

lonely planet

≡ *Fast Talk*

French

GUARANTEED TO GET YOU TALKING





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Before You Go

Many visitors to France get around without speaking a word of French, but just a few phrases go a long way in making friends, inviting service with a smile, and ensuring a rich and rewarding travel experience – you could discover a cosy vineyard off the tourist track, experience a sublime meal, or grab that great shopping bargain.

PRONUNCIATION TIPS

The sounds of French can almost all be found in English, and if you read our coloured pronunciation guides as if they were English you'll be understood.

★ The few sounds that do differ from English include the throaty **r** (a bit like a growl) and **ew** (said as the 'ee' in 'see' with rounded lips). Note also that **zh** is pronounced as the 's' in 'pleasure'.

★ French has nasal vowels (pronounced as if you're trying to force the sound 'through the nose'). English is similar to some extent – eg when you say 'sing', the 'i' is nasalised

by the 'ng'. We've used nasal consonant sounds (**m**, **n**, **ng**) after the nasal vowel so you can produce the sound with confidence.

★ Syllables in French are, for the most part, equally stressed – as English speakers tend to stress the first syllable, try adding a light stress on the final syllable of French words to compensate.

MUST-KNOW GRAMMAR

The structure of French holds no major surprises for English speakers since the two languages are quite closely related.

★ French has a formal and informal word for ‘you’ (*vous* **voo** and *tu* **tew** respectively). When talking to someone familiar or younger than you, use the *tu* form. Phrases in this book use the form that is appropriate to the situation. Where both forms can be used, they are indicated by **pol** and **inf** respectively.

★ French has masculine and feminine forms of words, eg *beau/belle* **bo/bel** (beautiful), indicated in this book by **m** and **f** respectively.

★ Verbs have a different ending for each person, like the English ‘I do’ vs ‘he/she does’. You’ll still be understood if you use the dictionary form of a verb in all contexts.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

Many French words are part of the English vocabulary – thanks to the Norman invasion of England in the 11th century, some estimate that three-fifths of everyday English vocabulary arrived via French. You’ll recognise *café*, *déjà vu*, *rendez-vous*, *cliché* ...

Fast Talk French

Don’t worry if you’ve never learnt French (*français* **fron-say**) before – it’s all about confidence. You don’t need to memorise endless grammatical details or long lists of vocabulary – you just need to start speaking. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain when the locals hear you making an effort. And remember that body language and a sense of humour have a role to play in every culture.

“you just need to start speaking”

Even if you use the very basics, such as greetings and civilities, your travel experience will be the better for it. Once you start, you’ll be amazed how many prompts you’ll get to help you build on those first words. You’ll hear people speaking, pick up sounds and expressions from the locals, catch a word or two that you know from TV already, see something on a billboard – all these things help to build your understanding.

5.

Phrases to Learn Before You Go

1. What are the opening hours? Quelles sont les heures d'ouverture?

kel zon lay zer doo-vair-tewr

French business hours are governed by a maze of regulations, so it's a good idea to check before you make plans.

2. I'd like the set menu, please. Je voudrais le menu, s'il vous plait.

zher voo-dray ler mer-new seel voo play

The best-value dining in France is the two- or three-course meal at a fixed price. Most restaurants have one on the chalkboard.

3. Which wine would you recommend? Quel vin vous conseillez?

kel vun voo kon-say-yay

Who better to ask for advice on wine than the French?

4. Can I address you with 'tu'? Est-ce que je peux vous tutoyer?

es-ker zher per voo tew-twa-yay

Before you start addressing someone with the informal 'you' form, it's polite to ask permission first.

5. Do you have plans for tonight? Vous avez prévu quelque chose ce soir?

voo za-vay pray-vev kel-ker shoz ser swar

To arrange to meet up without sounding pushy, ask friends if they're available rather than inviting them directly.

10.

Phrases to Sound Like a Local

Cool! **Génial!** zhay·nyal

No worries. **Pas de soucis.** pa der soo·see

Sure. **D'accord.** da·kor

No way! **Pas question!** pa kay·styon

Just joking! **Je plaisante!** zher play·zont

Too bad. **Tant pis.** tom pee

What a shame. **Quel dommage.** kel do·mash

What's up? **Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?** kes keel ya

Well done! **Bien joué!** byun zhoo·ay

Not bad. **Pas mal.** pa mal