



SPEAK FRENCH LIKE A NATIVE

The 12 Golden Rules of French

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ABOUT FRENCH

- **There is no such thing as *Easy French*.**

This is a marketing ploy designed to make you believe you can be fluent after you have finished whatever book/audio they are trying to sell you. Don't believe this for one minute. French is fiendishly complex, but it's manageable as long as you are willing to put in the effort (in the unlikely event you are NOT willing to put in the effort, just close this booklet down and go do something else, as there is nothing I can do for you).

- **You will not become fluent by studying French one or two hours per week.**

Sorry to burst your bubble, but you really need to immerse yourself in the language if being fluent is your objective. That means watching French films, reading French books, listening to French podcasts, talking to French people, using a French app, using this manual and videos, a little bit every day.

- **The entire structure of the language is way more complex than English.**

Let me give you an example: whereas in English you say *My name is Claire*, the French say *Je m'appelle Claire*, which literally translates as *I myself call Claire*. So, it is not just a matter of learning which word means what, it's about **learning to think in a different, *less direct* way**.

- **The grammar is mind-boggling, even for us natives.**

We spend most of our school years learning verbs and rules by rote and carrying out grammar analyses of random sentences, just so we can spell properly and use the right endings. But fear not - I will only teach you the bare minimum you need to get by and speak properly.

- **Our attitudes and values are totally different to yours.**

We don't understand how the British can eat marmite or chip butties and walk around in shorts and flip-flops in the middle of winter. They don't really get the pleasure of spending a whole day sitting at a table, eating an endless meal with one's family and just debating or arguing at length, like the French do. It's OK - each to their own.

Now let's get started!

THE 12 GOLDEN RULES OF FRENCH

1. How to say “a” and “the” – masculine and feminine

In French, people and objects are either HE or SHE. **Le** is the **masculine “the”** and **La** is the **feminine “the”**. These tiny words are called **articles**.

- **For people**, it’s easy – women, girls and female animals are all **La** and men, boys and male animals are all **Le**. If you don’t know the gender of a baby or an animal, the default “neutral” is **Le**. **For words starting with a vowel or an h, le or la become l’**, as in *l’orange* and *l’hôtel*, regardless of their gender.
- **For objects and concepts**, it’s almost completely random. I say “almost” because there are a few rules you should remember, the main one being that all words ending in –tion are feminine (ie information – more on that later).

Feminine articles: une, la, l’	Meaning	Masculine articles: un, le, l’	Meaning
Une maison	A house	Un garage	A garage
La maison	The house	Le chien	The dog
L’habitude	The habit	L’hôtel	The hotel

Il (he) and **Elle (She)** are called **subject pronouns**. If you need to say **It** to refer to a masculine object, use **Il**. For a feminine object, use **Elle**.

Articles and pronouns	Meaning	Articles and pronouns	Meaning
La maison est belle	The house is nice	Le garage est grand	The garage is big
Elle est belle	It (she) is nice	Il est grand	It (he) is big

- **When there is more than one** person, object, concept or animal, it’s called the **plural** and the gender becomes irrelevant.

Plural words: des, les	Meaning
Des bonbons	Some sweets
Les ordinateurs	The computers

2. How to say “you”

TU is for family members or friends – people you know well.

Ex: Tu vas bien ? = Are you well? (literally: Do you go well?)

VOUS is for everybody else – strangers or people you don’t know well.

Ex: Vous allez bien ? = Are you well?

VOUS is also the collective you, ie it is used to address a group of people - even if you say “tu” to them individually.

Ex: Vous allez bien ? = Are you well?

There is always a point in French conversation when people will ask “On se tutoie ? (Shall we say “tu” to each other)?” You have to wait until that happens to be able to switch from *vous* to *tu* in conversation and make sure you don’t offend anyone! Sometimes they won’t say anything and just switch automatically, in which case it’s OK for you to do the same.

Please avoid saying *tu* to a complete stranger, or you WILL offend them, guaranteed!!

3. How to say “we”

Did you know there are two words for *We* in French?

You may have been taught to use NOUS at school, and nothing else. This is fine if you are writing letters or even books in French. *Nous* is the posh *We*. Remember that.

Ex: Nous parlons = We are talking / We talk

On the other hand, when you speak you need to do what ALL FRENCH NATIVES DO and use ON only (it can also mean Someone, depending on the context).

Ex: On parle = We are talking / We talk / Someone is talking

4. How to guess the meaning of words

- **Words ending in –ment** usually mean the same in French as in English (with a few exceptions, which I will mention below), but in English they end in –ly.

French	English
Général ement	General ly
Absolu ment	Absolut ely
Evid ement	Evid ently
Rare ment	Rare ly

BUT watch out for those false friends:

French	English
Couram ment	Fluently
Actuel lement	Currently
En fait	Actually, Basically

- **For words starting with –dé or -dés**, replace with –dis or –un and you can usually tell what it means.

French	English
Dé couragé	Dis couraged
Dé placé	Dis placed or Out of place
Dé fait	Un done
Dés agréable	Un pleasant

- When there is a circumflex accent (or commonly called *Chinese hat*) on a word, it usually means that, in the old days, there used to be an “s” following that letter.

French	English
Forêt	Forest
Hôpital	Hospital
île	Island/Isle

5. How to ask questions the French way – keep it simple

- Unfortunately, books and schoolteachers always tell you to ask questions the “posh” way, but that is no good to you, as it is only used in written French. **If you want to speak French like a native, then use familiar language and structures. This is the approach we will take here.**

Ex: What are you eating?

POSH: Que manges-tu ? Only used in writing

FAMILIAR: Qu’est-ce que tu manges? Used when speaking and writing

VERY FAMILIAR: Tu manges quoi ? Only used when speaking

Go for the middle structure, as it is the most widely used in general.

- The main question words are:

French	English	Example in French	English translation
Qu’est-ce que*/Que	What	Qu’est-ce que tu dis ?	What are you saying?
Qui	Who	C’est qui ?	Who is it?
Comment	How	C’est comment ?	How is it?
Combien	How much/how many	C’est combien ?	How much is it?
Où	Where	C’est où ?	Where is it?
Quand	When	C’est quand ?	When is it?
Pourquoi	Why	Pourquoi tu fais ça ?	Why are you doing this ?



***Note the *Qu'est-ce que* – the whole thing means *What*. Don't question it or try to analyse it and just say it like a native, ie *Keske*.**

➤ ***Est-ce que*** is another interesting animal. It doesn't actually mean anything by itself, only that the sentence is a question. To make it easier for you to remember, just think it is the equivalent of *Do you* or *Did you*.

Ex: *Est-ce que tu veux partir ? = Do you want to leave?*

You can even leave it out and still be OK. That's what we natives do most of the time.

Ex: *Tu veux partir ? = Do you want to leave?*

This second example makes the question sound more blunt, especially to English speakers, but trust me, it's perfectly fine.

Remember not to confuse *Qu'est-ce que* and *Est-ce que* – they do not mean the same thing. Usually, a question starting with *Est-ce que* only requires a *Oui/Non* answer.

➤ Notice that the *Do* that precedes every question in English doesn't exist in French. So to use the previous examples:

Ex: *Qu'est-ce que tu manges ? Literally translates as *What you eat?**

But it means *What do you eat?* Or even *What are you eating?*

Ex: *Tu veux partir? Literally translates as *You want to leave?**

But it means *Do you want to leave?*

6. How French natives answer questions

This is massively important so pay attention!

➤ On the surface, English language seems more “polite” than French, in the sense that you always try to deliver a well-rounded answer to a question.

Q: *Would you like a cup of tea?*

A: *Yes, I would.*



French just doesn't have the *Yes, I do/No, I don't* structure. We just say *Oui/Non* (or even *Non, merci*). There is not much else you can say, so just get used to it. Short answers are perfectly fine and nobody will die if you start using them. You'll just sound more French. Like this :

Q: Vous voulez une tasse de thé ?

A : Oui

➤ In school, they tell you to answer questions the **long way**, like this:

Q : De quelle couleur est ta chemise? = What colour is your shirt?

A: Ma chemise est rouge = My shirt is red.

This is only useful if you need to practice your grammar. In real life, it is nonsense. Here is how a real-life exchange would go:

Q: De quelle couleur est ta chemise?

A : Rouge.

Job done. You have answered the question correctly and nobody died or got offended, BECAUSE THAT IS HOW WE SPEAK. You should try it, sometimes.

7. Words ending in –tion or -sion

These are worth mentioning, as most of the time they mean exactly the same in French as in English. So that means before you even start learning French, you already know the meaning of quite a few words.

Good news – all words ending in –tion or –sion are feminine (ie they take *une* for *a* and *la* for *the*). Here are a few:

Ex : Information, communication, nation, télévision, question, précision, action, situation, perfection, permission, décision, occasion.

BUT watch out for those false friends:

French	English
Attention!	Beware!
Une caution	A deposit
Une formation	A training course
English	French
A station	Une gare
An accommodation	Un logement
A commotion	Un remue-ménage

8. How to create French words

A lot of adjectives and nouns are almost the same in French and English (but they sound totally different, which is why you don't always recognise them).

Here are a few examples:

English words ending in	French	Examples
ible/able	stay the same in writing	Terrible, capable, probable, visible, déductible, possible
al	al/el	Local, personnel, central, occasionnel
or	eur	Docteur, acteur, pasteur
ic/ical	ique	Electrique, automatique, typique, plastique
ant/ent	stay the same in writing	Important, client, président
ty	té	Beauté, réalité, publicité
ous	eux	Furieux, délicieux, curieux
ude	stay the same in writing	Gratitude, aptitude, altitude
id	ide	Rapide, timide, avide
ive	if (masculine) ive (feminine)	Créatif/créative, explosif/explosive

mum	stay the same in writing	Maximum, minimum, optimum
sm	sme	Tourisme, sarcasme, optimisme
ary	aire	Dictionnaire, salaire, primaire, complémentaire
ory	oire	Gloire, histoire, victoire
ade	stay the same in writing	Barricade, cascade, limonade
ist	iste	Artiste, pianiste, raciste
ure	stay the same in writing	Agriculture, texture, culture

9. Verbs are “self-contained”

In English, you just change the bit you tag after the verb (the **preposition**) and – hey presto, you have got a new verb, such as *to go out*, *to go into*, *to go off*, etc.

There is no such thing in French. There will be no common part to keep and each verb will be totally different from the next.

Ex: Sortir = to go out

Je sors ce soir = I am going out tonight.

Attendre = to wait for

Elle attend Alice = She is waiting for Alice.

Chercher = to look for

Ils cherchent le chat = They are looking for the cat.

Ecouter = to listen to

Ecoute-moi ! = Listen to me!

10. The prefix –RE

This is so useful you will wonder where it was all your life. If you want to say you did something *back* or *again*, then most of the time you can just stick **–re** at the start of the verb

(it's called a **prefix**, because you fix it before the verb). If the verb starts with a vowel, then **re** becomes just **-r**.

Ex: Faire / Refaire = To do / To re-do

Lire / Relire = To read / To re-read

Commencer / Recommencer = To start / To start again

Monter / Remonter = To go up / To go up again

Appeler / Rappeler = To call / To call back or to call again

11. *May* and *Might* just don't exist in French

I can already hear the yelps of horror "*So what do I say instead???*" Easy – just use the magic word PEUT-ÊTRE (Maybe / perhaps) and slide it in after the main verb.

Ex: Je vais peut-être aller au cinéma demain = I might / may go to the cinema tomorrow (literally = I am perhaps going to go to the cinema tomorrow).

See? It's not that bad.

12. Basic grammar concepts in English

They are the same in French but it's easier to understand in your own language so here goes. This is about the only grammar you will need to learn French.

- **Nouns** are words used to identify a person, object or place.

Ex: Cat, house, London, pen

- **Articles** are little words what comes before the noun.

Ex: a, an, the



- **Adjectives** are words giving more information about a noun.

Ex: a ginger cat, a tall man.

- **Verbs** are the action/existence/occurrence words of sentences – without them, nothing happens.

Ex: to eat, to see, to talk, to run, to be

- **Adverbs** are words giving more information about a verb or an adjective. Words ending in -ly are always adverbs.

Ex: She walks slowly, the French speak quickly, this is a very beautiful place.

- **Prepositions** are words that connect one part of a sentence to another.

Ex: I live in Paris, the pen is on the table, a bag of sweets, I speak to her, I went to the theatre.

- **Pronouns** are short words used to replace a noun to save repeating it. They can be direct or indirect (the latter are usually used with *to* or *at* in front).

Ex of direct: I went there last year.

I find it difficult.

Ex of indirect: I am speaking to her.

He is looking at me.

- **Subject** and **object** of verbs.

The **subject** is the person or thing doing the action.

Ex: The man is waiting for the bus (the man is the subject).

The **object** is the person or thing to which the action is being done.

Ex: The man is waiting for the bus (the bus is the object).

A word on typography

By now you will have noticed that typography rules are different in French. Here are the most common ones (remember this if you type in French):

For a full-stop	no space. space
For a semi-colon	space ; space
For a colon	space : space
For a comma	no space, space
For an exclamation mark	space ! space
For a question mark	space ? space

Congratulations on reading until the end! I do hope you found this guide useful.

Are you ready to start learning the REAL French you were taught in school, without hours of tedious grammar?

If so, take a look at a sample of my Parlez Français course, which I designed specifically for people like you who want to learn how to speak French FAST:

- Your Level 1 (beginners) sample is [HERE](#).
- Your Level 2 (beginners to lower-intermediate learners) sample is [HERE](#).
- Your Level 3 (lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate learners) sample is [HERE](#).