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FRENCH LESSON

# Basic Conversation 1 • Chapter 1 • Greetings & Goodbyes

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# French Basic Conversation 1

Chapter 1 · Greetings & Goodbyes

## 👋 Greetings & Goodbyes — Salutations et au revoir

*Your very first French conversations: saying hello and goodbye, asking how someone is, being polite, and choosing between the formal and the informal way to speak. No French needed: everything is spelled out for you, including how to say it.*

## 🔊 How French Sounds — La prononciation

*French spelling doesn't look like its sound, and that is the first thing to know. The good news: the system is consistent, and a handful of ideas will let you say almost any word. Read this section once now, and come back to it whenever you like.*

### Three big ideas

1. **Many final letters are silent.** Most consonants at the end of a word aren't pronounced: *Paris* = "pah-REE", *très* = "tray", *vous* = "voo". The exceptions are usually **c, r, f, l** (think of the word "CaReFuL"): *bonjour* ends with a spoken r, *salut* doesn't end with a spoken t. A final **-e** is silent too: *madame* = "mah-DAHm".
2. **Nasal vowels.** When a vowel is followed by *n* or *m* (at the end of a syllable), you don't pronounce the *n*: you let the vowel resonate through your nose. This guide writes them with a tilde: **ã** (an, en), **õ** (on), **ẽ** (in, ain, un). So *bon* = "bõ", *bien* = "byẽ", *comment* = "ko-mã".
3. **Even rhythm.** French has almost no word stress: every syllable gets about the same weight, and the last syllable of a phrase is just a little longer. In the pronunciation lines, **CAPITALS mark the last syllable of each word**, which is the part that carries the gentle emphasis, and hyphens separate syllables.

**ou** = "oo" (vous)     **u** = "ü": say "ee" with rounded lips (salut = sah-LÜ)

**eu** = "uh" with rounded lips (monsieur)     **oi** = "wah" (moi = mwah)

**é, er, ez** at the end = "ay" (allez = ah-LAY)     **è, ê, ai** = "eh" (très = tray)     **au, eau** = "oh" (au revoir)

**an, en** = ã, nasal (comment)     **on** = õ, nasal (bon)     **in, ain, un** = ẽ, nasal (bien, demain)

**j, and g** before e/i = "zh" (bonjour)     **ch** = "sh" (chez)     **c** before e/i, and **ç** = "s" (ça, merci)

**qu** = "k" (qui)    **h** = silent (hôtel)

**r** = a soft sound from the back of the throat, like a gentle gargle (bonjour)

**Accents** (é è ê à ù ç) mostly show a spelling difference; only é ("ay") and è / ê ("eh") change the sound. And **ü** in the pronunciation lines is the French u: practise it by saying "ee" and then pushing your lips into a small circle.

## Six Short Conversations — Conversations

Read each one aloud, using the pronunciation line. Speaking out loud, even alone, is the fastest way to make these phrases feel natural.

### ① Good Morning (formal) — Bonjour

**A:**

Bonjour, Madame Dubois !

*bõ-ZHOOR, mah-DAHM dü-BWAH*

Good morning, Mrs Dubois!

**B:**

Bonjour, Monsieur Martin !

Comment allez-vous ?

*bõ-ZHOOR, muh-SYUH mar-TÊ! ko-mã-tah-lay-VOO*

Good morning, Mr Martin! How are you?

**A:**

Très bien, merci. Et vous ?

*tray BYÊ, mair-SEE. ay VOO*

Very well, thank you. And you?

**B:**

Bien, merci.

*BYÊ, mair-SEE*

Fine, thank you.

### ② Meeting a Friend (informal) — Salut !

**A:**

Salut, Léa ! Ça va ?

*sah-LÛ, lay-AH! sah VAH*

Hi, Léa! How's it going?

**B:**

Salut, Hugo ! Ça va bien, merci. Et toi ?

*sah-LÛ, ü-GOH! sah vah BYÊ, mair-SEE. ay TWAH*

Hi, Hugo! Fine, thanks. And you?

**A:**

Comme ci, comme ça. Pas terrible.

*kom SEE, kom SAH. pah tay-REE-bluh*

So-so. Not great.

### ③ Day & Evening — Bonjour, Bonsoir

### ④ Please, Thanks & Sorry — S'il vous plaît,

**A:**

Bonjour, Monsieur Petit.

*bô-ZHOOR, muh-SYUH puh-TEE*

Good day, Mr Petit.

**B:**

Bonjour, Madame Roux.

*bô-ZHOOR, mah-DAHM ROO*

Good day, Mrs Roux.

**A:**

Bonsoir, Madame Roux ! Bonne soirée !

*bô-SWAHR, mah-DAHM ROO! bon swah-RAY*

Good evening, Mrs Roux! Have a nice evening! (later that day)

**B:**

Bonsoir ! Merci, vous aussi !

*bô-SWAHR! mair-SEE, voo-zoh-SEE*

Good evening! Thanks, you too!

## Merci, Pardon

**A:**

Oh, pardon !

*oh, par-DÕ*

Oh, sorry! / Excuse me!

**B:**

Pas de problème !

*pah duh pro-BLEM*

No problem!

**A:**

Voilà, s'il vous plaît. — Merci beaucoup !

*vwah-LAH, seel voo PLAY — mair-SEE boh-KOO*

Here you are, please. — Thank you very much!

**B:**

De rien.

*duh RYÊ*

You're welcome. (literally "of nothing")

## ⑤ Formal Goodbye — Au revoir

**A:**

Au revoir, Monsieur Girard !

*oh ruh-VWAHR, muh-SYUH zhee-RAHR*

Goodbye, Mr Girard!

**B:**

Au revoir, Madame ! Bonne journée !

*oh ruh-VWAHR, mah-DAHM! bon zhoor-NAY*

Goodbye! Have a good day!

**A:**

Merci, vous aussi !

## ⑥ Casual Goodbye & Good Night — Salut, Bonne nuit

**A:**

Salut, Hugo ! À demain !

*sah-LÛ, ü-GOH! ah duh-MÊ*

Bye, Hugo! See you tomorrow!

**B:**

Salut ! À bientôt !

*sah-LÛ! ah byê-TOH*

Bye! See you soon!

**A:**

Bonne nuit, Chloé ! Dors bien !

*bon NWEE, klo-AY! dor BYÊ*

*mair-SEE, voo-zoh-SEE*

Thanks, you too!

Good night, Chloé! Sleep well!

**B:**

Merci, toi aussi !

*mair-SEE, twah oh-SEE*

Thanks, you too!

## Key Phrases at a Glance — Phrases clés

The formal way (with *vous*) is for strangers, shops, hotels, work and anyone older; the informal way (with *tu*) is for friends, family, children and people your own age in relaxed settings. *Ça va ?* works with both.

| SITUATION              | FORMAL                      | INFORMAL                     |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Hello (daytime)        | Bonjour                     | Salut / Bonjour              |
| Hello (evening)        | Bonsoir                     | Salut / Bonsoir              |
| How are you?           | Comment allez-vous ?        | Ça va ? / Comment vas-tu ?   |
| Fine, thanks. And you? | Très bien, merci. Et vous ? | Ça va bien, merci. Et toi ?  |
| Goodbye                | Au revoir                   | Salut / À bientôt / À demain |

| ANSWERING "HOW ARE YOU?" | PRONUNCIATION           | MEANING       |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Super !                  | <i>sü-PAIR</i>          | Great!        |
| Très bien.               | <i>tray BYĔ</i>         | Very well.    |
| Bien, merci.             | <i>BYĔ, mair-SEE</i>    | Fine, thanks. |
| Comme ci, comme ça.      | <i>kom SEE, kom SAH</i> | So-so.        |
| Pas terrible.            | <i>pah tay-REE-bluh</i> | Not great.    |
| Mal.                     | <i>mahl</i>             | Bad.          |

## Tu or vous? — The Formal / Informal Split

French has two words for "you". *Vous* is polite and formal (it also means "you" for more than one person); *tu* is friendly and informal. English has just "you", so this is new, but the rule of thumb is simple: **when in doubt, use vous**. Nobody is offended by being addressed too politely, and if a French speaker wants you to switch, they'll suggest it: *On peut se tutoyer ?* ("Can we say *tu* to each other?"). Notice that *Ça va ?* is neutral and works for everyone.

## Survival Phrases — Si vous ne comprenez pas

*Four phrases every beginner needs. You'll use them in every chapter of this course.*

| FRENCH                           | PRONUNCIATION              | ENGLISH               |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Je ne comprends pas.             | zhuh nuh kō-PRĀ pah        | I don't understand.   |
| Répétez, s'il vous plaît.        | ray-pay-TAY, seel voo PLAY | Please repeat that.   |
| Plus lentement, s'il vous plaît. | plü lāt-MĀ, seel voo PLAY  | Slower, please.       |
| Parlez-vous anglais ?            | par-lay-voo-ză-GLAY        | Do you speak English? |

## Vocabulary — Vocabulaire

*20 key words and phrases from this chapter. French nouns have a gender, masculine or feminine, which shows in the little word before them: le / un (masculine) and la / une (feminine). Learn the little word together with the noun. The only nouns in this chapter are the titles monsieur and madame.*

| # | FRENCH     | SAY IT   | ENGLISH         | TYPE   | NOTE                            |
|---|------------|----------|-----------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | bonjour    | bō-ZHOOR | hello, good day | phrase | until early evening; bon + jour |
| 2 | bonsoir    | bō-SWAHR | good evening    | phrase | a greeting, not a goodbye       |
| 3 | salut      | sah-LÜ   | hi / bye        | phrase | informal, hello and goodbye     |
| 4 | bonne nuit | bon NWEE | good night      | phrase | only when going to bed          |

| #  | FRENCH          | SAY IT                 | ENGLISH              | TYPE     | NOTE                                         |
|----|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------|
| 5  | au revoir       | <i>oh ruh-VWAHR</i>    | goodbye              | phrase   | <i>literally "until the seeing again"</i>    |
| 6  | à bientôt       | <i>ah byě-TOH</i>      | see you soon         | phrase   | <i>à = until, to</i>                         |
| 7  | à demain        | <i>ah duh-MĚ</i>       | see you tomorrow     | phrase   |                                              |
| 8  | merci           | <i>mair-SEE</i>        | thank you            | phrase   | <i>merci beaucoup = thank you very much</i>  |
| 9  | s'il vous plaît | <i>seel voo PLAY</i>   | please (formal)      | phrase   | <i>informal: s'il te plaît</i>               |
| 10 | de rien         | <i>duh RYĚ</i>         | you're welcome       | phrase   | <i>also: je vous en prie (formal)</i>        |
| 11 | pardon          | <i>par-DŎ</i>          | sorry / excuse me    | phrase   | <i>for bumping into someone</i>              |
| 12 | excusez-moi     | <i>ek-skü-zay-MWAH</i> | excuse me            | phrase   | <i>to get attention or ask for something</i> |
| 13 | oui             | <i>wee</i>             | yes                  | phrase   |                                              |
| 14 | non             | <i>nŏ</i>              | no                   | phrase   | <i>nasal: don't say the n</i>                |
| 15 | bien            | <i>byě</i>             | well, fine           | adv      | <i>Ça va bien.</i>                           |
| 16 | mal             | <i>mahl</i>            | badly                | adv      | <i>Ça va mal.</i>                            |
| 17 | très            | <i>tray</i>            | very                 | adv      | <i>très bien = very well</i>                 |
| 18 | et              | <i>ay</i>              | and                  | word     | <i>the t is silent: "Et vous ?"</i>          |
| 19 | monsieur        | <i>muh-SYUH</i>        | Mr / sir / gentleman | noun, m. | <i>abbreviated M. · un monsieur</i>          |
| 20 | madame          | <i>mah-DAHM</i>        | Mrs / madam / lady   | noun, f. | <i>abbreviated Mme · une dame</i>            |

**Real French Tip — Always Say Bonjour**

In France, greeting people when you walk into a shop, a café, a bakery, a doctor's waiting room or a lift is expected: say *Bonjour* (or *Bonsoir*) before you ask for anything. Starting straight in with "Un café, s'il vous plaît" can feel abrupt, and the same goes for saying *Au revoir* and *Merci* as you leave. You'll often add *Madame* or *Monsieur* without a surname: *Bonjour, Madame*. Between friends and family, people often kiss on the cheeks (*faire la bise*), and in a formal or work setting a handshake is usual. *Mademoiselle* is now rarely used, and *Madame* is the safe choice for any adult woman.

### Quick Grammar Note — Bonjour but Bonne nuit

Notice the two forms: *bon jour* / *bon appétit*, but *bonne nuit* / *bonne soirée* / *bonne journée*. The adjective *bon* ("good") changes its ending to agree with the gender of the noun: *jour* is masculine, *nuit*, *soirée* and *journée* are feminine. You don't need to understand this yet: just learn the phrases as they are. The system behind it arrives in later chapters.

### A First Look at the Verb Behind "Ça va ?"

"How are you?" uses the verb *aller* ("to go", literally "how do you go?"). You'll meet it fully later, but here are its forms so that *Comment allez-vous ?*, *Comment vas-tu ?* and *Ça va ?* make sense:

| WHO                             | ALLER         | SAY IT            |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| je (I)                          | je vais       | zhuh VAY          |
| tu (you, informal)              | tu vas        | tü VAH            |
| il / elle / on (he / she / one) | il va · ça va | eel VAH · sah VAH |
| vous (you, formal or plural)    | vous allez    | voo-zah-LAY       |

## Try It Yourself — Exercices

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. It's 8 a.m. and you meet your neighbour, Madame Dubois. What do you say?

▼ Show answer

Bonjour, Madame Dubois ! (You'd use *vous* with a neighbour you don't know well.)

2. You bump into a friend. Say hello and ask how they are.

▼ Show answer

Salut ! Ça va ? (or: Salut ! Comment vas-tu ?)

3. Your boss asks "Comment allez-vous ?" Reply that you're very well and ask the same back.

▼ Show answer

Très bien, merci. Et vous ?

4. It's 8 p.m. and you arrive at a restaurant. How do you greet the staff?

▼ Show answer

Bonsoir, Madame / Monsieur ! (*Bonsoir*, not *bonjour*, in the evening.)

5. A friend is leaving and you'll see them tomorrow. What do you say?

▼ Show answer

Salut ! À demain !

6. A shop assistant speaks quickly and you don't follow. Ask them to slow down and repeat.

▼ Show answer

Répétez, s'il vous plaît. Plus lentement, s'il vous plaît. (You can add: Je ne comprends pas.)

### Coming Up in Chapter 2

You can now greet people and say goodbye. Next you'll **introduce yourself**: your name, how to say "nice to meet you", and how to ask someone else's name.