

SOME TERMS FROM FRENCH LANGUAGE USED IN ENGLISH

So you think you can't speak French and it's going to be really hard to learn? It is estimated that around 70% of the words used in the English language are the same or very similar to the *French* equivalent words. The problem is more in the pronunciation but here are just a very few of the most commonly used words on both sides which we hope you'll find useful:

à gogo	In abundance
à la [...]	In the manner of/in the style of [...]
à la carte	Literally – on the menu; in restaurants it refers to ordering individual dishes rather than a fixed-price meal
à la mode	Idiomatic: in the style; in the United States, the phrase is used to describe a dessert with an accompanying scoop of ice cream (example: apple pie à la mode). However, in French, it is a culinary term usually meaning cooked with ale and some carrots and onions (example: boeuf à la mode)
Adieu	Farewell; literally means “to God,” it carries more weight than “au revoir” (“goodbye,” literally “Until re-seeing”); it is definitive, implying you will never see the other person again; depending on the context, misuse of this term can be considered as an insult, as one may wish for the other person's death or say that you do not wish to see the other person ever again while alive
Adroit	Dexterous, skilful, clever, in French: habile, as a “right-handed” person would be using his “right” hand, as opposed to his left one with which he would be “gauche” meaning “clumsy”
Aide-mémoire	“Memory aid”; an object or memorandum to assist in remembrance, or a diplomatic

	paper proposing the major points of discussion
Aperitif	A before-meal drink (in colloquial French, it is shortened as “apéro”). In French, it means either the drink or food (amuse-gueules) taken before a meal
Armoire	Type of cabinet; wardrobe
Art nouveau	A style of decoration and architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It takes a capital in French (Art nouveau)
Attaché	A person attached to an embassy; in French it is also the past participle of the verb attacher (= to fasten, to tighten, to be linked)
Au contraire	On the contrary
Au fait	Being conversant in or with, or instructed in or with
Au pair	A young foreigner who does domestic chores in exchange for room and board.
Avant-garde	Applied to cutting-edge or radically innovative movements in art, music and literature; figuratively “on the edge,” literally, a military term, meaning “vanguard” (which is a corruption of avant-garde) or “advance guard,” in other words, “first to attack” (antonym of arrière-garde)
Ballet	A classical type of dance

Beau geste	Literally “beautiful gesture”, a gracious gesture, noble in form but often futile or meaningless in substance
Belle Époque	A period in European social history that began during the late 19th century and lasted until World War I
Blasé	Unimpressed with something because of overfamiliarity, jaded
Bon appétit	Literally “good appetite”; enjoy your meal
Bon vivant	One who enjoys the good life, an epicurean
Bon voyage	Literally “good journey”; have a good trip!
Bourgeois	Member of the bourgeoisie. The word used to refer to shopkeepers living in towns in the Middle Ages. Now the term is derogatory, and it applies to a person whose beliefs, attitudes, and practices are conventionally middle-class
Bouquet	A handful of flowers
Bric-à-brac	Small ornamental objects, less valuable than antiques; a collection of old furniture, china, plates and curiosities
Brunette	Brown-haired girl. For brown-haired man, French uses brun and for a woman brune. “Brunette” is rarely used in French, unless in old literature, and its masculine form, “brunet” (for a boy), is almost unheard of

Bureau	Office. Also means “desk” in French
Cache	Collection of items of the same type stored in a hidden or inaccessible place (such as in an oubliette)
Café	Coffee shop (also used in French for “coffee”)
Carte blanche	Unlimited authority; literally “white card” (i.e. blank cheque)
Chaise longue	A long chair for reclining; (also rendered chaise lounge or chase lounge by folk etymology).
Charlatan	A person who is a fraud, a fake, a hoaxer, a deceiver, a con artist.
Chauffeur	Driver
Chic	Stylish
Chignon	A hairstyle worn in a roll at the nape of the neck
Cliché	Literally negative; trite through overuse; a stereotype
Clique	A small exclusive group of friends
Comme ci,	“Like this, like that”; so-so, neither good nor bad. In French, use. couci-couça.

commeça	
Communiqué	Literally communicated; an official communication
Concierge	Receptionist at a hotel or residence
Contretemps	An awkward clash; a delay
Cortège	A funeral procession; in French has a broader meaning and refers to all kinds of processions
Coup de grâce	The final blow that results in victory (literally “blow of mercy”), historically used in the context of the battlefield to refer to the killing of badly wounded enemy soldiers, now more often used in a figurative context.
Couture	Fashion (usually refers to high fashion)
Couturier	Fashion designer (usually refers to high fashion, rather than everyday clothes design)
Crèche	A nativity display; more commonly (in the United Kingdom), a place where children are left by their parents for short periods in the supervision of childminders; both meanings still exist in French
Crème de la crème	Best of the best, “cream of the cream,” used to describe highly skilled people or objects. A synonymous expression in French is “fin du fin”

Critique	Critical analysis or evaluation of a work, or the art of criticizing.
Cul-de-sac	Dead-end street
Debacle	An event or enterprise that ends suddenly and disastrously, often with humiliating consequences.
De rigueur	Required or expected, especially in fashion or etiquette
Décolleté	A woman's garment with a low-cut neckline that exposes cleavage, or a situation in which a woman's chest or cleavage is exposed; décolletage is dealt with below.
Décor	The layout and furnishing of a room
Decoupage	Decoration with cut paper
Depot	A deposit (as in geology or banking), a storehouse, or a transportation hub (bus depot)
Déjà vu	“Already seen”: an impression or illusion of having seen or experienced something before.
Derrière	Rear; buttocks; literally “behind”
Détente	Easing of diplomatic tension

Dieu et mon droit	Motto of the British Monarchy; appears on a scroll beneath the shield of the coat of arms of Great Britain
Divertissement	An amusing diversion; entertainment
Dossier	A file containing detailed information about a person; it has a much wider meaning in modern French, as any type of file, or even a computer directory
Doyen	The senior member of a group; the feminine is doyenne
Dressage	A form of competitive horse training, in French has the broader meaning of taming any kind of animal
Droit du seigneur	“Right of the lord”: the purported right of a lord in feudal times to take the virginity of one of his vassals’ brides on her wedding night (in precedence to her new husband)
Eau de Cologne	A type of perfume, originating in Cologne, Germany; its Italian creator used a French name to commercialize it, Cologne at that time being under the control of France.
Eau de toilette	Literally “grooming water.” It usually refers to an aromatic product that is less expensive than a perfume because it has less of the aromatic compounds and is more for an everyday use.
Éclair	A cream and chocolate icing pastry
Élan	A distinctive flair or style

Engarde	“[Be] on [your] guard,” used in fencing, and sometimes mistranscribed as “on guard”
En route	On the way
Enfant terrible	A disruptively unconventional person, a “terrible child”
Entente diplomatic	A agreement or cooperation. L’Entente cordiale (the Cordial Entente) refers to the good diplomatic relationship between France and United Kingdom before the first World War.
Entrepreneur	A person who undertakes and operates a new enterprise or venture and assumes some accountability for the inherent risks
Façade	The front view of an edifice (from the Italian facciata, or face); a fake persona, as in “putting on a façade” (the ç is pronounced like an s)
fait accompli	Literally – accomplished fact; something that has already happened and is thus unlikely to be reversed, a done deal
Faux pas	“False step”: violation of accepted, although unwritten, social rules
Femme fatale	“Deadly woman”: an attractive woman who seduces and takes advantage of men for her personal goals, after which she discards or abandons them; extends to describe an attractive woman with whom a relationship is likely to result, or has already resulted, in pain and sorrow
Fiancé	Betrothed; a man/woman engaged to be married.

Film noir	A genre of dark-themed movies from the 1940s and 1950s that focus on stories of crime and immorality
Flambé	A cooking procedure in which alcohol (ethanol) is added to a hot pan to create a burst of flames, meaning “flamed” in French; also used colloquially in reference to something on fire or burned.
Fleur-de-lis	A stylized-flower heraldic device; the golden fleur-de-lis on an azure background were the arms of the French Kingdom (often spelled with the old French style as “fleur-de-lys”)
Force majeure	An overpowering and unforeseeable event, especially when talking about weather (often appears in insurance contracts)
Gaffe	Blunder
Gauche	Tactless, does not mean “left-handed” (which translates in French as “gaucher”), but does mean “left”
Genre	A type or class, such as “the thriller genre”
Grand Prix	A type of motor racing, literally “Great Prize”
Grenadier	A specialized soldier, first established for the throwing of grenades and later as elite troops
haute couture	“High sewing”: Paris-based custom-fitted clothing; trend-setting fashion

haute cuisine	Upmarket gastronomy; literally “high cooking.”
Hauteur	Arrogance; literally height
hors d’œuvre	“Outside the [main] work”: appetizer
Impasse	Deadlock
Insouciant/e	Nonchalant man/woman
Ingénu/e	An innocent young man/woman, used particularly in reference to a theatrical stock character who is entirely virginal and wholesome; L’Ingénu is a famous novella written by Voltaire.
Jeud’esprit	“Play of spirit”; a witty, often light-hearted, comment or composition
Joie de vivre	“Joy of life/living”
Laissez-faire	“Let do”; often used within the context of economic policy or political philosophy, meaning leaving alone, or non-interference
Lamé	A type of fabric woven or knit with metallic yarns
Lèsemajesté	An offense against a sovereign power; or, an attack against someone’s dignity or against a custom or institution held sacred

Liaison	A close relationship or connection; an affair. The French meaning is broader; “liaison” also means bond such as in “une liaison chimique” (a chemical bond)
Louche	Of questionable taste;
Macramé	Coarse lace work made with knotted cords
Mademoiselle	Young unmarried lady, miss; literally “my noble young lady”
Malaise	A general sense of depression or unease
Mardi gras	Fat Tuesday, the last day of eating meat before Lent
Mélange	A mixture
Mêlée	A confused fight; a struggling crowd
ménage à trois	“Household for three”: a sexual arrangement between three people
Milieu	Social environment; setting (has also the meaning of “middle” in French)
Montage	Editing
Motif	A recurrent thematic element

Mousse	A whipped dessert or a hairstyling foam; in French, means any type of foam
Né, née	“Born”: a man’s/woman’s birth name (maiden name for a woman), e.g., “Elizabeth Burton, née Taylor”
Noblesse oblige	“Nobility obliges”; those granted a higher station in life have a duty to extend (possibly token) favours/courtesies to those in lower stations
Nom de plume	Author’s pseudonym, literally “pen name; ” Originally an English phrase, now also used in France
Nouveau riche	Newly rich, used in English to refer particularly to those living a garish lifestyle with their newfound wealth
Nouvelle cuisine	New cuisine
Objet d’art	A work of art, commonly a painting or sculpture; also a utilitarian object displayed for its aesthetic qualities
Omelette	Omelette
Panache	Verve; flamboyance
Papier-mâché	Literally chewed paper; a craft medium using paper and paste
Par excellence	“By excellence”: quintessential

Pastiche	A derivative work; an imitation
Patois	A dialect; jargon
Pince-nez	Literally “pinch nose,” a type of spectacles without temple arms.
Piste	Refers to skiing
Poseur	“Poser”: a person who pretends to be something he is not; an affected or insincere person: a wannabe
Prêt-à-porter	“Ready to wear” (clothing off the shelf
Protégé/e	A man/woman who receives support from an influential mentor
Raison d’être	“Reason for being”: justification or purpose of existence
Rapport	To be in someone’s “good graces”; French for: relationship
Rapprochement	The establishment of cordial relations, often used in diplomacy
Reconnaissance	Scouting
Renaissance	Rebirth, a cultural movement in the 14-17th centuries

Reservoir	An artificial lake
Restaurateur	Restaurant owner
Retard	Translates as late, but is used as a derogative term for someone who is a slow thinker
Riposte	A quick retort in speech or action, or in fencing, a quick thrust after parrying a lunge
Role	A part or function of a person in a situation or an actor in a play
Roman à clef	“Novel with a key”: an account of actual persons, places or events in fictional guise
Roué	An openly debauched, lecherous older man
Roux	Cooked mixture of flour and fat used as a base in soups and gravies
Sabotage	Subversive destruction, from the practice of workers fearful of industrialization destroying machines by tossing their sabots (“wooden shoes”) into machinery
Saboteur	Person who commits sabotage
Sacrebleu!	“Holy Blue!” general exclamation of horror and shock; a stereotypical minced oath; very dated in France and rarely heard
Sang-froid	“Cold blood”: coolness and composure under strain; stiff upper lip

Sauté	Literally jumped; quickly fry in a small amount of oil
Savant	“Knowing”: a wise or learned person; in English, one exceptionally gifted in a narrow skill
Savoir-faire	Literally “know how to do”; to respond appropriately to any situation
Silhouette	Image of a person, an object or scene consisting of the outline and a featureless interior, with the silhouetted object usually being black
Sobriquet	Assumed name, a nickname (often used in a pejorative way in French)
soi-disant	So-called; self-described; literally “oneself saying”
soigné	Fashionable; polished
soirée	Evening party
sommelier	Wine steward
soupçon	Very small amount (In French, can also mean suspicion)
Tableau	Chalkboard; the meaning is broader in French: all types of board (chalkboard, whiteboard, notice board...); also refers to a painting or a table (chart).

Tête-à-tête	“Head to head”; an intimate get-together or private conversation between two people
télévision	Telly
Toilette	Process of dressing or grooming. Also refers in French, when plural (“les toilettes”), to the toilet room
Touché	Acknowledgment of an effective counterpoint; literally “touched” or “hit!”
trompe-l’œil	Photograph-like realism in painting; literally “trick the eye”
V	
venu/e	Invited man/woman for a show, once (“come”); unused in modern French, though it can still be used in a few expressions like bienvenu/e (literally well come: welcome) or le premier venu (anyone; literally, the first who came)
vin de pays	Literally “country wine”; wine of a lower designated quality than appellation contrôlée
vinaigrette	Salad dressing of oil and vinegar; diminutive of vinaigre (vinegar)
vis-à-vis	“Face to face [with]”: in comparison with or in relation to; opposed to. From “vis” (conjugated form of “voir,” to see). In French, it’s also a real estate vocabulary word meaning that your windows and your neighbours’ are within sighting distance (more precisely, that you can see inside of their home)

voilà!	Literally “see there”; in French it can mean simply “there it is”; in English it is generally restricted to a triumphant revelation
volte-face	A complete reversal of opinion or position, about face
voyeur	Literally someone who sees; a peeping tom

