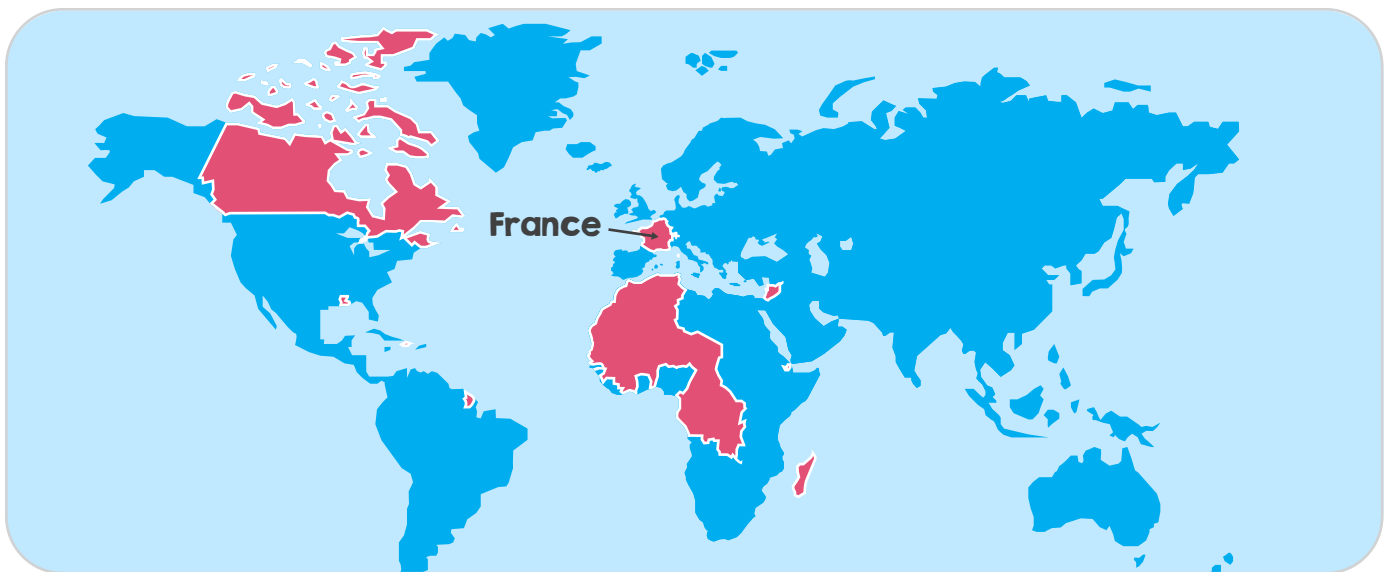




LEARNER PROFILE: FRENCH

This guide presents common challenges faced by French learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems; however, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.



Facts

- **Language family:** An Indo-European language. French is in the Romance family.
- **Native speakers:** Approximately 77 million
- **Second language speakers:** Around 200 million
- **Location:** French is an official language in countries around the world, from African countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar, to North American countries, like Canada and Haiti, and from European countries, like France and Luxembourg, to Oceanic countries, such as Vanuatu and French Polynesia.
- **Writing system:** Latin script
- **Alphabet:** The French alphabet uses the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet and diacritic marks on vowels to change their pronunciation. The cedilla can be added to 'c' (ç) which changes the pronunciation from a /k/ (as in the English 'car') to a /s/ (as in the English 'star')



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Pronunciation

- The sounds /ð/ (the initial sound in 'then'), /θ/ (the initial sound in 'think') and /h/ (the initial sound in 'house') are not sounds found in French. Native speakers may replace /z/ for /ð/, so 'then' sounds like 'zen', and /s/ for /θ/, so 'think' sounds like 'sink'.
- French is a syllable-timed language which places the syllable stress on last syllable of a long word. English is a stress-timed language and native French speakers may have difficulties producing unstressed English syllables.
- French speakers may nasalise vowels before the letter 'n', as this is the phonological rule in French.
- French has a 'r' sound which is pronounced differently to the English 'r' sound.
- The 'h' sound is not part of the French phonemic inventory and native speakers may struggle to pronounce this phoneme.
- When French verbs are conjugated, the gender and plural markers are rarely pronounced. Therefore, the 3rd person singular marker –s, which is added to verbs such as 'think' in 'she thinks', may not be pronounced.
- A typical French filler sound is 'euh'. When speaking, filler sounds tend to be the natural resting place of the tongue in between vowel sounds.

Grammar

- French has grammatical gender and possessive pronouns must agree with the gender of the noun. This can cause errors such as 'Peter and her wife', which is a direct translation from French 'Peter et sa femme'. 'Femme' is a feminine noun and therefore needs the feminine possessive pronoun 'sa'.
- Some grammatical structures use different tense in French compared to English. For example, using 'since' takes the simple present tense in French but the present perfect tense in English:

French: I cook since early this morning.



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English: I have been cooking since early this morning.

- English requires an auxiliary verb when forming questions, however, lexical verbs can be used to form questions in French.

French: Want you to play?

English: Do you want to play?

- In French, modal verbs must be followed by infinitive verbs. Therefore, native French speakers may insert an unnecessary 'to' in between a modal and a lexical verb, such as 'I must to buy a new coat'.
- French speakers may express 'there are three of us' as 'we are three', which is a direct translation of the French expression 'nous sommes trois'.
- In French, adverbs are placed between verbs and objects, however, in English, adverbs are often placed between subjects and verbs. This is especially true with 'always' which is not as moveable as other adverbs. Therefore, French native speakers may produce sentences in English such as, 'I eat always at that café'.
- 'That' and 'what' may be used interchangeably by French native speakers as the same word is used in French, 'que'. Grammatical structures in French might also be transferred to English, such as 'I want that you do something' (from 'je veux que tu fasse').
- In French, the verb 'to have' is used to express age, so French speakers may say 'I have 12 years' instead of 'I am 12'. Similarly, hunger and thirst is expressed using the verb 'to have', leading to mistakes like 'I have hungry'.
- There are many false friends in English and French. French speakers may use 'sympathetic' to mean 'nice' or 'to rest' to mean 'to stay'.





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Writing


- French typing convention is to add a space before most punctuation marks, such as question marks, exclamation marks, colons, semi-colons, the percentage symbol and currency symbols. These conventions are less common in typed English.
- Speech marks in written French are also written as « ... ».
- Currencies are written so €3.50 would be 3,50 €.


Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons


-  Beginner > Phonics 1 > Set 4


-  Beginner > Phonics 1 > Set 5


-  Beginner > Phonics 1 > Additional sounds

-  Beginner > Work & School > -ing vs. -ed

-  Beginner > Punctuation > Inverted commas

-  Intermediate > Maths > Currency symbols

-  Intermediate > Everyday Life > Make vs. Do

-  Intermediate > Environment & Society > For vs. Since