

French



french alphabet

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|------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Aa</i> a | <i>Bb</i> be | <i>Cc</i> se | <i>Dd</i> de | <i>Ee</i> eu |
| <i>Ff</i> ef | <i>Gg</i> zhe | <i>Hh</i> ash | <i>Ii</i> i | <i>Jj</i> zhi |
| <i>Kk</i> ka | <i>Ll</i> el | <i>Mm</i> em | <i>Nn</i> en | <i>Oo</i> o |
| <i>Pp</i> pe | <i>Qq</i> kew | <i>Rr</i> er | <i>Ss</i> es | <i>Tt</i> te |
| <i>Uu</i> ew | <i>Vv</i> ve | <i>Ww</i> dubl ve | <i>Xx</i> iks | <i>Yy</i> i grek |
| <i>Zz</i> zed | | | | |

french



introduction

What do you think of when the word 'French' comes up? A *bon vivant*, drinking an *apéritif tête-à-tête* with a friend at a *café*, while studying the *à la carte* menu and making some witty *double entendres*? Are you getting *déjà vu* yet? Chances are you already know a few fragments of French (*français* *fron-sey*) – *bonjour, oui, au revoir, bon voyage* and so on. Even if you missed out on French lessons, though, that first sentence (forgive the stereotyping) is evidence that you probably know quite a few French words without realising it. And thanks to the Norman invasion of England in the 11th century, many common English words have a French origin – some estimate, in fact, that three-fifths of everyday English vocabulary arrived via French.

So, after centuries of contact with English, French offers English speakers a relatively smooth path to communicating in another language. The structure of a French sentence won't come as a surprise and the sounds of the language are generally common to English as well. The few sounds that do differ will be familiar to most through television and film examples of French speakers – the silent 'h' and the throaty 'r', for example. French is a distant cousin of English, but is most closely related to its Romance siblings, Italian and Spanish. These languages developed from the Latin spoken by the Romans during their conquests of the 1st century BC.

Almost 30 countries cite French as an official language (not always the only language, of course), in many cases due to France's colonisation of various countries in Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean. It's the mother tongue of around 80 million people in places like Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Monaco, Canada and Senegal as well as France, and another 50 million speak it as a second language. French was the language of international diplomacy until the early 20th century, and is still an official language of a number of international organisations, including the Red Cross, the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee.

As well as the advantage of learning a language that's spoken all around the world, there are more subtle benefits to French. Being told of a wonderful vineyard off the tourist track, for example, or discovering that there's little truth in the cliché that the French are rude. And *regardez* the significant body of literature (the Nobel Prize for Literature has gone to French authors a dozen times), film and music ... You'll find the reasons to speak French just keep growing.