

French Accent

The Magazine of Learn French at Home

Interactive e-magazine for French learners

C'est la rentrée!

Grammar: "On" vs "Nous"

French Politics and the Environment...

**And as always: French Grammar, Exercises,
Audio Role Plays, Vocabulary, Dictations...**

Éditorial

“*C’est la rentrée !*” At the end of August, foreigners living in France will hear that expression so often that we thought it useful to offer a brief explanation of what the French mean by it, and how important it is for them. It is so important that the *rentrée de septembre*, which means the resumption of all activity after the long summer break, is very comparable to January 1st as the first day of a new year, or of a new era. Even for those French who haven’t taken a real vacation because of *la crise*, this summer hiatus was felt to be a necessary pause, at least for the brain, and *la rentrée* will unleash the same reactions as it does every year. A sense of anger when they realize what the Sarkozy administration has prepared for them, for example within its environment programmes, as we explain in our article on Politics in France. A taste of bitterness at the idea of going back to work, school, or unemployment. A lingering fear when faced with a future of uncertainty. All of this might very well lead to a set of strikes, a national sport that the French are so good at it!

But, at the same time, *la rentrée* also triggers a taste of something much more positive: the real pleasure of seeing the country spring to life again, in particular in the areas of art, culture, TV and sports. This is part of the way the French tackle *la rentrée*, with a set of mixed feelings, one of them being this sense of a new beginning, or even a boost, no matter how differently it may occur or manifest itself from one person to another.

To give to those of our readers who are looking to improve their French another type of boost, we have continued in this issue to provide in-depth analyses of several expressions, such as the difference between *on* and *nous* in everyday spoken language, or other trendy words which are very much *tendance* or *improbables* these days in France. And we also want to encourage them to discover the best of the French, and Belgian, culture, through a few suggestions of things to see, visit or read.

La rentrée is a very interesting time of the year to observe these and many other aspects of French culture. Don’t miss out on the many ramifications of this phenomenon, which is an integral part of the French experience, with all of its sometimes very strange peculiarities.

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Le français interactif — “On”: Friendlier than “Nous”

The tiny word *on* carries great importance in every-day spoken French. For Anglophones learning French, *on* is frequently misunderstood or ignored because many think that *on* only expresses its English equivalent of ‘one’, while many of those who under-

stand that it’s also an alternative to using *nous* hesitate to use it because of the false belief that it’s more formal. To make matters worse, French grammar books seldom deal with this issue.

In this article and the scenarios that follow, I would like to clarify the usage of

on and to encourage you to use it as frequently as the French do.

On, the personal pronoun expressing ‘We’:

Contrary to what many French learners think, using *on* does not carry a formal or even pompous con-

notation, as is sometimes the case with the English ‘one’. In fact, it’s a very convivial word. If you say *on préfère le thé que le café*, you’re not actually saying “one prefers tea to coffee”, but you’re simply saying “we prefer tea to

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French Basic Scenario

Julie et son mari sont en vacances chez des amis en Ardèche pendant deux semaines. Julie et Carine, la maitresse de maison, font un plan d’activités pour aujourd’hui.

Julie and her husband are on holiday at their friend’s place in Ardèche for 2 weeks. Julie and Carine, the hostess of the house, are planning the activities for today.

Julie : Aujourd’hui, on peut peut-être aller voir les Gorges de l’Ardèche. Tu aimes aller là-bas ?

Julie: Today, perhaps we can go see the Grand Canyon of Ardèche. Do you like going there?

Carine : Avec mon mari et les enfants, on y est allés la semaine dernière. Et les grottes ? On a de belles grottes en Ardèche !

Carine: With my husband and the children, we went there last week. How about the caves? We have beautiful caves in Ardèche!

Julie : Ah oui, pourquoi pas ? Il ne fait pas très beau aujourd’hui. On peut passer la journée dans les grottes !

Julie: Oh yes, why not? It’s not a very nice day out today. We can spend the day in the caves!

Carine : Oui, elles sont vraiment magnifiques. On pourra déjeuner dans un restaurant sur place. En fin d’après-midi, on ira faire les courses pour le repas du soir.

Carine: Yes, they are really beautiful. We will be able to eat lunch in a restaurant on site. At the end of the afternoon, we will go food shopping for the evening meal.

Julie : Qu’est-ce qu’on mange ce soir ?

Julie: What are we eating this evening?

Carine : On pense faire un barbecue !

Carine: We’re thinking of having a barbecue!

Julie : Ah sympa ! On t’aidera. On achètera la bière...


Julie: Oh nice! We will help you. We will buy some beer...

Carine : En général, ici, avec les barbecues, on boit du Rosé de Provence. Est-ce que vous l’aimez ?

Carine: Generally, here, with barbecues, we drink Rosé de Provence. Do you like it?

Julie : Mais bien sûr ! On aime tout, on n’est pas difficile et surtout, on ne veut pas changer vos habitudes!

Julie: But of course! We like everything, we’re not fussy and especially, we don’t want to change your habits!

Carine : Oh, on peut faire  remment mais le petit rosé est un délice. On va parler avec les hommes et voir ce qu’ils pensent de notre plan ?

Carine: Well, we can always do something different, but this rosé is a real treat. We’re going to speak with the men and see what they think about our plan?

Julie : On y va ! 

Julie: Let’s go!

