

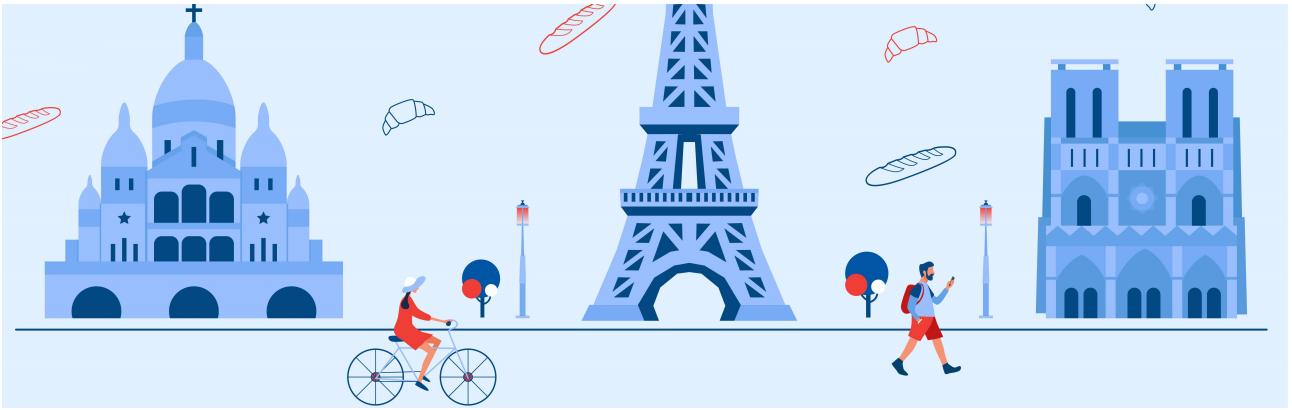
Published course notes



French for speakers of English

LEVEL 1 - Foundations of French

<https://ouicommunicate.com/>



## CHAPTER 1

### 1. Four Reference Sounds

We all know that the way we **pronounce** French is very different from English. The manner in which we make these sounds determines how good our **accent** will be to the ears of native speakers.

Due to the complexity of the task, acquiring a native-like accent is rarely the focus of any language lesson and will not be the purpose of this E-book either.

We will however focus on the **pitfalls** and **difficulties** that speakers of English usually encounter when learning French. We will start with **four reference sounds** symbolised by each of these pictures:



The **four pictures** above will be used as **references**, as we learn about the link between letters and sounds in French.

1. I..... as in ski
2. A..... as in apple
3. E..... as in nest
4. O..... as in box

These **four sounds** find an almost exact equivalent in British English and constitute our first two important facts about French:

1. Some **letters** only represent **one sound** in French.
2. Some French **sounds** are almost **identical** to English.

## 2. Two predictable letters: a / i

English has the inconvenience of having **several sounds** attached to one letter or combination of letters.

1. James / January / Japan / Again / Start
2. Cough / Touch / Found / Ghoul

The **examples** above show us that “a” or “ou” don't **reliably** tell the **reader** how the words are meant to sound.

In French, the “a” and the “i” are always linked to **one sound** each. This means that when the reader encounters a word containing either of these **letters** (alone), they will sound as in “apple” or “ski”.

Practice pronouncing the following:

- |                       |                          |                       |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. La <b>a</b> table. | 3. La <b>a</b> vitamine. | 5. La <b>a</b> rime.  |
| 2. L' <b>a</b> mi.    | 4. La <b>a</b> limite.   | 6. La <b>a</b> pizza. |

Tip from the teacher:

Speakers of English will have to pay particular attention to “sharpen” their “a” and their “i” and to resist the temptation of pronouncing familiar words in an English way.

For example, when saying “animal” or “active”!

### 3. Pronouncing the “o” in “Box”

The letter “o” in French sounds **close** to the sound in “**box**”, making it quite a **predictable** letter. The mouth will be more **narrowed-down** than in English but the principle remains the same: it is a short round sound.

Practice pronouncing the following:

- |                       |                      |                       |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. La <b>tomate</b> . | 3. La <b>colle</b> . | 5. La <b>police</b> . |
| 2. La <b>pomme</b> .  | 4. <b>Stop</b> .     | 6. <b>Dollar</b> .    |

There is a **second sound** which is linked to the letter “o”, which is rather determined by the **muscles** of the mouth than an arbitrary decision. The good news for us, is that it is **instinctive** to do and not usually a problem.

This second sound is a lot more “**closed**” and rhymes with “**château**”.

- |                      |                     |                      |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. La <b>moto</b> .  | 3. Le <b>vélo</b> . | 5. Le <b>piano</b> . |
| 2. La <b>photo</b> . | 4. Le <b>polo</b> . | 6. <b>Soprano</b> .  |

Do you notice how **awkward** it would be to pronounce these words with an **open** “o”? It would be quite an **effort** to try to say these words in any other way!

#### 4. Pronouncing the “e” in “Nest”

Lastly, we have the sound “e” in “nest” which is a sound whose importance could not be overemphasized, since it will play a **crucial role** later on when we look at certain **past tenses** and for the **plural**.

Pronouncing it is not usually a problem for speakers of English since we have this sound in many words such as “**b**etter, **n**ever, **r**ed...”

However, this sound can be represented by **different letters** in French and only rarely by the letter E as a stand-alone letter.

Some frequent words which do so are the following:

- |                        |                        |                       |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Mer <b>e</b> credi. | 3. Le <b>e</b> stival. | 5. Le <b>e</b> rbe.   |
| 2. La <b>e</b> r.      | 4. Mer <b>e</b> ci.    | 6. L' <b>e</b> hiver. |

Some sure ways the **recognize** this sound is when the “e” has an accent towards the left OR when it is followed by a **double** consonant.

- |                          |                      |                         |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. La m <b>è</b> re.     | 4. La f <b>ê</b> te. | 7. Derri <b>è</b> re.   |
| 2. Le fr <b>è</b> re.    | 5. La b <b>ê</b> te. | 8. Belle.               |
| 3. La cass <b>e</b> tte. | 6. Cay <b>e</b> nne. | 9. La fin <b>e</b> sse. |

Tip from the teacher:

The accent on an “e” can never be ignored in French - if it's there, it has a valid reason to be. (é è ê)

When saying “i” (merci, joli...) don't add a “j” after the “i” as in “The bee, the fee...” - We want to do a nice short “i” that we cut off without prolonging by a “j”.

## 5. The sound of the Plural

Building on what we have **seen** so far, we will now look at how the sound of “**nest**” plays a crucial role in the **plural**.

You might already know that “**the**” translates to “**le**” or “**la**” in French. All words are either **feminine** (la) or **masculine** (le).

- |              |                    |
|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. The table | 1. <b>La</b> table |
| 2. The piano | 2. <b>Le</b> piano |

In English, once we put words in the **plural**, we add an “**s**” which can be **heard** when we speak: *the tables*, *the pianos*.

French does the exact **opposite**: we change the “**Le/La**” and add a **silent S** to the words.

- |               |                      |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 1. The tables | 1. <b>Les</b> tables |
| 2. The pianos | 2. <b>Les</b> pianos |

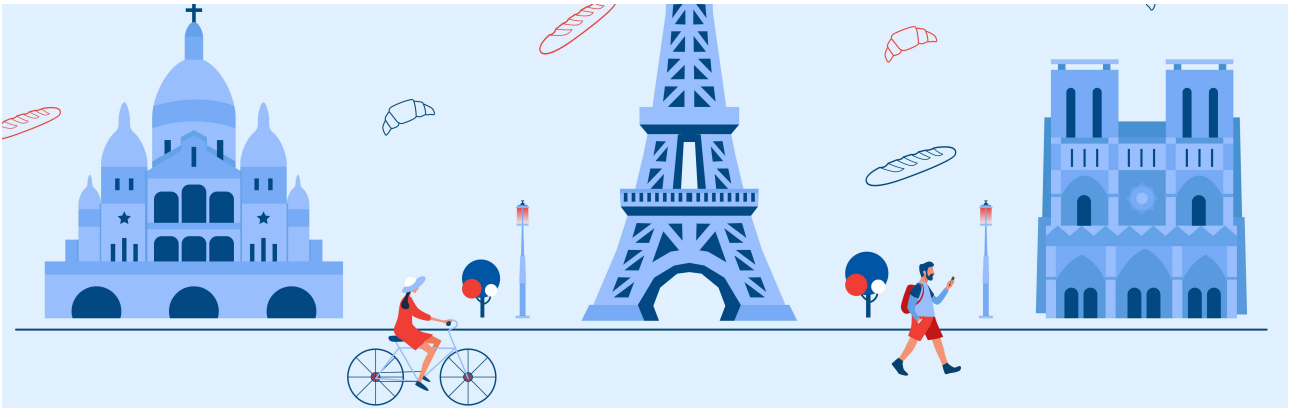
We can appreciate how **important** it will be to properly do the sound “**les**”, since it is that sound which will **signal** that there is “more than one”.

Practice the following plurals:

- |                          |                        |                          |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. <b>Les</b> festivals. | 3. <b>Les</b> pommes.  | 5. <b>Les</b> ministres. |
| 2. <b>Les</b> sopranos.  | 4. <b>Les</b> limites. | 6. <b>Les</b> verbes.    |

Tip from the teacher:

Speakers of English have a natural tendency to say “**Lay**” instead of “**les**”. Be sure not to follow with a “**j**” - just as we saw with “**i**”.



## CHAPTER 2

### 1. The most important sounds of all

As we continue to lay down the **foundations** of good quality French, we must now turn our attention towards arguably the most **important** sounds of all: **the sounds è / e / é**.

These little sounds deserve all our **attention** from the very beginning, since they actually contain meaningful **information**.

Think of it as a palette of **colours**:

è	E	é
---	---	---

Sounds are a bit like a **colour**: if it is too **bright** or too **dark**, it is no longer the exact colour (or sound) we want.

As an experiment, say “**dark**” while gradually **opening** your lips. If you open too **wide**, you reach a point where you are no longer making the correct sound for us to **understand** “dark”.

The **three sounds** represented in this palette are ones that will have important **consequences** in various aspects of French and must be learned well from the outset.

## 2. The neutral sound E

What we'll call the “neutral E” is the sound we achieve when relaxing all the muscles in our face and lips.

The closest sound we have in English is the so-called “Schwa”, which we represent in dictionaries by the symbol /ə/.

It is the sound as in: *butter, love, money, mother...*

The English version of this sound is more “open” while in French the lips are more closed.

- |              |                     |                      |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Le frère. | 4. Je parle.        | 7. Le festival.      |
| 2. Le père.  | 5. Je marche.       | 8. Le ministre.      |
| 3. Le verbe. | 6. Je ne parle pas. | 9. Je ne marche pas. |

As we can see, the neutral sound E has several crucial functions:

- It is used to communicate that there is one item of a certain thing: *one brother, one father, one verb...*
- It helps people understand that the action is happening in the present tense: *I am speaking, I am walking...*
- It plays a part in negative sentences: *I am not speaking...*

Tip from the teacher:

Pronouncing your “neutral E” will be one of the most important things when speaking French. Make sure it is very distinct from é and è. It will serve you later when using other tenses.



### 3. The sound é

The **reason** this sound is so **important** is that it is used in **conjugation**.

If your “é” isn't **distinct** enough from your “è” it might cause some **confusion** as to which past tense you are in.

Let's look at some examples:

- |                              |                       |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Je jou <b>ais</b>         | 1. I was playing      |
| 2. J' <b>ai</b> jou <b>é</b> | 2. I have played      |
| 3. Je <b>vais</b> jouer      | 3. I am going to play |
| 4. Je jouer <b>ais</b>       | 4. I would play       |
| 5. Je jouer <b>ai</b>        | 5. I will play        |

Each of these **5 examples** relies on the **correct** pronunciation of the sounds [e / é / è] in order to be properly **understood**.

In English, the **closest** sound to “é” can be found in “give, sit, win...”

Practice pronouncing the following:

- |                            |                               |                        |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Le dé <b>jeu</b> ner.   | 4. Je pré <b>f</b> ère.       | 7. Je se <b>r</b> ais. |
| 2. La vé <b>r</b> ité.     | 5. J' <b>é</b> tai <b>s</b> . | 8. Le thé <b>é</b> .   |
| 3. Le télé <b>é</b> phone. | 6. Je se <b>r</b> ai.         | 9. Le café <b>é</b> .  |

Even though these examples contain **advanced tenses** of conjugation, they show us how **important** it is to take on board that these sounds do play a **major part** of French. Correcting these mistakes **later** is often **harder** than doing it right from the start !

Tip from the teacher:

Here also, we must resist the temptation of adding a “j” at the end. We don't say “Je seray”, “Le caféy” or “Le théy”.

### 3. Distinguishing “u” / “ou”

The letter **u** has the advantage of only being linked to **one sound** in French. Provided it is not used in combination with another letter, it will be very **predictable**.

Let's read the following:

1. Julie.
2. La surprise.
3. Jules.
4. La musique.
5. Le pull.
6. Les dunes.

Closely **linked**, we have the **combination** of letters “**ou**” which is the **tightest** sound in French which the lips must do. Think of an **owl** going “ooh-ooh” - that is what we are aiming for!

These two letters **together** always create the same sound.

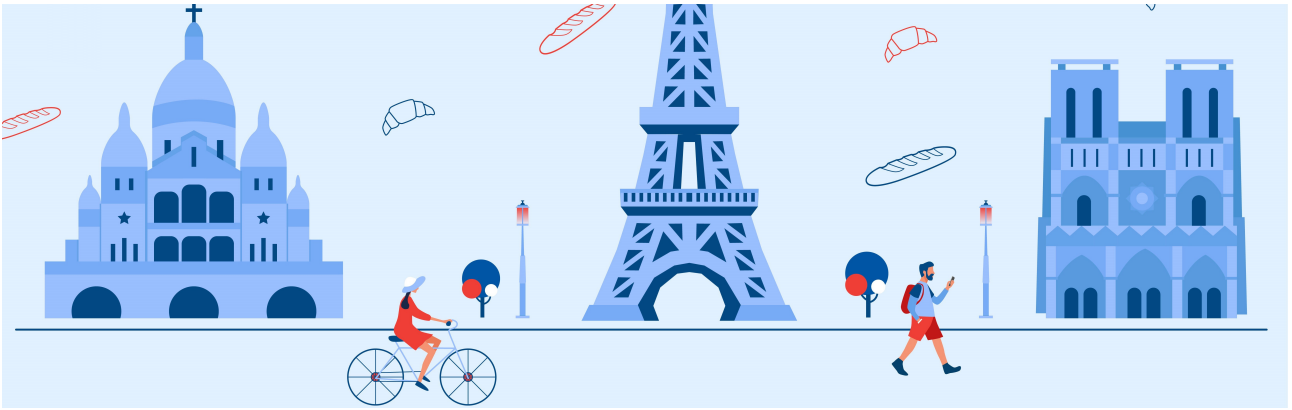
1. La route.
2. La bouche.
3. Voulez-vous.
4. La course.
5. S'il vous plait.
6. La joue.

### 4. Adding “a” and “u”

As we saw with the example of “**ou**” above, French letters **combine** to create **new** sounds. This is also the case for “**au**” and “**eau**” which gives us the **same** sound as the “**o**” in “photo”.

Read the following examples:

1. Le châte**au**.
2. Ja**u**ne.
3. La cha**u**ssure.
4. Le chape**au**.
5. Le taure**au**.
6. Une a**u**to.



## CHAPTER 3

### 1. Understanding French verbs

All French verbs follow the **same system**: we add a word **ending** which tells the listener (or reader) which **tense** we are in.

English uses this system too, such as for the past tense:

1. I want a hot-dog.
2. I want**ed** a hot-dog.

The fact of adding “**ed**” tells people that the action is in the **past**.

The only difference is that French does this for **all tenses** and not just for the past. This means that there is a certain “**ending**” to be added for the present, the future, the past...and have to be learned.

### 2. Verbs have Names

Verbs are words which we use to describe **actions** that are happening now, happened in the past, will happen or might happen.

Their appearance **changes** all the time, following the tense they are in. Just look at the verb “**to give**” in different tenses:

1. I am **giving** some money.
2. I have **given** some money.
3. I **gave** some money.

We have 3 **different** appearances for the “**action of giving**”. But what do we actually *call* the action of giving? What is the **name** of this verb?

In English, it's usually “**to + verb**”.

The name of the action of giving is “**to give**”.

The name of the action of having is “**to have**”.

We call the name of the verb the **Infinitive**. It is the verb when it is not in any tense and just **refers to an action** without telling when it is happening.

Tip from the teacher:

It will be crucial for your learning of French to properly understand what an “Infinitive” is. Infinitives will be our starting point when we use verbs in various tenses.

They are the “raw” form of the verb when they just “name” the action and don't yet say *when* the action is happening.

### 3. Looking at our first verb names

For various historical reasons, it came to be that French verbs now fit into **groups**. We can classify the verbs according to which group they belong to.

We will start by the largest of all the **4 verb groups**, the so-called **ER verbs**.

An example of an **ER verb** is “**parler**” which means “to speak”. “Parler” is what we call an “**infinitive**” because it is not yet ready to be used in a sentence. We still have to put it in a certain tense, depending on when the “action of speaking” is happening.

#### 4. Using our first verb in the Present tense

Let's take “**parler**” (to speak) and use it in a sentence which translates to “I speak English”.

At this stage, we can't simply say “*Je parler anglais*” because the infinitive “**parler**” isn't yet ready. We still have to **process** it and put it in the present tense.

The way we do this is to firstly take off “**ER**” (which is only there to tell us that we are looking at an **infinitive**)

This is the 2-step process:

1. Take the “ER” off.
2. Use “parl” and add the **ending** for the present tense.

The verb “**to speak**” in the Present tense looks like this:

JE	parle	I speak
TU	parles	You speak
IL/ELLE	parle	He/She speaks
NOUS	parlons	We speak
VOUS	parlez	You speak
ILS/ELLES	parlent	They speak

We can repeat the process with the verb “**marcher**” (to walk) and see that the results will be exactly the same:

JE	marche	I walk
TU	marches	You walk
IL/ELLE	marche	He/She walks
NOUS	marchons	We walk
VOUS	marchez	You walk
ILS/ELLES	marchent	They walk

Tip from the teacher:

Only 2 of the 6 endings can actually be heard. We must write them, but not say them, even the “ent” of ILS/ELLES is silent.

Remember that the “o” in NOUS matches the “o” of the ending -ons.

The “ez” of “VOUS” makes exactly the same sound as the “é” which we saw in Chapter 2.

## 5. Regular verbs and Irregular verbs

If it was **only** a matter of taking off -ER and not worry about anything else, it would be quite **easy**.

We saw **two verbs** that acted in this way (parler, marcher) but all of them don't work so easily. Some verbs will be more **unpredictable** than others and will require of us to remember that they are **different**.

Just as the verb “**to see**” unpredictably becomes “**I saw**” in the past, so do some French verbs.

100% regular	Change of the stem	Irregular
Marcher Parler Danser ...	Appeler Répéter Acheter Espérer ...	Aller /

These **3 boxes** show us the one verb that's **irregular** (Aller), the verbs that have a **change** in their **stem** and those that are **regular**.

## 6. The one Irregular verb: Aller

Saying “I am going” or “You are going” in the present tense doesn't work in the same way as “parler” or “marcher”, the reason being that Aller is **irregular**. It has to be learned **separately**.

The conjugation of ALLER looks like this:

JE	vais	I	go
TU	vas	YOU	go
IL/ELLE	va	HE/SHE	goes
NOUS	allons*	WE	go
VOUS	allez*	YOU	go
ILS/ELLES	vont	THEY	go

Tip from the teacher:

Notice how NOUS/VOUS seem more logical? They often form their own little subgroup which we will encounter elsewhere as well.

\* We “link” NOUS/VOUS/ILS/ELLES by means of a “Z” when leading towards a vowel. This is a compulsory part of French pronunciation!

## 7. The verbs that change their stem

We have seen that **ER verbs** are relatively **simple** to use in the Present tense: We take off “**ER**” and add on **endings**.

However, if we **compare** one of those “easy” verbs with the verb **APPELER**, we will see that there is **something more**: the **letter E** will be affected and the **stem** will **change**.

The **extra L** which is added to the **letter E** does **two things**:

1. It shows the way we **pronounce** this verb.
2. It impacts the way we **read** the verb. (E + double consonant)

## 8. Comparing DONNER and APPELER

JE	donne	appelle*	extra L
TU	donnes	appelles*	extra L
IL/ELLE	donne	appelle*	extra L
NOUS	donnons	appelons	
VOUS	donnez	appelez	
ILS/ELLES	donnent	appellent*	extra L

\* **Extra L** : J'appelle, tu appelles, il/elle appelle, ils/elles appellent.

The **good news** is that it is quite **instinctive** to pronounce “J'appelle” with an “**elle**” = the **sound è**.

It would indeed be quite hard to say the same with a **neutral E sound**. In this sense, the **spelling** reflects the **natural way we speak**.

Only **Nous** and **Vous** don't follow suit. They don't take on a double letter.

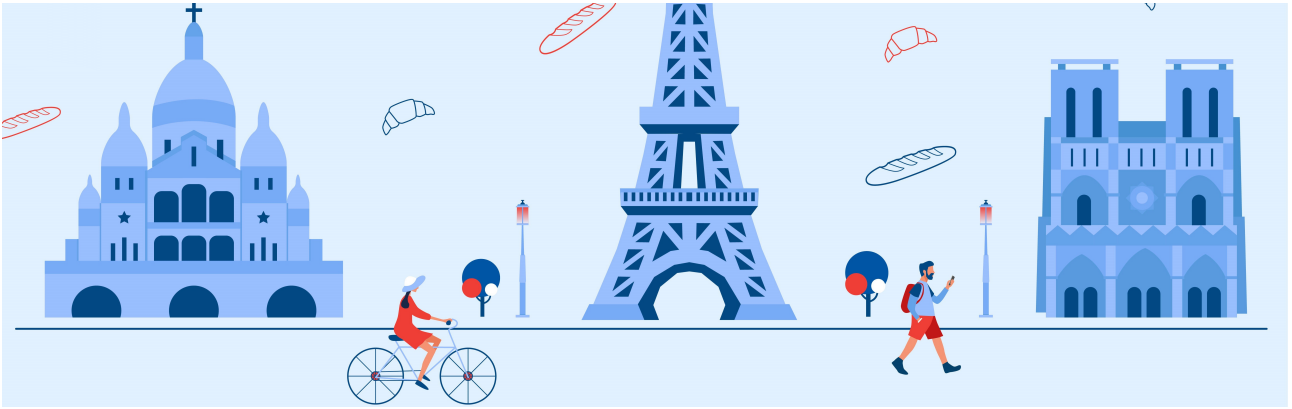
## 9. Other similar cases

The **doubling of a letter** is **not the only way** we mark that the **E** has changed sounds. Sometimes it can be the **accent** on the letter itself. Let's look at other examples:

	ACHETER	CONSIDÉRER	JETER
JE	achète	considère	jette
TU	achètes	considères	jettes
IL / ELLE	achète	considère	jette
NOUS	achetons	considérons	jetons
VOUS	achetez	considérez	jetez
ILS / ELLES	achètent	considèrent	jettent

The pronouns **NOUS** and **VOUS** **don't change** from the **infinitive**.





## CHAPTER 4

### 1. Further rules of pronunciation

As well as the sounds *within* the words, we will have to pay attention to the sounds *between* the words.

Just as we aren't supposed to say “A oval” in English but “An oval”, there are rules that govern the way we *link up* words in French.

We already saw the case of “Nous (Z) allons” and “Vous (Z) allez” in which we added an extra (Z) *between* them.

This *rule* will be applied each time these *pronouns* are followed by a *vowel*:

#### AIMER

NOUS	aimons
VOUS	aimez
ILS	aiment
ELLES	aiment

#### TO LIKE

WE	like
YOU	like
THEY	like
THEY	like

#### ORGANISER

NOUS	organisons
VOUS	organisez
ILS	organisent
ELLES	organisent

#### TO ORGANIZE

WE	organize
YOU	organize
THEY	organize
THEY	organize

## 2. Back to the Plural

The **plural** is another case in which we must do the “**linking sounds**” between words.

Any type of plural **article** + **vowel** must be followed by a (Z) sound.

To the person listening to you, they serve the purpose of **confirming** that we do indeed mean “**several**” - not doing them would be **confusing** to whomever you are speaking with.

Let's read the following:

- |                 |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Les arbres.  | 3. Des enfants. | 5. Mes habitudes. |
| 2. Les oranges. | 4. Ses amis.    | 6. Tes yeux.      |

## 3. Disappearing Letters

**Between** certain words, there are letters that must **disappear** to help with the smoothness of the pronunciation.

For example, if the **first** word ends in “**a**” or “**e**”, the **second** word can't start with a vowel.

Therefore, a combination such as “**Le arbre**” can't ever exist in French. We will need to correct it and write “**L'arbre**”. The same thing applies with **JE + verb** and any 2-letter word ending in “**e**”.

INCORRECT	CORRECT
1. Je ne <b>aime</b> pas	1. Je n' <b>aime</b> pas
2. La <b>école</b>	2. L' <b>école</b>
3. Le <b>accident</b>	3. L' <b>accident</b>

#### 4. The combination à + le

A further **combination** which doesn't exist in French is **à + le**, which combines to become **"au"** .

In English, it would be the equivalent of saying **"at + the = au"**.

There is a total of 3 similar cases:

INCORRECT	CORRECT
1. Je vais <b>à le</b> restaurant.	1. Je vais <b>au</b> restaurant.
2. Je pense <b>à les</b> vacances.	2. Je pense <b>aux</b> vacances.
3. Les jouets <b>de les</b> enfants.	3. Les jouets <b>des</b> enfants.

The combination **"à + la"** is perfectly **correct** and requires no change.

Ex: Je vais à la cuisine.

#### 5. The combination o + i

When the letters **"oi"** appear together in any French word they make the sound **"wa"**.

Practice reading the following words:

- |                  |                     |                    |
|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <b>Moi</b> .  | 4. <b>Droite</b> .  | 7. <b>Trois</b> .  |
| 2. <b>Toi</b> .  | 5. <b>Bonsoir</b> . | 8. Le <b>roi</b> . |
| 3. <b>Noir</b> . | 6. <b>Boire</b> .   | 9. <b>Etoile</b> . |

Notable exception: The word **"oignon"**.

## 6. Closed doors and open doors

The last point in this chapter will aim to **avoid** a very frequent mistake coming from English: the pronunciation of “**en**” “**on**” “**an**” “**in**” and similar **variants** containing the letter “**m**”.

Each of these combinations of letters produce a **new sound**, in which the letter “**n**” should **not** be heard.

This means that we should read [**in**] or [**an**] as **symbols** that are used to represent this new sound.

Let's read some examples:

- |                         |                      |                     |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Le <b>matin</b> .    | 4. La <b>tante</b> . | 7. <b>Brun</b> .    |
| 2. L' <b>oncle</b> .    | 5. Le <b>nom</b> .   | 8. <b>Londres</b> . |
| 3. <b>Intéressant</b> . | 6. <b>Lundi</b> .    | 9. <b>Encore</b> .  |

In **none** of these words should we hear the “**n**”.

Only when these combinations are followed by a **vowel** or **double consonant** do we read them as separate letters.

- |                      |                     |                      |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. <b>Année</b> .    | 4. <b>Bonne</b> .   | 7. <b>Brune</b> .    |
| 2. <b>Trombone</b> . | 5. <b>Nomade</b> .  | 8. <b>Innocent</b> . |
| 3. <b>Inactif</b> .  | 6. <b>La lune</b> . | 9. <b>Animal</b> .   |

Tip from the teacher:

We could see the consonant as a type of “closed door” which locks the nasal sounds together. When there is a vowel, it can be seen as an open door which allows us to read them as separate letters.



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