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French Essentials

FOR
DUMMIES®

Learn:

- The basics of French grammar and sentence construction

• How to conjugate regular, irregular, and stem-changing verbs

• How to express ideas about the past, present, and future

Laura K. Lawless

Author, Intermediate French For Dummies

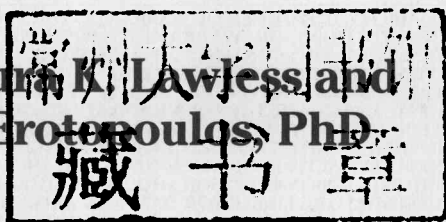
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Introduction

Whether you're taking a French class in high school or college, this handy reference book can help you recall vocabulary, verb conjugation, crucial differences between French and English, and much more. If the idea of snuggling up with your textbook in advance of a big exam makes you queasy, take heart: This book is a focused, straightforward review of the key material covered in introductory French courses. *French Essentials For Dummies* can help you reach your goals painlessly and effortlessly as you enhance your French language skills.

French Essentials For Dummies provides you with all the basic grammar you need to know to understand the language and to communicate it clearly. With the help of this book, you'll find it a snap to have a conversation about topics other than your name and the weather. And that's quite an achievement!

About This Book

We designed this book to be as accessible as possible. Each self-contained chapter presents a different topic that allows you to master essential French skills. We cover just the basics of each topic so you can get a quick refresher of what you've learned in your coursework. Plus, we include plenty of examples to reinforce the rules so that you're exposed to colloquial, everyday, correct French that native speakers expect to hear from someone using their language.

Conventions Used in This Book

To make this book as easy to use as possible, we use two important conventions throughout:

- ✓ French words and sentences, as well as endings we want to highlight, are set in **boldface** to make them stand out.
- ✓ English equivalents, set in *italic*, follow the French examples.

Foolish Assumptions

We wrote this book with the following assumptions in mind:

- ✓ You've taken — or are taking — an introductory French class either at the high school or college level.
- ✓ You want to review what you've already learned so you can pass a test for your course or excel on a college placement exam.
- ✓ You want a thorough book but one that isn't so advanced that you get bogged down by the rules. We try to explain French grammar as simply as possible without using too many technical terms.
- ✓ You use French at work or school and want to improve your writing or speaking skills. Maybe a family member or significant other is studying French and you want to help (even though you haven't looked at a verb conjugation for years). Or you're planning a trip to France or another French-speaking country and want to put your French into practice.

Icons Used in This Book

Like all *For Dummies* books, this one uses icons to indicate certain kinds of content. You can see them in the left-hand column throughout the book. Here's what they mean:



The Remember icon points out important concepts that you need to store in the back of your mind because you'll use them quite regularly.



We use Tip icons to give you time-saving information that makes your studies quick and effective.



This icon points out certain differences between English and French that you may find confusing. To learn how French constructions differ from those in English, consult these icons.

Where to Go from Here

French Essentials For Dummies is organized to let you read only what you want to read. Each chapter stands on its own and doesn't require that you complete any of the other chapters in the book. This setup saves you a lot of time if you've mastered certain topics but feel a bit insecure about others. Take a look at the table of contents or index, pick a topic, and go! Or you may want to proceed methodically by starting at the very beginning. It's up to you!

Go ahead! Jump right in and get your feet wet. If you don't know where to begin, take time to look at the table of contents and choose the topic that seems to best fit your abilities and needs. If you're timid because you feel that your background hasn't prepared you enough, you can start at the very beginning and work your way through the book.

No matter how you choose to read *French Essentials For Dummies*, we're confident that it can help you improve your French writing and speaking skills. Of course, you shouldn't let your practice end here. Write to a French pen pal, visit French websites and message boards, rent foreign flicks from the library, attempt conversations with your French-speaking friends, or try to translate song lyrics into French while you're stuck in traffic. And when you have a grammar question, come back here and look it up. Pretty soon, the thoughts running through your head may take on a decidedly French flair. *Bonne chance!* (Good luck!)

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant

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"Here's something. It's a language school that will teach you to speak French for \$500, or for \$200 they'll just give you an accent."

Chapter 1

Getting Down to Basics

In This Chapter

- ▶ Counting with cardinal and ordinal numbers
- ▶ Expressing dates
- ▶ Telling time
- ▶ Reviewing parts of speech

Being able to use cardinal and ordinal numbers and recognizing parts of speech are essential French skills. Knowing these basics will help you perfect your oral and written French.

Using Numbers

Numbers are one of the most basic and useful parts of language. In addition to simple counting, you need *cardinal numbers* for communicating dates, time, prices, phone numbers, addresses, and so much more. You use *ordinal numbers* to express the number of a floor or the order of a person in a race or competition.

Counting with cardinal numbers

Cardinal numbers are for counting, and the low numbers are easy. You may already know them backwards and forwards, but if not, all you need to do is memorize them. The higher numbers get a bit more complicated. Check out the following list of French numbers from 0 to 1 billion.