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Learn French at Home, created in 2004 by Céline and Vincent Anthonioz, has helped thousands of French learners, each with very different learning goals. The main ingredient of our success lies in our team of professional and friendly native French teachers who take the time to personalize every single lesson according to the student’s personal and professional goal. Our main purpose is to deliver true quality service to each student.

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À bientôt !

Céline
French Grammar Basics and Beyond

Easy Explanations in English of French Grammar with 200 Exercises and Solutions

Céline Van Loan and Annick Stevenson

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By learning a new language I discover mine,
I analyse it more, I understand much better
my own grammar.

Nancy Huston
is a Canadian novelist who writes
primarily in French and translates
her own works into English
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FOREWORD

Why a French grammar book in English?

While writing this French grammar book, I put myself in our students' shoes who needed to grasp the complexities of the grammar. Many of them came to us nervous about the idea of having to learn it. French grammar should not be a stumbling block to learning the language, and one way to get over the fear is to teach it with easy and straightforward explanations.

Most grammar books are in French, which can be quite challenging or discouraging. Therefore, I wanted to write an attractive and accessible grammar reference in English for our students in order to facilitate comprehension.

We included most of the answers to the exercises at the end of book. We could not add the answers to all the questions, especially to the ones that ask the students to answer freely or to translate some sentences.

This French basic grammar book is intended for beginner to intermediate learners (French levels from A1 to B1). The objective is for the students to learn and exercise their understanding of the basic elements of the language as well as some cultural aspects. Step by step, together with a teacher or on their own, French learners can construct the sentences and gain plenty of practice.

A first edition was published in 2011. This is a new revised edition.

Céline Van Loan
1. Bonjour!

Bonjour, bonsoir...

When you walk into a boutique or a small shop in France, the people in the place will acknowledge you by saying **bonjour** (all day) or **bonsoir** (after 6:00 p.m.). Of course, in return you should do the same. If you walk into a place filled with women only, you could say **Bonjour Mesdames**, in a place filled with men and women **Bonjour Mesdames et Messieurs** (or simply **Messieurs-dames**). If you’re facing one person only, it is customary to say **Bonjour Monsieur or Bonjour Madame**, if you’re greeting a younger female person (18 years or less), you should say **Bonjour Mademoiselle**.

Au revoir, bonne journée, bonne soirée, bonne nuit...

When you leave a shop or a restaurant during the day, you should always automatically say **au revoir** (good bye) or **bonne journée** (have a good day!). In the evening, you must say **bonne soirée** (good evening). And when you leave someone at night, you say **bonne nuit** (good night).

À bientôt, à plus tard !...

Here is a list of common expressions you say when you leave people, and when to use them:

– À **bientôt** ! = See you soon! Used when you are going to see that person again one day but you’re not sure when! The equivalent of "see you later."

– À **samedi, à mercredi, à ce soir, à demain, à la semaine prochaine, à demain soir, à midi**, etc. = See you Saturday, Wednesday, tonight, tomorrow, next week, tomorrow evening, at lunch time, etc. When you are indicating the specific day and time when you will meet again, just start the phrase with à + any specific day or time.

– À **tout à l’heure** ! = See you later today! It is said when you are going to see that person again in just a few hours within that same day. The younger kids and adults may just say **à tout** and will pronounce the t at the end of the word.

– À **plus tard** ! = See you later! It is used when you are unsure if you’re going to see that person again or not but most likely will. The younger kids and adults may just say **à plus** and will pronounce the s at the end of the word. In text messages (sms), they simply write: À+

– À **une prochaine** ! = See you next time! Same as above.

– À **un de ces quatre** ! = See you one of these days! You use it when you are not sure when you will see someone again.

Les bises (kisses on the cheek)

Until recently, each time you encountered someone you know, you had to be prepared to give two to four **bises** to the other person. However, since the social distancing imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, this habit is evolving, and who knows what will happen in the future?
EXERCISE

What do you say:

1. When you enter a boulangerie in the morning? ________________________________

2. When you enter a fromagerie in which the fromagère (a woman) is alone? ________________

3. When you enter a bank in which you are welcomed by the banquier (a man)? ________________

4. When you leave a friend that you will meet again in the afternoon? ________________________

5. When you enter a café in the evening? ________________________________

6. When you leave a shop during the day? ________________________________

7. When you leave a teacher that you will meet again the following Wednesday? ________________

8. When you leave a restaurant at the end of the afternoon? ______________________________

9. When you leave your friends at night before going home to bed? ____________________________

10. When you leave a colleague that you will see very soon? ________________________________
2. Spelling and the alphabet

It is important to first learn the alphabet to the point where you can easily spell your contact details. The exercises have to be done orally with your teacher.

EXERCISES

1) Say the alphabet to the teacher:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

2) Spell the following words:

Maison
Architecte
Rasoir
Queue
Grange
Rêve
Bouteille
Bâtir
Vendre
Courir

3) Difficult syllables with the vowels – Learn to pronounce the following to your teacher:

eu: jeune; bleu
au: automne; faux
an: maman; charmant
en: vent; lentille
ain: pain; vain
in: vin; malin

ui: oui; puits
ou: roux; loup
on: ronde; longue
eau: chapeau; tableau
oi: poisson; croire
3. *Être* (to be)

The verb *être* is an irregular verb. Study and memorize the way it is conjugated according to the different subject pronouns:

First let’s learn what the subject pronouns are:

*Je* = I
*Tu* = You (the familiar form)
*I* = He
*Elle* = She
*On* = One/We (more informal than using *nous*)
*Nous* = We
*Vous* = You (plural form)
*Ils* = They (masculine)
*Elles* = They (feminine)

**Note:** A mixed group of males and females is referred to as masculine, even if there are 10 women and only one man. You will have to use *ils*.

**Tu and vous**

There are two different words to express "you" in French: *tu* and *vous*.

**Tu** is the familiar "you." It expresses a certain closeness and informality. Use *tu* when speaking to a friend, a colleague, a relative or a child.

Example:
Salut Jean, *tu es content d’être en vacances?* = Hi, Jean, are you happy to be on holidays?

**Vous** is the formal form of "you." It is used when one has to express respect or in formal situations.

Example:
Bonjour Monsieur Desbois, *vous êtes ici pour quelques semaines?* = Good morning Mr Desbois, you are here for a few weeks?

The conjugation of *être*

*Je suis.* = I am. *Tu es.* = You are. *Il/elle/on est.* = He/she/one is (or: we are; see next page).
*Nous sommes.* = We are. *Vous êtes.* = You are. *Ils/elles sont.* = They are. *C’est* = This is.
On and nous

There are 2 ways to express "we" = on or nous. On is more casual than nous. The French have a tendency of using "on" more than "nous" in the everyday language. It is conjugated at the 3rd person just like il or elle.

Example:
Avec mes copains, on est allés au cinéma hier. = With my friends, we went to the movies yesterday.

On also means "one" or "everyone." It is used when expressing facts, generalities or obligations.

Examples:
En France, on boit un apéritif avant le repas. = in France, one (we) drinks an aperitif before the meal.
On doit avoir un visa de travail pour travailler en France. = One (we) must have a work visa to work in France.

Les nationalités (Nationalities)

Nouns and adjectives of nationality agree with the gender and the plural (feminine/masculine, singular/plural); if the subject is feminine, you need to add an e to the nationality and if the subject is plural, you need to add an "s."

Examples:
Elle est française. = She is French.
Il est anglais. = He is English.
Nous sommes américaines. = We are American (females).
Elles sont anglaises. = They are English (females).
Ils sont anglais. = They are English (males).

Quelques adjectifs (A few adjectives)

An adjective is a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. In French, an adjective is usually placed after the noun, except for the shorter ones. Just like nationalities, they must agree with the gender and the plural*.

Examples of adjectives:
petit = small/short
grand = tall
content = happy
drôle = funny
triste = sad
méchant = mean
marié = married
fatigué = tired

*In most cases, the feminine form of the adjective is formed by adding an "e."
The plural is formed by adding an "s."
Examples:
Mon mari est grand. = My husband is tall.
Ma femme est grande. = My wife is tall.
Mes enfants sont grands. = My children are tall.
Mes filles sont grandes. = My daughters are tall.

With some adjectives, the feminine form is irregular.
Examples:
beau becomes belle = handsome, beautiful
mignon becomes mignonne = cute
gentil becomes gentille = nice
gros becomes grosse = big, fat.

You'll learn more about the adjectives on page 81.

The more usual negative construction (ne... pas)

In order to make a sentence negative, you need to add ne and pas around the verb.
Example:
Je ne suis pas grande. = I am not tall.
Note: in everyday speech the French will often drop the ne: Je suis pas grande.

You'll learn more about the negative forms on page 102.
EXERCISES

1) Fill in the blanks with the proper form of the verb être:

1. Bonjour, je _______ Caroline Dupuy.
2. Et vous ? Qui _______ vous ?
3. Bonjour, je _______ Roger Carlson !
4. Je _______ belge.
5. Et vous, _______ vous anglais ?

2) Translate the following sentences into French:

1. I am tired = _____________________________
2. I am happy = _____________________________
3. You are busy (tu form) = _____________________________
4. I am not Irish = _____________________________
5. You are not English (vous form) = _____________________________
6. I am a student = _____________________________
7. We are married = _____________________________
8. He is nice = _____________________________
9. She is short = _____________________________
10. They are tall = _____________________________
11. She is funny = _____________________________
12. They are cute = _____________________________

3) Complete the following sentence by filling in the blanks with the proper form of the verb être:

Paul _______ grand, il _______ sympa et il _______ professeur d’anglais. Je _______ son meilleur ami.
Nous _______ dans la même école. Paul _______ français, il n’_______ pas dans ma classe, il _______ le grand frère de Camille. Il _______ très gentil et drôle, je _______ heureux d’_______ son ami.
### 4) What is the nationality and occupation of the following people? (Write out complete sentences):

*Example: Céline/française/professeure de français: Céline est Française et elle est professeure de français.*

1. Pierre/suisse/chanteur: ________________________________
2. Yves/français/cuisinier: ________________________________
3. Vous/chinois/photographe: ________________________________
4. Caroline/italienne/professeure: ________________________________
5. Nous/russes/mannequins: ________________________________
6. Ils/espagnols/maçons: ________________________________
7. Vous/indien/informaticien: ________________________________
8. Tu/américain/homme d'affaires: ________________________________
9. Elle/suédoise/pharmacienne: ________________________________
10. Marc/belge/dessinateur: ________________________________

### 5) Answer the following questions:

1. Vous êtes grand(e) ou petit(e) ? ________________________________
2. Vous êtes blond(e) ou brun(e) ? ________________________________
3. Vous êtes marié(e) ou célibataire ? ________________________________
4. Vous êtes étudiant(e) ou professeur(e) ? ________________________________
5. Vous êtes sportif(ve) ou artiste ? ________________________________
6. Vous êtes drôle ou sérieux(se) ? ________________________________

### 6) Make the following sentences negative:

1. Je suis dans le jardin. ________________________________
2. Vous êtes américain. ________________________________
3. Je suis grand. ________________________________
4. Elle est blonde. ________________________________
5. Tu es dans le nord de la France. ________________________________
6. Vous êtes à l’école. ________________________________
7. Nous sommes écossais. ________________________________
8. Il est intelligent. __________________________________________
9. Je suis avocat. __________________________________________
10. Je suis célibataire. ________________________________________
11. Nous sommes divorcés. ____________________________________
12. Il est sympa. ____________________________________________
13. Elles sont ici ! __________________________________________

7) Translate the following sentences into French:

1. They are not happy (men). __________________________________
2. We are not happy (men and women). ________________________
3. I am not short (woman). __________________________________
4. I am not short, I am tall (a man is speaking). ________________
5. I am not short, I am tall (a woman is speaking). ______________
6. We are not short (men). __________________________________
7. We are not sad, we are happy (men and women). _____________
8. They are not shy (men). __________________________________
9. They are not shy (women). _________________________________
10. You are not glad (men, plural). _____________________________
11. You are not glad (woman, singular). _________________________
12. He is not tired. _________________________________________
13. They are not tired (men). _________________________________
14. I am not blond, but (mais) I am brown (woman). ____________

8) Complete the following sentences with the feminine equivalent:

Example: Marc est un artiste américain. Lucy ______________

Lucy est une artiste américaine.

1. Monsieur Yamamoto est un client important. Madame Lauder ______________
2. Gérard est un acteur français. Sophie _____________________________
3. Carlos est un chanteur cubain. Célia _____________________________
4. Paolo est un champion de ski italien. Anna _________________________
5. Thomas Dutronc est un chanteur français célèbre. Mylène Farmer________
C’est vs Il est

To introduce or present something or a person, the French will use either c’est (this is), il/elle est (he/it/she is).

The plural of c’est is ce sont = these are.
The plural of il/elle est is ils/elles sont = they are.

The negative form of c’est = ce n’est pas (singular); ce ne sont pas (plural) = these aren’t.
The negative form of il/elle est is ils/elles ne sont pas = they aren’t.

The choice between c’est or il est is not always straightforward. Most of the time, c’est or ce sont are followed by a noun (c’est une voiture allemande = it’s a German car; c’est un livre = it’s a book; c’est Julien = it’s Julien).

Note: Il/elle is usually followed with an adjective (see below).

In order to make sure that it’s clear, let’s understand in which situations we use one or the other:

C’est is used:

1) To identify or introduce a person or a thing

Examples:
– Qu’est-ce que c’est ? = What is it?
C’est un arbre exotique. = It is an exotic tree (identifying something).
– Qui est-ce ? = Who is it?
C’est Charles, mon ami. = This is Charles, my friend (introducing someone).
– Qui sont-ils ? = Who are they?
Ce sont des Américains. = They are Americans.

2) To announce oneself (for example on the telephone)

Examples:
Allo, c’est Carole ! = Hello, this is Carole!
Est-ce que c’est Carl ? = Is it Carl?
– Non, ce n’est pas Carl ! = No, it is not Carl!

3) To make a general statement

Examples:
Les vacances, c’est bien ! = Holidays, they’re great!
Le travail, c’est difficile ! = Work, it’s difficult!
Note: If you have a possessive adjective such as mon, ma, mes, then you would always use c’est:
C’est mon chien. = This is my dog.
C’est ma voiture. = This is my car.

Il/elle est is used:

1) To describe something or someone in particular.

Note: il/elle is usually followed by an adjective.
Examples:
Carine ? Elle est grande, blonde et intelligente. = Carine? She is tall, blond hair and intelligent.
Il est sympa, le professeur. = He is nice, the teacher.

2) When talking about someone’s profession, nationality, religion or family status. In this case, you
don’t add an article (take out the un, une, des, le, la, les).
Examples:
Carla ? Elle est informaticienne. = Carla is a computer specialist.
Elle est française. = She is French.
Elle est célibataire. = She is single.
Il est catholique. = He’s catholic.

BUT you will add an article if you add a descriptive adjective:
Elle est une informaticienne intelligente. = She is an intelligent computer specialist.
Il est un écrivain célèbre. = He is a famous writer.

Note: In French, when the nationality is a substantive, we start it with a capital letter, but we don’t do
it when it is an adjective. When speaking about a French man or a French woman, you just say: un Français,
une Française. You don’t need to specify un homme français or une femme française.
Examples:
L’homme qui a obtenu ce travail est français. = The man who got that job is French.
C’est un Français qui a obtenu ce travail. = It is a Frenchman who got that job.
Cette femme qui fait la pizza ce soir est Italienne. = This woman who makes the pizza tonight is Italian.
Ce soir, la pizza est préparée par une Italienne. = Tonight, the pizza is prepared by an Italian woman.
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