 years are now living in modern cities like Montreal, Quebec, Sherbrooke, and a few others where cable TV is constantly bombarding them with American commercials, movies, and a variety of shows. These people are trying to preserve the French language.

Although protective of their language, French-Canadians are an extremely friendly people who welcome their southern neighbors.

## Idioms and Popular Expressions

French, like English, has many *idioms* (unusual ways of expressing feelings and ideas). You may find the meaning of these expressions puzzling if you try to translate them word for word.

These fixed forms of expression belong specifically to the language in question. If you walk up to a French person and say **Il pleut des chats et des chiens** (eel pluh dey shah ey dey shyaN) (*It's raining cats and dogs*), he or she would question your sanity. On the other hand, you may find yourself wondering what a French speaker means when she says **Il tombe des cordes** (eel tohNb dey kohrd), whose literal translation is *Ropes are falling*, but it's roughly equivalent to *It's raining cats and dogs*.

Apart from those idioms, which take a long time to comprehend and belong specifically to a culture, every language has many expressions and phrases that, although they cannot be translated word for word, can easily be learned and used. Here are a few of the useful expressions you frequently hear in French:

- ✓ **À la vôtre!** (ah lah voh-truh!) (*Cheers!*)
- ✓ **À mon avis** (ah mohN-nah-vee) (*in my opinion*)
- ✓ **À tes/vos souhaits!** (ah tey/voh sweh!) (*Bless you!/Gesundheit!*)
- ✓ **Allez! Un petit effort!** (ah-ley! uhN puh-tee-teh-fohr!) (*Come on! Try a little!*)
- ✓ **Bien sûr.** (byaN sewr.) (*Of course.*)
- ✓ **Bon appétit!** (bohN-nah-pey-tee!) (*Enjoy your meal!*)
- ✓ **Ça vaut la peine/le coup.** (sah voh lah pehn/luh kooh.) (*It's worth it.*)
- ✓ **D'accord.** (dah-kohr.) (*Okay.*)
- ✓ **De rien.** (duh ryaN.) (*Don't mention it.*)
- ✓ **Jamais de la vie!** (zhah-meh duh lah vee!) or **Pas question!** (pah kehs-tyohN!) (*No way!*)
- ✓ **Revenons à nos moutons.** (ruh-vuh-nohN ah noh mooh-tohN.) (*Let's get back to the subject at hand.*)
- ✓ **Tant mieux.** (tahN myuh.) (*So much the better.*)
- ✓ **Tant pis.** (tahN pee.) (*Too bad.*)
- ✓ **Tout à fait.** (tooh-tah feh.) (*Quite.*)
- ✓ **Un coup d'oeil** (uhN kooh duhy) (*a glance, a quick look*)

## Chapter 2

# Laying the Foundation: Basic French Grammar

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Getting familiar with nouns, articles, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs
  - ▶ Understanding gender and agreement
  - ▶ Introducing regular and irregular verbs
  - ▶ Constructing simple sentences
- 

**I**n your native language, you instinctively know how to form sentences and ask questions that make sense. However, when learning a new language, you need to learn that language's grammar because it lays the foundation for communicating correctly and effectively. This chapter simplifies French grammar, introducing you to the parts of speech and telling you how to construct grammatically correct sentences and questions. As you read this material, you'll be amazed to discover that learning basic French grammar is easy and completely painless. The key to success is to remain cool and patient. Little by little — and before you know it — you'll be able to speak French.

### *Key Parts of Speech*

Words are classified based on their part of speech — verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections — depending on how they are used. In this section, we concentrate on a few key parts of speech you need to know in order to form and understand basic French sentences: nouns, articles, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs. You can check out verbs in the later section “Cavorting with Verbs.”

## Naming things with nouns

*Nouns* name things: people, objects, places, concepts, and so on. *House* is a noun. So is *Mary* or *truth* or *Sandusky*. There are a few key differences between French and English nouns, however, as the next sections explain.

### That whole gender thing

Unlike English nouns, all French nouns have a gender: They are either grammatically masculine or feminine. Knowing whether a noun is masculine or feminine is very important because it has an impact on the sentence construction. For example, if the noun is feminine, the articles and adjectives that modify that noun must also be feminine.

But how do you know whether a noun is masculine or feminine? Of course, if you are talking about the sex of a person or an animal, the gender is obvious. But if the noun is a thing or an idea, how do you determine its gender? For the most part, just look at the word's ending. With a few exceptions, the ending of a noun is a rather good indication of its gender. Table 2-1 shows common masculine and feminine endings.

**Table 2-1 Common Masculine and Feminine Noun Endings**

<i>Masculine Endings</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Feminine Endings</i>	<i>Example</i>
–eur (uhr)	<b>l'auteur</b> (loh-tuhr) ( <i>author</i> ); <b>le bonheur</b> (luh boh-nuhr) ( <i>happiness</i> )	–ade (ahd)	<b>la promenade</b> (lah proh-m-nahd) ( <i>walk</i> ); <b>la limonade</b> (lah lee-moh-nahd) ( <i>lemonade</i> )
–eau (oh)	<b>le chapeau</b> (luh shah-poh) ( <i>hat</i> ); <b>le manteau</b> (luh mahN-toh) ( <i>coat</i> )	–ance/–ence (ahNs)	<b>la naissance</b> (lah neh-sahNs) ( <i>birth</i> ); <b>la différence</b> (lah dee-fey-rahNs) ( <i>difference</i> )
–isme (eez-muh)	<b>le capitalisme</b> (luh kah-pee-tah-leez-muh) ( <i>capitalism</i> ); <b>le féminisme</b> (luh fey-mee-nee-z-muh) ( <i>feminism</i> )	–oire (wahr)	<b>la mémoire</b> (lah mey-mwahr) ( <i>memory</i> ); <b>la victoire</b> (lah veek-twahr) ( <i>victory</i> )

<b>Masculine Endings</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Feminine Endings</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>–ment</b> (mahN)	<b>l'appartement</b> (lah-pahr-tuh-mahN) ( <i>apartment</i> ); <b>le logement</b> (luh lohzh-mahN) ( <i>lodging, place of residence</i> )	<b>–sion/tion</b> (syohN)	<b>l'impression</b> (laN-prey-syohN) ( <i>impression</i> ); <b>la condition</b> (lah kohN-dee-syohN) ( <i>condition</i> )
<b>–ail</b> (ahy)	<b>le travail</b> (luh trah-vahy) ( <i>work</i> ); <b>le détail</b> (luh dey-tahy) ( <i>detail</i> )	<b>–son</b> (zohN)	<b>la saison</b> (lah seh-zohN) ( <i>season</i> ); <b>la maison</b> (lah meh-zohN) ( <i>house</i> )
Final vowels other than <b>–e</b>	<b>le cinéma</b> (luh see-ney-mah) ( <i>movies</i> ); <b>le piano</b> (luh pyah-noh) ( <i>piano</i> ); <b>le genou</b> (luh zhuh-nooh) ( <i>knee</i> )	<b>–té, –ée</b> (tey, ey)	<b>la liberté</b> (lah lee-behr-tey) ( <i>freedom</i> ); <b>l'égalité</b> (ley-gah-lee-tey) ( <i>equality</i> ); <b>l'idée</b> (lee-dey) ( <i>idea</i> ); <b>la pensée</b> (lah pahN-sey) ( <i>thought</i> )
<b>–al</b> (ahl)	<b>le journal</b> (luh zhoohr-nahl) ( <i>news-paper</i> ); <b>le festival</b> (luh feh-stee-vahl) ( <i>festival</i> )	<b>–ie</b> (ee)	<b>la boulangerie</b> (lah booh-lahN-zhree) ( <i>bakery</i> ); <b>l'épicerie</b> (ley-pees-ree) ( <i>grocery store</i> )

In addition, certain occupations are always masculine in French, even though both men and women work in them. Some examples include

- ✓ **un professeur** (uhN proh-feh-suhr) (*teacher, professor*)
- ✓ **un architecte** (uhN-nahr-shee-tehkt) (*architect*)
- ✓ **un chef** (uhN shehf) (*chef*)
- ✓ **un ingénieur** (uhN-nahN-zhey-nyuhr) (*engineer*)
- ✓ **un agent** (uhN-nah-zhahN) (*agent*)
- ✓ **un médecin** (uhN meyd-saN) (*doctor*)
- ✓ **un auteur** (uhN-noh-tuhr) (*author*)

Similarly, some nouns are always feminine, even when they refer to a male. Here they are:

- ✓ **une vedette** (ewn veh-deht) (*movie star*)
- ✓ **une personne** (ewn pehr-sohhn) (*person*)
- ✓ **une victime** (ewn veek-teem) (*victim*)



If you come across a noun that does not follow any of these patterns, simply consult Appendix A in the back of this book or a French dictionary.

### *Making singular nouns plural*

In French, as in English, nouns are either singular or plural. The French say they have a *number*. To make nouns plural, you simply add an *s* to most of them, just like in English. **La maison** (lah meh-zohN) (*house*) is singular while **les maisons** (ley meh-zohN) (*houses*) is plural.

However, if a noun ends in **-ou**, **-eu**, or **-eau**, you add an *x* instead of an *s* to make it plural: The singular **le bureau** (luh bew-roh) (*office, desk*) becomes the plural **les bureaux** (ley bew-roh) (*offices, desks*).

If a noun already ends in an **-s**, **-z**, or **-x**, you don't add anything to it. In these instances, the article (and the context) makes clear that the noun is plural:

#### *Singular*

**un fils** (uhN fees) (*son*)

**un nez** (uhN ney) (*nose*)

**un époux** (uhN-ney-pooH) (*spouse*)

#### *Plural*

**des fils** (dey fees) (*sons*)

**des nez** (dey ney) (*noses*)

**des époux** (dey-zey-pooH) (*spouses*)

### *Keeping an eye on articles*

Unlike English nouns, which don't necessarily need articles (the words *the*, *a*, and *an*), French nouns are almost always preceded by articles. In English, for example, you say *France*, but in French, you say **la France** (lah frahNs) (*France*). The same convention applies to plural nouns: *mountains* in English becomes **les montagnes** (ley mohN-tah-nyuh) (*mountains*) in French. Another difference between English and French articles is that French articles mark the gender and the number of nouns.



When you learn the gender of a noun, try to learn the article that goes with it. Instead of memorizing **table** (tah-bluh) (*table*), for example, memorize **la table** (lah tah-bluh) (*the table*) or **une table** (ewn tah-bluh) (*a table*). Instead of **livre** (lee-vruh) (*book*), think **le livre** (luh lee-vruh) (*the book*) or **un livre** (uhN lee-vruh) (*a book*).