

BEGINNING FRENCH

A GRAMMAR AND READER

By

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INTRODUCTION

FRENCH PRONUNCIATION

Be sure to listen carefully to your instructor. Try to repeat his sounds as exactly as possible, just as you unself-consciously imitated your mother's words when you were first learning English.

Since your instructor will not always be available to help you, we are giving you a list of letters and other signs which represent French sounds. Each of these is enclosed in brackets. You are familiar with most of the letters, but you must remember that in French the letters are not always pronounced as they are in English. Only nine letters and signs are totally unknown to you, but it should not be long before you become familiar with them and the sounds they represent. These letters and signs are international phonetic symbols. They are accepted by linguists all over the world, just as chemical symbols are accepted by the chemists of all nations.

The English sounds given for comparison are only approximate, because no French sound is exactly comparable to a similar English one. In order to get the French sound correct, you will have to fight constantly against your native habits of speech and add to that "nearest English sound" the French "color" that you will detect in your instructor's French pronunciation. If your instructor can speak French properly, there is no reason why you cannot do the same. The magic formula for it is simply "listen carefully and repeat as accurately as possible."

Accentuation

The *accented* syllable of a word is the one which is spoken more forcefully than the others. In English it is the pet syllable of the English-speaking person, and the stumbling block for foreigners, especially for French people who are learning English. The

reason for this is that in French every syllable is uttered very distinctly and with about the same amount of energy. A Frenchman will naturally want to give every English syllable the same careful treatment; therefore he will sound dreadfully French. This is precisely what you want to do when learning French. Sound French with a vengeance, pronounce French as you would pronounce English if you attempted to make fun of a French person who is struggling with the English language.

You should put stress, tenseness, clearness of pronunciation on every French syllable. The action of the organs of articulation is far more energetic in French than in English. Though you can speak English with a fair degree of clearness if you hold the stem of your pipe, or even a hairpin, tightly between your teeth, you cannot speak French that way and still hope to be understood by anyone but yourself. So don't be afraid to open your mouth when you speak French. Please make your lips, tongue, and throat work more than when you speak English.

There is in French, however, a very slight stress which usually falls on the last syllable of a word of two or more syllables, or on the next to the last if the last vowel of the word is *e*. That, along with the sounds themselves, gives the French language its musical quality.

PHONETIC SYMBOLS

SYMBOLS	NEAREST ENGLISH SOUND	EXAMPLES
[i]	<i>i</i> in <i>machine</i> , but more tense.	il [il] <i>he, it</i> ; vite [vit] <i>quickly</i> ; la <i>machine</i> [maʃin] <i>the machine</i> ; merci [mɛrsi] <i>thank you</i>
[y]	between <i>i</i> in <i>machine</i> and <i>oo</i> in <i>boot</i> ; [i] rounded.	tu [ty] <i>you, thou</i> ; une [yn] <i>a, an, one, f.</i> ; tu <i>étudies</i> [ty etydi] <i>you study</i>
[e] Closed e	<i>e</i> in <i>they</i> pronounced tensely, without allowing [e] to glide off into [ei] (off-glide).	Désirez-vous? [dezire vu?] <i>Do you desire?</i>
[ɛ] Open e	<i>e</i> in <i>bet</i> , without off-glide.	Elle est française. [ɛl ɛ frãsez.] <i>She is French.</i>

SYMBOLS	NEAREST ENGLISH SOUND	EXAMPLES
[ɛ] Nasal	<i>an</i> in <i>hang</i> , without pronouncing <i>g</i> .	demain [dəmɛ] <i>tomorrow</i>
[ø]	<i>u</i> in <i>hurt</i> , without adding an <i>r</i> sound.	bien [bjɛ] <i>well</i>
[ə]	<i>e</i> in unstressed <i>the</i> .	un peu mieux [œ pø mjø] <i>a little better</i>
[œ]	<i>u</i> in <i>cut</i> .	je [ʒə] <i>I</i>
[œ̃] Nasal	<i>un</i> in <i>hung</i> without pronouncing <i>g</i> .	que [kə] <i>that, whom, which, what</i>
[a] Closed a	between the <i>a</i> in <i>cat</i> and the <i>a</i> in <i>father</i> .	Ma sœur est seule. [ma søer ɛ sœl.] <i>My sister is alone.</i>
[a] Open a	<i>a</i> in <i>father</i> .	un [œ̃] <i>one, a, an (m.)</i>
[ɑ̃] Nasal	<i>a</i> in <i>father</i> , nasalized.	Ça va, madame? [sa va ma-dam?] <i>Is everything all right with you, madam?</i>
[ɔ] Open o	<i>o</i> in <i>not</i> , but not quite so short.	La classe n'est pas là-bas. [la klas nɛ pa la-ba.] <i>The class is not over there.</i>
[ɔ̃] Nasal	<i>o</i> in <i>not</i> , nasalized.	L'enfant commence le français. [lɑ̃fɑ̃ kɔ̃mɑ̃s lə frɑ̃sɛ.] <i>The child begins French.</i>
[o] Closed o	<i>o</i> in <i>go</i> , without off-glide.	votre école [vɔtr ekɔl] <i>your school</i>
[u]	<i>oo</i> in <i>boot</i> , without off-glide.	Bonjour, mon ami. [bɔ̃ʒur mɔ̃n ami.] <i>Good morning, my friend.</i>
[ʃ]	<i>sh</i> in <i>ship</i> .	beaucoup d'eau chaude [boku do ʃod] <i>much hot water</i>
[ʒ]	<i>s</i> in <i>measure</i> .	pour toujours [pur tuzur] <i>forever</i>
[ɲ] ni in onion.		chercher une chose [ʃɛʁʃe yn ʃoz] <i>to look for a thing</i>
[j]	<i>y</i> in <i>yes</i> , but briefer.	Je joue toujours. [ʒə ʒu tuzur.] <i>I always play.</i>
[ɥ]	brief [y] pronounced in the same syllable with the following vowel.	La montagne est magnifique. [la mɔ̃taɲ ɛ maɲifik.] <i>The mountain is magnificent.</i>
[w] w in we.		La fille travaille bien mieux. [la fij travaj bjɛ mjø.] <i>The daughter (girl) works much better.</i>
[g] g in get.		je suis [ʒə sqi] <i>I am</i>
		oui, moi [wi, mwa] <i>yes, I</i>
		un garçon anglais [œ garsɔ̃ ɑ̃ɡlɛ] <i>an English boy</i>

The other symbols, which are familiar to you, express sounds that are generally much the same as those indicated by the same letters in English. They are, however, more tense.

[p] [b] [m] [f] [v] [t] [d] [n] [s] [z] [l] [k] [r]

French Vowels and Their Chief Written Combinations

Practice the pronunciation of the French written vowels set out below.

a	e	i	o	u
[a]	[ə]	[i]	[o]	[y]

Add i to the spelling.

ai	ei	ii	oi	ui
[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ii]	[wa]	[qi]

Add u to the spelling, except u because the combination does not exist.

au	eu	iu	ou
[o]	[ø]	[jy]	[u]

Add n to the vowels, and you have the nasal sounds shown below.

an	en	in	on	un
[ā]	[ā]	[ɛ]	[ɔ]	[œ]

ai }
au } is pronounced like
an } ei [ɛ]
eau [o]
en [ā]

Add in to each of the vowels except i.

ain	ein	oin	uin
[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[wɛ]	[yɛ]

ain, ein, and in are pronounced alike—[ɛ].

Put i before en and on.

ien	ion
[jɛ]	[jɔ]

In each lesson essential points of French pronunciation will be taken up along with practice exercises.

Linking

In spoken, but not in written French, the final consonant of a word is sometimes pronounced and joined with the initial vowel of the following word. This is known as *la liaison*, which means *joining* or *linking*. Up to the end of Lesson 5, a tie curve [] has been printed between words which should be linked in pronunciation. Do not reproduce that curve when you write. The following examples of linking have been taken from the first five lessons.

LINK

1. Articles and nouns.

les_amis	[lez ami]	the friends
un_enfant	[œn āfā]	a child
des_allumettes	[dez alymet]	some matches

2. Adjectives and nouns.

mon_ami	[mōn ami]	my friend <i>m.</i>
deux_enfants	[døz āfā]	two children
cet_après-midi	[set apremidi]	this afternoon
les_grandes_ailes	[le grādiz ēl]	the big (large) wings

3. Prepositions and their objects.

dans_une région	[dāz yn rezjō]	in a region
après_avoir	[aprez avwar]	after having

4. Pronoun subjects or objects and verbs.

nous_avons	[nuz avō]	we have
vous_êtes	[vuz et]	you are
vous_vous_asseyez	[vu vuz aseje]	you sit down.
Voulez-vous_aller?	[vule vuz ale?]	Do you wish (want) to go?
ils_ont	[ilz ō]	they have <i>m.</i>
elles_ont	[ēlz ō]	they have <i>f.</i>
Dit-il?	[dit il?]	Does he say?
Fait-il?	[fet il?]	Does he (it) do (make)?

5. Verbs and objects, adjectives (also past participles and infinitives).

Je voudrais une pomme.	[ʒə vudʁɛz yn pɔm.]	I should like an apple.
Je suis occupée.	[ʒə sɥiz ɔkype.]	I am busy. <i>f.</i>
Êtes-vous Américain?	[ɛt vuz amerikɛʔ]	Are you (an) American? <i>m.</i>

6. Adverbs and prepositions, and verbs.

rien à manger	[rjɛn a mɑʒe]	nothing to eat
Comment allez-vous?	[kɔmɑt ale vuʔ]	How are you (do you go)?

7. Nouns and prepositions.

des parents à New-York	[de parɑz a nujɔrk]	some relatives in New York
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8. Pronouns or adjectives and conjunctions.

vous et moi	[vuz ɛ mwa]	you and I (me)
vingt et un	[vɛt ɛ œ]	twenty (and) one

NEVER LINK

The *t* in *et*. E.g., *vingt et un*.

A few consonants change their sounds in linking.

1. Final *s* and *x* are sounded [z].

aux États-Unis	[oz etaz yni]	in the United States
ils ont	[ilz ɔ̃]	they have <i>m.</i>

2. Final *d* is sounded [t].

quand il pleut	[kɑ̃t il plø]	when it rains
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Linking every time it is possible to do so sometimes creates an unpleasant repetition of sounds. For example, in the following sentence:

Vous êtes aux États-Unis.	[vuz ɛtz oz etaz yni.]	You are in the United States.
---------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------------

In this and similar cases it is recommended that only the closely connected words be linked. For example, do not link verb and object.

[vuz et oz etaz yni.]

In French, linking is almost a personal matter. Try to find a happy medium by limiting yourself to the *must* rules which are set out above. Imitate your teacher. No linking at all is proof of illiteracy or carelessness. Too much linking is an affectation. For linking before *h*'s see page 26.

Syllabification

THE DIVISION OF WORDS INTO SYLLABLES

You know that a word is made up of one or more syllables. In order to pronounce correctly, it is necessary to be able to divide words into the syllables of which they consist. A syllable is a unit of speech which is uttered with a single impulse of air from the lungs. Each syllable is represented in writing by a vowel which is usually accompanied by one or more consonants.

In English, more syllables end with a consonant than with a vowel. In French, just the reverse is true. A consonant always forms a syllable with a following—not a preceding—vowel, and as a rule in the body of a French word a syllable begins with a consonant and ends with a vowel. Examine the words below.

madame	ma-da-me	madam
je désire	je dé-si-re	I desire (wish)
déjà	dé-jà	already
il étudie	il é-tu-die	he studies

Naturally, many words begin with one or more vowels.

étudier	é-tu-dier	to study
aimer	ai-mer	to like (to love)

Syllables that end in [ə], written *e*, are said to be mute because the final *e* is not pronounced. They usually come at the end of a word (*madame*), sometimes within the word.

mademoiselle	ma-de-moi-sel-le	[madmwazel] miss
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Notice that in the case of **-selle**, in **mademoiselle**, we have a double consonant, **ll**, which is divided as **l-l**. Double consonants are usually divided in writing, and pronounced as one with the following sound.

comment	com-ment	how
allez	al-lez	go
je travaille	je tra-vail-le	I work
aussi	aus-si	also

Many syllables begin with a consonant, end with a consonant, and contain a vowel between, just as in English. Such words are divided as in English.

bonjour	bon-jour	[bɔ̃ʒur]	good day
monsieur	mon-sieur	[mɔ̃sjø]	sir
parlez	par-lez	[parle]	speak
français	fran-çais	[frɑ̃sɛ]	French

Two dissimilar consonants between vowels go with the following vowel if they can be pronounced together.

quatre	qua-tre	[katr]	four
votre	vo-tre	[votr]	your <i>sing.</i>
table	ta-ble	[tabl]	table
je voudrais	je vou-drais	[vudre]	I should like

Since the following consonants can be pronounced together, they belong to the same syllable.

bl, cl, fl, gl pl, tl
br, cr, dr, gr, pr, tr, vr
ch, ph, th, gn

All other combinations belong in separate syllables.

par-ler fran-çais bon-jour

Two dissimilar consonants, the second being **l** or **r** (except in the combination **rl** or **lr**) belong to the following syllable.

je prendrai	pren-drai	I shall take
ensemble	en-sem-ble	together