

Chapter 1

Getting Down to Basics

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 - ▶ Telling time
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Being able to use cardinal and ordinal numbers and recognizing parts of speech are essential French skills. Knowing these basics will help you perfect your oral and written French.

Using Numbers

Numbers are one of the most basic and useful parts of language. In addition to simple counting, you need *cardinal numbers* for communicating dates, time, prices, phone numbers, addresses, and so much more. You use *ordinal numbers* to express the number of a floor or the order of a person in a race or competition.

Counting with cardinal numbers

Cardinal numbers are for counting, and the low numbers are easy. You may already know them backwards and forwards, but if not, all you need to do is memorize them. The higher numbers get a bit more complicated. Check out the following list of French numbers from 0 to 1 billion.

0 zéro	71 soixante et onze
1 un(e)	72 soixante-douze
2 deux	73 soixante-treize
3 trois	74 soixante-quatorze
4 quatre	75 soixante-quinze
5 cinq	76 soixante-seize
6 six	77 soixante-dix-sept
7 sept	78 soixante-dix-huit
8 huit	79 soixante-dix-neuf
9 neuf	80 quatre-vingts
10 dix	81 quatre-vingt-un
11 onze	89 quatre-vingt-neuf
12 douze	90 quatre-vingt-dix
13 treize	91 quatre-vingt-onze
14 quatorze	92 quatre-vingt-douze
15 quinze	93 quatre-vingt-treize
16 seize	94 quatre-vingt-quatorze
17 dix-sept	95 quatre-vingt-quinze
18 dix-huit	96 quatre-vingt-seize
19 dix-neuf	97 quatre-vingt-dix-sept
20 vingt	98 quatre-vingt-dix-huit
21 vingt et un	99 quatre-vingt-dix-neuf
22 vingt-deux	100 cent
30 trente	101 cent un
31 trente et un	200 deux cents
33 trente-trois	201 deux cent un
40 quarante	320 trois cent vingt
41 quarante et un	1,000 mille
45 quarante-cinq	1,001 mille un
70 soixante-dix	

50 cinquante	1,100 mille cent/onze cents
51 cinquante et un	2,000 deux mille
56 cinquante-six	100,000 cent mille
60 soixante	1,000,000 un million
61 soixante et un	2,000,000 deux millions
68 soixante-huit	1 billion un milliard

Note the following about cardinal numbers:

- ✓ The conjunction **et** (*and*) is used only for the numbers 21, 31, 41, 51, 61, and 71. For all other compound numbers through 99, use a hyphen. **Un** becomes **une** before a feminine noun.

trente et un hommes (*31 men*)

trente et une femmes (*31 women*)

- ✓ **Quatre-vingts** and the plural **cents** drop the *-s* before another number but not before another noun.

quatre-vingt-trois (deux cent trois) pages (*83 [203] pages*)

but

quatre-vingts (deux cents) pages (*80 [200] pages*)

- ✓ The indefinite article **un/une** does not precede **cent** and **mille**. **Million**, **milliard** (*billion*), and **billion** (*trillion*) are nouns. They are preceded by **un** (or another number) and are followed by **de** before another noun.

Cent (mille) planètes (*100 [1,000] planets*)

Un million de planètes (*1,000,000 planets*)

Deux milliards de dollars (*2 billion dollars*)

- ✓ **Mille** does not change in the plural.

Six mille étoiles (*6,000 stars*)

- ✓ **Mille** is often written as **mil** in dates.

Il est né en deux mil douze. (*He was born in 2012.*)



With numerals and decimals, French uses commas where English uses periods, and vice versa.

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>
6,000	6.000
0.75	0,75
\$14.99	\$14,99

Expressing ordinal numbers

You use *ordinal numbers* — those used to express numbers in a series — far less frequently than cardinal numbers, but they still have some very important applications in everyday life. Table 1-1 presents the French ordinal numbers.

<i>English Ordinal</i>	<i>French Ordinal</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
1st	premier, première	1^{er}, 1^{ère}
2nd	deuxième, second(e)	2^e
3rd	troisième	3^e
4th	quatrième	4^e
5th	cinquième	5^e
6th	sixième	6^e
7th	septième	7^e
8th	huitième	8^e
9th	neuvième	9^e
10th	dixième	10^e

The following list outlines what you must remember when using ordinal numbers in French.



- ✓ **Second(e)** usually replaces **deuxième** in a series that does not go beyond two.

son deuxième livre (*his second book* – there are more than two)

son second livre (*his second book* – he wrote only two)

- ✓ **Premier** and **second** are the only ordinal numbers to have a feminine form: *première* and *seconde*, respectively.

le premier garçon (*the first boy*)

la première fille (*the first girl*)

la seconde pièce (*the second play*)

le second acte (*the second act*)

- ✓ Except for **premier** and **second**, ordinal numbers are formed by adding **-ième** to the cardinal numbers. Silent e is dropped: **quatrième**.
- ✓ Note the **u** added to **cinquième** and the **f** that changes to **v** in **neuvième**.

Setting the Date

Knowing French calendar words and how to say what day it is makes it easier for you to make appointments, break dates, and plan outings.

Naming the days of the week

The days of the week end in **-di**, except for Sunday, which begins with those two letters.



In French, the week starts on Monday, not Sunday, and you don't capitalize the names of days. Here are **les jours de la semaine** (*the days of the week*):

- ✓ **lundi** (*Monday*)
- ✓ **mardi** (*Tuesday*)
- ✓ **mercredi** (*Wednesday*)
- ✓ **jeudi** (*Thursday*)
- ✓ **vendredi** (*Friday*)
- ✓ **samedi** (*Saturday*)
- ✓ **dimanche** (*Sunday*)

If you want to know what day of the week it is, ask **Quel jour sommes-nous?** or **Quel jour est-ce?** You can answer such a question with any of the following phrases followed by the day of the week: **Nous sommes**, **On est**, or **C'est**.

C'est mardi. (*It's Tuesday.*)

To say that something happens on a certain day, you just use that day with no preposition or article.

Je vais à la banque lundi. (*I am going to the bank on Monday.*)

To say that something generally happens on a certain day, you use the definite article.

Je vais à la banque le vendredi. (*I go to the bank on Fridays.*)

Here are some other useful words related to days and weeks:

- ✔ **hier** (*yesterday*)
- ✔ **aujourd'hui** (*today*)
- ✔ **demain** (*tomorrow*)
- ✔ **la semaine dernière (passée)** (*last week*)
- ✔ **cette semaine** (*this week*)
- ✔ **la semaine prochaine** (*next week*)

Using the months of the year

You need to know the names of the months in French when writing a letter or making a date. This list shows you the months of the year, which, like the days of the week, aren't capitalized.

- ✔ **janvier** (*January*)
- ✔ **février** (*February*)
- ✔ **mars** (*March*)
- ✔ **avril** (*April*)
- ✔ **mai** (*May*)
- ✔ **juin** (*June*)
- ✔ **juillet** (*July*)
- ✔ **août** (*August*)

- ✓ **septembre** (*September*)
- ✓ **octobre** (*October*)
- ✓ **novembre** (*November*)
- ✓ **décembre** (*December*)

To say that something happened or will happen in a given month, use the preposition **en**.

J'ai acheté ma voiture en juin. (*I bought my car in June.*)

Giving the date

Every event takes place on a particular date. So if you want to invite or if you are invited, you need to know how to express the date. The first thing to know is the question:

Quelle est la date (d'aujourd'hui)? (*What's the date [today]?*)

To answer, you can say **Nous sommes**, **On est**, or **C'est** followed by **le** + cardinal number + month + year (optional). Notice that the day comes before the month and its number has to be preceded by the definite article **le**. For example:

C'est (lundi) le 3 [trois] mai. (*It's [Monday] May 3.*)

On est le 22 [vingt-deux] février 2010 [deux mil dix].
(*It's February 22, 2010.*)



Use a cardinal number to say the date in French except when you're talking about the first day of the month. For that you use **premier**.

C'est le 1^{er} [premier] décembre. (*It's December 1st.*)



In French, when dates are written as numbers, they follow the sequence day/month/year, which may prove confusing to English speakers — especially for dates below the 12th of the month. You write *February 9th* as 2/9 in English, but in French it's 9/2.

Telling Time

When writing and speaking French, knowing and telling the time is an important concept to master especially when you have an appointment or a train to catch. The first thing you need to know is how to ask what time it is: **Quelle heure est-il?** The response may be one of the following:

Il est midi (minuit). (*It's noon [midnight].*)

Il est . . . heure(s). (*It's . . . o'clock.*) (use *heure* only for 1 o'clock)



In France, the 24-hour system is used in public announcements and timetables. So the morning hours are 1 to 12, and the afternoon and evening hours (expressed in full numbers) are 13 to 24. To convert back to a 12-hour clock, subtract 12 from any time greater than 12.

To express the time after the hour (but before half past the hour), the number of minutes is added. To express the time for the second half of the hour, the number of minutes is subtracted from the next hour. Use **et** (*and*) only with **quart et demi(e)**. You can also express time numerically (as shown in the third example here).

Il est une heure et demie. (*It's 1:30.*)

Il est cinq heures moins vingt. (*It's 4:40.*)

Il est quatre heures quarante. (*It's 4:40.*)

If you want to ask at what time an event is taking place, use **à quelle heure**.

À quelle heure est la téléconférence? (*[At] What time is the conference call?)*

To answer, you just start with that event and add **à** and the time.

La téléconférence est à midi. (*The conference call is at noon.*)

The following chart shows how to express time after and before the hour.

<i>Time</i>	<i>French</i>
1:00	une heure
2:05	deux heures cinq
3:10	trois heures dix
4:15	quatre heures et quart
5:20	cinq heures vingt
6:25	six heures vingt-cinq
7:30	sept heures et demie
7:35	huit heures moins vingt-cinq or sept heures trente-cinq
8:40	neuf heures moins vingt or huit heures quarante
9:45	dix heures moins le quart or neuf heures quarante-cinq
10:50	onze heures moins dix or dix heures cinquante
10:55	onze heures moins cinq or dix heures cinquante-cinq
noon	midi
midnight	minuit



To express half past noon or midnight, use **demi**.

Il est midi (minuit) et demi. (*It's half past noon [midnight].*)

Demie is used to express *half past* with all other times.

Il est trois heures et demie. (*It's 3:30.*)



In French, an **h** (short for **heures**) is used where English uses a colon.

14h00 (*2:00 p.m.*)

8h30 (*8:30 a.m.*)

Reviewing the Parts of Speech

Language is made up of parts of speech — nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on. Each of these building blocks has its own function and rules, and understanding them is key to using them correctly, particularly with a foreign language. If you don't know the difference between the parts of speech in English, you probably won't understand them in French, either.

Identifying things with nouns and articles

Nouns are people, places, things, and ideas. They're the concrete and abstract things in your sentences, the *who* and the *what* that are doing something or having something done to them. Take a look at the example:

Marie veut vraiment visiter les **musées** célèbres. (*Marie really wants to visit the famous museums.*)



Unlike English nouns, all French nouns have a gender (masculine or feminine) and a number (singular or plural). All words you use to qualify or describe a noun must agree with the noun with respect to gender. We discuss this subject in more detail in Chapter 2.

An article is a very particular part of speech. You can use it only with a noun. French has three kinds of articles:

- ✓ Definite articles: **le, la, l', les** (*the*)
- ✓ Indefinite articles: **un, une** (*a/an*), **des** (*some*)
- ✓ Partitive articles: **du, de la, de l', des** (*some*)

Replacing with pronouns

Pronouns are easy to understand; they replace nouns. That is, pronouns also refer to people, places, things, and ideas, but they let you avoid repeating the same words over and over. The following list outlines the pronouns we discuss in this book.

- ✔ *Subject pronouns* (see Chapter 3) are followed by the verb expressing the main action in the sentence (*I, you, he, she, it, we, they*).

Tu es sympathique. (*You are nice.*)

- ✔ *Interrogative pronouns* (see Chapter 6) ask a question (*who, which, what, and so on*).

Qui est-ce? (*Who is that?*)

- ✔ *Direct object pronouns* (see Chapter 2) replace direct object nouns; they answer who or what the subject is acting upon. The direct object pronouns are **me, te, le, la, nous, vous, and les**.

Il te voit. (*He sees you.*)

- ✔ *Indirect object pronouns* (see Chapter 2) replace indirect object nouns; they explain to or for whom something is done. They include **me, te, lui, nous, vous, and leur**.

Il lui a écrit. (*He wrote to her.*)

- ✔ *Adverbial pronouns* (see Chapter 2) **y** and **en** have various applications that are explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

- ✔ *Reflexive pronouns* (see Chapter 3) show that the subject is acting upon itself (**me, te, se, nous, and vous**).

Elle se regarde dans le miroir. (*She is looking at herself in the mirror.*)

- ✔ *Prepositional pronouns*, also used as stress pronouns (see Chapter 5), are used after prepositions: **moi, toi, lui, elle, nous, vous, eux, and elles**.

Ils vont au cinéma sans moi. (*They're going to the movies without me.*)

Moving along with verbs

A verb is a part of speech that shows an action or a state of being. In French, as in English, verbs change from their infinitive form (in other words, they're *conjugated*) as follows:

- ✔ To agree with the person performing the action (I, you, he, she, it, we, they).

- ✔ To indicate the time when the action was performed (past, present, future).
- ✔ To indicate the mood (subjunctive, imperative, conditional, indicative) of the action.

French verbs are classified by how they're conjugated:

- ✔ Regular verbs: **-er** verbs, **-ir** verbs, and **-re** verbs
- ✔ Spelling-change verbs
- ✔ Irregular verbs
- ✔ Reflexive verbs



The *infinitive* of the verb is its “raw” form — its “to” form before it’s conjugated: **danser** (*to dance*), **finir** (*to finish*), **répondre** (*to answer*). Regular infinitives in French have three different endings, and you conjugate them according to these endings (**-er**, **-ir**, and **-re**). We give you lots more information about verbs in Chapters 3, 7, 8, and 9.

Modifying with adjectives

Adjectives may be flowery words that describe nouns.

Je veux vraiment aller en France et visiter les musées célèbres. (*I really want to go to France and visit the famous museums.*)

But adjectives are not only descriptive; they come in many other useful varieties:

- ✔ Demonstrative adjectives: **ce**, **cet**, **cette** (*this, that*), **ces** (*these, those*)
- ✔ Interrogative adjectives: **quel**, **quelle**, **quels**, **quelles** (*which*)
- ✔ Possessive adjectives: **mon** (*my*), **ton** (*your*), **son** (*his/her/its*)



Unlike English adjectives, French adjectives have masculine, feminine, singular, and plural forms so that they can agree with nouns. (Chapter 4 tells you lots of other interesting details about adjectives.)

Qualifying with adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. In the example sentence, *really* modifies the verb *want*.

Je veux vraiment aller en France et visiter les musées célèbres. (*I really want to go to France and visit the famous museums.*)

English adverbs often end in *-ly* and indicate how the action of a verb is occurring: happily, quickly, rudely. Most of these words are *adverbs of manner*. The other kinds of adverbs are

- ✓ Adverbs of frequency: **jamais** (*never*), **souvent** (*often*)
- ✓ Adverbs of place: **ici** (*here*), **partout** (*everywhere*)
- ✓ Adverbs of quantity: **beaucoup de** (*a lot*), **peu de** (*few*)
- ✓ Adverbs of time: **avant** (*before*), **demain** (*tomorrow*)
- ✓ Interrogative adverbs: **quand** (*when*), **où** (*where*)

Read Chapter 4 thoroughly to understand more about French adverbs.

Connecting with prepositions

A *preposition* is the part of speech you put in front of a noun or pronoun to show the relationship between that word and another word or phrase. Prepositions tell you how verbs and nouns fit together. Prepositions may be one word (*to*, *at*, *about*) or part of a group of words (*next to*, *in front of*, *on top of*).

Je veux vraiment aller en France et visiter les musées célèbres. (*I really want to go to France and visit the famous museums.*)

Prepositions are not like a list of vocabulary that you can just memorize. Instead, they're grammatical terms with various functions that you have to study and practice. Chapter 5 explains all about prepositions.

