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## INTRODUCTION

If you've ever tried speaking French with a stranger, chances are it wasn't easy! You might have felt tongue-tied when you tried to recall words or verb conjugations. You might have struggled to keep up with the conversation, with French words flying at you at 100mph. Indeed, many students report feeling so overwhelmed with the experience of speaking French in the real world that they struggle to maintain motivation. The problem lies with the way French is usually taught. Textbooks and language classes break French down into rules and other "nuggets" of information in order to make it easier to learn. But that can leave you with a bit of a shock when you come to actually speak French out in the real world: "People don't speak like they do in my textbooks!" That's why I wrote this book.

*101 Conversations in Intermediate French* prepares you to speak French in the real world. Unlike the contrived and unnatural dialogues in your textbook, the 101 authentic conversations in this book offer you simple but authentic spoken French that you can study away from the pressure of face-to-face conversation. The conversations in this book tell the story of six people in Paris. You'll experience the story by following the conversations the characters have with one another. Written entirely in spoken French, the conversations give you the authentic experience of reading

real French in a format that is convenient and accessible for a beginner (A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference).

The extensive, story-based format of the book helps you get used to spoken French in a natural way, with the words and phrases you see gradually emerging in your own spoken French as you learn them naturally through your reading. The book is packed with engaging learning material including short dialogues that you can finish in one sitting, helpful English definitions of difficult words, scene-setting introductions to each chapter to help you follow along, and a story that will have you gripped until the end. These learning features allow you to learn and absorb new words and phrases, and then activate them so that, over time, you can remember and use them in your own spoken French. You'll never find another way to get so much practice with real, spoken French!

Suitable for beginners and intermediate learners alike, *101 Conversations in Intermediate French* is the perfect complement to any French course and will give you the ultimate head start for using French confidently in the real world! Whether you're new to French and looking for an entertaining challenge, or you have been learning for a while and want to take your speaking to the next level, this

book is the biggest step forward you will take in your French this year.

If you're ready, let's get started!

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## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There are many possible ways to use a resource such as this, which is written entirely in French. In this section, I would like to offer my suggestions for using this book effectively, based on my experience with thousands of students and their struggles.

There are two main ways to work with content in a foreign language:

1. Intensively
2. Extensively

*Intensive* learning is when you examine the material in great detail, seeking to understand all the content - the meaning of vocabulary, the use of grammar, the pronunciation of difficult words, etc. You will typically spend much longer with each section and, therefore, cover less material overall.

Traditional classroom learning, generally involves intensive learning. *Extensive* learning is the opposite of intensive. To learn extensively is to treat the material for what it is – not as the object of language study, but rather as content to be enjoyed and appreciated. To read a book for pleasure is an example of extensive reading. As such, the aim is not to stop and study the language that you find, but rather to read (and complete) the book.

There are pros and cons to both modes of study and, indeed, you may use a combination of both in your

approach. However, the “default mode” for most people is to study *intensively*. This is because there is the inevitable temptation to investigate anything you do not understand in the pursuit of progress and hope to eliminate all mistakes. Traditional language education trains us to do this. Similarly, it is not obvious to many readers how extensive study can be effective. The uncertainty and ambiguity can be uncomfortable: “There’s so much I don’t understand!”

In my experience, people have a tendency to drastically overestimate what they can learn from intensive study, and drastically underestimate what they can gain from extensive study. My observations are as follows:

- **Intensive learning:** Although it is intuitive to try to “learn” something you don’t understand, such as a new word, there is no guarantee you will actually manage to “learn” it! Indeed, you will be familiar with the feeling of trying to learn a new word, only to forget it shortly afterwards! Studying intensively is also time- consuming meaning you can’t cover as much material.
- **Extensive learning:** By contrast, when you study extensively, you cover huge amounts of material and give yourself exposure to much more content in the language than you otherwise would. In my view, this is the primary benefit of extensive learning. Given the immense size of the task of learning a foreign language, extensive learning is the only way to give

yourself the exposure to the language that you need in order to stand a chance of acquiring it. You simply can't learn everything you need in the classroom!

When put like this, extensive learning may sound quite compelling! However, there is an obvious objection: "But how do I *learn* when I'm not looking up or memorising things?" This is an understandable doubt if you are used to a traditional approach to language study. However, the truth is that you can learn an extraordinary amount *passively* as you read and listen to the language, but only if you give yourself the opportunity to do so! Remember, you learned your mother tongue passively. There is no reason you shouldn't do the same with a second language!

Here are some of the characteristics of studying languages extensively:

***Aim for completion*** When you read material in a foreign language, your first job is to make your way through from beginning to end. Read to the end of the chapter or listen to the entire audio without worrying about things you don't understand. Set your sights on the finish line and don't get distracted. This is a vital behaviour to foster because it trains you to enjoy the material before you start to get lost in the details. This is how you read or listen to things in your native language, so it's the perfect thing to aim for!

***Read for gist*** The most effective way to make headway through a piece of content in another language is to ask yourself: “Can I follow the gist of what’s going on?” You don’t need to understand every word, just the main ideas. If you can, that’s enough! You’re set! You can understand and enjoy a great amount with gist alone, so carry on through the material and enjoy the feeling of making progress! If the material is so hard that you struggle to understand even the gist, then my advice for you would be to consider easier material.

***Don’t look up words*** As tempting as it is to look up new words, doing so robs you of time that you could spend reading the material. In the extreme, you can spend so long looking up words that you never finish what you’re reading. If you come across a word you don’t understand... Don’t worry! Keep calm and carry on. Focus on the goal of reaching the end of the chapter. You’ll probably see that difficult word again soon, and you might guess the meaning in the meantime!

***Don’t analyse grammar*** Similarly to new words, if you stop to study verb tenses or verb conjugations as you go, you’ll never make any headway with the material. Try to *notice* the grammar that’s being used (make a mental note) and carry on. Have you spotted some unfamiliar grammar? No problem. It can wait. Unfamiliar grammar rarely

prevents you from understanding the gist of a passage but can completely derail your reading if you insist on looking up and studying every grammar point you encounter. After a while, you'll be surprised by how this "difficult" grammar starts to become "normal"!

***You don't understand? Don't worry!*** The feeling you often have when you are engaged in extensive learning is: "I don't understand". You may find an entire paragraph that you don't understand or that you find confusing. So, what's the best response? Spend the next hour trying to decode that difficult paragraph? Or continue reading regardless? (Hint: It's the latter!) When you read in your mother tongue, you will often skip entire paragraphs you find boring, so there's no need to feel guilty about doing the same when reading French. Skipping difficult passages of text may feel like cheating, but it can, in fact, be a mature approach to reading that allows you to make progress through the material and, ultimately, learn more.

If you follow this mindset when you read French, you will be training yourself to be a strong, independent French learner who doesn't have to rely on a teacher or rule book to make progress and enjoy learning. As you will have noticed, this approach draws on the fact that your brain can learn many things naturally, without conscious study. This is something that we appear to have forgotten with the

formalisation of the education system. But, speak to any accomplished language learner and they will confirm that their proficiency in languages comes not from their ability to memorise grammar rules, but from the time they spend reading, listening to, and speaking the language, enjoying the process, and integrating it into their lives.

So, I encourage you to embrace extensive learning, and trust in your natural abilities to learn languages, starting with... The contents of this book!

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## THE FIVE-STEP READING PROCESS

Here is my suggested five-step process for making the most of each conversation in this book:

1. Read the short introduction to the conversation. This is important, as it sets the context for the conversation, helping you understand what you are about to read. Take note of the characters who are speaking and the situation they are in. If you need to refresh your memory of the characters, refer to the character introductions at the front of the book.
2. Read the conversation all the way through without stopping. Your aim is simply to reach the end of the conversation, so do not stop to look up words and do not worry if there are things you do not understand. Simply try to follow the gist of the conversation.
3. Go back and read the same conversation a second time. If you like, you can read in more detail than before, but otherwise simply read it through one more time, using the vocabulary list to check unknown words and phrases where necessary.
4. By this point, you should be able to follow the gist of the conversation. You might like to continue to read the same conversation a few more times until you feel confident. This is time well-spent and with each repetition you will gradually build your understanding of the content.
5. Move on! There is no need to understand every word in the conversation, and the greatest value

to be derived from the book comes from reading it through to completion! Move on to the next conversation and do your best to enjoy the story at your own pace, just as you would any other book.

At every stage of the process, there will inevitably be words and phrases you do not understand or passages you find confusing. Instead of worrying about the things you *don't* understand, try to focus instead on everything that you *do* understand, and congratulate yourself for the hard work you are putting into improving your French.

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**LE SECRET DE LA PEINTURE**

(The Secret in the Painting)

*Translated by Julie Baraize*

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## **CHARACTER PROFILES**

### **Claire Gentil**

Detective Gentil is a policewoman who works in Paris. After her previous experiences with Sophie and Alice, she now specialises in cases related to the world of art.

### **Jacques Dubois**

Jacques is a detective and colleague of Detective Gentil. He has had less time on the job and, therefore, Detective Gentil is his guide and mentor. He listens attentively to what she says and follows her instructions to the letter, although he is not afraid to give his opinion when he thinks necessary.

### **Sophie**

A young art historian and curator who works at the Louvre Museum.

### **Amélia Rousseau**

The Director of the Louvre Museum.

### **Inspecteur en chef Faure**

Chief Inspector at the police station where Detective Gentil works. He controls the work of everyone in the division.

### **Lucas**

A scholar at the Louvre Museum, under the supervision of Sophie. He is an art history student. Everyone in his family is on the police force but he wants to dedicate his life to painting.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STORY**

Shortly after arresting a major art forger, detective Claire Gentil receives a call from the director of the Louvre Museum in Paris.

Has another work of art gone missing? Actually, the opposite! A mysterious painting has appeared on the Louvre's walls. No-one knows where it came from or how it got there.

Detective Gentil goes to the museum with her partner Jacques Dubois. They meet the director, Amélia, and the curator, Sophie. Could this be a mistake? A joke? In fact, it's neither! They discover some tiny writing on the back of the painting: "This painting is not here by accident."

While they try to figure out where the painting came from, they further discover that it is filled with clues. The painting contains five scenes, each representing a crime that will be committed somewhere in Paris by the end of the day.

As they race around the city to stop this crime wave, more questions arise: Who is behind this network of organised crime? And who is trying to warn detective Gentil?

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## 1. L'APPEL

*L'inspecteur Claire Gentil est réveillée par la sonnerie du téléphone. Elle regarde son réveil. Il est 8 heures du matin. Elle entend son fils, Matthieu, répondre à l'appel. Après quelques minutes, elle arrive enfin à rassembler ses forces pour sortir du lit et aller à la cuisine.*

**Matthieu:** Bonjour maman !

**Claire:** Bonjour, mon chéri, comment tu vas aujourd'hui ?

**Matthieu:** Très bien ! Ça va maman ?

**Claire:** Je suis très fatiguée. Maman a travaillé dur cette semaine... J'espère que les prochains jours seront plus calmes !

**Matthieu:** Moi aussi ! Je suis épuisé !

**Claire:** Ah oui ? Et pourquoi ça, mon cher fils ?

**Matthieu:** Ils me font travailler très dur à l'école : le maître nous fait peindre, peindre et encore peindre, et il veut qu'on utilise *toutes* les couleurs. Et ensuite il y a l'heure du conte, et puis nous devons chanter une chanson, et ensuite jouer au ballon.

**Claire:** Je vois... Et ensuite ici à la maison, ta mère s'endort et tu dois répondre au téléphone. C'était qui, d'ailleurs ?

**Matthieu:** Ton chef, il a dit que c'était *agent* !

**Claire:** Agent ?

**Matthieu:** Non, c'était pas *agent*. Il a dit que c'était...  
*sergent*.

**Claire:** Mais qu'est-ce que tu racontes, Matthieu ? Attends...  
il a dit que c'était *urgent* ?

**Matthieu:** Oui, c'est ça ! Il a dit que c'était *urgent* !

---

### ***Vocabulaire***

**un appel** a call

**réveiller** to wake up

**un réveil** an alarm clock

**une sonnerie** a ringtone

**rassembler** to gather

**mon chéri** sweetheart

**travailler dur** to work hard

**peindre** to paint

**un conte** a tale

**une chanson** a song

**s'endormir** to fall asleep

**répondre** to answer

**d'ailleurs** by the way

**Qu'est-ce que tu racontes ?** What are you talking about?

---

## 2. L'URGENCE

*Claire Gentil prend son téléphone portable et elle appelle son chef, l'inspecteur Faure. C'est un homme au caractère difficile et avec des manières un peu brusques, mais ils ont toujours eu de bons rapports. En discutant, Claire prépare un chocolat chaud pour Matthieu, qui le boit en silence en regardant des dessins animés.*

**Faure:** Allô ?

**Claire:** Bonjour, Faure. C'est moi, l'inspecteur Gentil. Vous avez appelé tout à l'heure ?

**Faure:** Oui, oui, j'ai dit à votre fils que c'était urgent, où est-ce que vous étiez ?

**Claire:** Désolée, après l'affaire de cette semaine, je suis épuisée. J'étais au lit.

**Faure:** Eh bien, j'espère que vous avez bien dormi, car on a quelque chose de nouveau qui nécessite votre présence immédiate au commissariat.

**Claire:** Oh non ! De quoi est-ce qu'il s'agit ? Un autre faussaire de tableaux ?

**Faure:** Je ne peux pas vous donner plus de détails par téléphone, Gentil, vous devez venir. Emmenez Matthieu à l'école et venez immédiatement.

**Claire:** Bien. Je suis là dans une demi-heure.

**Faure:** Parfait, on vous attend. À tout de suite !

**Claire:** À tout de suite !

**Matthieu:** Maman, qu'est-ce que ça veut dire *urgent* ?

---

### ***Vocabulaire***

**au caractère difficile** a difficult person

**brusque** blunt

**avoir de bons rapports** get along well

**un dessin animé** a cartoon

**tout à l'heure** a moment ago

**une affaire** a case

**espérer** to hope

**s'agir de** to be about

**un faussaire** a forger

**un tableau** a painting

**emmener** to bring

**à tout de suite** see you soon

---

### 3. QUELQUE CHOSE D'INATTENDU

*Après avoir emmené Matthieu à l'école, Claire se rend le plus rapidement possible au poste de police, où elle travaille. À son arrivée, elle voit que son chef l'attend à la porte. L'inspecteur Faure semble très inquiet.*

**Claire:** Inspecteur Faure, qu'est-ce qu'il s'est passé ? Qu'est-ce qui est si urgent ?

**Faure:** Je ne peux pas vous le dire ici... Entrons dans le bureau et je vous montrerai.

**Claire:** Que de mystère ! Ce doit être une affaire très sensible. Jacques est à l'intérieur ?

**Faure:** Oui, ils sont tous à l'intérieur. C'est une affaire très sérieuse... et elle a besoin de ton action immédiate.

**Tous:** SURPRISEEEEEEEEEEE !

**Claire:** Ahhhhhh ! Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça ? Une fête surprise, pour moi ?!

**Faure:** Joyeux anniversaire, inspecteur Gentil.

**Claire:** Mais mon anniversaire, c'est le 12 septembre !

**Jacques:** Justement, c'est *aujourd'hui* le 12 septembre. Ça y est, tu as quarante ans !

**Claire:** Mon dieu, c'est vrai ! Merci d'y avoir pensé !

**Faure:** Je commence surtout à penser que vous avez besoin de vacances. Allez, tout le monde, un toast à notre meilleur inspecteur, qui, s'il y a encore quelqu'un à Paris à qui cela a

échappé, a attrapé hier Pierre Lefèvre, le plus grand faussaire de Matisse de toute l'Europe. Santé !

**Tous:** Santé !

**Claire:** Un grand merci à vous tous ! C'est un honneur de travailler avec cette équipe... Attendez une minute, c'est du mille-feuille ça ? Allez, passez-moi la pelle à tarte.

---

### ***Vocabulaire***

**se rendre** to go to

**inquiet** worried

**montrer** to show

**que de mystère** how mysterious

**sensible** sensitive

**à l'intérieur** inside

**une fête** a party

**joyeux anniversaire** happy birthday

**justement** precisely

**ça y est** that's it

**mon dieu** my God

**surtout** especially

**échapper à quelqu'un** to miss

**attraper** to catch

**une équipe** a team

**un mille-feuille** a millefeuille is a type of cake

**une pelle à tarte** a pie server

---

#### 4. LE DEUXIÈME APPEL

*Alors qu'ils fêtent l'anniversaire de Claire au commissariat, le téléphone de son bureau sonne. En avalant rapidement la dernière bouchée de sa part de mille-feuille, l'inspecteur Gentil répond au téléphone.*

**Claire:** Oui, allô ? Qui est-ce ?

**Amélia:** Inspecteur Gentil, c'est Amélia Rousseau, directrice du Musée du Louvre. Félicitations !

**Claire:** Bonjour, Amélia. Vous aussi vous êtes aussi au courant pour mon anniversaire ? On dirait que je suis la dernière informée.

**Amélia:** Ah non, je ne savais pas que c'était votre anniversaire, joyeux anniversaire ! Je vous félicitais d'avoir attrapé Pierre Lefèvre. Nous nous débarrassons enfin de ce malfaiteur ! Je ne sais pas ce qui m'énerve le plus : que ses œuvres étaient si bonnes qu'elles ont trompé nos meilleurs spécialistes ou qu'une personne avec un tel talent ait décidé de se consacrer à la contrefaçon au lieu de développer sa propre carrière artistique.

**Claire:** Oui, c'est vraiment dommage. Au fait, qu'est-ce que vous allez faire de ses tableaux ?

**Amélia:** Eh bien, bien qu'ils ne soient pas des Matisse originaux, nous les considérons maintenant comme des pièces historiques, d'autant plus que vous avez attrapé

l'artiste ! Nous prévoyons une exposition spéciale consacrée aux contrefaçons.

**Claire:** Ça me paraît être une excellente idée ! Depuis que nous avons travaillé sur le vol des dessins de Monet l'année dernière, je m'intéresse de plus en plus aux affaires liés au monde de l'art.

**Amélia:** Je sais ! C'est justement pour ça que je vous ai appelé...

**Claire:** Oh non ! Quelque chose a été volé au musée ?

**Amélia:** Non... C'est plutôt *le contraire*. Vous feriez mieux de venir.

---

### **Vocabulaire**

**sonner** to ring

**avaler** to swallow

**une bouchée** a bite

**être au courant** to know about

**on dirait que** it seems that

**féliciter** to congratulate

**se débarrasser de** to get rid of

**énervé** to annoy

**une oeuvre** an artwork

**tromper** to deceive

**tel** such a

**la contrefaçon** forgery

**bien que** even though

**prévoir** to plan

**voler** to steal

**vous feriez mieux de...** you'd better...

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## 5. L'APPARITION

*S'excusant auprès de son chef et de ses collègues de ne pas rester manger et boire plus longtemps, Claire se rend au musée du Louvre. À son arrivée, elle retrouve Amélia et son amie Sophie, avec qui elle a collaboré par le passé pour attraper un voleur d'art. Amélia et Sophie regardent avec inquiétude une grande peinture dans l'une des salles les plus importantes de l'aile d'art contemporain du musée.*

**Sophie:** Claire ! Comment ça va ?

**Claire:** Salut Sophie. Bien. Et toi ? Ça va ? Et Alice ?

**Sophie:** Alice peut à peine bouger. Elle accouchera dans quelques semaines et le bébé est très agité... mais à part ça, tout va bien.

**Claire:** Tant mieux. Vous allez bien Amélia ? Vous m'avez beaucoup intriguée avec votre appel, est-ce que vous allez me dire ce qui se passe ? Est-ce que cette peinture est un faux ? Ou est-ce qu'elle a été volée ?

**Amélia:** Pour vous dire la vérité... On ne sait pas vraiment quel est le problème de cette peinture.

---

### **Vocabulaire**

**s'excuser auprès de** to apologise

**retrouver** to meet up

**avec inquiétude** with concern

**une aile** a wing  
**à peine** hardly  
**accoucher** to give birth  
**tant mieux** good!  
**la vérité** a truth

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