

## Chapter 1

# I Say It How? Speaking French

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Recognizing the French you already know
  - ▶ Figuring out basic pronunciation
  - ▶ Using popular expressions
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**T**his chapter lets you get your feet wet. Well, actually, we kind of throw you right into the pond. We start by showing you how French and English are similar; then we present some French expressions that you probably already know and understand; and then we talk about pronunciation.

### *The French You Know*

People tend to forget that French was the English court language for a very long time. Today, about 45 percent of English vocabulary is of French origin. That being the case, you already know an impressive amount of French, whether you realize it or not. That's what you are going to find out in this chapter. The only pitfall you have to watch for is that sometimes these English words have different meanings from their French counterparts, and they almost certainly have different pronunciations.

## ***Friendly allies — bons alliés*** ***(bohN-zah-lyay)***

The following list shows words that are spelled the same — and have the same meaning — in French and English. The only thing that may be different is the pronunciation.

- ✓ **art** (*ahr*)
- ✓ **brave** (*brahv*)
- ✓ **bureau** (*bew-ro*)
- ✓ **client** (*klee-yahN*)
- ✓ **concert** (*kohN-sehr*)
- ✓ **condition** (*kohN-dee-syohN*)
- ✓ **content** (*cohN-tahN*)
- ✓ **courage** (*koo-razh*)
- ✓ **cousin** (*koo-zaN*)
- ✓ **culture** (*kewl-tewr*)
- ✓ **différent** (*dee-fay-rahN*)
- ✓ **excellent** (*ayk-say-lahN*)
- ✓ **garage** (*gah-razh*)
- ✓ **guide** (*geed*)
- ✓ **important** (*aN-pohr-tahN*)
- ✓ **journal** (*zhoor-nahl*)
- ✓ **machine** (*mah-sheen*)
- ✓ **moment** (*moh-mahN*)
- ✓ **nation** (*nah-syohN*)
- ✓ **orange** (*oh-rahNzh*)
- ✓ **parent** (*pah-rahN*)
- ✓ **possible** (*poh-seebl*)
- ✓ **principal** (*praN-see-pahl*)
- ✓ **probable** (*pro-bahbl*)

- ✓ **question** (*kehsh-tyohN*)
- ✓ **radio** (*rah-dyo*)
- ✓ **répétition** (*ray-pay-tee-syohN*)
- ✓ **restaurant** (*rehs-to-rahN*)
- ✓ **rose** (*roz*)
- ✓ **rouge** (*roozh*)
- ✓ **route** (*root*)
- ✓ **science** (*syahNs*)
- ✓ **secret** (*suh-kreh*)
- ✓ **service** (*sehr-vees*)
- ✓ **signal** (*see-nyahl*)
- ✓ **silence** (*see-lahNs*)
- ✓ **solitude** (*soh-lee-tewd*)
- ✓ **sport** (*spohr*)
- ✓ **station** (*stah-syohN*)
- ✓ **statue** (*stah-tew*)
- ✓ **suggestion** (*sewg-zhehs-syohN*)
- ✓ **surprise** (*sewr-preez*)
- ✓ **table** (*tahbl*)
- ✓ **taxi** (*tahk-see*)
- ✓ **tennis** (*tay-nees*)
- ✓ **train** (*traN*)
- ✓ **urgent** (*ewr-zhahN*)
- ✓ **violet** (*vyo-leh*)
- ✓ **voyage** (*vwah-yahzh*)

### ***Kissing cousins***

Table 1-1 shows words that are spelled almost the same in French and English and have similar meanings.

**Table 1-1 Words Similar in Meaning, Slightly Different in Spelling**

<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>
acteur (ahk-tuhr)	actor
adresse (ah-drehs)	address
âge (ahzh)	age
allée (ah-lay)	alley
américain (ah-may-ree-kaN)	American
artiste (ahr-teest)	artist
auteur (o-tuhr)	author
banque (bahNk)	bank
chambre (shaNbr)	chamber (or bedroom)
chèque (shehk)	check
classe (klahs)	class
comédie (koh-may-dee)	comedy
congrès (kohN-greh)	congress
démocratie (day-moh-krah-see)	democracy
développement (day-vlohp-mahN)	development
gouvernement (goo-vehr-nuh-mahN)	government
hôtel (o-tehl)	hotel
leçon (luh-sohN)	lesson
lettre (lehtr)	letter
mémoire (may-mwahr)	memory
musique (mew-zeek)	music
nationalité (nah-syo-nah-lee-tay)	nationality

<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>
nécessaire (nay-say-sehr)	necessary
ordinaire (ohr-dee-nehr)	ordinary
papier (pah-pyay)	paper
poème (poh-ehm)	poem
potentiel (po-tahN-syehl)	potential
problème (proh-blehm)	problem
saison (seh-zohN)	season
sénateur (say-nah-tuhr)	senator
tragédie (trah-zhay-dee)	tragedy
visite (vee-zeet)	visit

### *False friends — faux amis*

The words that follow look similar to English words, but they don't have the same meanings:

- ✓ **actuellement** (*ak-tew-ehl-mahN*): This word means “now,” not “actually.” The French word for “actually” is **en fait** (*ahN feht*).
- ✓ **assister** (*ah-sees-tay*): This word means “to attend,” not “to assist.” The French word for “to assist” is **aider** (*ay-day*).
- ✓ **attendre** (*ah-tahNdr*): This word means “to wait for,” not “to attend.” The French word for “to attend” is **assister à** (*ah-sees-tay ah*).
- ✓ **bague** (*bahg*): This word means “ring,” not “bag.” The French word for “bag” is **sac** (*sahk*).
- ✓ **librairie** (*lee-breh-ree*): This word means “bookstore,” not “library.” The French word for “library” is **bibliothèque** (*bee-blee-oh-tehk*).

- ✓ **place** (*plahs*): This word means “square or seat at the theater or on the bus,” not “place.” The French word for “place” is **lieu** or **endroit**.
- ✓ **rester** (*rehs-tay*): This word means “to stay or remain,” not “to rest.” The French word for “to rest” is **se reposer** (*suh-ruh-po-zay*).

## *Lenders and borrowers*

Quite a few English words have been borrowed from French, thus retaining their French meanings with different pronunciations.

However, French has also borrowed many words from English and continues to do so in spite of the loud protests by purists who condemn this trend as a sign of cultural contamination and name it **franglais** (*frahN-gleh*):

- ✓ **cool**
- ✓ **le budget**
- ✓ **le business**
- ✓ **le fast food**
- ✓ **le jet set**
- ✓ **le job** (**la job** in Québec)
- ✓ **le manager**
- ✓ **le marketing**
- ✓ **le parking**
- ✓ **le rock**
- ✓ **le shopping**
- ✓ **le steak**
- ✓ **le tunnel**
- ✓ **le weekend**

## *Mouthing Off: Basic Pronunciation*

The hardest part of pronunciation is overcoming your fear of not sounding French when you speak the language. You're probably afraid that you'll never be able to reproduce the sounds that you hear in French songs or movies. Remember, though, that any time anyone hears any foreign language spoken or sung at a normal speed, the words — which don't make sense to begin with — create a muddle of sounds impossible to reproduce. After you overcome your fear of sounding funny, everything else is fun and easy. Hopefully, our reassurance helps reduce your fear.



Before you can enjoy watching or playing a game, you have to understand its basic rules. Acquiring another language is no different. After you master these pronunciation rules, you need to practice whenever you have a moment to do so, just as you had to practice the piano as a child. (Aim for short but frequent practice sessions.) Your best bet is simply to repeat over and over again, no matter how boring that sounds.

### *The French alphabet*

The French alphabet has the same number of letters as the English alphabet — 26. As you already know, many of the letters are pronounced differently. Table 1-2 lists the letters and their pronunciations, which you may find useful to refer to, if, for instance, you have to spell your name on the phone or write down an address. Whenever possible, the table refers to sound-alike English words so that you can have a pretty good idea of the way the letters are pronounced. Such helpful hints aren't always possible, of course, because even though many sounds are roughly the same in French and in English, some French sounds don't exist in the

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English language. The fact that these sounds are unfamiliar doesn't mean that you can't pronounce them. Just read the next few sections for some help and tips.

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Sound</i>	<i>As in English</i>
a	ah	card
b	bay	baby
c	say	say
d	day	date
e	uh	but
f	ehf	effort
g	zhay	
h	ahsh	ash
i	ee	igloo
j	zhee	
k	kah	car
l	ehl	elegant
m	ehm	employee
n	ehn	end
o	o	rose
p	pay	paper
q	kew	
r	ehr	ersatz
s	ehs	estimate
t	tay	take
u	ew	

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Sound</i>	<i>As in English</i>
v	vay	vague
w	doobluhvay	
x	eeks	
y	eegrehk	
z	zehd	

### *Vowel sounds*

Vowel sounds are the most difficult to pronounce in French. They're shorter than in English and usually end syllables. Almost all of them have an equivalent in English. Take a look at Table 1-3.

<i>Sound</i>	<i>Spelled</i>	<i>As In English</i>	<i>French Word</i>
ah	a, â	card	la tasse (lah tahs) (the cup)
uh	e, eu	but	le petit (luh puh-tee) (the little one)
ay	é, ez, er, et	take	les cafés (lay kah-fay) (coffee houses)
eh	è, ê, ai	day	la mère (lah mehr) (the mother)
ee	i, y	igloo	vite (veet) (quickly)
o	o, ô, au, eau	boat	l'eau (lo) (water)
oh	o	love	la pomme (lah pohm) (the apple)

*(continued)*

Table 1-3 (continued)

<i>Sound</i>	<i>Spelled</i>	<i>As In English</i>	<i>French Word</i>
oo	ou	you	l'amour (lah-moor) (love)
wah	oi, oy	watch	la soie (lah swah) (silk)
ew*	*		salut (sah-lew) (hello)

\*The ew sound, represented in French by the letter u, doesn't exist in English, but it's not difficult to pronounce. Here's a little trick to help you: Say ee; the tip of your tongue is against your front bottom teeth. Keeping this position, you then round your lips and the sound coming out of your mouth is . . . the French ew (u).

## *The accent*

The accent over a vowel in French doesn't indicate that a syllable is stressed. It only affects the letter on which it stands and doesn't even change the pronunciation of that letter unless it's an *e* (see Table 1-3).

## *The mute e*

At the end of a word or between two consonants, the *e* isn't usually pronounced; it's called mute. For example, you don't pronounce the *e* at the end of **grande** (*grahNd*) (tall) or in the middle of **samedi** (*sahm-dee*) (Saturday). (See also the section "The elision" later in this chapter for more about final *e*.)

## The nasal sounds

The nasal sound is very common in French and doesn't exist in English. It's also fairly easy to pronounce. Imagine that you have a cold and pronounce the sounds *ah*, *ee*, *oh* through your nose. They come out nasalized. Be sure not to pronounce the consonant *n* afterward.

Table 1-4 lists the nasal sounds.

<b>Table 1-4 Nasal Sounds</b>		
<b>Sound</b>	<b>Spelled</b>	<b>French Word</b>
ah -> ahN	an, en	grand (grahN) (large)
ee -> aN	ain, in, un, aim, im	pain (paN) (bread)
oh -> ohN	on	bon (bohN) (good)

## Consonants

French consonants are pronounced almost like in English, except that you don't linger on them; let them explode and move on to the vowel that follows. You can't pronounce French with a lazy mouth. Remember to articulate.

Another few words of caution: In French, the consonants at the end of a word are not usually pronounced, except for *c*, *f*, *r*, and *l* (the consonants in the word *careful*).

Table 1-5 lists French consonant sounds that may puzzle you either because they come in different spellings or because you think they don't exist in English.

**Table 1-5 Tricky French Consonants**

<i>Sound</i>	<i>Spelled</i>	<i>As In English</i>	<i>French Word</i>
s	ss (between two vowels)	sole	poisson (pwah-sohN) (fish)
	c (in front of e and i)		ciel (see-ehl) (sky)
	ç (in front of a, o, u)		garçon (gar-sohN) (boy)
g	g (in front of a, o, u)	greed	gâteau (gah-to) (cake)
	gu (in front of e and i)		guerre (gehr) (war)
zh	j, g (in front of e and i)	azure	jour (zhoor) (day)
			genou (zhuh-noo) (knee)
sh	ch	ship	chapeau (shah-po) (hat)
ny	gn	canyon	montagne (mohN-tany) (mountain)

Two extra consonants to mention:

- ✓ The letter *h* is always silent in French. Just ignore it.
- ✓ The French *r* often scares foreigners. Don't be afraid. You have to pronounce it with your throat, but make it as soft and gentle as you can, and you're in business.

## The liaison

Have you ever thought, when listening to a French conversation, that it sounded like a great big, long word? Probably. That is because of a French phenomenon called the liaison. **Faire la liaison** (*feh lah lyay-zohN*) (to make a liaison) means that the last consonant of a word is linked with the vowel that begins the following word. Check out these examples:

- ✓ **C'est un petit appartement.** (*seh-tahN puh-tee-tah-pahr-tuh-mahN*) (It's a small apartment.)
- ✓ **Vous êtes mon ami depuis six ans.** (*voo-zeht-moh-nah-mee duh-pwee see-zahN*) (You have been my friend for six years.)

But the French language being full of exceptions, you have to be careful each time that you learn a new grouping of words: The liaison isn't systematic. One important exception is for words following the word **et** (*ay*), which means "and."

**un livre et // un crayon** (*aN leev-ray // aN kray-yohN*) (a book and a pencil)

## The elision

When a word ending with an *e* or an *a* (usually an article or a pronoun) is followed by a word starting with a vowel, the first *e* or *a* disappears and is replaced by an apostrophe. This rule, like the liaison, contributes to the easy flow of the French language. Here are some examples:

- ✓ **la + école -> l'école** (*lay-kohl*) (the school)
- ✓ **je + aime -> j'aime** (*jehm*) (I like)
- ✓ **le + enfant -> l'enfant** (*lahN-fahN*) (the child)

## Stress

Don't stress! In French, every syllable is of equal importance in volume and stress. The emphasis in French words of two or more syllables is on the last syllable — but that stress is moderate. For instance, the stress — very slight — in the French word **photographie** (*fo-to-grah-fee*) (photography) is on the last syllable of the word.

Remembering to unstress the syllable that you're used to pronouncing in those words that have similar spellings in French and in English may take quite a bit of practice. It's like ironing the pleat out of a pair of trousers over and over again.

## Idioms and Popular Expressions

French, like English, has many *idioms* (unusual ways of expressing feelings and ideas). You may find the meanings of these expressions puzzling if you try to translate them word for word.

These fixed forms of expression — you should recognize and use them as such — belong specifically to the language in question. If you walked up to a French man and said, “**Il pleut des chats et des chiens**” (*eel plew day shah ay day shy-aN*) (It's raining cats and dogs), he'd question your sanity. You may find yourself wondering what a Frenchman means when using one of his language's idioms, such as “**Il tombe des cordes**” (*eel tohNb day kohrd*), literally “ropes are falling,” the French expression corresponding to “it's raining cats and dogs.”

Apart from those idioms, which take a long time to recognize and belong specifically to a culture, you find many expressions and phrases that you can't translate word for word but which you can easily learn and use.

Here are a few useful expressions you frequently hear in French:

- ✓ **Allez! Un petit effort!** (*ah-lay uhn puh-tee-teh-for*) (Come on! Try a little!)
- ✓ **à mon avis** (*ah mohN-nah-vee*) (in my opinion)
- ✓ **bien sûr** (*byaN seur*) (of course)
- ✓ **de rien** (*duh ryaN*) (don't mention it)
- ✓ **d'accord** (*dah-kohr*) (okay)
- ✓ **jamais de la vie!** (*zhah-meh dlah vee*) or **pas question!** (*pah kes-tyohN*) (no way)
- ✓ **tant mieux** (*tahN my-uh*) (so much the better)
- ✓ **tant pis** (*tahN pee*) (too bad)
- ✓ **tout à fait** (*too-tah feh*) (quite)

Here are other miscellaneous expressions that use the word **faire** (*fehr*) (to do; to make):

- ✓ **faire une promenade** (*feh-rewn pro-muh-nahd*) (to take a walk)
- ✓ **faire le plein** (*fehr luh plaN*) (to fill up)
- ✓ **faire attention** (*feh-rah-tahN-syohN*) (to pay attention)
- ✓ **faire partie de** (*fehr pah-tee duh*) (to be part of)
- ✓ **faire ses valises** (*fehr say vah-leez*) (to pack)



Here are some other expressions with **avoir** (*ah-vwahr*) (to have):

- ✓ **avoir besoin de** (*ah-vwahr buh-zwaN duh*) (to need something)
- ✓ **avoir peur de** (*ah-vwahr puhr duh*) (to fear)
- ✓ **avoir envie de** (*ah-vwah-rahN-vee duh*) (to feel like)
- ✓ **avoir mal à la tête** (*ah-vwahr-mah-lah-lah teht*) (to have a headache)

- ✓ **avoir chaud** (*ah-vwahr sho*) (to be hot)
- ✓ **avoir froid** (*ah-vwahr frwah*) (to be cold)
- ✓ **avoir faim** (*ah-vwahr faN*) (to be hungry)
- ✓ **avoir soif** (*ah-vwahr swahf*) (to be thirsty)
- ✓ **avoir raison** (*ah-vwahr reh-zohN*) (to be right)
- ✓ **avoir tort** (*ah-vwahr tohr*) (to be wrong)
- ✓ **en avoir assez** (*ahN-nah-vwah-rah-say*), literally to have enough; in Québec, **être tanné** (*eh-truh tah-nay*) (to be fed up)