

Pronunciation Guide

Here are some basic features of French pronunciation and spelling.

The French vowel sounds

Letters	Sounds like . . .	As in . . .	Examples
a, à, â	ah	bah	ça (that)
è, é, e, ê, ai, ei	eh	bet	le père (father)
é	ay (without the y sound)	bay	l'été (summer)
e	euh (unstressed)	book	je (I)
eu, œu	euh	sir (without the r)	le feu (fire)
i, î	ee	see	si (if)
o	uh	bug	donne (give)
ô, au, aux, eau	oh (without the w sound)	go	hôtel (hotel)
ou, où	ooh	who	où (where)
u	[no English vowel]	tee (but with lips rounded like oo)*	tu (you)
oi	wah		moi (me)

*To make this sound, say a word like *tee*. Then, keeping everything else still, move your lips to a rounded position (as in the word *too*).

Note, though, that *no* French vowel ever sounds exactly like a vowel in English. These are only rough approximations—in some cases, very rough ones!

There are also three *nasal vowels* in French. English doesn't have these vowels at all, so again, we can only suggest rough approximations.

Letters	As in . . .	Examples
an, an, en, en	song (without the n)	le blanc (white)
in, in, ain, ein	sang (without the n)	le vin (wine)
on, on, un, un	don't (without the n)	bon (good)

PRONUNCIATION OF NASAL SOUNDS

- * **ain/aim** Similar to the *an* sound in *hand* without pronouncing the *n*.
 pain /bread
 faim/hunger
- * **an** Similar to the nasal sound in *on* without pronouncing the *n*.
 écran/screen
 antenne/antenna
- * **en** Similar to *an*, but the mouth is rounded a little more.
 enfant/child
 cent/one hundred
- * **in/im** Similar to *ain*, but the mouth is rounded a little more.
 vin/wine
 important/important
- * **on/om** To make this sound, say first *an* then almost close the mouth to form a circle. It is similar to the nasal sound in *own*, without pronouncing the *n*.
 bon/good
 nom/name
- * **un** Similar to the nasal sound *eu*.
 un/one/a
 lundi/Monday

WHEN TWO CONSONANTS FOLLOW EACH OTHER

Consonants	Pronunciation	Examples
ch	Similar to the English <i>sh</i> .	<i>chocolat/chocolate</i> <i>chéri/darling</i>
sc	Before <i>e</i> and <i>i</i> , it is pronounced like an <i>s</i> . Before <i>a</i> , <i>o</i> , <i>u</i> , it is pronounced <i>sk</i> .	<i>scénario/scenario</i> (s) <i>scier/to saw</i> (s) <i>escaliers/stairs</i> (sk) <i>scorpion/scorpion</i> (sk) <i>sculpter/to sculpt</i> (sk)
gn	Similar to the “ny” sound in <i>canyon</i> .	<i>campagne/countryside</i> <i>signe/sign</i>
th	It is pronounced like a <i>t</i> .	<i>thé/tea</i> <i>thème/theme</i>
pn	Unlike English where, at the beginning of a word, only the <i>n</i> is pronounced, both the <i>p</i> and the <i>n</i> must be pronounced in French.	<i>pneu/tire</i> <i>pneumonie/pneumonia</i>