

Intermediate French: Understanding spoken French



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Introduction

In this free course, *Intermediate French: Understanding spoken French*, you will meet people living and working in France and Belgium by watching video clips and hearing them speak about themselves and their lives. Listening to and seeing people describing what they do and who they are can offer you an enjoyable and interesting insight into a way of life in a different culture. You will find that the more you watch and listen, the more you understand. Exposure to spoken language is invaluable when you are learning to speak and understand a new language. You may not understand everything you hear, but even so, the act of listening can help you in many different ways: you will understand more vocabulary, you can learn useful phrases, and listening to the intonation and sound of language can improve your pronunciation of spoken French.

The video recordings you view were recorded for your learning. These video clips are all authentic; they all show people from France or Belgium talking about themselves at normal speed. Listening to spoken language presented at natural speed helps to prepare you for spoken language you may encounter in real life, whether on the street in a French-speaking country, watching material on the internet, or listening to French radio.

Authentic sources, especially authentic audio-visual resources, typically include language, grammar and expressions that you may not have come across in your language learning before. In this way they provide you with an extremely useful learning resource. They prepare you for the world beyond the classroom.

At first, authentic speech may be difficult to understand due to its unplanned content and delivery. However, an awareness of the features of natural speech and the conscious use of listening comprehension strategies can greatly increase your ability to understand what you hear. As your confidence grows, you will be able to use the strategies and skills you acquire to understand more and more in a range of settings and improve your oral communication skills.

You will focus on different ways you can use authentic audio and visual materials to help you learn French. The language level of the course is for intermediate level learners of French at B1.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [L112 French Studies 1: Language and culture of the French-speaking world](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/intermediate-french-understanding-spoken-french/content-section-0).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand French spoken at natural speed
- use strategies for understanding video resources in French
- understand and give personal information in French
- employ strategies to enhance listening comprehension skills.

1 Introducing the course

Before you start the course, watch the following video which gives useful hints and tips when trying to improve your understanding of spoken French.

Video content is not available in this format.



2 Using knowledge of the topic and context

In this section, you will meet Peggy. When you hear someone presenting themselves for the first time, you already have certain ideas about the kind of information they are likely to give. The first activity in this course will focus on how relying on your prior knowledge can help your listening comprehension.



Figure 1 Peggy

Activity 1

Think about the kind of information you might give when presenting yourself. Make a list of five or six areas of your life that you might mention.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Responses to this question might vary, but it is likely that you might have included several of the following topics:

- Your given name and family name
- Your age
- Where you live
- Where you were born or brought up
- Who you live with
- Your family
- Your professional activity
- Your previous professional activities

Your studies
 Your leisure activities
 Your character (as seen by others and yourself)
 What makes you happy in life

Activity 2

Now think of between two and five French expressions or words that you might hear from someone giving information about the topics from the answer to Activity 1.

Your given name and family name
 Your age
 Where you live
 Where you were born or brought up
 Who you live with
 Your family
 Your professional activity
 Your previous professional activities
 Your studies
 Your leisure activities
 Your character (as seen by others and yourself)
 What makes you happy in life

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Responses to this question might vary, but it is likely that you might have included several of the following expressions or words:

Your given name and family name: je m'appelle... ; je suis... ; moi, c'est...

Your age: j'ai ...ans ; âgé de... ans

Where you live: j'habite ; je vis

Where you were born or brought up: je suis né ; je suis ... d'origine ; originaire de ; je viens de

Who you live with: je vis avec ; mari ; femme ; copain/copine ; partenaire

Your family: enfants ; fils ; fille(s) ; frère(s) ; soeur(s) ; parents ; famille

Your professional activity: je travaille comme ; je suis ; employé/emploi ; activité ; responsable

Your previous professional activities: j'ai travaillé ; j'ai été

Your studies: université ; faculté ; étudier/études ; diplôme

Your leisure activities: temps libre ; loisirs ; j'aime ; je joue ; je fais

Your character (as seen by others and yourself): caractère ; personnalité ; je suis ; amis ; autres

What makes you happy in life: heureux ; j'aime

2.1 Peggy and introductions

Now you have prepared some ideas of what might be said during an introduction, listen to how Peggy does it.

Activity 3

Listen to Peggy introducing herself.

Video content is not available in this format.



Look at the list below while you listen to Peggy. Tick the piece of information that she **doesn't** give.

- ☐ Prénom
- ☐ Domicile
- ☐ Age
- ☐ Profession
- ☐ Activités professionnelles dans le passé
- ☐ Famille
- ☐ Mariée/célibataire/divorcée
- ☐ Loisirs
- ☐ Origines
- ☐ Etudes
- ☐ Caractère
- ☐ Ce qui la rend heureuse

Answer

Peggy doesn't mention her previous professional activities.

Activity 4

Now listen again to Peggy, stopping the recording if necessary. Complete the table below in French with the information she gives. Write single words or short notes; don't worry about your spelling or other features of your language accuracy: in this task you are developing your listening comprehension skills, your ability to understand spoken French rather than your ability to write accurately.

Video content is not available in this format.



Prénom	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Domicile	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Age	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Profession	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Famille	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Mariée/célibataire/ divorcée	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Loisirs	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Origines	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Etudes	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Caractère	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Ce qui la rend heureuse	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Answer

Prénom	Peggy
Domicile	Tours, Tours-nord, région Centre
Age	37 ans
Profession	infirmière
Famille	2 enfants (garçons)
Mariée/célibataire/divorcée	mariée
Loisirs	chanteuse
Origines	Guadeloupe
Etudes	droit, anglais, infirmière
Caractère	drôle, fait rire les gens, confidente
Ce qui la rend heureuse	famille, amis, la chanson

Peggy speaks quite fast and is certainly not the easiest person to understand in this series of video clips. Do not worry if you did not get all of the answers. The important thing is that you were able to use some of your work from the earlier activities to pick out at least some of the key information.

Activity 5

Now listen again, this time with the transcript. Listen for the information that you missed in your answer to Activity 4.

Video content is not available in this format.



Discussion

This activity has demonstrated the extent to which knowledge of the topic and context can help to understand authentic spoken French. Using your knowledge of the kinds of things people often say when presenting themselves for the first time may have helped you to predict the subject areas that Peggy was likely to talk about. Using these ideas, you were then able to think about French words and expressions that you might expect to hear. In short, your previous knowledge of the world and the French language helped you to predict possible content and language before you listened to the clip. Your first listening then enabled you to confirm and adjust your expectations as well as familiarising yourself with the speaker's language choices, delivery and voice. Having identified the subject matter and the order in which topics were presented, a subsequent listening (stopping the recording as and when necessary) allowed you to fill in information about the key areas you had identified. A final listening with the transcript permitted you to confirm your understanding of key words and phrases and perhaps add to your language knowledge.

In short, you used prior knowledge of the topic and the French language to make sense of new information and perhaps new language items. Predicting likely content and brainstorming possible language for the topic area are both valuable *pre-listening* activities. You can then use what you succeed in understanding in a first listening to confirm and adjust your expectations.

You may have employed other comprehension strategies, such as visual clues (you saw Peggy with her two sons), cultural knowledge (Peggy's family photo from Guadeloupe) to help your understanding, as well as using a transcript to confirm what you had heard and consolidate your language learning. You will return to all of these strategies in more detail in later activities.

3 Using visual clues

In this section, you will meet Mohammed. One of the significant advantages that watching a video clip offers you is visual support. You will practise using this to support your listening in the next activities.



Figure 2 Mohammed

Activity 6

Watch the clip of Mohammed **with the sound turned off**. Use the speaker icon at the bottom of the screen to mute the sound.

Video content is not available in this format.



Choose the correct word or phrase to complete the following sentences.

1 Mohammed est

- ☐ a. marié
- ☐ b. célibataire
- ☐ c. veuf

2 Mohammed a

- ☐ a. une fille et un garçon
- ☐ b. deux filles
- ☐ c. deux garçons

3 Mohammed travaille comme

- ☐ a. chauffeur de bus
- ☐ b. ouvrier dans le bâtiment
- ☐ c. commerçant

4 Mohammed vend

- ☐ a. des olives, des fruits secs et des épices
- ☐ b. du pain et de la pâtisserie
- ☐ c. de la viande et de la charcuterie

5 Mohammed travaille

- ☐ a. dans un petit magasin
- ☐ b. dans un hypermarché
- ☐ c. sur un marché en plein air

Mohammed est originaire

- ☐ a. de l'Afrique sous-saharienne
- ☐ b. de l'Islande
- ☐ c. du Maroc

7 La fille aînée de Mohammed a

- ☐ a. 9 mois

- ☐ b. 9 ans
- ☐ c. 19 ans

8 La fille cadette de Mohammed a

- ☐ a. 6 mois
- ☐ b. 6 ans
- ☐ c. 16 ans

9 Mohammed

- ☐ a. aime son travail
- ☐ b. déteste son travail
- ☐ c. est indifférent à son travail

Activity 7

Make a list of the visual clues that you used to complete the sentences in Activity 7.

Provide your answer...

Answer

1. At the beginning of the clip, we see Mohammed with his arm around a young woman of about his age; the couple are with two children. The woman is of European heritage, so it seems unlikely that she is a family relative of Mohammed.
2. The children in the picture with Mohammed and his wife are both girls. The same two girls are seen again later in the extract.
3. We see Mohammed selling items to customers.
4. We see olives and other related products on Mohammed's stall.
5. We see Mohammed working in an open-air market.
6. Mohammed is of North-African appearance; the products he sells are associated with North-African cooking; the items we can see in the background when Mohammed is at home appear to be North-African.
7. We can guess at the girls' ages from their physical appearance – children rather than babies or adolescents.
8. We can guess at the girls' ages from their physical appearance – children rather than babies or adolescents.
9. Mohammed smiles a lot while he is working and his general body language is very positive.

3.1 Mohammed and talking about personality

Now you have prepared with visual clues, you are going to listen to Mohammed introducing himself and talking about his life.

Activity 8

Now watch the clip with the sound turned on to confirm your responses

Video content is not available in this format.



Activity 9

Watch the clip again, once again with the sound turned off, using the speaker icon as before to mute the sound.

Video content is not available in this format.



Based on what you see, select some adjectives from the list below to describe Mohammed's personality.

- ☐ affectueux
- ☐ amical
- ☐ de bonne humeur
- ☐ impatient
- ☐ lugubre
- ☐ malheureux
- ☐ ouvert
- ☐ poli
- ☐ serviable
- ☐ souriant
- ☐ travailleur

Answer

From the visual clues, all of the above adjectives except 'impatient', 'lugubre' and 'malheureux' seem appropriate.

Activity 10

Watch the clip again, this time with the sound turned on. Do you hear any of the words from the list above?

Video content is not available in this format.



Answer

In fact Mohammed doesn't use any of these words to describe himself. However, this exercise provides good practice in listening for particular words in an audio-visual extract.

Activity 11

Play the clip again and complete the following three phrases which you hear towards the end.

Use the transcript to check your answers

Video content is not available in this format.



j'aime bien rendre service.!Warning! Calibri not supported
a fait les Beaux Arts.!Warning! Calibri not supported
toucher à plein de choses dans la vie.!Warning! Calibri not supported

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Mes amis diraient que
 Je suis une personne qui
 J'aime bien

Activity 12

Now make up some phrases about yourself, using:

'*je suis*' plus one or more adjectives

'*mes amis diraient que j'aime bien*' plus a verb in the infinitive to say how your friends see you

'je suis une personne qui' plus a verb in the passé composé to say something you've done in the past

'j'aime bien' plus a verb in the infinitive to say how you see yourself

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Using visual clues can be an important strategy to help understand authentic spoken language. What we see will give us a great deal of information about the speaker and the context in which he/she is speaking; this in turn can help us to make sense of what we hear. The words 'jean' ('jeans') and 'gin' ('gin') are both pronounced in the same way in French - [dʒin] – so if we heard the word pronounced in isolation we do not know whether it refers to an item of clothing or an alcoholic drink. However, if we can see whether a spoken exchange is taking place in a clothes shop or a bar, then we know the purpose of the customer's request when we hear 'je voudrais un [dʒin]'. *[Warning! Cambria not supported]*

Visual clues can also tell us a great deal about the speaker. In the clip featuring Mohammed, we were presented with a great deal of visual input about him, his family and his work. This helps us to interpret what we hear by providing assistance in decoding words and phrases, helping us to choose between similar sounding words and confirming the meaning of words or expressions whose sense we have tried to guess. The words 'Maroc', 'marocain' and 'Casablanca' all occur in the video extract. Being able to see Mohammed may confirm what we think we have heard.

Finally, visual clues may allow us to use cultural knowledge as a tool for listening comprehension. The foodstuffs we see on Mohammed's market stall (olives, dried fruits, spices) are all associated with North-African cookery and the artefacts we see in his home are also typical of North Africa. We can use this cultural knowledge to confirm spoken information about Mohammed that we may have only partially understood by listening, just as cultural knowledge about the position of French in many Moroccan schools may confirm our understanding when Mohammed explains that, along with his brother and his sisters, he pursued his studies in France up to and including time at the prestigious *École des Beaux Arts*.

4 Using your understanding of why you are listening

In this section, you will meet Lionel. Understanding *why* you are listening will help you decide *what* to focus on as you listen. This is what you will practise in the next activities.



Figure 3 Lionel

Activity 13

Watch the clip featuring Lionel Truet. Think about a suitable title for the clip.

Video content is not available in this format.



Which title seems to best summarise the clip?

- ☐ a. L'industrie viticole en crise: Lionel Truet fait face à un avenir incertain
- ☐ b. Lionel Truet : un vigneron satisfait de sa vie sur le vignoble familial

How did you come to your choice?

Provide your answer...

Answer

b

You may have grasped the general sense (without necessarily understanding every single word) of quite complex phrases such as *'le désir de revenir sur la propriété familiale'*, *'si serait à refaire, je le referais'*, *'ce qui me rend heureux c'est de pouvoir vivre une passion'*, *'être mon propre patron'*, *'de faire quelque chose que j'aime'*.

Or you may have picked out key individual words and phrases such as *'passion'*, *'désir'*, *'propriété familiale'*, *'heureux'*, *'liberté'*, *'plaisir'*.

Whichever of these approaches you used, you were probably also helped by the visual clues showing a clearly happy Lionel working in what is obviously a small (and therefore possibly family) wine-producing business. You may also have been influenced by the generally positive tone of Lionel's voice and the absence of any words related to crises or difficulties.

Activity 14

Listen again to Lionel and answer the questions below in English:

Video content is not available in this format.



1. How long has Lionel been a wine producer?
2. How long did Lionel work for the SNCF in the Paris region?
3. How many children does Lionel have? How many boys? How many girls?
4. In which year did Lionel return to the family vineyard?
5. How large is the vineyard?

Provide your answer...

What strategies did you use before and during listening?

Provide your answer...

Answer

1 – 25 years; 2 – 10/10-12 years; 3 – four, three, one; 5 – 1990; 6 – 6 hectares

When you read the questions before listening, you probably realised at once that all of the required information involved numbers, so when you came to listen you would have been paying particular attention to the numbers you could hear. You might have also tried to hear the word '*ans*' or words such as '*depuis*' or '*pendant*' which act as a signal that a period of time is being spoken about. You might also have listened for words such as '*presque*' and '*près de*' indicating an approximate period of time. To get the number of children, you would have been listening for the words '*enfants*', '*garçon*' and '*filles*'. For the size of the vineyard, you would have listened for words indicating a surface area, perhaps using your cultural knowledge that this is measured in hectares in France. For a date, you would be paying attention to any phrases starting '*mille-neuf-cent*' or '*deuxmille*'. Finally, you probably paused and repeated the recording to confirm your understanding of the figures. As a listening comprehension strategy, this is no different to asking an interlocutor to repeat something in face-to-face conversation.

4.1 Lionel and talking about the past

Lionel uses verbs in several forms to talk about his past and here you will spend some time identifying them and trying them out.

Activity 15

Authentic audio-visual resources can also make learners more aware of how language structures are used naturally in unscripted language. In the first 40 seconds of the clip, Lionel talks about past events in his life. Listen again to this part of the clip as many times as you like, pausing and repeating the recording as necessary, and complete the gaps in the transcript below with the verb forms you hear.

Je m'appelle Lionel Truet, je _____ vigneron à Saint-Ouen les Vignes, qui est un petit village dans la Touraine. Depuis maintenant 25 ans.
Après un court passage on va dire en région parisienne, où j'_____ un autre métier que celui de vigneron j'_____ pendant presque 10, 10-12 ans j'_____ à la SNCF. J'_____ un jeune cadre dynamique. Et c'est la la passion et le désir de revenir sur le la propriété familiale qui a fait qu'on _____ de vie voilà déjà maintenant près de 25 ans.

Video content is not available in this format.



Answer

Je m'appelle Lionel Truet, je **suis** vigneron à Saint-Ouen les Vignes, qui est un petit village dans la Touraine. Depuis maintenant 25 ans.

Après un court passage on va dire en région parisienne, où j'**avais exercé** un autre métier que celui de vigneron j'**ai travaillé** pendant presque 10, 10-12 ans j'**ai travaillé** à la SNCF. J'**étais** un jeune cadre dynamique. Et c'est la la passion et le désir de revenir sur le la propriété familiale qui a fait qu'on **a changé** de vie voilà déjà maintenant près de 25 ans.

Activity 16

Now match each of the sentences to the description of the underlined verb form

- présent
- plus-que-parfait
- passé composé
- imparfait
- passé composé

Match each of the items above to an item below.

1. Je suis vigneron ... depuis maintenant 25 ans
2. J'avais exercé un autre métier
3. J'ai travaillé pendant presque 10 ans
4. J'étais un jeune cadre dynamique
5. On a changé de vie voilà déjà maintenant près de 25 ans

Activity 17

Now match each of the phrases from the recording to the sense conveyed by the verb form.

- a. An action or state of affairs which began in the past and is still continuing in the present
- d. An action or event in the past which occurred before another past action or event which is also mentioned
- c. An action or event which occurred in the past over a completed period of time
- e. A state of affairs in the past which continued over an unspecified period of time
- b. An action or event which occurred at a given moment in the past

Match each of the items above to an item below.

1. Je suis vigneron ... depuis maintenant 25 ans (Présent)
2. j'avais exercé un autre métier (Plus-que-parfait)
3. j'ai travaillé pendant presque 10 ans (Passé composé)
4. j'étais un jeune cadre dynamique (Imparfait)
5. on a changé de vie voilà déjà maintenant près de 25 ans (Passé composé)

Answer

1. a – Lionel became a wine producer 25 years ago and he is still a wine producer now. [Présent + 'depuis']
2. d – His short spell in Paris is the first of two related past events mentioned by Lionel [Plus-que-parfait]
3. c – Lionel worked for the SNCF for 10 (or 10-12) years, then this period in his life ended [Passé composé + 'pendant']
4. e – Lionel was a dynamic young manager ('un jeune cadre dynamique') for a period of time that he doesn't specify precisely [Imparfait]
5. b – The change in lifestyle took place at a defined moment in the past (almost 25 years ago) [Passé composé]

Activity 18

Now write sentences about yourself using each of these verb forms to convey the senses described above.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here is a sample answer using all of the verb forms.

Je suis maintenant propriétaire de restaurant depuis 9 mois. Après quelques années à Paris, où j'avais exercé la profession de serveur dans une boîte de nuit prestigieuse, et où j'étais très heureux, je suis venu à Londres en 2006. J'ai travaillé comme chef cuisinier dans un grand hôtel pendant dix ans et en 2016 je suis devenu propriétaire de mon propre établissement.

In Activity 13, you listened to understand the general sense of what Lionel says.

Activity 14, you attempted to hear some very specific information. In Activity 15, you used the recording as a source of information about how different verb forms are used in natural speech to express different views of events and actions in the past and their relations to each other.

Understanding *why* you are listening will help you decide *what* to focus on as you listen as well as *how* to prepare yourself before listening. Take as an example watching a televised weather forecast for the week to come.

If you just want a general idea of what the weather will be like, then you might be able to use visual clues such as the symbols on a map; you might decide to revise some general vocabulary relating to weather before listening.

If you are listening to find out when is the best time to go for a long bicycle journey, then you will want more detailed information. If rain is predicted, what time will it start? Is the weather forecast the same for your destination 50 kilometres away as for your point of departure? If the weather is changing, is it getting better or worse as the day progresses? What is the wind direction; will you be cycling into the wind or with it behind you? This kind of detailed listening might require more detailed vocabulary revision focused on the specific information you are trying to obtain.

If you are listening to improve your familiarity with and ability in the language you are learning, then you will need to decide in advance where to direct your attention. This might be an exercise to practice accurately noting numbers, in which case you will concentrate on information about temperatures and wind-speeds. Alternatively, you might want to focus on different constructions used by the presenter to talk about the future: how do his/her language choices vary according to whether it is an immediate or more distant future or according to the degree of certainty of the prediction? For this kind of language-focused listening, you would probably want to revise the different ways of talking about the future before watching.

5 Using text to support listening



Figure 4 Manon

In this section, you will meet Manon. As a language learner, you are often asked to listen to audio or video materials with the support of transcripts. When you watch videos online, or French language films, you can often display subtitles. The next set of activities will demonstrate how to use these to develop your listening skills.

Activity 19

Listen (without subtitles – click the CC icon) to Manon presenting herself and complete the table with the information she gives.

Video content is not available in this format.



Nom et prénom	Gallez, Manon
Age	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Nationalité	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Province d'origine	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Ville d'origine	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Domicile actuel	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Activité principale	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Nom du magasin où elle travaille	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Answer

Nom et prénom	Gallez, Manon
Age	21 ans
Nationalité	Belge
Province d'origine	Hainaut
Ville d'origine	Mons
Domicile actuel	Bruxelles
Activité principale	étudiante
Nom du magasin où elle travaille	'La Meute'

You may have found this exercise difficult. At times, Manon speaks quite quickly and she does not always articulate her words very clearly. Moreover, you may never have come across the province of Hainaut and the town of Mons or the name of the shop where she sometimes helps out.

Activity 20

Now listen again, this time with the subtitles enabled (click the CC icon). Are you able to identify the information which you missed in your first listening? Using subtitles can help you overcome difficulties caused by features of the speaker's delivery or by the presence of unfamiliar words.

Video content is not available in this format.



5.1 Manon and identifying sounds in French

With Manon, you will listen out for nasal vowels and also practise 'shadow-reading', using subtitles and transcripts to help you achieve a natural speaking pace in French.

Activity 21

Listen again to the first 30 seconds of the recording (up to '*La Meute*').

Video content is not available in this format.



Manon uses a number of words containing nasal vowels such as:

Manon [ɔ̃]

ans [ɑ̃]

viens [ɛ̃]

The symbols in brackets are called 'phonemic symbols' and represent the sounds made when nasal vowels are spoken.

Using what you hear, the subtitles and the transcript below, identify the nasal vowels you hear. Print the transcript and underline the nasal vowels.

Alors, je m'appelle Manon Gallez, j'ai 21 ans. Je vis avec ma petite amie qui s'appelle Charlotte. On vit ensemble depuis trois ans. Je suis originaire de Belgique, je viens de la province du Hainaut dans la ville de Mons et je vis à Bruxelles depuis cinq ans.

Je suis étudiante en Arts et je suis aussi en collaboration avec 'La Meute'.

Answer

Alors, je m'appelle Manon Gallez, j'ai 21 ans. Je vis avec ma petite amie qui s'appelle Charlotte. On vit ensemble depuis trois ans. Je suis originaire de Belgique, je viens de la province du Hainaut dans la ville de Mons et je vis à Bruxelles depuis cinq ans. Je suis étudiante en Arts et je suis aussi en collaboration en avec 'La Meute'.

Activity 22

Video content is not available in this format.



Now listen again and match the nasal vowels you hear to the phonemic symbol representing them following the examples given below.

[ɔ̃] Manon

[ɑ̃] ans

[ɛ̃] viens

Manon ; on. Mons ; collaborationon

ans ; ensemble ; ans ; ans ; étudiante ; en

viens ; province ; cinq

Match each of the items above to an item below.

[ɔ̃]

[ɑ̃]

[ɛ̃]

Activity 23

Using the answer to Activity 22, can you identify a link between spelling and sound for the nasal vowels ?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The sound [ɔ̃] is represented in writing by the spelling 'on'.

The sound [ɑ̃] is represented in writing by the spellings 'an' and by 'en' and 'em' at the beginning or in the middle of words (*ensemble*).

The sound [ɛ̃] is represented in writing by the spellings 'in' and by 'en' at the end of words (*viens*).

Activity 24

Using the answer to Activity 23, pronounce the following words including nasal vowels:

bon
banc
bain
sans
sain
son
rien
rang
rond
marrant
marron
marin

Activity 25

Video content is not available in this format.



You can also use subtitles and transcripts accompanying recordings to practise your own delivery of connected speech using a technique known as 'shadow-reading' in which you read aloud the subtitles/transcript while playing the recording. Try this now with the recording of Manon; it may take several attempts to get up to the same speed as her.

Discussion

There is no answer as such to this task. You should find, however, that shadow-reading will not only enable you to develop the ability to speak French at a faster pace but will also help you to achieve a more natural sounding rhythm and intonation as you make your voice shadow that of the French native-speaker.

The video clips in this course all come with subtitles and you can also access transcripts of the recordings. Using text to support listening can be very helpful for your learning: natural speech can sometimes seem like a stream of sound without the white spaces between words that exist in writing to break up a text into separate words. Used selectively, textual support can help develop your listening comprehension skills along with providing insights into the relationship between the way words are spelled and how they are pronounced and helping you to improve your own spoken French through shadow-reading.

You should however be careful not to become over-reliant on transcripts. If you are reading the subtitles rather than listening to the speaker, you can get a very false idea about your listening comprehension abilities, as most adults are better at reading a foreign language than understanding authentic speech. One possible strategy is to always listen at least twice to a recording without textual support before using subtitles. If you do use transcripts, always make sure to conclude your comprehension activities by listen again to the recording without textual support.

6 Using your knowledge of features of spoken French

In this section, you will meet Franz. Naturally-occurring speech is often quite fast. As a result, some sounds tend to be inaudible, and others merge into each other. As you will see in the next series of activities, being aware of some of the features of authentic spoken French can help you develop your listening skills.



Figure 5 Franz

Activity 26

Video content is not available in this format.



Listen to the first part of the clip featuring Franz Lemaître (up to 'le hongrois') and complete the table.

Nom et prénom	Lemaître, Franz
Profession	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Lieu de travail	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Age	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Origine	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Naturalisé	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Langue maternelle	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Autre langues	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Answer

Nom et prénom	Lemaître, Franz
Profession	Interprète
Lieu de travail	Bruxelles (commission européenne)
Age	43
Origine	Belge

Naturalisé	Luxembourgeois
Langue maternelle	Français
Autre langues	Allemand, anglais, néerlandais, espagnol, suédois, hongrois

Activity 27

Video content is not available in this format.



Listen to the full clip. Tick the following words and phrases as you hear them:

- ☐ je suis interprète
- ☐ quarante-trois ans
- ☐ mes études
- ☐ douze ans
- ☐ le hongrois
- ☐ navetteur
- ☐ nous avons un fils
- ☐ qui est à présent
- ☐ mes amis
- ☐ je suis un être
- ☐ dont on ne sait pas
- ☐ sens de l'humour
- ☐ ce qui est important
- ☐ l'harmonie
- ☐ le respect mutuel

Activity 28

Video content is not available in this format.



Listen again and pause the recording when you hear the following words and phrases. What do you notice about Franz's pronunciation in connected speech of words whose final consonant would be silent if the word was spoken in isolation?

je suis interprète

quarante-trois ans

mes études

nous avons un fils

qui est à présent

mes amis

je suis un être

ce qui est important

Answer

Word-final consonants, such as 's', 't' and 'n', which would be silent in isolation are pronounced in connected speech when the following word begins with a vowel :

je suis_interprète

quarante-trois_ans

mes_études

nous_avons un fils

qui est_à présent

mes_amis

je suis_un_être

ce qui est_important

You will have noticed that in a liaison the letter 's' is pronounced as the sound [z]

6.1 Franz and pronunciation practice

Franz is a good model for you to 'shadow' as you study the way words and phrases are connected in French speech.

Activity 29

Video content is not available in this format.



Listen again to Franz. Pause the recording when you hear the words:

mes études

douze ans

qui est à présent

mes amis

je suis un être

How many syllables does each phrase contains? How are the syllables separated in speech? Do the syllables tend to end with vowel or consonant sounds?

Provide your answer...

Answer

mes études = 3 syllables > sounds like *me/zé/tudes*

douze ans = 2 syllables > sounds like *dou/zans*

qui est à présent = 5 syllables > sounds like *qui/es/tà/pré/sent*

mes amis = 3 syllables > sounds like *me/za/mis*

je suis un être = 4 syllables > sounds like *je/sui/zu/nêtre*

You will notice that syllables in connected speech tend to end in vowel sounds. This is called open-syllabification and is typical of spoken French.

Activity 30

Video content is not available in this format.



Listen again to Franz, pausing the recording and paying particular attention to the words:

le hongrois

sens de l'humour

l'harmonie

and to Franz's two pronunciations of

navetteur

What do you notice?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The letter 'h' is never pronounced in spoken French. It is to all intents and purposes treated as a vowel and therefore the words 'le' and 'la' before it are reduced to 'l', as in '*l'humour*' and '*l'harmonie*'. However, in certain words (such as '*hongrois*') the letter 'h' is known as '*h aspiré*', and 'le' and 'la' are not reduced to 'l', hence '*le hongrois*'. If you look at words starting with 'h' in your dictionary, '*h aspiré*' is signalled by an asterix before the word, so you will find **harem*, **hareng*, **haricot* and **hongrois* among others.

In words like '*navetteur*', where the letter 'e' is sandwiched between two consonant sounds, the sound [ə] tends to disappear, thereby turning '*navetteur*' into '*nav-tteur*'. This is known as elision.

Activity 31

Video content is not available in this format.



Remembering what you have learned about liaison, open syllabification, h aspiré and elision, play the recording of Franz with the subtitles and shadow-read along with him. Franz, as befits his profession as an interpreter, speaks very clearly and carefully. The elements of his connected speech such as liaison, open syllabification, the absence of the contraction of 'le' and 'la' before '*h aspiré*' and the elision of the sound [ə] when the letter 'e' occurs between two consonants are not 'carelessness' but, in fact, features of good spoken French which you should try to imitate. One advantage of using authentic video recordings is that they can sensitise you to features of natural connected speech and give you an excellent model for your own spoken French.

7 Using knowledge about languages

In this section, you will meet Yann. You will reflect on how you can use your existing knowledge of French (and perhaps other languages too) to make sense of language you have not yet learned, and to build your vocabulary.



Figure 6 Yann

Activity 32

Video content is not available in this format.



Listen to the first 25 seconds of the clip featuring Yann Renard (up to 'Amboise').
Correct the following summary of what Yann says:

Yann a 55 ans et il est directeur d'une école secondaire. Il travaille dans cette école depuis trente ans et il habite au centre-ville d'Amboise.

Provide your answer...

Answer

Yann a 56 ans et il est directeur d'une école primaire. Il travaille dans cette école depuis une trentaine d'années et il habite dans un village en périphérie de la ville d'Amboise.

Activity 33

Video content is not available in this format.



An important difference between unscripted spoken language and written language is that the former contains hesitations, repetitions, 'filler' words and false starts followed by reformulations. This is quite natural, as when a person starts to speak he/she does not usually know exactly how the sentence will develop. This is also an important difference between spontaneous speech and the scripted recordings that you may hear in language learning courses. It is important not to get distracted by these features but rather to use the time they offer to concentrate your attention on listening for the key information you are required to understand.

Listen to the whole of the clip with the subtitles enabled and pause the tape when you hear these features. Note them in the table below against the purpose they serve.

Hesitations	euh
-------------	-----

Repetitions	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
'Fillers'	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
False starts and reformulations	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Answer

Here are a few examples. You can probably think of similar hesitation and filler words in your own language. Listen carefully to spontaneous speech in your own language and you will certainly also notice repetitions, false starts and reformulations.

Hesitations	euh ben (=eh bien)
Repetitions	je je l'ai je l'ai eue
'Fillers'	un village <u>disons</u> rural <u>alors</u> je suis souvent caricaturé
False starts and reformulations	de moments que je peux passer <u>avec au sein de ma profession</u> <u>avec mes collègues</u>

Activity 34

Video content is not available in this format.



One way in which you can use your knowledge of French to improve your listening comprehension skills is to focus on *mots charnières* or connecting words. These usually serve to indicate the logical relationship between two phrases containing information, thereby helping you to make sense of what you hear. So, for example:

- *et* ('and') joins together two pieces of closely connected information
- *mais* ('but') suggests that the information in the second part of a phrase somehow contradicts or opposes the first part of the phrase
- *donc* ('so', 'therefore') implies a logical connection, that the second part of the phrase follows from the first part
- *aussi* ('also') suggests a new piece of information that supplements what has already been stated
- *grâce à* ('thanks to', 'because of') introduces a reason explaining a statement

Listen again to Yann, with the subtitles, try to catch the words listed above, pausing the recording if necessary, and identify how they indicate a particular relationship between two pieces of information. If you can grasp this relationship, it may help you to successfully guess the sense of individual words whose exact meaning you may be unsure of.

Answer

Here is the transcript of Yann with the mots *charnières* indicated in bold and underlined.

Je m'appelle Yann Renard.

J'ai 56 ans, je suis enseignant **et** directeur d'une école primaire.

Je travaille dans cette école depuis une trentaine d'années.

J'ai fait le choix d'habiter **aussi** dans le village où j'enseigne. C'est un village qui est en périphérie de la ville d'Amboise. C'est un village disons rural ce qui me permet de pratiquer les activités que j'aime bien.

Je joue au tennis, je suis cavalier **aussi** donc la campagne ça me permet de pratiquer et de faire de la balade.

Pour mes amis, alors je suis souvent caricaturé comme étant 'le fonctionnaire'. Bien sûr c'est toujours sur le ton de la plaisanterie.

Je suis **aussi** la personne qui, grâce à sa curiosité, je m'intéresse à beaucoup de choses, j'ai une bonne mémoire donc j'ai des tas d'informations et quelquefois on me questionne - je sers de pas d'encyclopédie **mais** je réponds à des questions sur l'histoire, la géographie, la littérature et je crois que cette curiosité je l'ai eue **grâce à** l'école et j'ai gardé cette curiosité, **donc** oui, je crois qu'on peut me décrire comme quelqu'un de curieux et peut-être un peu bavard.

Ce qui me rend heureux dans la vie ce sont des petits moments. Alors de moments que je peux passer avec au sein de ma profession avec mes collègues mais aussi rencontrer des amis sur un court de tennis. C'est passer un après-midi à la terrasse d'un café à parler, c'est au restaurant, c'est aller au cinéma avec des amis. Moi, je me contente des choses très simples.

7.1 Yann and working out the meaning of words

As you listen to Yann and complete the activities, you will learn how to identify 'cognates', words which share a similar origin, and this can help you to build up your vocabulary and ability to use words from the same family.

Activity 35

Video content is not available in this format.



Sometimes you can use your existing knowledge of French language and culture to work out the meaning of words which may initially seem unfamiliar. For example, you might know that '*un enseignant*' is a teacher, '*le périphérique*' is the ring-road around central Paris, '*un cheval*' is a horse and '*un baladeur*' is a personal stereo. Listen to Yann for the first 40 seconds of the clip (up to '*balade*'). How might the foregoing information help you to translate the underlined words and understand the phrases they are part of?

1. j'ai fait le choix d'habiter aussi dans le village où j'enseigne

Provide your answer...

2. un village qui est en périphérie de la ville d'Amboise

Provide your answer...

3. je suis cavalier

Provide your answer...

4. la campagne [...] me permet de [...] faire de la balade

Provide your answer...

Answer

1. You might have realised that '*enseigner*' is a verb because it is preceded by 'je'; so if '*un enseignant*' is a teacher, then '*enseigner*' means 'to teach' and '*où j'enseigne*' means 'where I teach'.
2. If the '*périphérique*' circles the centre of Paris, then the village is 'on the outskirts' of Amboise.

3. The similarity between the words '*cheval*' and '*cavalier*', the former an animal, the latter a person, suggests that '*un cavalier*' is a horse rider.
4. If a '*baladeur*' is a personal stereo that can be listened to on the move, then '*faire de la balade*' is likely to mean moving around, in the context of the preceding phrase to go for a ride on horseback.

Activity 36

Video content is not available in this format.



If you speak English or any of the European languages which emerged from Latin (Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish), then you can use your knowledge of these languages to understand many French words which share the same origin, similar spelling and usually the same meaning. These words are known as *cognates*.

Many French words ending in '-tion' have cognates ending in '-tion' in English, '-zione' in Italian, '-ção' in Portuguese, '-țiune' in Romanian, '-ción', in Spanish

Many French words ending in '-sion' have cognates ending in '-sion' in English, '-sione' in Italian, '-são' in Portuguese, '-iune' in Romanian, '-sión', in Spanish

Many French words ending in '-té' have cognates ending in '-ty' in English, '-tà' in Italian, '-dade' in Portuguese, '-tate' in Romanian, '-tad' in Spanish.

Many French words starting with the letter 'é' followed by a consonant have cognates in English, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish where 'é' is either replaced by 's' or 's' is placed after the letter 'e' and before the consonant.

French	English	Italian	Portuguese	Romanian	Spanish
nation	nation	nazione	nação	națiune	nación

vision	vision	visione	visão	viziune	visión
liberté	liberty	libertà	liberdade	libertate	libertad
étudiant	student	studente	estudante	student	estudiante

Now listen again to Yann, first without the subtitles, then if necessary with the subtitles. Using what you have learned above, can you hear the French words for

school (English)
 attività (Italian)
 curiosidade (Portuguese)
 informație (Romanian)
 profesión (Spanish)

Answer

école ; activité ; curiosité ; information(s) ; profession

Activity 37

One way in which you can use your existing knowledge of French to extend your vocabulary and thereby improve your listening comprehension skills is to try to learn related words (for example a noun, a verb and an adjective) together. In addition to making vocabulary learning more productive (three words for the price of one!) this will help develop your ability to work out the meaning of what may at first appear to be unfamiliar words. An example from Yann's speech might be:

- enseignant (noun) = teacher; l'enseignement (noun) = education
- enseigner (verb) = to teach
- enseigné (adjective) = taught

Using a dictionary and the transcript, can you find other possible word groups for vocabulary learning based on words in the video clip ?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Here are some possible word groups that you might have thought of:

le directeur/la directrice (noun) = director; la direction (noun) = management; diriger (verb) = direct; dirigé (adjective) = directed

le choix (noun) = choice; choisir (verb) = to choose; choisi (adjective) = chosen

la permission (noun) = permission; permettre (verb) = to permit, allow; permis (adjective) = permitted, allowed

la plaisanterie (noun) = joke; plaisanter (verb) = to joke; plaisant (adjective) = funny

l'intérêt (noun) = interest; s'intéresser à (verb) to be interested in; intéressé (adjective) = interested in, concerned by

le contentement (noun) = satisfaction; se contenter de (verb) = to be satisfied with; content (adjective) = satisfied

Discussion

When we listen to speech or read a text in a foreign language, we have several means of recognising individual words.

Words that have a common origin are called *cognates*; these often resemble in appearance their equivalent word in a related language, although their pronunciation may be quite different. However, a small number of words that look similar are *false cognates* or *faux amis* and have different meanings, for example the French word '*éventuellement*' means 'possibly' in English and not 'eventually', '*la chair*' means 'flesh' rather than a piece of furniture. Recognising cognates in speech may be more challenging than when reading: not only may the relationship between spelling and pronunciation vary greatly between different languages but it will also be necessary to break up the succession of sounds into individual words. You worked on some of the skills necessary to do this in the video clips featuring Manon and Franz.

Recognising words is only one of the processes involved in comprehension. Meaning can sometimes be deduced by understanding how linking words such as 'and', 'but', 'so', etc., relate words to each other to establish the overall meaning of a phrase or passage. Cultural knowledge can also play a part in helping us to infer the meaning of words or expressions in different contexts.

8 Being a reflective learner



Figure 7 The Thinker, Auguste Rodin

The activities you have worked through in this short online course have introduced you to a number of strategies you can use to develop your comprehension skills when listening to authentic spoken French. Becoming a reflective learner is about developing an awareness of how you learn and using that knowledge to improve your learning. In your work on the video clips you have:

- developed your understanding of what listening involves
- analysed specific listening tasks
- familiarised yourself with possible strategies to better understand spoken French
- selected the best strategies for particular tasks
- evaluated the success of these strategies

Activity 38

Go back to one or more of the video clips from this course and listen to them again. Before you listen, think about why you are listening and what information you hope to understand. Are you listening to grasp the general sense, to pick out specific information or to help develop your knowledge of the French language? What pre-listening activities might help you achieve your purpose? These might include 'word storming' vocabulary that comes to mind related to the topic or setting yourself questions to answer in advance.

- Which clip have you chosen?
- What is your purpose for listening?

- What exactly do you hope to understand?
- What pre-listening activities have you chosen and why?

Now set yourself some tasks to do while listening. These might include:

- ticking off words and phrases from your word storm
- noting unfamiliar words to look up in your dictionary after listening
- answering the questions you asked yourself in advance
- making notes for a summary of the general sense of the clip
- using visual or other contextual clues
- using your existing knowledge of French or other languages to work out the meaning of unfamiliar language
- focusing on a particular language area, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar or discourse markers (linking words)
- following the subtitles as you listen

After listening, review how successful your strategies were:

- Did the strategies you chose help you achieve your aims in listening?
- Did the strategies you chose help you do other things you hadn't planned for?
- Would the strategies you used have been helpful in another context?
- What other strategies could you have used?

Conclusion

This free course, *Intermediate French: Understanding spoken French*, has offered you some support and advice on working with audio-visual materials in French. Do not see this as the end, but rather as a step on the way to working independently with materials to develop your French further. There is so much material that is readily accessible online. Take every opportunity to watch, read and listen. You can listen to French radio, watch programmes on the internet, use French search engines and look up things that interest you. If you are interested in a topic in English, then follow it up with finding more about it in French.

We hope that you have found this short course useful. Good luck with your continuing French studies!



Figure 8 Château in Amboise, Touraine, France

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [L112 French Studies 1: language and culture of the French-speaking world](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/intermediate-french-understanding-spoken-french/content-section-0)

Take the next step



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