FR

GRAMMAR COURSE

French Grammar 1

10 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

FRENCH GRAMMAR 1

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🔊 The Sound & Spelling Map — La carte des sons

*French spelling looks wild: beaucoup, oiseau, ils parlent. But it is more regular than it appears, and in one direction it is largely regular: **from spelling to sound**. Once you know the patterns below, you can read almost any French word aloud. The other direction (from sound to spelling) is harder, because many spellings share a sound. This course turns the phrases you met in French Basic Conversation 1 and 2 into rules. The rules in later chapters lean on sounds (the feminine of an adjective is often heard in the final consonant, liaison depends on spelling), so this chapter comes first. It is the only chapter in the course with a pronunciation respelling.*

How to read the respellings: **ah** as in *father* **ay** as in *say* **ü** say *ee* with rounded lips **uh** as in *the* (weak) **zh** as the *s* in *measure* **(n)** nasal vowel: do not say the *n*, let the air go through your nose

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A French word is read **letter by letter and group by group** with **fixed sound values** (*ou* = *oo*, *oi* = *wah*, *eau* = *oh*, *ch* = *sh*). The traps are: **silent final consonants** (except often *c, r, f, l*), **nasal vowels** (*an, on, in*), **accents** that change a vowel or a consonant (*é, è, ç*), and **the same sound written in several ways**.

The alphabet

The 26 letters are the same as in English; only their **names** differ. You need them to spell your name on the phone (*Comment ça s'écrit ?*).

LETTER	NAME	LETTER	NAME	LETTER	NAME
A	ah	J	zhee	S	ess
B	bay	K	kah	T	tay

LETTER	NAME	LETTER	NAME	LETTER	NAME
C	say	**L**	ell	**U**	ü
D	day	**M**	emm	**V**	vay
E	uh	**N**	enn	**W**	doo-bluh-vay
F	eff	**O**	oh	**X**	eeks
G	zhay	**P**	pay	**Y**	ee-grek
H	ash	**Q**	kü	**Z**	zed
I	ee	**R**	air (the throaty French *r*)		

The accents

MARK	EFFECT	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
é (acute)	the vowel *ay*, as in *say* (without the glide)	**café, été**	kah-fay, ay-tay
è (grave)	the vowel of *bed*	**père, mère**	pair, mair
ê (circumflex)	the same sound as *è*; often marks a lost *s*	**forêt** (forest), **fête**	fo-ray, fet
ë (diaeresis)	says: pronounce this vowel separately from the one before	**Noël**	no-ell
ç (cedilla)	makes *c* sound like *s* before *a, o, u*	**garçon, français**	gar-soh(n), frah(n)-say
à, ù (grave)	no change of sound; they tell two words apart	**là** (there) / **la** (the), **où** (where) / **ou** (or)	lah / lah, oo / oo
â, î, ô, û (circumflex)	little or no change of sound; often marks a lost *s*	**hôtel, île**	oh-tell, eel

If you cannot type accents

On a phone, hold the letter to see its accents. In writing, an accent is part of the spelling: *a* and *à* are different words, and *pêche* (peach) is not *péché* (sin). Capital letters keep their accents in correct French: *À bientôt*, *École*.

Silent letters

Final consonants are **usually silent**, and a final **-e** is silent too. This is the single most important French habit:

SPELLING	WHAT YOU HEAR	SAY IT
petit, grand, vous, trop, beaucoup	no final consonant	puh-tee, grah(n), voo, troh, boh-koo
petite, grande, la table	the consonant before the silent *-e* **is** heard	puh-teet, grah(n)d, lah tah-bluh
ils parlent, tu parles, je parle	all three sound the same	eel parl, tü parl, zhuh parl

Watch out: the "careful" letters

Final **c, r, f, l** (the letters of "careFuL") are often **pronounced**: **sac** (sack), **bonjour** (boh(n)-zhoor), **chef** (shef), **mal** (mal). There are exceptions: the verb ending *-er* sounds *ay* with a silent *r* (**donner**, do-nay), and **clef** (klay) and **gentil** (zhah(n)-tee) keep silent letters, so learn the word as a whole.

The nasal vowels

French has three nasal vowels (four in careful speech). A vowel plus **n** or **m** at the end of a syllable is **nasal**: the *n* or *m* is not pronounced as a consonant, it only tells you to pass the air through the nose.

SPELLING	SOUND	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
an, am, en, em	nasal *ah*	**enfant, chambre**	ah(n)-fah(n), shah(n)-bruh
on, om	nasal *oh*	**bon, nom**	boh(n), noh(n)
in, im, ain, ein	nasal *a* as in *man*	**vin, pain, faim**	va(n), pa(n), fa(n)
un	often the same as *in* today	**un, lundi**	a(n), la(n)-dee

Watch out: nasal against not nasal

The vowel is nasal only if **n or m ends the syllable**. Before a second *n* or *m*, or before a vowel, it is not: **bon** (boh(n)) against **bonne** (bonn); **vin** (va(n)) against **vinaigre** (vee-nay-gruh); **ami** (ah-mee), with *m* before a vowel. This contrast carries grammar: *un voisin / une voisine* (vwah-za(n) / vwah-zeen).

The main spelling patterns

SPELLING	SOUND	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
ou, où, oû	*oo* as in *food*	**vous, rouge**	voo, roozh
oi, oy	*wah*	**moi, voyage**	mwah, vwah-yazh
au, eau	*oh*	**beau, chapeau**	boh, shah-poh
eu, œu	rounded lips, as *e* in *the* but tighter	**peu, deux, sœur**	puh, duh, suhr
u	*ü*: say *ee* with rounded lips	**tu, rue**	tü, rü
ai, ei	*è*	**mais, neige**	may, nezh
ch	*sh*	**chat, chanson**	shah, shah(n)-soh(n)
gn	*ny* as in *canyon*	**montagne, agneau**	moh(n)-tah-nyuh, ah-nyoh

SPELLING	SOUND	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
ill	*y* after a vowel, or *ee-y* after a consonant	**fille, famille**	fee-y, fah-mee-y
qu	*k*	**qui, quatre**	kee, kah-truh
ph, th	*f, t*	**photo, thé**	foh-toh, tay
-tion	*syoh(n)*	**nation, attention**	nah-syoh(n), ah-tah(n)-syoh(n)

The consonants that change: c, g, s, x

SPELLING	SOUND	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
c before *e, i, y*	*s*	**ceci, cinéma**	suh-see, see-nay-mah
c before *a, o, u* or a consonant	*k*	**café, cours**	kah-fay, koor
ç	*s* before *a, o, u*	**garçon**	gar-soh(n)
g before *e, i, y*	*zh*	**manger, rouge**	mah(n)-zhay, roozh
g before *a, o, u* or a consonant; **gu** before *e, i*	hard *g*	**gare, guerre**	gar, gair
j	*zh*	**je, bonjour**	zhuh, boh(n)-zhoor
s between two vowels	*z*	**maison, poison**	may-zoh(n), pwah-zoh(n)
ss	*s*	**poisson**	pwah-soh(n)
ex- before a vowel	*egz*	**exemple**	eg-zah(n)-pluh
h	silent	**homme, hôtel**	om, oh-tell

> **Watch out: ill is not always "y"**
>
> The group *ill* sounds *y* in most words (*fille, famille, travailler*), but a handful have a real *l*: **ville** (veel), **mille** (meel), **tranquille** (trah(n)-keel). Learn these three as exceptions.

The weak e and the French r

The letter **e** without an accent is a weak, rounded vowel (*uh*) in short words (*le, je, de, ne, me*), and it often **disappears in fast speech**: **samedi** sounds like *sam-dee*, **je ne sais pas** like *zh'n'say pah*. The French **r** is made at the back of the throat, close to a gentle gargle; the English *r* will be understood, but practise the throaty sound with *rue* (rü), *rouge* (roozh), *merci* (mair-see).

Why spelling and sound disagree

French spelling was fixed centuries ago, when more letters were pronounced. Since then the sounds changed but the spelling mostly did not. That has two effects:

EFFECT	EXAMPLE
Many spellings, one sound (hard to spell what you hear)	**o, au, eau** all sound *oh*; **è, ê, ai, ei** all sound *è*
Homophones: different words that sound the same	**vers, verre, vert, ver** (all *vair*); **cent, sans, sang, sent** (all *sah(n)*); **où / ou, à / a**
Silent endings that matter in writing	**il parle / ils parlent** sound the same, but the written form shows the number

In later chapters you will see why this matters for grammar: the written **-s** of a plural, the **-e** of a feminine adjective, and the **-ent** of a verb are often **invisible to the ear**. You must check them on the page.

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read the exchanges aloud, using the respellings.

① Spelling a name

A:

Comment ça s'écrit ?

How is that spelled?

B:

G-A-U-T-I-E-R : G, A, U, T, I, E, R.

G-A-U-T-I-E-R (zhay, ah, ü, tay, ee, uh, air).

② Poisson or poison?

A:

C'est du poisson ou du poison ?

Is that fish or poison? (pwah-soh(n) or pwah-zoh(n))

B:

Du poisson ! Avec deux s, c'est un animal qui nage.

Fish! With two s's, it is an animal that swims.

③ The cedilla

A:

Comment vous écrivez « garçon » ?

How do you write "garçon"?

B:

G-A-R-C cédille-O-N. La cédille donne le son « s ».

G-A-R-C with a cedilla-O-N. The cedilla gives the "s" sound.

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

TOPIC	SUMMARY
silent letters	final consonants and final *-e* usually silent; c, r, f, l often sounded
nasal vowels	an / en → ah(n) · on → oh(n) · in / ain / ein → a(n)
vowel groups	ou = oo · oi = wah · au / eau = oh · eu = rounded uh · u = ü · ai / ei = è

TOPIC	SUMMARY
consonant groups	ch = sh · gn = ny · ill = y · qu = k · -tion = syoh(n)
c, g	soft before e, i, y (s, zh), hard before a, o, u; ç = s
s	z between vowels, s with ss
accents	é = ay · è / ê = è · ë = separate · ç = s
spelling versus sound	read reliably from spelling; writing from sound needs care

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Read aloud: *chanson, jambon, fromage.*

▼ Show answer

shah(n)-soh(n), zhah(n)-boh(n), fro-mazh.

2. Read aloud: *oiseau, chapeau, beaucoup.*

▼ Show answer

wah-zoh, shah-poh, boh-koo. (*oi* = wah, *eau* = oh)

3. Which final letters are silent? *petit, grand, vous, parlent.*

▼ Show answer

All of them: puh-tee, grah(n), voo, parl. (The *-ent* of the verb is silent.)

4. Is the vowel nasal? *bon · bonne · vin · vinaigre.*

▼ Show answer

bon: yes · bonne: no · vin: yes · vinaigre: no. (A second *n* or a following vowel stops the nasalisation.)

5. Say the difference: *poisson* and *poison*.

▼ Show answer

pwah-soh(n) (fish, *ss* = s) and pwah-zoh(n) (poison, single *s* between vowels = z).

6. Soft or hard? *cinéma, café, manger, gare*.

▼ Show answer

see-nay-mah (soft c) · kah-fay (hard c) · mah(n)-zhay (soft g) · gar (hard g).

7. Why is there a cedilla in *garçon*?

▼ Show answer

Because *c* before *o* would sound *k*; the cedilla makes it *s*: gar-soh(n).

8. Which three common words with *ill* keep a real *l*?

▼ Show answer

ville (veel), *mille* (meel), *tranquille* (trah(n)-keel).

9. Spell your first name aloud in French letter names, for example *ANNA*.

▼ Show answer

A-N-N-A: ah, enn, enn, ah.

10. What do these homophones have in common: *vers, verre, vert, ver*? How can you tell them apart?

▼ Show answer

They all sound the same (vair). Only the spelling and the context tell them apart (towards, glass, green, worm).

Coming up in Chapter 2: Linking Sounds: Elision, Liaison and Enchaînement. *l'ami, j'ai, qu'il*; obligatory, forbidden and optional liaison (*les amis, un petit ami*); *h muet* against *h aspiré*; and how all of this shows in writing.

🔗 Linking Sounds — Les liaisons

*French is spoken in **breath groups**, not in separate words. The words in a group run together, so a vowel at the start of a word **borrows** the sound before it. Three things do this: **elision** (a vowel drops out and an apostrophe takes its place: l'ami), **enchaînement** (a final consonant that is always pronounced slides onto the next vowel: il a sounds like i-la), and **liaison** (a normally silent final consonant comes back to life: les amis). Elision is always written; the other two are heard, not written, which is why they matter for your ear and for later grammar. The respellings below use the key from French Grammar 1 1.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Elision is obligatory: *le, la, je, me, te, se, ne, de, que* (and *si* before *il / ils*) lose their vowel before a vowel or **h muet**: *l'ami, j'ai, qu'il*. **Liaison** links a silent final consonant to a following vowel in **tight groups** (*les amis, nous avons, petit ami*), is **forbidden** in others (after *et*, before **h aspiré**), and is optional elsewhere. A liaison *s, x* sounds *z*; *d* sounds *t*; *f* sounds *v*.

Elision: the apostrophe

WORD	BECOMES	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
le, la (the)	**l'**	**l'ami, l'école**	lah-mee, lay-kol
je	**j'**	**j'ai, j'habite**	zhay, zhah-beet
me, te, se	**m', t', s'**	**je t'aime, il s'appelle**	zhuh tem, eel sah-pell
ne	**n'**	**il n'est pas ici**	eel neh pah zee-see
de	**d'**	**d'abord**	dah-bor
que	**qu'**	**qu'il vient**	keel vya(n)

WORD	BECOMES	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
ce	c' before *est, était…*	c'est	seh
si	s' only before *il, ils*	s'il vous plaît	seel voo play

Watch out: elision is not optional, and si is special

Je aime, *le ami*, *que il* are not French: say and write *j'aime, l'ami, qu'il*. But *si* elides **only** before *il / ils* (*s'il pleut*), not before *elle* (*si elle vient*). And *ce* before a noun does not elide: it changes to *cet* (*cet ami*, French Grammar 1 9). Elision also happens inside longer words: *lorsqu'il, puisqu'elle, jusqu'à*.

Enchaînement: the pronounced consonant slides over

When a word ends in a consonant that **is** pronounced, and the next word begins with a vowel, there is no break: the consonant is simply said with the next vowel. This is not liaison (no silent letter comes back to life); it is how French is syllabled.

WRITTEN	HEARD AS
il a	ee-lah
elle est	eh-leh
une amie	ü-nah-mee
avec elle	ah-veh-kell
quelle heure est-il ?	keh-luhr eh-teel

Liaison: the silent consonant comes back

In a liaison the **silent final consonant** of the first word is pronounced because the next word starts with a vowel or h muet. Some consonants change their sound:

WRITTEN FINAL LETTER	LIAISON SOUND	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
s, x, z	*z*	**les amis, deux enfants, vous avez**	lay-zah-mee, duh-zah(n)-fah(n), voo-zah-vay
t, d	*t*	**petit ami, grand homme**	puh-tee-tah-mee, grah(n)-tom
n	*n* (and the nasal vowel becomes plain)	**un ami, en Italie**	a(n)-nah-mee, ah(n)-nee-tah-lee
f	*v* (only in a few words)	**neuf heures, neuf ans**	nuh-vuhr, nuh-vah(n)

Where liaison is obligatory

CONTEXT	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
determiner + noun or adjective	**les amis, un ami, mon ami, ces enfants, trois heures**	lay-zah-mee, a(n)-nah-mee, moh(n)-nah-mee, say-zah(n)-fah(n), trwah-zuhr
adjective + noun	**petit ami, grand arbre, bon appétit**	puh-tee-tah-mee, grah(n)-tar-bruh, boh(n)-nah-pay-tee
pronoun + verb (and verb + pronoun in inversion)	**nous avons, ils ont, vous êtes, a-t-il, vont-ils**	noo-zah-voh(n), eel-zoh(n), voo-zet, ah-teel, voh(n)-teel
short prepositions and adverbs + next word	**en été, dans un, très utile, bien aimé**	ah(n)-nay-tay, dah(n)-za(n), tray-zü-teel, bya(n)-nay-may
fixed expressions	**c'est-à-dire, tout à fait, États-Unis**	seh-tah-deer, too-tah-feh, ay-tah-zü-nee

Where liaison is forbidden

CONTEXT	EXAMPLE	SAY IT
after **et** (never)	**un garçon et une fille**	a(n) gar-soh(n) ay ü-nuh fee-y (no *t*)
before **h aspiré** (see below)	**les haricots, les héros**	lay ah-ree-koh, lay ay-roh
between a plural subject noun and its verb	**les enfants // ont faim**	lay-zah(n)-fah(n) oh(n) fa(n)
before *oui, onze* and the number *huit*	**les onze, les huit**	lay oh(n)z, lay weet

Where liaison is optional

Careful or formal speech makes more liaisons than relaxed speech. A liaison after a plural noun before an adjective, after *pas* or after a verb is a matter of style: **ils sont arrivés** (eel soh(n)-tah-ree-vay, liaison), **pas encore** (pah-zah(n)-kor, or pah ah(n)-kor). As a learner, make the **obligatory** ones and skip the optional ones.

> **Watch out: the wrong liaison can change the word**
> Liaison is how the ear hears **gender and number** in some words: *un ami* (a(n)-nah-mee) against *une amie* (ü-nah-mee), and *un enfant* (a(n)-nah(n)-fah(n)) against *des enfants* (day-zah(n)-fah(n)). The plural *-s* is often heard nowhere else, so with no liaison (*des // héros*) you cannot hear the plural at all.

h muet and h aspiré

The letter *h* is **never pronounced**, but it behaves in two ways. A word with **h muet** (mute h) acts as if it began with a **vowel**: elision and liaison apply. A word with **h aspiré** (aspirate h) acts as if it began with a **consonant**: no elision and no liaison.

	H MUET	H ASPIRÉ
behaves like	a vowel	a consonant

	H MUET	H ASPIRÉ
elision	**l'homme, l'hôtel, l'heure, l'histoire**	**le héros, le haricot, la honte, le hibou**
liaison	**les hommes** (lay-zom), **les hôtels** (lay-zoh-tell)	**les héros** (lay ay-roh), **les haricots** (lay ah-ree-koh)

Watch out: there is no way to see which h it is

The spelling does not tell you. Most h muet words come from Latin (*homme, hôtel, heure, histoire, hôpital, hiver*); most h aspiré words come from Germanic or other languages (*héros, haricot, honte, hibou, homard, hockey*). A good dictionary marks h aspiré with an asterisk or a dagger. Learn the common ones as exceptions: *le héros* (the hero) but *l'héroïne* (the heroine).

How it shows in writing

EFFECT	VISIBLE IN WRITING?	EXAMPLE
elision	yes: apostrophe	**l'ami, j'ai, qu'il**
liaison and enchaînement	no	**les amis** is written as two words
an extra *t* for the sound	yes: *-t-* in inversion	**a-t-il, parle-t-elle, va-t-on**
forms that exist because of the vowel after	yes: different word forms	**mon amie** (not *ma amie*), **cet ami**, **un bel enfant** (French Grammar 1 8 and 9)

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read the exchanges aloud, joining the words as the respellings show.

① Children

A:

② A friend

A:

Vous avez des enfants ?

Do you have children? (voo-zah-vay day-zah(n)-fah(n))

B:

Oui, deux enfants et trois petits-enfants.

Yes, two children and three grandchildren. (duh-zah(n)-fah(n) ay trwah puh-tee-zah(n)-fah(n))

Tu as un ami ici ?

Do you have a friend here? (tü ah a(n)-nah-mee ee-see)

B:

Oui, un petit ami américain.

Yes, a (boy)friend who is American. (puh-tee-tah-mee ah-may-ree-ka(n))

③ At the market

A:

Il y a des haricots ou des oignons ?

Are there beans or onions? (day ah-ree-koh, no liaison; day-zo-nyoh(n), liaison)

B:

Des haricots. Les oignons, je n'en ai pas.

Beans. Onions, I haven't got any.

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

TOPIC	SUMMARY
elision	le, la, je, me, te, se, ne, de, que, ce, si (+ il/ils) lose the vowel before a vowel or h muet
enchaînement	a pronounced final consonant slides onto the next vowel: il a = ee-lah
liaison sounds	s, x, z → z · t, d → t · n → n · f → v (neuf heures)
obligatory	determiner + noun, adjective + noun, pronoun + verb, short preposition + word, fixed expressions

TOPIC	SUMMARY
forbidden	after et · before h aspiré · plural noun subject + verb · before oui, onze, huit
h muet / aspiré	vowel (l'homme, les hommes) / consonant (le héros, les héros)

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Apply elision: *je aime · le ami · que il · ne est*.

▼ Show answer

j'aime · l'ami · qu'il · n'est.

2. Elide or not? *si il · si elle*.

▼ Show answer

s'il · si elle (*si* elides only before *il / ils*).

3. Read aloud: *les amis · des enfants · vous avez*.

▼ Show answer

lay-zah-mee · day-zah(n)-fah(n) · voo-zah-vay. The *s* and *z* link as *z*.

4. Which consonant do you hear? *petit ami · grand homme · neuf heures*.

▼ Show answer

t (puh-tee-tah-mee) · *t* (grah(n)-tom) · *v* (nuh-vuhr).

5. Liaison: yes or no? *un garçon et une fille* (between *garçon* and *et*, and between *et* and *une*).

▼ Show answer

No liaison after *et*, and none between *garçon* and *et* (a singular noun). Say: a(n) gar-soh(n) ay ü-nuh fee-y.

6. h muet or h aspiré? *l'homme · le héros · l'heure · le haricot.*

▼ Show answer

muet · aspiré · muet · aspiré. (Elision shows it: *l'homme, l'heure* but *le héros, le haricot*.)

7. Say the plural: *les hommes* and *les héros*.

▼ Show answer

lay-zom (liaison, h muet) · lay ay-roh (no liaison, h aspiré).

8. What is the *-t-* in *a-t-il*?

▼ Show answer

An extra *t* written between a verb ending in a vowel and *il / elle / on* so that the sound has a consonant to link: *a-t-il* (ah-teel), *parle-t-elle*.

9. Is this liaison obligatory, forbidden or optional? *nous avons · les héros · ils sont arrivés.*

▼ Show answer

obligatory · forbidden (h aspiré) · optional (careful speech).

10. How do you hear that *des enfants* is plural and *un enfant* singular?

▼ Show answer

By the liaison: *day-zah(n)-fah(n)* (z) against *a(n)-nah(n)-fah(n)* (n). The plural *-s* is not heard anywhere else.

Coming up in Chapter 3: Nouns and Gender. The two genders; endings that predict gender (*-tion, -ment, -eur, -age, -ette*); the common exceptions; masculine and feminine pairs (*un étudiant, une étudiante*); and nouns that change meaning with gender (*le tour, la tour*).

⚥ Nouns and Gender — Le genre des noms

*Every French noun is either **masculine** or **feminine**. There is no neuter, and the gender is a grammatical label, not a fact about the thing: un livre (a book) is masculine, une table (a table) is feminine, and nobody can tell you why. Gender matters because articles, adjectives and pronouns all agree with it (le petit garçon, la petite fille). The good news is that the **ending of a noun predicts its gender** far more often than not, and for people the gender follows the sex. This chapter gives you the endings, the common exceptions, the masculine and feminine pairs, and the nouns whose meaning changes with gender. The words un / une ("a") and le / la ("the") are used here as labels; the articles themselves come in French Grammar 1 5.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Learn every noun with its article (*un livre, une table*), never alone. For people, gender follows sex (*un homme, une femme*). For things, **the ending predicts the gender**: *-age, -ment, -eau, -isme, -oir* are usually masculine; *-tion, -sion, -ette, -té, -ure, -ée, -ie* are usually feminine. Every ending has a few exceptions, so treat the endings as strong hints, not laws.

People: gender follows sex

MASCULINE	FEMININE
un homme man · **un père** father · **un frère** brother	**une femme** woman · **une mère** mother · **une sœur** sister
un garçon boy · **un oncle** uncle · **un roi** king	**une fille** girl · **une tante** aunt · **une reine** queen

Watch out: the person is not always the gender

A few nouns keep **one gender whatever the sex** of the person: **une personne** (always feminine, even for a man), **une victime**, **une vedette** (a star), **un bébé**, **un témoin** (a witness), **un ange**. So *Marc est une personne* (Marc is a person) uses *une* even though Marc is a man.

Endings that predict masculine

ENDING	EXAMPLES	EXCEPTIONS
-age	le voyage, le garage, le fromage	la page, la plage, la cage, l'image, la nage
-ment	le moment, le gouvernement, le vêtement	la jument (mare)
-eau	le bureau, le chapeau, le gâteau	l'eau, la peau
-isme	le tourisme, le journalisme	none worth learning
-oir	le miroir, le couloir, le soir	few
-ier	le papier, le cahier, le cuisinier	few
-al	le journal, l'animal, le cheval	few
-in	le jardin, le matin, le chemin	la fin, la main

Endings that predict feminine

ENDING	EXAMPLES	EXCEPTIONS
-tion, -sion	la nation, la station, la télévision	very few
-ette	la fourchette, la bicyclette	le squelette
-té	la liberté, la beauté, la santé	le côté, l'été, le comité
-ure	la voiture, la culture, la nature	le murmure

ENDING	EXAMPLES	EXCEPTIONS
-ée	la journée, l'année, la pensée	le lycée, le musée
-ie	la vie, la pharmacie, la mélodie	le parapluie
-ance, -ence	la chance, la patience, la science	le silence
-esse, -ude	la jeunesse, l'habitude, la solitude	few

> **Watch out: -eur is a mixed ending**
>
> Nouns in *-eur* that name **a person who does something** are masculine (*le chanteur, le directeur*), and so are many things (*le moteur, le bonheur*). But many **feminine** nouns also end in *-eur*: **la fleur, la couleur, la chaleur, la peur, la douleur**. Learn each one with its article.

Categories that are usually masculine

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
days, months, seasons	le lundi, le janvier, le printemps, l'été
languages	le français, l'anglais, le chinois
colours as nouns	le rouge, le bleu, le vert
metals, trees, fruit-trees	le fer, l'or, le chêne, le pommier
most country names *not* ending in *-e*	le Canada, le Japon, le Mexique, le Portugal

Country names ending in *-e* are feminine (**la France, la Chine, la Suisse, la Belgique**). The fruit is often feminine and the tree masculine: **la pomme** (apple) / **le pommier** (apple tree).

Masculine and feminine pairs

RULE	MASCULINE	FEMININE
add **-e**	un ami, un étudiant, un client	une amie, une étudiante, une cliente
-ier → -ière, **-er → -ère**	un infirmier, un boulanger	une infirmière, une boulangère
-eur → -euse	un chanteur, un vendeur	une chanteuse, une vendeuse
-teur → -trice	un acteur, un directeur	une actrice, une directrice
-en → -enne, **-on → -onne**	un chien, un Parisien, un patron	une chienne, une Parisienne, une patronne
same form for both	un élève, un artiste, un enfant, un collègue	une élève, une artiste, une enfant, une collègue
a different word	un homme, un père, un roi	une femme, une mère, une reine

Watch out: professions with one form

Some professions have only a masculine form that is used for both sexes: **un professeur, un médecin, un ingénieur**. Feminine forms (*une professeure, une ingénieure*) are used more and more, especially in Canada, but *une femme médecin* or *Madame le professeur* are still heard. The sentence round the noun shows the sex: *Elle est professeur*.

Same word, two genders, two meanings

MASCULINE	FEMININE
le tour turn, trip	**la tour** tower
le livre book	**la livre** pound (money, weight)
le poste job; radio or TV set	**la poste** post office
le mode way, method	**la mode** fashion

MASCULINE	FEMININE
le vase vase	**la vase** mud
le mémoire dissertation	**la mémoire** memory
le manche handle	**la manche** sleeve
le critique critic	**la critique** criticism

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read the exchanges aloud. Notice which noun is masculine and which feminine.

① Friends in Lyon

A:

Tu as des amis à Lyon ?

Have you got friends in Lyon?

B:

Oui, un ami et une amie. Il est étudiant, elle est étudiante.

Yes, a friend (m.) and a friend (f.). He is a student, she is a student.

② The tower

A:

On visite le tour Eiffel ?

Shall we visit the "tour" Eiffel?

B:

La tour Eiffel ! C'est la tour, pas le tour.

The Eiffel Tower! It's *la tour*, not *le tour*.

③ Jobs

A:

Que font tes cousins ?

What do your cousins do?

B:

Mon cousin est infirmier et ma cousine est actrice.

My cousin (m.) is a nurse and my cousin (f.) is an actress.

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

TOPIC	SUMMARY
learn	every noun with its article (un livre, une table)
masculine endings	-age, -ment, -eau, -isme, -oir, -ier, -al, -in
feminine endings	-tion, -sion, -ette, -té, -ure, -ée, -ie, -ance, -ence, -esse, -ude
mixed	-eur (le moteur, la fleur)
always masculine	days, months, seasons, languages, colours, metals, most countries not in -e
pairs	+e · -ier/-ière · -eur/-euse · -teur/-trice · -en/-enne · -on/-onne · invariable · different words
two genders, two meanings	le tour / la tour · le livre / la livre · le poste / la poste

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Masculine or feminine? *voyage, nation, bureau, liberté, gouvernement, voiture.*

▼ Show answer

le voyage (m.) · la nation (f.) · le bureau (m.) · la liberté (f.) · le gouvernement (m.) · la voiture (f.).

2. Which of these break the pattern? *page, eau, fin, musée, jument.*

▼ Show answer

All of them. *la page* (-age but feminine), *l'eau* (-eau but feminine), *la fin* (-in but feminine), *le musée* (-ée but masculine), *la jument* (-ment but feminine).

3. Give the feminine: *un ami, un étudiant, un client, un infirmier*.

▼ Show answer

une amie, une étudiante, une cliente, une infirmière.

4. Give the feminine: *un chanteur, un acteur, un chien, un patron*.

▼ Show answer

une chanteuse, une actrice, une chienne, une patronne.

5. Which have the same form for both sexes? *élève, collègue, directeur, artiste*.

▼ Show answer

élève, collègue, artiste (un / une élève, un / une collègue, un / une artiste). *Directeur* has a feminine form, *directrice*.

6. Gender of *personne* when it means a man?

▼ Show answer

Always feminine: *une personne*, even for a man. The same holds for *une victime* and *une vedette*.

7. Meaning of *le poste* against *la poste*; *le livre* against *la livre*.

▼ Show answer

job or radio set / post office · book / pound.

8. Country names: *France, Japon, Chine, Portugal*.

▼ Show answer

la France (f.) · le Japon (m.) · la Chine (f.) · le Portugal (m.). Names in *-e* are feminine, with the exception of *le Mexique*.

9. Why is *le chanteur* masculine but *la fleur* feminine?

▼ Show answer

-eur is a mixed ending: agent nouns (a person who does something) are masculine, but a group of abstract and other nouns (*la fleur, la couleur, la peur*) are feminine. Learn each with its article.

10. Find the error: *une voyage · un nation · un bureau.*

▼ Show answer

un voyage (-age, masculine) · *une nation* (-tion, feminine) · *un bureau* is already correct (-eau, masculine).

Coming up in Chapter 4: Plurals. *-s, -x, -aux, -eaux*; the nouns in *-ail* and *-al*; irregular plurals (*œil → yeux*); silent plurals; and plurals of compound nouns.

➕ Plurals — Le pluriel des noms

*Most French plurals just add **-s**, exactly as in English. The catch is that this **-s is silent**: un frère and des frères sound the same, so in speech the plural is heard in the article (un / des, le / les), not in the noun. In writing there are a handful of patterns to learn: nouns that stay the same, nouns that take **-x**, the **-al** → **-aux** group, a few irregular plurals, and compound nouns. The articles themselves are taught in French Grammar 1 5; here un / une / des and le / la / les serve as signposts.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Add -s (*un livre → des livres*). Nouns already ending in **-s, -x, -z** do not change. Nouns in **-eau, -au, -eu** add **-x**. Nouns in **-al** change to **-aux**. Nouns in **-ail** and **-ou** usually add -s, with short lists of exceptions. The plural -s and -x are never pronounced, except in liaison (French Grammar 1 2).

The regular patterns

SINGULAR ENDS IN	PLURAL	EXAMPLES
most endings	add **-s**	un ami → des amis · une maison → des maisons · un frère → des frères
-s, -x, -z	no change	un fils → des fils · une voix → des voix · un nez → des nez
-eau, -au, -eu	add **-x**	un bateau → des bateaux · un tuyau → des tuyaux · un jeu → des jeux · un neveu → des neveux
-al	**-aux**	un journal → des journaux · un cheval → des chevaux · un animal → des animaux

Watch out: the exceptions to -eau, -au, -eu

> Three common nouns take a plain *-s*: **un pneu → des pneus** (tyre), **un landau → des landaus** (pram), and **un bleu → des bleus** (a bruise).

-al nouns and their exceptions

The great majority of nouns in *-al* change to *-aux*. A short list takes a regular *-s*:

REGULAR -AUX	EXCEPTIONS WITH -S
un hôpital → des hôpitaux · un signal → des signaux · un animal → des animaux	un bal → des bals · un carnaval → des carnavals · un festival → des festivals · un récital → des récitals · un chacal → des chacals · un régal → des régals

-ail and -ou nouns

ENDING	USUAL PLURAL	EXCEPTIONS
-ail	add **-s**: un détail → des détails, un portail → des portails	change to **-aux**: un travail → des travaux · un vitrail → des vitraux · un corail → des coraux · un émail → des émaux
-ou	add **-s**: un trou → des trous, un clou → des clous	add **-x**: un bijou → des bijoux · un caillou → des cailloux · un chou → des choux · un genou → des genoux · un hibou → des hiboux · un joujou → des joujoux · un pou → des poux

Irregular plurals

SINGULAR	PLURAL	NOTE
un œil eye	des yeux	a different word form altogether

SINGULAR	PLURAL	NOTE
le ciel sky	**les cieux**	*cieux* is used for heaven or in set phrases; in the sense of a painter's skies, *ciels* is used
monsieur	**messieurs**	both parts change
madame	**mesdames**	both parts change
mademoiselle	**mesdemoiselles**	both parts change
un jeune homme young man	**des jeunes gens**	the plural has *gens*, not *hommes*

> **Watch out: three nouns whose sound changes**
>
> In **un œuf** (egg), **un bœuf** (ox, beef) and **un os** (bone), the **final consonant is pronounced in the singular and silent in the plural**: *œuf* ends in a spoken *f*, but *des œufs* has a silent *fs*. *Os* has a spoken *s* in the singular only. These are the rare nouns where the plural *is* audible in the noun itself.

Silent plurals

Since the plural *-s* and *-x* are silent, the listener relies on the small words round the noun:

WRITTEN	YOU HEAR	WHAT TELLS YOU
le frère / les frères	the article: *luh* against *lay*	the article
un ami / des amis	*un* against *day*, plus the liaison in *dayz-ami*	article and liaison
il parle / ils parlent	the same sound	context only, or a liaison before a vowel

The same logic applies in writing: an error in a plural is often invisible in speech, so check the *-s* on the noun every time you write one.

Compound nouns

Compound nouns follow no single rule, because it depends on the *parts of speech* that make them up. A reliable guide:

MADE OF	RULE	EXAMPLES
noun + noun	both usually take the plural	**un chou-fleur → des choux-fleurs** · **un chef-lieu → des chefs-lieux**
adjective + noun	both take the plural	**un grand-père → des grands-pères** · **une belle-sœur → des belles-sœurs** · **un grand-parent → des grands-parents**
verb + noun	the verb never changes; the noun may or may not	**un tire-bouchon → des tire-bouchons** · **un porte-monnaie → des porte-monnaie**
preposition + noun	the noun usually changes, or it stays as it is	**un après-midi → des après-midi** (the plural *-s* is also accepted)

> **Watch out: compounds are unreliable**
> The spelling of compound plurals is partly a matter of the meaning (a *porte-monnaie* is a purse for carrying money, and *monnaie* is a mass of coins, so it stays singular) and partly history, and the 1990 spelling reform tried to simplify them, so you will see both *des après-midi* and *des après-midis*. When unsure, look the word up.

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read these aloud and notice that, apart from un / des, you cannot hear which nouns are plural.

① Brothers and sisters

A:
Tu as des frères ou des sœurs ?

② At the doctor's

A:
Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas ?

Have you got brothers or sisters?

B:

J'ai deux frères et une sœur. Mes grands-parents habitent à Lyon.

I've got two brothers and a sister. My grandparents live in Lyon.

What's wrong?

B:

Mes yeux et mes genoux me font mal.

My eyes and my knees hurt.

③ Spelling check

A:

Un journal, des journaux. Et un festival ?

A newspaper, newspapers. And a festival?

B:

Des festivals, avec un *s*. C'est une exception !

Festivals, with an *s*. It's an exception!

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

SINGULAR	PLURAL
most nouns	+ **s**
-s, -x, -z	no change
-eau, -au, -eu	+ **x** (but pneus, landaus, bleus)
-al	-aux (but bals, carnavals, festivals, récitals)
-ail	+ s (but travaux, vitraux, coraux, émaux)
-ou	+ s (but bijoux, cailloux, choux, genoux, hiboux, joujoux, poux)
œil · ciel · monsieur	yeux · cieux · messieurs

SINGULAR	PLURAL
compounds	depends on the parts: look it up

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Make plural: *un ami, une maison, un frère, un fils.*

▼ Show answer

des amis, des maisons, des frères, des fils (*fils* already ends in -s, so no change).

2. Make plural: *un bateau, un jeu, un neveu, un tuyau.*

▼ Show answer

des bateaux, des jeux, des neveux, des tuyaux.

3. Make plural: *un journal, un cheval, un hôpital, un animal.*

▼ Show answer

des journaux, des chevaux, des hôpitaux, des animaux.

4. These -al nouns are exceptions. Make plural: *un bal, un carnaval, un festival.*

▼ Show answer

des bals, des carnavals, des festivals (regular -s, not -aux).

5. Make plural: *un détail, un travail, un vitrail.*

▼ Show answer

des détails (regular -s) but des travaux and des vitraux (-ail → -aux exceptions).

6. Make plural: *un trou, un genou, un bijou, un clou.*

▼ Show answer

des trous, des genoux, des bijoux, des clous. Only *genou* and *bijou* take -x here.

7. Make plural: *un œil, monsieur, madame, un jeune homme*.

▼ Show answer

des yeux, messieurs, mesdames, des jeunes gens.

8. Make plural: *un grand-père, une belle-sœur, un chou-fleur*.

▼ Show answer

des grands-pères, des belles-sœurs, des choux-fleurs (adjective + noun and noun + noun: both parts change).

9. Make plural: *un tire-bouchon, un porte-monnaie*. Which part never changes?

▼ Show answer

des tire-bouchons, des porte-monnaie. The verb part (*tire, porte*) never changes; the noun part follows the meaning: several corks (*bouchons*), but money (*monnaie*) stays singular.

10. Find the error: *des chevals · des pneux · des festivaux*.

▼ Show answer

des chevaux (-al → -aux) · des pneus (exception: -s) · des festivals (exception: -s).

Coming up in Chapter 5: Articles: Definite and Indefinite. *le, la, l', les; un, une, des*; the contractions *au, aux, du, des*; the generic use; and leaving the article out after *être* with a profession.

🚀 The Articles — Les articles

*French nouns almost always come with a small word in front: an **article**. It agrees with the noun's gender and number (French Grammar 1 3 and 4). There are two families: the **definite** article (the) and the **indefinite** article (a, some). A third family, the partitive (some for amounts), is the subject of French Grammar 1 6. The one big difference from English: French uses the article **far more often**, in places where English uses nothing at all (J'aime le café, "I like coffee").*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Definite: *le* (m.), *la* (f.), *l'* (before a vowel or mute h), *les* (plural). **Indefinite:** *un* (m.), *une* (f.), *des* (plural). After *à* and *de*, *le* and *les* merge: *à* + *le* = *au*, *à* + *les* = *aux*, *de* + *le* = *du*, *de* + *les* = *des*. Use the article with **every noun**, including general ideas; leave it out only in a few set cases, such as a profession after *être*.

The forms

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	BEFORE A VOWEL	PLURAL
Definite (the)	le livre	la table	l'ami, l'amie, l'homme	les livres, les tables, les amis
Indefinite (a, an, some)	un livre	une table	un ami · une amie	des livres, des tables, des amis

Watch out: l' hides the gender, and h can be tricky

L'ami and *l'amie* look the same; the gender is only visible in *un / une* or in an adjective. Before a mute *h* the article elides (**l'homme, l'hôtel**); before an aspirate *h* it does not (**le héros, la haine**, **les héros**, with no liaison). See French Grammar 1 2.

Contractions with à and de

The prepositions *à* (to, at) and *de* (of, from) merge with *le* and *les*, but **not** with *la* or *l'*:

	+ LE (M.)	+ LA (F.)	+ L' (VOWEL)	+ LES (PLURAL)
à	**au** → *au marché*	**à la** → *à la gare*	**à l'** → *à l'école*	**aux** → *aux magasins*
de	**du** → *du marché*	**de la** → *de la gare*	**de l'** → *de l'école*	**des** → *des magasins*

> **Watch out: two different des**
>
> **des** is both the **indefinite plural** (*J'ai des amis*, "I have friends") and the contraction of **de + les** (*le nom des amis*, "the friends' name"). They look and sound the same; the sentence tells you which. The test: if *de* is already there as a preposition (*le nom de*, *près de*), *des* is the contraction.

Using the definite article

USE	EXAMPLE
a specific thing, known to both speakers	**Le livre est sur la table.** The book is on the table.
generic: a whole class or an idea	**J'aime le café.** I like coffee. · **Les chats dorment beaucoup.** Cats sleep a lot. · **J'aime la vie.** I love life.
with verbs of liking and hating	**Elle déteste les lundis.** She hates Mondays.
a repeated day of the week	**Le lundi, je travaille.** On Mondays I work. (Without *le*, *lundi* means this coming Monday.)
languages after *parler*, *aimer*, *étudier*	**Je parle le français.** (*Je parle français* is also correct after *parler*.)
price per unit	**Trois euros le kilo.** Three euros a kilo.

USE	EXAMPLE
most country names	**la France, le Canada, les États-Unis** (used with à and en: *en France, au Canada, aux États-Unis*)

Using the indefinite article

USE	EXAMPLE
one thing, not yet known to the listener	**J'ai un frère.** I have a brother.
plural: *des* is "some" or nothing at all in English	**J'ai des frères.** I have brothers.
new information, then definite once known	**Il y a un chat. Le chat dort.** There is a cat. The cat is sleeping.
after *c'est* + a noun	**C'est un médecin.** He's a doctor. · **Ce sont des amis.** They're friends.

The plural of *un / une* is always *des*, and this plural article is **never dropped** in French, although English has to say "some" or nothing.

> **Watch out: des turns into de after a negative**
>
> In a negative sentence, *un, une, des* after the verb become **de** (*Je n'ai pas de frères*). This and the partitive *du, de la* are the subject of French Grammar 1 6.

Leaving the article out

CASE	WITHOUT ARTICLE	WITH *C'EST* + ARTICLE
profession after *être*	**Il est médecin.** He is a doctor.	**C'est un médecin.**
profession, feminine	**Elle est infirmière.**	**C'est une infirmière.**
student, as a noun of status	**Il est étudiant.** · **Elle est étudiante.**	**C'est un étudiant.**

The pattern: ***il / elle est* + profession, no article**, but ***c'est* + article + noun**. When the noun is described (*C'est un bon médecin*), the article comes back, since the noun is now more than a label.

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read these aloud. Find every article and say whether it is definite or indefinite.

① Likes and dislikes

A:

Tu aimes le café ?

Do you like coffee?

B:

J'aime le café, mais je déteste les lundis !

I like coffee but I hate Mondays!

② Where is it?

A:

Tu vas à la gare ou au marché ?

Are you going to the station or to the market?

B:

Je vais au marché, puis à l'école. Mes enfants rentrent des cours à trois heures.

I'm going to the market, then to the school.

My children come home from lessons at three.

③ Who is he?

A:

Qui est cet homme ?

Who is that man?

B:

C'est un ami de mon frère. Il est médecin.

He's a friend of my brother's. He's a doctor.

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

TOPIC	SUMMARY
definite	le, la, l', les
indefinite	un, une, des
contractions	à + le = au · à + les = aux · de + le = du · de + les = des (not with la or l')
generic	use the definite article: J'aime le café, Les chats dorment
profession	Il est médecin (no article) · C'est un médecin (article)
negative	un, une, des → de (French Grammar 1 6)

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Give the definite article: *livre, table, ami, amis, école.*

▼ Show answer

le livre, la table, l'ami, les amis, l'école.

2. Give the indefinite article: *livre, table, amis.*

▼ Show answer

un livre, une table, des amis.

3. Contract if needed: *à + le marché · à + la gare · à + les magasins.*

▼ Show answer

au marché · à la gare (no contraction) · aux magasins.

4. Contract if needed: *de + le marché · de + l'école · de + les enfants.*

▼ Show answer

du marché · de l'école (no contraction) · des enfants.

5. How do you say "I like cats" and "I hate Mondays"?

▼ Show answer

J'aime les chats. Je déteste les lundis. French uses the definite article for a whole class of things, where English uses none.

6. What is the difference between *Le lundi, je travaille* and *Lundi, je travaille*?

▼ Show answer

With *le*: every Monday ("on Mondays I work"). Without: this coming Monday only.

7. Say "He is a doctor" in two ways.

▼ Show answer

Il est médecin. C'est un médecin. The first has no article; the second has one.

8. Find the error: *Elle est une infirmière.*

▼ Show answer

Elle est infirmière (no article after *être* + profession), or *C'est une infirmière.*

9. Is *des* indefinite or a contraction? (a) *J'ai des amis.* (b) *le nom des amis.*

▼ Show answer

(a) indefinite plural ("some friends"); (b) contraction of *de* + *les* ("of the friends").

10. Say: "There is a cat. The cat is sleeping."

▼ Show answer

Il y a un chat. Le chat dort. The cat is first introduced with *un*, then known, so it takes *le*.

Coming up in Chapter 6: The Partitive and Quantity. *du, de la, de l'* for "some"; *de* after a negative and after words of quantity (*beaucoup de, un peu de*).

🥖 The Partitive — Le partitif

*English can say "I drink coffee" or "I'd like some water" with no article at all, or with some. French cannot drop the article, so it needs a third kind: the **partitive**, which means "an unspecified part of something". It is formed from de + the definite article, and it is used with things you cannot count one by one (coffee, water, bread, patience, courage). The second half of the chapter shows when the partitive, un / une / des and the whole article turn into plain **de**: after a negative and after words of quantity.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Partitive: *du* (m.), *de la* (f.), *de l'* (before a vowel or mute h), *des* (plural). It means "some" or "any", and it can never be left out: *Je bois du café*. After a **negative** or a **word of quantity** it becomes **de** (*d'* before a vowel): *Je ne bois pas de café · beaucoup de café*. The article is kept whole with verbs of liking (*J'aime le café*) and after *être* in the negative (*Ce n'est pas un chat*).

The forms

GENDER	FORM	EXAMPLE
masculine	**du** (*de* + *le*)	**du café, du pain, du lait**
feminine	**de la**	**de la soupe, de la viande, de la patience**
before a vowel	**de l'**	**de l'eau, de l'argent, de l'huile**
plural	**des**	**des légumes, des pâtes** (plural mass nouns)

Partitive or definite?

The choice depends on what the sentence says about the noun. A **specific thing** or a **whole class** takes the definite article; an **unspecified amount** takes the partitive:

IDEA	ARTICLE	EXAMPLE
liking, loving, hating, preferring: the whole class	**le, la, l', les**	**J'aime le café.** I like coffee (as a thing in general).
eating, drinking, buying, having: some of it	**du, de la, de l', des**	**Je bois du café.** I'm drinking (some) coffee.
one specific portion, known to both	**le, la, l', les**	**Le café est chaud.** The coffee is hot.

> **Watch out: the partitive is not "some" in every sentence**
>
> *Du* and *des* do not always translate as "some". *Je veux de l'eau* is "I want water" as often as "I want some water". Do not drop the article to match the English.

After a negative: de

In a negative sentence, the articles **un, une, des, du, de la, de l'** after the verb all become **de** (**d'** before a vowel). The negative says "none at all", and a quantity of zero needs no gender:

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
J'ai un frère.	Je n'ai pas de frère.
J'ai des frères.	Je n'ai pas de frères.
Elle boit du café.	Elle ne boit pas de café.
Il y a de la soupe.	Il n'y a pas de soupe.
Nous avons de l'argent.	Nous n'avons pas d'argent.

> **Watch out: three cases where the article stays whole**
>
> **1. With être:** *C'est un chat → Ce n'est pas un chat.* **2. With verbs of liking:** *Je n'aime pas le café* (the definite article was never a partitive). **3. When you contrast two things:** *Ce n'est pas du*

café, c'est du thé ("it's not coffee, it's tea"). In all three, *pas de* would be wrong.

Quantity: always de

After any word that expresses a quantity, the noun follows with plain **de** and no article. This is the same in affirmative and negative sentences:

ADVERBS OF QUANTITY	CONTAINERS AND MEASURES
beaucoup de a lot of · **trop de** too much, too many · **assez de** enough · **un peu de** a little · **peu de** little, few · **tant de** so much, so many · **plus de** more · **moins de** less, fewer · **combien de** how much, how many	**un kilo de** a kilo of · **un verre de** a glass of · **une bouteille de** a bottle of · **un morceau de** a piece of · **une tasse de** a cup of · **une douzaine de** a dozen

EXAMPLE	MEANING
beaucoup de café · trop d'amis · assez d'argent	a lot of coffee · too many friends · enough money
un peu de lait · peu de temps	a little milk · little time
un kilo de pommes · une bouteille d'eau	a kilo of apples · a bottle of water
Combien de frères as-tu ?	How many brothers have you?

Watch out: quantity word + definite group, and two exceptions

If the quantity word is followed by a **specific** group, the article returns: *beaucoup **des** amis de Paul* ("many **of** Paul's friends"). Two quantity expressions never take plain *de*: **la plupart des** (most) and **bien des** (many a). Say *la plupart des gens*, not *la plupart de gens*.

De before a plural adjective

When a plural adjective stands **in front of** the noun, *des* normally turns into **de**. This is an everyday rule in writing and fairly formal speech:

ADJECTIVE AFTER THE NOUN	ADJECTIVE BEFORE THE NOUN
des amis (no adjective)	**de bons amis** good friends
des films	**de grands films** great films

In everyday speech you will also hear *des bons amis*; it is commonly used in conversation but still counts as an error in careful writing. The position of adjectives is the subject of French Grammar 1 8.

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read these aloud and say whether each de is a quantity word, a negative or a partitive.

① At the café

A:

Vous prenez du café ou du thé ?

Will you have coffee or tea?

B:

Du café, avec un peu de lait. Pas de sucre, merci.

Coffee, with a little milk. No sugar, thank you.

② At the market

A:

Je voudrais un kilo de pommes et une bouteille d'eau.

I'd like a kilo of apples and a bottle of water.

B:

Et du pain ? Il y a beaucoup de pain aujourd'hui.

And some bread? There's a lot of bread today.

③ Family

A:

Tu as des frères ou des sœurs ?

Have you got brothers or sisters?

B:

Je n'ai pas de frères, mais j'ai trois sœurs. Combien de cousins as-tu ?

I haven't got any brothers, but I have three sisters. How many cousins have you got?

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

SITUATION	ARTICLE	EXAMPLE
an unspecified amount	du, de la, de l', des	Je bois du café.
liking, whole class	le, la, l', les	J'aime le café.
negative	de / d'	Je ne bois pas de café.
negative with être, or a contrast	article stays	Ce n'est pas un chat.
quantity word	de / d'	beaucoup de café, un kilo de pommes
la plupart · bien (des)	des	la plupart des gens
plural adjective in front	de	de bons amis

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Add the partitive: *Je bois ____ café · Elle mange ____ soupe · Nous voulons ____ eau.*

▼ Show answer

du café · de la soupe · de l'eau.

2. Which article: *J'aime ____ café* (liking) or *Je bois ____ café* (drinking)?

▼ Show answer

J'aime le café · Je bois du café.

3. Make negative: *J'ai un frère. · Elle boit du café. · Il y a de la soupe.*

▼ Show answer

Je n'ai pas de frère. · Elle ne boit pas de café. · Il n'y a pas de soupe.

4. Make negative: *Nous avons de l'argent.*

▼ Show answer

Nous n'avons pas d'argent (*de* elides to *d'* before a vowel).

5. Say "I don't like coffee". Why not *pas de café*?

▼ Show answer

Je n'aime pas le café. After *aimer* the article is the definite one for the whole class, which stays whole in a negative.

6. Make negative: *C'est un chat.*

▼ Show answer

Ce n'est pas un chat. After *être* the article stays.

7. Say: "a lot of coffee, too many friends, enough money, a little milk".

▼ Show answer

beaucoup de café · trop d'amis · assez d'argent · un peu de lait.

8. Say: "a kilo of apples, a bottle of water, a glass of milk".

▼ Show answer

un kilo de pommes · une bouteille d'eau · un verre de lait.

9. Say "most people" and "good friends".

▼ Show answer

la plupart des gens (not *de gens*) · de bons amis (*des* becomes *de* before a plural adjective).

10. Find the error: *Je ne bois pas du café · beaucoup des amis · Combien des frères ?*

▼ Show answer

Je ne bois pas de café · beaucoup d'amis · Combien de frères ? (a negative or a quantity word needs plain *de*.)

Coming up in Chapter 7: Adjectives: Agreement. Feminine and plural endings (*-eux → -euse, -if → -ive, -al → -aux*), irregular patterns, and invariable colours.

🎨 Adjective Agreement — L'accord des adjectifs

*In English an adjective never changes: a tall brother, a tall sister, tall friends. In French the adjective **agrees** with the noun it describes in gender and in number, so it has up to four forms: masculine singular, feminine singular, masculine plural and feminine plural (grand, grande, grands, grandes). The feminine usually adds **-e**, and that final -e makes the last consonant audible (grand ends in a vowel sound, grande ends in a sounded d), so the feminine is often heard as well as seen. This chapter gives the endings, the irregular adjectives and the colours that never change. Where the adjective goes in the sentence is the subject of French Grammar 1 8; here every adjective follows its noun or comes after être.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Feminine: add **-e** (*petit → petite*), unless the adjective already ends in -e (*rouge, jeune*). Some endings change: *-eux → -euse, -if → -ive, -er → -ère*, and many double the consonant (*bon → bonne*). **Plural:** add **-s**; adjectives in *-s* or *-x* do not change; *-eau* adds *-x*; *-al* becomes *-aux*. A group of masculine and feminine is **masculine plural**. A few colours are **invariable**.

Feminine: the regular endings

MASCULINE ENDS IN	FEMININE	EXAMPLES
a consonant	add **-e**	**grand → grande · petit → petite · vert → verte · content → contente**
a vowel (*é, i, u*)	add **-e**, no spoken change	**marié → mariée · poli → polie · vrai → vraie**
already **-e**	no change	**rouge · jeune · facile · timide** (same for both genders)
-er	**-ère**	**premier → première · cher → chère · léger → légère**

MASCULINE ENDS IN	FEMININE	EXAMPLES
-eux	**-euse**	heureux → heureuse · sérieux → sérieuse · paresseux → paresseuse
-if	**-ive**	actif → active · sportif → sportive · naïf → naïve
-eur (from a verb)	**-euse**	menteur → menteuse · travailleur → travailleuse
-teur	**-trice**	créateur → créatrice · conservateur → conservatrice

Feminine: doubling the consonant

MASCULINE ENDS IN	FEMININE	EXAMPLES
-el, -eil	**-elle, -eille**	réel → réelle · naturel → naturelle · pareil → pareille
-en	**-enne**	italien → italienne · parisien → parisienne
-on	**-onne**	bon → bonne · breton → bretonne
-s	**-sse**	gros → grosse · gras → grasse · bas → basse
-et, -ot	**-ette, -otte**	muet → muette · sot → sotte

> **Watch out: -et does not always double**
>
> A group of adjectives in *-et* takes a grave accent instead: **complet → complète** · **secret → secrète** · **discret → discrète** · **inquiet → inquiète**. Most others double (*muet → muette*). Likewise *idiot → idiote*, with no doubling.

Feminine: other changes and irregulars

MASCULINE	FEMININE	PATTERN
blanc white · **sec** dry	**blanche** · **sèche**	*-c → -che*
public · **grec** · **turc**	**publique** · **grecque** · **turque**	*-c → -que*
long long	**longue**	*-g → -gue*
jaloux jealous · **faux** false · **doux** soft, sweet · **roux** red-haired	**jalouse** · **fausse** · **douce** · **rousse**	*-x → -se* (*jalouse*); the others are *-sse, -ce, -sse*
frais fresh	**fraîche**	irregular
fou mad · **mou** soft	**folle** · **molle**	irregular
beau · **nouveau** · **vieux**	**belle** · **nouvelle** · **vieille**	special forms (French Grammar 1 8)

Plural of adjectives

MASCULINE SINGULAR ENDS IN	MASCULINE PLURAL	FEMININE PLURAL
most endings	add **-s**: **grands**	**grandes** (feminine + s)
-s, -x	no change: **gris, heureux, vieux**	**grises, heureuses**
-eau	**-eaux**: **beaux, nouveaux**	**belles, nouvelles**
-al	**-aux**: **loyaux, principaux**	**loyales, principales**

Watch out: a few -al adjectives take plain -s

banal → banals, **fatal → fatals**, **final → finals**, **naval → navals** (the usual plural of *final* is *finals*, but *finaux* also exists). Only the masculine plural is irregular; the feminine plural is always regular (*banales*).

Agreement with more than one noun

An adjective agrees with the noun it describes. When it refers to **two or more nouns**, it is plural, and a **mixed group is masculine plural**:

NOUNS	AGREEMENT
both masculine	**Mon père et mon frère sont contents.**
both feminine	**Ma mère et ma sœur sont contentes.**
one of each	**Mon père et ma mère sont contents.** (masculine plural wins, even if there are nine women and one man)

Colours

Most colour adjectives agree as usual (*une robe rouge, des robes vertes, une maison blanche*). Two groups do **not**:

GROUP	RULE	EXAMPLES
colours named after a thing (nouns used as adjectives)	invariable: no *-e*, no *-s*	**marron** chestnut · **orange** · **cerise** cherry · **noisette** hazel · **citron** lemon · **crème** · **olive** → *des chaussures marron*
compound colours (colour + shade)	invariable, with no hyphen in most	**bleu clair** · **vert foncé** · **bleu marine** → *des yeux bleu clair, une robe vert foncé*

> **Watch out: a few exceptions**
>
> **rose** (pink) and **mauve** (mauve) **do** agree in the plural (*des fleurs roses*), although they come from nouns. **Orange** and **marron** never do. When in doubt, look up the colour in a dictionary.

Nationalities

Adjectives of nationality agree, and they are **written with a lower-case letter** as adjectives (*un livre français*). As nouns for people they take a capital letter (*un Français, une Française*). The language is lower case and masculine (*le français*).

MASCULINE	FEMININE
français · anglais · japonais	française · anglaise · japonaise
allemand · espagnol	allemande · espagnole
italien · canadien	italienne · canadienne

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read these aloud and find the adjectives that change between masculine and feminine.

① About the family

A:

Ta sœur est contente de son travail ?

Is your sister happy with her job?

B:

Oui, elle est heureuse, et mon frère est content aussi. Mes parents sont fiers.

Yes, she's happy, and my brother is pleased too. My parents are proud.

② Colours

A:

De quelle couleur sont tes chaussures ?

What colour are your shoes?

B:

Elles sont marron, et ma robe est vert foncé.

They're brown, and my dress is dark green.

③ Nationalities

A:

Ton ami est italien, et ton amie ?

Your friend is Italian, and your (female) friend?

B:

Elle est italienne aussi. Nous sommes amis tous les trois.

She's Italian too. All three of us are friends.

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

MASCULINE	FEMININE	PLURAL
consonant	+e	+s
-e	no change	+s
-er · -eux · -if	-ère · -euse · -ive	+s (-eux unchanged)
-el · -en · -on · -s	-elle · -enne · -onne · -sse	+s
-et	-ette (but complète, secrète)	+s
-al · -eau	-ale · -elle	-aux · -eaux
marron, orange, bleu clair	invariable	

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Give the feminine: *grand, petit, content, vert.*

▼ Show answer

grande, petite, contente, verte.

2. Give the feminine: *heureux, sportif, premier, créateur.*

▼ Show answer

heureuse, sportive, première, créatrice.

3. Give the feminine: *bon, italien, gros, réel.*

▼ Show answer

bonne, italienne, grosse, réelle.

4. Give the feminine: *blanc, long, doux, frais.*

▼ Show answer

blanche, longue, douce, fraîche.

5. Which have the same form for both genders? *rouge, jeune, grand, timide.*

▼ Show answer

rouge, jeune, timide (all end in -e). *Grand* has *grande*.

6. Make plural (masculine and feminine): *heureux, beau, loyal, gris.*

▼ Show answer

heureux / heureuses · beaux / belles · loyaux / loyales · gris / grises.

7. Complete: *Mon père et ma mère sont ___ (content).*

▼ Show answer

contents. A mixed group takes the masculine plural.

8. Complete: *Ma mère et ma sœur sont ___ (heureux).*

▼ Show answer

heureuses. Both nouns are feminine, so the feminine plural.

9. Say "brown shoes" and "dark green dresses".

▼ Show answer

des chaussures marron · des robes vert foncé. Both are invariable: *marron* and compound colours never take -e or -s.

10. Find the error: *Elle est heureux · des fleurs oranges · une amie italien*.

▼ Show answer

Elle est heureuse · des fleurs orange (invariable) · une amie italienne.

Coming up in Chapter 8: Adjectives: Position and Special Forms. The BAGS rule, *beau / bel / belle*, *nouveau / nouvel*, *vieux / vieil*, and adjectives that change meaning with position.

📍 Adjective Position — La place de l'adjectif

*In English an adjective always comes before its noun: a red car, a big house. In French most adjectives come **after** the noun (une voiture rouge), but a short list of very common ones goes **before** it (une grande maison). Three of the "before" adjectives also have a special form in front of a vowel, and a handful change their meaning according to position. This chapter gives the rule of thumb, the lists and those special forms. The agreement endings are in French Grammar 1 7.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Default: after the noun (colours, nationalities, shapes, descriptions: *une voiture rouge, un étudiant français*). **Before the noun** go the **BAGS** adjectives: **B**eauty (*beau, joli*), **A**ge (*jeune, vieux, nouveau*), **G**oodness (*bon, mauvais*), **S**ize (*grand, petit, gros, long*). In front of a masculine noun starting with a vowel, *beau, nouveau, vieux* become **bel, nouvel, vieil.**

The BAGS adjectives

CATEGORY	ADJECTIVES	EXAMPLES
Beauty	beau, joli	une jolie robe · un beau jardin
Age	jeune, vieux, nouveau	un jeune homme · un vieux livre · une nouvelle voiture
Goodness	bon, mauvais, meilleur	un bon ami · une mauvaise idée
Size	grand, petit, gros, long, court, haut	une grande maison · un petit chat · un gros livre

A few others also go before the noun: autre (other), même (same), premier, dernier, prochain and chaque (each), as well as numbers (*trois frères*). Everything else goes after:

GOES AFTER THE NOUN	EXAMPLES
colours	une voiture rouge · un chat noir
nationalities	un étudiant français · une amie italienne
shapes and physical qualities	une table ronde · un pull chaud
long adjectives and participles	un homme sportif · une idée intéressante

Beau, nouveau, vieux: the special forms

These three have two masculine singular forms: the ordinary one, and a form for use before a vowel or mute h. The reason is the same as for elision: the ordinary form would end in a vowel and meet another vowel.

	MASCULINE	MASCULINE BEFORE A VOWEL	FEMININE	MASCULINE PLURAL	FEMININE PLURAL
beautiful	beau	bel	belle	beaux	belles
new	nouveau	nouvel	nouvelle	nouveaux	nouvelles
old	vieux	vieil	vieille	vieux	vieilles

BEFORE A CONSONANT	BEFORE A VOWEL OR MUTE H
un beau jardin · un nouveau livre · un vieux livre	un bel homme · un nouvel ami · un vieil hôtel

Watch out: the "vowel" forms are only for masculine singular

Feminine and plural nouns never need them: *une belle amie* (not *bel*), *de beaux hommes*, *de nouveaux amis*. The special form is only masculine singular. Note that *bel* is pronounced exactly like *belle*: the special masculine form is what you say anyway before a vowel.

When position changes the meaning

A group of adjectives has two meanings, depending on where it stands. As a rule of thumb, before the noun the meaning is figurative, subjective or about the speaker's feeling; after the noun it is literal and physical.

ADJECTIVE	BEFORE THE NOUN	AFTER THE NOUN
ancien	un ancien professeur a former teacher	un livre ancien an ancient book
cher	mon cher ami my dear friend	une voiture chère an expensive car
grand	un grand homme a great man	un homme grand a tall man
pauvre	un pauvre homme an unfortunate man	un homme pauvre a man without money
propre	ma propre chambre my own room	une chambre propre a clean room
seul	un seul ami only one friend	un homme seul a lonely man
dernier	la dernière semaine the final week (of a series)	la semaine dernière last week
prochain	le prochain train the next train in line	la semaine prochaine next week

Two adjectives with one noun

CASE	RULE	EXAMPLE
one "before", one "after"	each goes in its own place	un petit chat noir · une jolie robe rouge
two "before"	both before the noun	un joli petit village · une belle grande maison
two "after"	after the noun, joined by *et*	un homme grand et sportif

Watch out: des turns to de, and liaison appears

Remember French Grammar 1 6: with a plural adjective in front of the noun, *des* becomes *de*: *de jolies robes*. And before a vowel the final consonant of the adjective is linked: *un petit ami* (the *t* is heard), *un grand homme* (the *d* is heard as a *t*); see French Grammar 1 2.

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read these aloud. Say where each adjective stands and why.

① A new house

A:

Vous avez une nouvelle maison ?

Have you got a new house?

B:

Oui, une belle grande maison avec un petit jardin.

Yes, a lovely big house with a small garden.

② Old friends

A:

Qui est cet homme ?

Who is that man?

B:

C'est un vieil ami de mon père et un ancien professeur.

He's an old friend of my father's and a former teacher.

③ Next week

A:

Tu es libre la semaine prochaine ?

Are you free next week?

B:

Pas la semaine prochaine. La semaine dernière, oui, mais c'est trop tard !

> Not next week. Last week, yes, but it's too late!

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

TOPIC	SUMMARY
default position	after the noun: colours, nationalities, shapes
BAGS (before)	beauty · age · goodness · size
special forms	beau/bel/belle · nouveau/nouvel/nouvelle · vieux/vieil/vieille
meaning changes	before: figurative, subjective · after: literal
two adjectives	each in its own place; two "before" both go before
plural + adjective before	des → de

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Place the adjective: *une maison (grand) · une voiture (rouge) · un ami (bon).*

▼ Show answer

une grande maison · une voiture rouge · un bon ami.

2. What does BAGS stand for?

▼ Show answer

Beauty, Age, Goodness, Size: the groups of adjectives that go before the noun.

3. Choose the form: *un ____ homme (beau) · un ____ jardin (beau) · une ____ amie (beau).*

▼ Show answer

un bel homme · un beau jardin · une belle amie.

4. Choose the form: *un ____ ami (nouveau)* · *un ____ livre (nouveau)* · *des ____ amis (nouveau).*

▼ Show answer

un nouvel ami · un nouveau livre · de nouveaux amis (and *des* becomes *de*).

5. Choose the form: *un ____ hôtel (vieux)* · *une ____ amie (vieux)* · *des ____ livres (vieux).*

▼ Show answer

un vieil hôtel · une vieille amie · de vieux livres.

6. What is the difference between *un grand homme* and *un homme grand*?

▼ Show answer

A great man (figurative, before) against a tall man (literal, after).

7. Translate: "a former teacher" and "an ancient book".

▼ Show answer

un ancien professeur · un livre ancien.

8. Say "my dear friend" and "an expensive car".

▼ Show answer

mon cher ami · une voiture chère.

9. Put the two adjectives in place: *un chat (petit, noir)* · *une robe (joli, rouge)* · *un village (joli, petit).*

▼ Show answer

un petit chat noir · une jolie robe rouge · un joli petit village.

10. Find the error: ***un beau ami · des grandes maisons · la prochaine semaine.***

▼ Show answer

un bel ami · de grandes maisons (*des → de* before a plural adjective) · la semaine prochaine (for "next week").

Coming up in Chapter 9: Possessives, Demonstratives and Other Determiners. ***mon, ton, son*** **and the vowel rule,** ***ce / cet / cette / ces*****, and the other small words that stand before a noun.**

👆 Determiners — Les déterminants

An article is one kind of determiner: a small word that stands in front of a noun and says which one, whose or how many. French Grammar 1 5 and 6 gave the articles. This chapter adds the rest: the possessives (my, your, his), the demonstratives (this, that) and a handful of others (which, each, several, all). They follow one simple principle: a determiner agrees with the noun that follows, in gender and number, and it replaces the article (you never say le mon livre).

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Possessives agree with the *thing owned*, not with the owner: *mon / ma / mes*, *ton / ta / tes*, *son / sa / ses*, *notre / nos*, *votre / vos*, *leur / leurs*. Before a feminine noun that starts with a vowel, use the *masculine* form (*mon amie*). Demonstratives: *ce* (m.), *cet* (m., before a vowel or mute h), *cette* (f.), *ces* (plural). A determiner *replaces* the article; never use both.

Possessive adjectives

OWNER	MASCULINE	FEMININE	PLURAL
my (*je*)	mon frère	ma sœur	mes parents
your (*tu*)	ton frère	ta sœur	tes parents
his, her, its (*il, elle*)	son frère	sa sœur	ses parents
our (*nous*)	notre frère · notre sœur		nos parents
your (*vous*)	votre frère · votre sœur		vos parents
their (*ils, elles*)	leur frère · leur sœur		leurs parents

Watch out: son / sa follows the noun, not the owner

Son frère **means "his brother" or "her brother": the word *son* is masculine because *frère* is, and it says nothing about whether the owner is a man or a woman. The same goes for *sa sœur* ("his sister" or "her sister"). Only the context tells you whose it is.**

Before a vowel: mon, ton, son

A feminine noun that starts with a vowel or mute *h* takes mon, ton, son instead of *ma, ta, sa*, to avoid two vowels meeting (*ma amie* becomes *mon amie*). The noun is still feminine; only the determiner changes.

FEMININE BEFORE A CONSONANT	FEMININE BEFORE A VOWEL
ma sœur · ta maison · sa voiture	mon amie · ton école · son idée · mon histoire

An adjective in front of the noun changes which word follows *mon*: *mon amie* but *ma meilleure amie* (*ma*, because the next word, *meilleure*, starts with a consonant).

Tu or vous: ton or votre

The possessive has to match the form of address: use *ton, ta, tes* with *tu*, and *votre, vos* with *vous*. *Votre* is used for one person you address formally *and* for several people:

YOU ADDRESS…	EXAMPLE
one friend (*tu*)	Où est ta sœur ?
one person formally (*vous*)	Où est votre sœur, Madame ?
several people (*vous*)	Où sont vos parents ?

Possession with de

French has no *'s*. To say "Marie's brother", put the owner after the noun with **de**: **le frère de Marie · la maison de mes parents · les amis de ma sœur**. Before the article *le* or *les* the contraction applies: **le frère du professeur, la voiture des voisins** (French Grammar 1 5).

Demonstratives: this, that, these, those

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
masculine, before a consonant	ce livre	ces livres, ces tables, ces amis, ces hommes
masculine, before a vowel or mute h	cet ami · cet homme	
feminine	cette table · cette amie	

The same word means "this" and "that": ***ce livre*** is "this book" or "that book". To make the difference, add **-ci** (here) or **-là** (there) after the noun:

EXAMPLE	MEANING
Je prends ce livre-ci, pas ce livre-là.	I'll take this book, not that one.
Cette semaine-là, j'étais à Paris.	That week I was in Paris.

> **Watch out: cet and cette sound the same**
>
> *Cet* and *cette* are pronounced alike, as *cet ami* and *cette amie* show. The gender is only visible in the noun that follows (*ami / amie*) or in an adjective. Before a plural vowel noun, *ces* links to it: *ces amis* (liaison, French Grammar 1 2).

Other determiners

DETERMINER	FORMS	EXAMPLES
quel which, what	quel · quelle · quels · quelles	Quel âge as-tu ? · Quelle heure est-il ? · Quels livres ?
chaque each, every	invariable, always singular	chaque jour · chaque semaine
plusieurs several	invariable, always plural	plusieurs amis · plusieurs fois
quelques a few, some	always plural	quelques amis · quelques minutes
tout all, the whole	tout · toute · tous · toutes + article	tout le monde · toute la journée · tous les jours · toutes les semaines
autre other	autre · autres	un autre ami · les autres amis
même same	même · mêmes	le même livre · les mêmes amis
numbers	invariable (except *un / une*)	trois frères · une sœur

Watch out: quel is not "what" before a verb

Quel is an adjective and must be followed by a noun: *Quel livre ?* ("Which book?"). It agrees with that noun, also after *être*: *Quelle est ton adresse ?* Do not use it to mean "what" before a verb; that is a different word (*que, qu'est-ce que*), which belongs to a later course. The exclamation uses it too: *Quelle surprise !*

🗣️ In Use — En situation

Read these aloud. Say whose each possessive points to.

① About the family

A:

② In a shop

A:

Comment s'appelle ta sœur ? Et ton amie ?
What's your sister called? And your friend?

B:

Ma sœur s'appelle Claire et mon amie s'appelle Léa. Leurs parents sont amis.
My sister is called Claire and my friend is called Léa. Their parents are friends.

Quel livre voulez-vous, Madame ?
Which book would you like, madam?

B:

Ce livre-ci, pas ce livre-là. Et cette carte, s'il vous plaît.
This book, not that one. And this map, please.

③ Every day

A:

Tu vois tes amis chaque semaine ?
Do you see your friends every week?

B:

Oui, plusieurs amis et moi, nous dînons ensemble tous les jours.
Yes, several friends and I have dinner together every day.

📋 Quick Reference — Aide-mémoire

TOPIC	SUMMARY
possessives	mon/ma/mes · ton/ta/tes · son/sa/ses · notre/nos · votre/vos · leur/leurs
agree with…	the thing owned, not the owner

TOPIC	SUMMARY
feminine before a vowel	mon, ton, son: mon amie
owner after the noun	le frère de Marie
demonstratives	ce · cet · cette · ces (+ -ci / -là)
others	quel · chaque · plusieurs · quelques · tout · autre · même

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Complete: ____ *frère (my)* · ____ *sœur (my)* · ____ *parents (my).*

▼ Show answer

mon frère · ma sœur · mes parents.

2. Complete: ____ *amie (my)* · ____ *école (your, tu)* · ____ *idée (his or her).*

▼ Show answer

mon amie · ton école · son idée. Before a feminine noun that starts with a vowel the masculine form is used.

3. Say "his sister" and "her sister". What changes?

▼ Show answer

Both are *sa sœur*. The possessive agrees with the noun, not the owner.

4. Complete with ton, ta, tes, votre or vos: *Où est ____ sœur, Madame ?* · *Où sont ____ parents, mes amis ?*

▼ Show answer

Où est votre sœur, Madame ? · Où sont vos parents, mes amis ? (*vous* goes with *votre / vos*.)

5. Say "Marie's brother", "my parents' house" and "the teacher's car".

▼ Show answer

le frère de Marie · la maison de mes parents · la voiture du professeur (*de* + *le* = *du*).

6. Choose ce, cet, cette or ces: ____ *livre* · ____ *ami* · ____ *amie* · ____ *tables*.

▼ Show answer

ce livre · cet ami · cette amie · ces tables.

7. How do you say "this book, not that book"?

▼ Show answer

Ce livre-ci, pas ce livre-là. The endings *-ci* and *-là* tell "this" from "that".

8. Complete with quel, quelle, quels or quelles: ____ *âge as-tu ?* · ____ *heure est-il ?* · ____ *livres ?*

▼ Show answer

Quel âge as-tu ? · Quelle heure est-il ? · Quels livres ?

9. Say "every day", "all day", "everyone", "every week" (use *tout* for the first three where needed).

▼ Show answer

tous les jours · toute la journée · tout le monde · chaque semaine (or *toutes les semaines*).

10. Find the error: *ma amie* · *le mon livre* · *cette ami*.

▼ Show answer

mon amie · mon livre (a determiner replaces the article) · cet ami (*ami* is masculine and starts with a vowel).

Coming up in Chapter 10: Putting It Together. An error clinic on the whole noun phrase (gender, plural, article, adjective), a final recap, and the way on to French Grammar 2.

🧩 Putting It Together — Tout ensemble

Nine chapters have given you the pieces of the French noun phrase: the sounds, the gender and number of the noun, the articles, the partitive, the adjectives and the other determiners. This chapter assembles them. First the order of the words in a phrase, then a seven-step procedure you can run on any noun, then an error clinic built from the typical mistakes of the whole course, and finally the recap.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A French noun phrase runs determiner → number → "before" adjective → noun → "after" adjective. Everything in it agrees with the noun: determiner and adjectives take its gender and number. If you know the noun's gender, its plural and the position of the adjective, the rest is a matter of endings.

The whole noun phrase in order

DETERMINER	NUMBER	BEFORE (BAGS)	NOUN	AFTER
mes	deux	grandes	sœurs	sportives
ce		bel	ami	italien
nos		nouvelles	voitures	rouges
de (for *des*)		jolies	robes	vertes
tous mes			amis	français

Watch out: tout comes first

> *Tout* stands before the article or possessive and agrees with the noun: *tous mes amis, toutes les semaines, tout le monde*. The number and the BAGS adjectives come after the determiner (*mes deux grandes sœurs*), never before it.

The seven-step procedure

When you build a noun phrase, run through these steps. It takes a few seconds once it becomes a habit:

STEP	QUESTION	WHERE YOU LEARNED IT
1	Is the noun **masculine or feminine**? Check its ending, then learn it with its article.	French Grammar 1 3
2	Is it **singular or plural**? Add *-s*, use *-x* or *-aux*, or leave it.	French Grammar 1 4
3	Which **determiner**: definite, indefinite, partitive, possessive, demonstrative or quantity?	French Grammar 1 5, 6 and 9
4	After a **negative** or a **quantity** word: use plain *de*. Before *le* or *les* after *à* or *de*: contract.	French Grammar 1 5 and 6
5	Give the **adjective** the noun's gender and number.	French Grammar 1 7
6	Put it **before** (BAGS) or **after** the noun; use *bel, nouvel, vieil* before a masculine vowel.	French Grammar 1 8
7	Say it: **elide** (*l'*, *d'*), **link** (liaison) and keep final consonants silent.	French Grammar 1 1 and 2

🔧 Error Clinic

These are the typical mistakes of the course. Cover the right-hand column and correct each one.

ERROR	CORRECT	RULE AND CHAPTER
une voyage	un voyage	***-age*** **is masculine (French Grammar 1 3)**
des chevals	des chevaux	***-al*** **→** ***-aux*** **(French Grammar 1 4)**
à le marché	au marché	***à*** **+** ***le*** **=** ***au*** **(French Grammar 1 5)**
Il est un médecin.	Il est médecin. / C'est un médecin.	**no article after** ***être*** **+ profession (French Grammar 1 5)**
J'aime du café.	J'aime le café.	**liking takes the definite article (French Grammar 1 5 and 6)**
Je ne bois pas du café.	Je ne bois pas de café.	**negative →** ***de*** **(French Grammar 1 6)**
la plupart de gens	la plupart des gens	**exception to** ***de*** **after a quantity word (French Grammar 1 6)**
une amie italien	une amie italienne	**feminine of** ***-en*** **(French Grammar 1 7)**
des fleurs oranges	des fleurs orange	***orange*** **is invariable (French Grammar 1 7)**
un beau ami	un bel ami	***bel*** **before a vowel (French Grammar 1 8)**
des grandes maisons	de grandes maisons	***des*** **→** ***de*** **before a plural adjective (French Grammar 1 6 and 8)**
ma amie	mon amie	***mon*** **before a vowel (French Grammar 1 9)**
cette ami	cet ami	***cet*** **before a masculine vowel (French Grammar 1 9)**

Watch out: the sound can fool you

Most of these errors cannot be heard: ***un ami*** **and** ***une amie***, ***cet*** **and** ***cette***, ***bel*** **and** ***belle***, **and a plural** ***-s*** **are all silent or identical. French is a language where you write**

grammar the ear cannot check, so always run the steps on paper before trusting your sense of how it sounds.

🗣️ In Use — En situation

One last set of exchanges that uses the whole noun phrase. Read them aloud and run the seven steps on each phrase.

① Family photo

A:

Qui sont ces deux jeunes femmes ?

Who are these two young women?

B:

Ce sont mes sœurs, et voici notre vieil oncle avec ses nouvelles lunettes.

They are my sisters, and here is our old uncle with his new glasses.

② Shopping

A:

Je cherche de jolies robes vertes, mais je n'ai pas beaucoup d'argent.

I'm looking for pretty green dresses, but I haven't got much money.

B:

Voici une belle robe verte, et cette petite robe-là est moins chère.

Here is a lovely green dress, and that little one is cheaper.

③ Friends

A:

Tu vois tous tes amis français chaque semaine ?

Do you see all your French friends every week?

B:

Oui, un nouvel ami et deux amies italiennes dînent avec

nous.

Yes, a new friend and two Italian friends have dinner with us.

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Exercices

Build each phrase with the seven steps, then click to check.

1. Build: "my two big sisters" (*sœur*, *grand*, *sportif*: "my two big, sporty sisters").

▼ Show answer

mes deux grandes sœurs sportives (possessive, number, BAGS adjective, noun, other adjective).

2. Build: "this lovely Italian friend" (masculine, *ami*, *beau*, *italien*).

▼ Show answer

ce bel ami italien. *Bel* is chosen because *ami* starts with a vowel, and *ce* (not *cet*) because the next word, *bel*, starts with a consonant.

3. Build: "pretty green dresses" (*robe*, *joli*, *vert*, no determiner but the indefinite plural).

▼ Show answer

de jolies robes vertes (*des* → *de* because a plural adjective stands in front).

4. Build: "all my French friends" (*ami*, *français*).

▼ Show answer

tous mes amis français (*tout* comes first and agrees with the plural masculine noun).

5. Say "I don't have any brothers, but I have a lot of cousins".

▼ Show answer

Je n'ai pas de frères, mais j'ai beaucoup de cousins (negative *de*, quantity *de*).

6. Make this correct: *Il est un étudiant.* · *J'aime du thé.* · *une amie français.*

▼ Show answer

Il est étudiant (or C'est un étudiant) · J'aime le thé · une amie française.

7. Make this correct: *ma amie* · *des chevals* · *un beau ami* · *cette ami.*

▼ Show answer

mon amie · des chevaux · un bel ami · cet ami.

8. Which of the seven steps is each: (a) choosing *bel*; (b) *pas de*; (c) *chevaux*?

▼ Show answer

(a) step 6 (position and special forms); (b) step 4 (negative → *de*); (c) step 2 (plural).

🏁 Course Complete — Terminé !

You have finished French Grammar 1. Here is what these ten chapters gave you.

CHAPTERS	WHAT YOU CAN NOW DO
1–2	Read the sound map of French (letters, accents, silent letters, nasal vowels) and apply elision and liaison.
3–4	Predict a noun's gender from its ending, form masculine and feminine pairs, and write regular and irregular plurals.
5–6	Use the definite, indefinite and partitive articles, the contractions *au, aux, du, des*, and plain *de* after a negative or a quantity.
7–8	Make adjectives agree, place them before or after the noun and use *bel, nouvel, vieil*.

CHAPTERS	WHAT YOU CAN NOW DO
9	Use possessives, demonstratives and the other determiners.
10	Build a whole noun phrase in seven steps and correct typical mistakes.

Where next: French Grammar 2. The noun phrase is now complete, so the next course turns to **the verb**: the present tense, negation and questions. Take the seven steps with you; every sentence in French Grammar 2 will contain at least one noun phrase to build.