

Beginners' French: food and drink



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Introduction

In this free course, *Beginners' French: food and drink*, you will learn some basic vocabulary to talk about food and drink in French. You will learn how to express your likes and dislikes in relation to food, and you will learn how to order food and drinks in cafés or restaurants, and how to ask for your bill.

You will listen to French speakers in a variety of situations, and you will be provided with some skills for coping with reading texts. Cultural information throughout the course explains about customs surrounding meals and food habits in France.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course L192 [*Bon départ: beginners' French*](#).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- express likes and dislikes in relation to food and drink
- order food and drinks, and take part in simple exchanges
- pay restaurant or café bills
- demonstrate a better understanding of some food-related customs in France
- know how to approach reading longer texts

1 Food in France

In this section you will learn how to talk about food in French. In particular, you will learn how to say what food you like and dislike using the verbs *aimer* ('to like'), *adorer* ('to love'), and *préférer* ('to prefer') and the negative structure *ne ... pas* .

1.1 Talking about food in French

Many French people place a great deal of importance on food – as the British often resort to talking about the weather, French people will fill the conversation with what they had for dinner the night before or what they are thinking of cooking that evening. Despite the growth in supermarkets, most French people still buy their bread from a local baker, and often visit markets to stock up on fresh, locally produced fruit, vegetables and meat. And although the pace of modern life has certainly affected how people eat, preparing food and taking time to enjoy it remain important.

Most regions boast an impressive diversity of dishes. From *bouillabaisse* (a fish soup from Provence) to *choucroute* (a dish of sauerkraut, sausages and pork, popular in Alsace), there are dozens of dishes and drinks to try when visiting a new region. Some regional specialities, such as *foie gras* or *champagne* , have become internationally famous.



Figure 1 Le foie gras du sud-ouest

Activité 1

Task 1

Can you work out what the following French food items are? Drag the English words against the French terms they correspond to.

vegetables

ice cream

cheese
red meat
pineapple
sea food
white wine
fish
raw vegetables

Match each of the items above to an item below.

les légumes

la glace

le fromage

la viande rouge

l'ananas

les fruits de mer

le vin blanc

le poisson

les crudités

Task 2

Claudette Dupont and her husband, Paul, have invited their friends the Lenoirs and the Khalifes for dinner on Saturday. Claudette has made a list of what her guests and her husband like to eat.

Read her notes and for each name, select the item(s) that person likes.

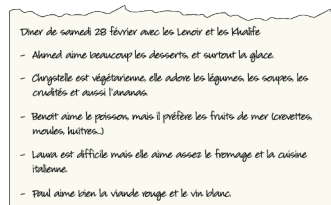


Figure 2

Question 1

Ahmed

- vegetables
- ice cream
- desserts

Question 2

Chrystelle

- cheese
- vegetables
- soups

Question 3

Benoît

- fish
- sea food
- white wine

Question 4

Laura

- cheese
- fruit
- Italian food

Question 5

Paul

- fish
- white wine
- red meat

Activité 2

Task 1

We asked some French people what they like eating: *Qu'est-ce que vous aimez manger ?* Listen to the audio track, then select the correct answers below.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 1](#)

Question 1

All the interviewees like fish.

- True.
- False.

Question 2

Maryse, Philippe and Lionel like meat.

- True.
- False.

Question 3

None of the interviewees like Italian food.

- True.
- False.

Question 4

Maryse and Philippe like seafood.

- True.
- False.

Question 5

Maryse likes cheese.

- True.
- False.

1.2 Talking about what food you like

Talking about what you like using *aimer* , *adorer* and *préférer* + *le/la/les*

To express your likes, you can use several verbs: *aimer* , *adorer* or *préférer* .

Benoît aime le poisson. Benoît **likes** fish.

Chrystelle adore les légumes. Chrystelle **loves** vegetables.

Il préfère les fruits de mer. He **prefers** sea food.

Note that you will need a definite article (*le, la, l' or les*) when using the verbs of liking with a noun:

Il aime le poisson. He likes fish.

Il aime la viande. He likes meat.

Elle adore l'ananas. She loves pineapple.

J'aime les desserts. I love dessert.

Beaucoup ('a lot'), *bien* ('rather a lot') and *assez* ('quite'), placed after the verb *aimer* , are used to say how much you like things. *Surtout* means 'above all'.

Activité 3

Now watch this video clip, in which Élisabeth and Tobias are talking about food, and select which items of food that Tobias likes (below). Don't worry if you don't know the meaning of some of these words, concentrate on recognising the sounds for now. You can then check the meaning of each word in the comment when you check your answers.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1](#)

- les courgettes
- les carottes
- les haricots verts
- les frites
- les pâtes
- le poulet
- la viande
- la sauce tomate
- la confiture
- le gruyère
- le poisson
- l'avocat
- les betteraves

Comment

Here are the translations of these words: *les carottes* (carrots); *les haricots verts* (green beans); *les frites* (chips); *les pâtes* (pasta); *le poulet* (chicken); *la viande* (meat); *la sauce tomate* (tomato sauce); *la confiture* (jam); *le gruyère* (Gruyère/hard cheese); *le poisson* (fish); *l'avocat* (avocado); *les betteraves* (beetroot).

Activité 4

Now you are going to practise saying what you like and how much you like it. Listen to the questions and the prompts. Speak in the gaps to give your answers.

Exemple

(You hear) *Vous aimez la cuisine italienne ?*

(You hear) *(Beaucoup)*

(You say) *Oui, j'aime beaucoup la cuisine italienne.*

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 2](#)

1.3 Talking about what you dislike

To talk about what you dislike, you can use the negative form of the verbs used to express what you like. To form the negative in French, use *ne* before the verb and *pas* after the verb. *ne* becomes *n'* in front of a verb starting with a vowel sound or an 'h'):

Elle n' aime pas les oignons. She doesn't like onions.

Il n' est pas français. He is not French.

You can use *beaucoup* and *du tout* with *je n'aime pas* to say how much you dislike something. If you use these words, they go after *ne ... pas* in the sentence:

Je n'aime pas du tout la viande. I don't like meat at all.

Il n'aime pas beaucoup la cuisine nord-africaine. He doesn't like North African food very much.

Note that in informal spoken French, people often omit the *ne*,

Je n'habite pas en France. → *J'habite pas en France.* (I don't live in France.)

Elle n'aime pas les sardines. → *Elle aime pas les sardines.* (She doesn't like sardines.)

Activité 5

Claudette has just found out what her guests do not like to eat. Read her notes and identify all the words and phrases which express dislike.

Dîner de samedi 28 février avec les Lenoir et les Khalife

- Ahmed aime beaucoup les desserts, et surtout la glace, mais il n'aime pas les tomates.
- Chrystelle adore les légumes mais elle n'aime pas du tout les oignons.
- Benoît aime surtout le poisson et les fruits de mer. Il n'aime pas beaucoup la cuisine nord-africaine.
- Laura est difficile mais elle aime assez le fromage et la cuisine italienne. Par contre, elle déteste les champignons.
- Paul aime bien la viande rouge et le vin blanc mais il n'aime pas du tout les cuisines exotiques.

Figure 3

Provide your answer...

Answer

You should have identified:

n'aime pas , for Ahmed

n'aime pas du tout , for Chrystelle

n'aime pas beaucoup , for Benoît

déteste , for Laura

n'aime pas du tout , for Paul.

Activité 6

Answer the following questions in the negative, using whole sentences and *ne/n'* ... *pas*, as shown in the example. Remember to put the negative elements in the correct place in your sentences.

Exemple

Il aime le poulet ? Non, il **n'** aime **pas** le poulet.

Vous êtes docteur ? Non, je **ne** suis **pas** docteur.

1. Vous êtes professeur ?
2. Ils viennent de Montréal ?
3. Vous aimez les huîtres ?
4. Il parle portugais ?
5. Vous avez 35 ans ?
6. Elle habite en Angleterre ?
7. Il est végétarien ?
8. Elles sont étudiantes ?

Provide your answer...

Answer

You should have answered as follows.

1. Non, je ne suis pas professeur.
2. Non, ils ne viennent pas de Montréal.
3. Non, je n'aime pas les huîtres.
4. Non, il ne parle pas portugais.
5. Non, je n'ai pas 35 ans.
6. Non, elle n'habite pas en Angleterre.
7. Non, il n'est pas végétarien.
8. Non, elles ne sont pas étudiantes.

Note that *n'* is used instead of 'ne' in sentences 3, 5, 6 and 7 because the verbs in question begin with a vowel or an 'h'.

Activité 7

Claudette's son, Frédéric, is a very fussy eater. There are many things he won't eat or drink. Listen to the audio track and, putting yourself in Frédéric's shoes, answer all the questions in the negative following the prompts you hear.

Exemple

(You hear) Tu aimes le café, Fred ?

(You hear) (*Say no, you do not like coffee.*)

(You say) Non, je n'aime pas le café.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 6](#)

Activité 8

Claudette would like to invite you to her dinner party. Write a short message in French to tell her what kind of food you like and dislike.

Provide your answer...

Answer

Here is one possible answer.

*J'aime beaucoup les fruits de mer. J'aime aussi le poisson. J'adore la glace.
Je n'aime pas du tout la viande rouge et je déteste les oignons. J'ai horreur
des fast-foods !*

Did you use a range of expressions from this section to express likes and dislikes?

2 Eating out in France

In this section you will learn how to order food using *je voudrais*, and you will learn vocabulary that is useful when you eat at a restaurant in France. You will read about eating out in France.

2.1 Types of restaurants and menus

You can find all sorts of different restaurants in France. There are Italian restaurants and pizzerias in practically every town; Vietnamese restaurants are also common. North African immigrants (from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco) brought *couscous* (a grain related to semolina cooked with mutton, vegetables and spices), *merguez* (a spicy lamb sausage) and *taboulé* (a cold salad made with bulgur wheat and flavoured with mint and lemon).

'Fusion' cuisine, which makes use of a combination of international cooking styles, is on offer in a small but growing number of restaurants in France. However, it's not easy to find vegetarian restaurants.

Le menu or la carte ?

Both *le menu* and *la carte* can be translated as 'menu' in English. French people will use either to request the menu in a restaurant. However, ***le menu*** is always used to refer to set menus. These are normally printed on a separate page in the menu (***la carte***) or advertised at the entrance of the restaurant. Set menus can be advertised as, for example, *menu à 21 €*, *menu gastronomique*, *menu touristique*. The expression *à la carte* is used when you order your dishes from the full range of what is on offer. In *brasseries* and *sandwicheries* you may see the word *formule* instead of *menu*.



Figure 4

Activité 9

Look at the following pictures of restaurants and match them to the descriptions below, according to the type of cuisine they offer.

(Click on the photos or the words 'View larger image' to display a larger version of the photos.)



Figure 5

- a. un restaurant grec
- b. une couscousserie
- c. un restaurant kebab turc
- d. une pizzeria
- e. un restaurant de cuisine française

Provide your answer...

Answer

The correct answers are:

1 b 2 e 3 a 4 d 5 c

Activité 10

You are in a café-brasserie *Le Bistro du Musée*, deciding what to order. Look at the food items below and match the English dishes with their French equivalent.

Le Bistro du Musée	Entrée	
	soupe de poissons	14,50 €
	pâté de campagne	8,00 €
	Fruits de mer	
	crabe mayonnaise	10,00 €
	homard grillé	30,00 €
	langoustines mayonnaise	24,00 €
	Vian­des	
	steak frites	12,50 €
	rôti de porc	11,00 €
	Plat du jour : lapin à la moutarde	11,00 €
	Poissons	
	truite aux amandes	14,00 €
	saumon grillé	16,00 €
	filet de sole	18,00 €
Dessert		
glace à la fraise	6,00 €	
mousse au chocolat	7,00 €	
tarte aux abricots	7,50 €	

Figure 6

- a starter
- rabbit in mustard sauce
- apricot tart
- today's special

Match each of the items above to an item below.

une entrée

lapin à la moutarde

tarte aux abricots
plat du jour

2.2 Ordering food at a restaurant

Using *je voudrais* + *un/une* + noun to order food

To order food, you can simply use the indefinite article *un* (masculine) or *une* (feminine) + the item. You would normally add *s'il vous plaît* ('please'), at the end of the sentence:

Une soupe de poisson, s'il vous plaît. One fish soup, please.

If you want to order a specific quantity of items, you use the relevant number:

Trois croissants. Three croissants.

Deux pains au chocolat. Two pains au chocolat.

Un rôti de porc. One (plate of) roast pork.

You can also use the polite form ('would like') of the verb *vouloir* ('want'): *Je voudrais* ('I would like') + article + item:

Je voudrais un rôti de porc. I'd like the roast pork.

Je voudrais une mousse au chocolat. I'd like the chocolate mousse.

Activité 11

You are about to have your lunch at the *café-brasserie Le Bistro du Musée*. You are going to place your order. Listen to the waitress and the prompts, and answer in the gaps in the audio track. To check your answers, look at the transcript.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 8](#)

Café culture

If you order *un café* in France you will get *un express* (a strong black coffee). Make sure you say *un grand café* or *un café allongé* if you want a large black coffee, *un café crème* or just *un crème* if you want white coffee, and *un grand crème* if you want it large.

Traditional *cafés* in France are places where people go at any time of day and consume different drinks depending on the time of day. The food served in *cafés* is limited to light snacks, such as sandwiches or *croque-monsieur*.

American-style coffee shops can now be found in larger French towns and cities, but are not as popular as traditional cafés.



Figure 7

2.3 Paying your bill at a restaurant

This section teaches you how to pay your bill after a meal at a restaurant. You will also find out about the café culture in France.

Paying your bill: using *ça fait* / *c'est combien* ?

To ask for the price of an item or a meal, you can use:

C'est combien ?

Ça fait combien ?

Ça coûte combien ?

All mean 'How much does it cost?'. Note that *Ça coûte combien ?* or *Il/elle coûte combien ?* tend to be used for items in shops.

Il coûte combien, ce T-shirt ? How much does this T-shirt cost?

To signal that you want to pay in a café or restaurant, you can use:

L'addition, s'il vous plaît. The bill, please.

The answer will be expressed in one of the following ways:

Vingt euros cinquante.

C'est vingt euros cinquante.

Ça coûte vingt euros cinquante.

Ça fait vingt euros cinquante.

All of which mean 'That'll be/That's twenty euros fifty, please'.



Figure 8

Activité 12

Now listen to the audio track below, paying attention to the questions and the prompts in the three dialogues. Play the role of the customer. Speak in the pauses following the prompts. To check your answers, look at the transcript.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 23

3 Talking about eating habits

In this section you will practise talking about what you eat, talking about different meals and eating habits.

Activité 13

Task 1

Match the French phrases below with their English translations.

You are thirsty.

You are hungry.

You are on a diet.

Have a large meal.

You don't drink anything.

You eat nothing.

A fizzy drink.

It's Christmas.

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Vous avez soif.

Vous avez faim.

Vous faites un régime.

Faire un gros repas.

Vous ne buvez rien.

Vous ne prenez rien / vous ne mangez pas.

Une boisson gazeuse.

C'est Noël.

Task 2

You want to eat healthily. Select the right answers in the quiz.

Question 1

Vous avez faim.

- Vous aimez manger une barre de chocolat.
- Vous mangez un ou deux fruits.
- Vous ne mangez pas.

Question 2

Vous avez soif.

- Vous préférez une boisson gazeuse.
- Vous ne buvez rien.
- Vous prenez de l'eau minérale.

Question 3

Pour le petit déjeuner...

- Vous ne mangez pas.
- Vous buvez du café.
- Vous prenez des céréales, un thé et un fruit.

Question 4

Au déjeuner, en général...

- En général vous aimez faire un gros repas, de la viande, des frites et un dessert au chocolat.
- Vous préférez travailler et vous ne prenez rien.
- Vous mangez un sandwich, un fruit et un yaourt.

Question 5

C'est Noël.

- Vous mangez et buvez beaucoup.
- Vous prenez de tout en petite quantité.
- Vous faites un régime et choisissez de ne rien manger.

3.1 Reading longer texts

In this section you will learn some tips to help you read longer texts in French. When you read longer texts, first look at the title, which will help you identify the topic and give you an idea of the content.

Illustrations (if there are any) may also help you to understand what a text is about.

Remember that there are usually a number of words in any text that are similar to those used in English. Using them as clues, you can often understand quite a lot of a text without resorting to your dictionary.

Aim to get the gist without attempting to understand every word. Use your dictionary if you need a more detailed comprehension.

Activité 14

Task 1

Read the text *Les Français et les repas* .

Les Français et les repas

Qu'est-ce qu'on mange en France ?

Le petit déjeuner

- 2% des Français ne prennent pas de petit déjeuner.

- La plupart des Français boivent plutôt du café (59%).
- 11% boivent un jus de fruits et 5% mangent un fruit le matin.
- Seulement 7% mangent des céréales.
- 59% mangent des tartines avec du beurre et/ou de la confiture.
- Le week-end, 17% des Français mangent des croissants, des pains au chocolat ou des pains aux raisins.

Le déjeuner

- 68% des Français déjeunent généralement chez eux en semaine.
- La plupart des Français (66%) mangent de la viande (bœuf, porc, poulet...)
- 38% mangent des légumes.
- Seulement 3% mangent un sandwich.
- 4% prennent un plateau-repas dans leur canapé.
- 17% (surtout les hommes et les personnes de plus de 55 ans) prennent une entrée, un plat et un dessert.
- De plus en plus, on prend un plat unique à midi.

Le dîner

- Le soir, les Français mangent en famille.
- Ils mangent souvent un repas complet (entrée, plat, et dessert).
- Les personnes de plus de 50 ans mangent souvent de la soupe et du fromage.
- Un Français sur dix mange des œufs le soir.
- Normalement on mange du fromage et un dessert.
- On boit de l'eau ou du vin.
- Le repas préféré des jeunes, c'est le steak-frites.

Find the French for:

1. breakfast, lunch and dinner
2. at home
3. one-course meal
4. TV dinner
5. at lunchtime
6. three-course meal

Provide your answer...

Answer

The correct answers are:

1. breakfast, lunch and dinner: *le petit déjeuner* (breakfast); *le déjeuner* (lunch); *le dîner* (dinner).
2. at home: *chez eux*
3. one-course meal: *plat unique*

4. TV dinner: *un plateau-repas*
 5. at lunchtime: *à midi*
 6. three-course meal: *repas complet*
-

Task 2

Read the text *Les Français et les repas* again and decide if the following statements are true or false.

Question 1

Few French people eat breakfast.

- True.
- False.

Question 2

The most popular breakfast drink is coffee.

- True.
- False.

Question 3

Cereal is not popular in France.

- True.
- False.

Question 4

Most French people eat lunch at work during the week.

- True.
- False.

Question 5

Most French people do not eat sandwiches for lunch.

- True.
- False.

Question 6

Having just one course for lunch is increasingly popular.

- True.
- False.

Question 7

In the evening, most French people eat just one course for dinner.

- True.
- False.

4 Pronouncing the sounds [s] and [z]

In this section you will practise pronouncing the sounds [s] and [z].

Where there is a single 's' between two vowels in a word, it is pronounced [z] as in 'zero', for example in the word *poison*. Where there is a double 's' between two vowels this is pronounced [s] as in 'mass', for example in the word *poisson*. It is very important to distinguish between these sounds, as some words with quite similar spellings but very different meanings could otherwise be confused, e.g. *dessert* ('dessert') and *désert* ('desert')!

Activité 15

Task 1

Listen to the audio track and select whether you hear an 's' sound (as in *poisson*) or a 'z' sound (as in *raisin*).

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 17](#)

Question 1

assiette

- [s]
- [z]

Question 2

raisin

- [s]
- [z]

Question 3

parmesan

- [s]
- [z]

Question 4

soupe

- [s]
- [z]

Question 5

croissant

[s]

[z]

Question 6

pissaladière

[s]

[z]

Question 7

boisson

[s]

[z]

Question 8

cuisine

[s]

[z]

Question 9

spécialités

[s]

[z]

Question 10

soufflé

[s]

[z]

Question 11

poisson

[s]

[z]

Question 12

poison

[s]

[z]

Question 13

désert

[s]

[z]

Question 14

dessert

- [s]
- [z]

Activité 16**Task 1**

In this activity you will practise the pronunciation of the sounds [s] and [z].

Listen to each of the recordings below, then practise repeating the words with the appropriate pronunciation.

1.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 5a](#)

2.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 5b](#)

3.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 5c](#)

4.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 5d](#)

5.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 5e](#)

6.

Audio content is not available in this format.

[Audio 5f](#)

Conclusion

We hope you have enjoyed this course. Now that you know how to talk about what food you like and dislike, and that you have learned how to order food in a restaurant and what to say when you pay for it, you may wish to try this language out on your next visit to France or to another French-speaking country!

If you enjoyed this course, you might be interested in studying the Open University module [L192 *Bon départ: beginners' French*](#). Or, if you are interested in other language short courses, rather than studying languages for a degree, you may want to have a look at what else is on offer [here](#).

Take the next step



If you enjoyed this course, why not explore the subject further with our paid-for short course, *Beginners French 1: eh oui!*?

[Find out more about *Beginners French 1: eh oui!*](#)

Acknowledgements

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