

Basic French Grammar



Basic French Grammar

When you walk into a boutique or a small shop in French speaking country, the people in the place will acknowledge you by saying **bonjour** (all day) or **bonsoir** (after 5:00 p.m.). Of course, in return you should do the same. If you walk into a place filled with women only, you could say *Bonjour Mesdames*, in a place filled with men and women *Bonjour Mesdames et Messieurs* (or simply *Messieurs-dames*). If you're facing one person only, it is customary to say *Bonjour Monsieur* or *Bonjour Madame*, if you're greeting a younger female person (18 years or less), you should say *Bonjour Mademoiselle*.

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

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

A bientôt, à plus tard !...

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

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

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

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

A une prochaine ! = See you next time! Same as above.

.....EXERCISE.....

What do you say:

1. When you enter a *boulangerie* in the morning?
2. When you enter a *fromagerie* in which the *fromagère* (a woman) is alone?
3. When you enter a bank in which you are welcomed by the *banquier* (a man)?
4. When you leave a friend that you will meet again in the afternoon?
5. When you enter a café in the evening?
6. When you leave a shop during the day?
7. When you leave a restaurant at the end of the afternoon?
8. When you leave your friends at night before going home to bed?
9. When you leave a colleague that you will see very soon?

Basic French Grammar

Etre (to be)

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

First let's learn what the subject pronouns are:

Je = I

Tu = You (the familiar form)

Il = He

Elle = She *On* = One/We

Nous = We

Vous = You (plural form)

Ils = They (masculine)

Elles = They (feminine)

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

Tu and *vous*

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

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

Example:

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

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

Example:

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

Note: However, when speaking to more than one person, *vous* is used, even if you are talking to people you would say *tu* to individually.

Examples:

Salut Jean, tu vas bien ? = Hi John, are you OK?

Bonjour, tu es libre aujourd'hui ? = Good morning, you are free today?

Jean et Marie, vous êtes contents ? = John and Mary, are you happy?

The conjugation of *être*

Je suis = I am

Tu es = You are

Basic French Grammar

Il/elle/on **est** = He/she/one is (we are)

Nous **sommes** = We are

Vous **êtes** = You are

Ils/elles **sont** = They are **C'est** = This is

On and nous

There are 2 ways to express “we”: *on* or *nous*.

On is more casual than **nous**. It is conjugated at the 3rd person just like *il* or *elle*.

Example:

Vincent et moi, nous sommes français. On est de Lyon. = Vincent and I, we are French. We are from Lyon.

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

Examples:

En France, on boit un apéritif avant le repas. = in France, one (we) drinks an aperitif before the meal.

On doit avoir un visa de travail pour travailler en France. = One (we) must have a work visa to work in France.

Les nationalités (Nationalities)

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

Examples:

Elle est française = She is French *Il est anglais* = He is English

Nous sommes américaines = We are American (females) *Elles sont anglaises* = They are English (females)

Ils sont anglais = They are English (males)

Quelques adjectifs (A few adjectives)

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

Examples of adjectives: *petit* = small/short *grand* = tall

content = happy *drôle* = funny *triste* = sad *méchant* = mean *marié* = married *fatigué* = tired

In most cases, the feminine form of the adjective is formed by adding an **e**. The plural is formed by adding an **s**.

Examples:

Mon mari est grand = My husband is tall. *Ma femme est grande* = My wife is tall.

Basic French Grammar

Mes enfants sont grands = My children are tall.
Mes filles sont grandes = My daughters are tall.

With some of adjectives, the feminine form is irregular.

Examples:

beau becomes *belle* (handsome, beautiful) *mignon* becomes *mignonne* (cute)

gentil becomes *gentille* (nice) *gros* becomes *grosse* (big, fat)

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

In order to make a sentence negative, you need to add **ne** and **pas** around the verb.

Example:

Je ne suis pas grande = I am not tall.

Note: in everyday speech the French will often drop the *ne*: *Je suis pas grande*.

.....EXERCISES.....

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

1. Bonjour, je _____ Caroline Dupuy.

2. Et vous ? Qui _____ vous?

3. Bonjour, je _____ Roger Carlson !

4. Je _____ Belge

5. Et vous, _____ vous anglais ?

6. Non, je _____ canadien.

2) Translate the following sentences:

1. I am tired = 2. I am happy =

3. You are busy = 4. I am not Irish =

5. You are not English = 6. I am a student =

7. We are married = 8. He is nice =

9. She is short = 10. They are tall = 11. She is funny =

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

Paul _____ grand, il _____ sympa et il _____ professeur d'anglais. Je _____ son meilleur ami. Nous _____ dans la même école. Paul _____ français, il n'_____ pas le plus jeune de la famille, il _____ le grand frère de Camille. Il _____ très gentil et comique, je _____ heureux d'_____ son ami.