




Modern French
Grammar **A PRACTICAL GUIDE**

SECOND EDITION

Margaret Lang and Isabelle Perez



**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

Modern FRENCH Grammar

Second Edition

Routledge Modern Grammars

Series concept and development—Sarah Butler

Other books in series:

Modern German Grammar, Second Edition
Modern German Grammar Workbook, Second Edition

Modern Italian Grammar
Modern Italian Grammar Workbook

Modern Spanish Grammar, Second Edition
Modern Spanish Grammar Workbook, Second Edition

Modern FRENCH Grammar

A practical guide

Second Edition

Margaret Lang
and Isabelle Perez

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1996
by Routledge

Reprinted 1997, 2000, 2002 (twice), 2003

Second edition published 2004
by Routledge

11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge

29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

© 1996, 2004 Margaret Lang and Isabelle Perez

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lang, Margaret, 1940–

Modern French grammar : a practice guide/Margaret Lang and Isabelle Perez.—2nd ed.
p. cm. —(Routledge modern grammars)

Includes index.

1. French language—Grammar. 2. French language—Textbook for foreign speakers—English.

I. Perez, Isabelle, 1962–. II. Title. III. Series.

PC2112.L35 2004

448.2'421–dc22 2003026062

ISBN 0-203-39725-8 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-67129-5 (Adobe eReader Format)

ISBN 0-415-33482-9 (hbk)

0-415-33162-5 (pbk)

Contents

Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction	xii
How to use this book	xvii
Glossary	xix

SECTION A Structures

I The noun group	2
1 Articles	2
2 The definite article	2
3 The indefinite article	9
4 The partitive article	11
5 Demonstrative adjectives	15
6 Demonstrative pronouns	17
7 Possessive adjectives	20
8 Possessive pronouns	22
9 Nouns	23
10 Adjectives	31
11 Indefinite adjectives, pronouns and adverbs	40
12 Personal pronouns	51
13 Reflexive pronouns	56
14 Emphatic pronouns; position and order of pronouns	56
15 Relative pronouns	62
16 Interrogative pronouns, adjectives and adverbs	67
17 Cardinal and ordinal numbers	72

18	Fractions	77
19	Approximate quantities	78
20	Dimensions	78
21	Adverbs of quantity	80
II	The verb group	82
22	Agreement of verb and subject	82
23	Formation of tenses	86
24	The indicative tenses; the present tense	86
25	The future tense	93
26	The imperfect tense	97
27	The past historic	100
28	The compound tenses	103
29	How the perfect is used	104
30	How the future perfect is used	107
31	How the pluperfect is used	108
32	How the past anterior is used	109
33	The conditional and the conditional perfect	110
34	The subjunctive	114
35	The present subjunctive	114
36	The imperfect subjunctive	116
37	The perfect subjunctive	117
38	The pluperfect subjunctive	117
39	Sequence of tenses; uses of the subjunctive	117
40	Reflexive verbs	127
41	The passive	129
42	The past participle	132
43	The present participle	137
44	The imperative	139
45	The infinitive	142

46	Impersonal verbs	145
47	Adverbs	147
48	Prepositions	156

SECTION B Functions

III	Exposition	159
49	Referring to people, things and places	159
49.1	Physical characteristics	159
49.2	Personality	161
49.3	Relationships	162
49.4	Age	165
49.5	Ownership	167
49.6	Dimensions	172
49.7	Quantity and number	174
49.8	Quality	179
49.9	Comparison	180
49.10	Directions	184
49.11	Location	187
49.12	Manner	191
50	Narrating	194
50.1	Present time	195
50.2	Past time	197
50.3	Future time	200
50.4	Dates and time	201
50.5	Sequence	205
51	Reporting	208
52	Asking questions	215
53	Negating	219
IV	Attitude	222
54	Greeting and leave-taking	222

54.1	Greeting	222
54.2	Leave-taking	223
55	Expressing congratulations and appreciation	225
55.1	Congratulations	225
55.2	Appreciation	226
56	Expressing apologies and sympathy	228
56.1	Apologies	228
56.2	Sympathy	230
57	Expressing surprise and disgust	232
57.1	Surprise	232
57.2	Disgust	234
58	Expressing contrasting attitudes, emotions, feelings	235
58.1	Likes and dislikes	235
58.2	Preference	237
59	Love and hate	238
60	Enthusiasm and indifference	240
61	Hopes, fears and regrets	241
62	Approval and disapproval	243
V	Argumentation	245
63	Agreeing and disagreeing	245
63.1	Agreeing	245
63.2	Disagreeing	247
63.3	Agreeing to differ	250
64	Asserting and confirming	251
64.1	Asserting	251
64.2	Confirming	252
65	Admitting and conceding	253
65.1	Admitting	253
65.2	Conceding	254

66	Correcting and protesting	255
67	Contradicting and criticizing	258
68	Suggesting and persuading	260
68.1	Suggesting	260
68.2	Persuading someone to think the way you do	262
68.3	Persuading someone to do/not to do something	264
68.4	Other ways of persuading and dissuading	264
69	Expressing volition	267
69.1	Verbs expressing volition	268
69.2	Wishing and intending	269
69.3	Asking what someone intends	270
69.4	Asking someone for something	272
69.5	Expressing (un)willingness to act upon request	273
69.6	Deliberate or non-deliberate actions	275
69.7	Saying what you do not want	276
70	Expressing permission and obligation	278
70.1	Permission	278
70.2	Prohibition	279
70.3	Obligation	281
70.4	Exemption	285
71	Expressing doubt and certainty	287
71.1	Doubt and certainty	287
71.2	Possibility and probability	292
71.3	Condition and hypothesis	298
72	Expressing logical relations	302
72.1	Cause—explicit	302
72.2	Cause—implicit	306
72.3	Consequence—explicit	307
72.4	Consequence—implicit	311

72.5	Aim	312
73	Expressing opposition	315
74	Structuring	321
74.1	Beginning	321
74.2	Continuing	326
74.3	Ending	328
VI	The sounds of French	333
75	Vowels	333
76	Nasal vowels	333
77	Semi-vowels/semi-consonants	333
78	Consonants	334
79	Accents, cedilla, diaeresis	334
80	Liaison	335
81	Elision	337
	Verb tables	339
	Index of grammar structures and functions	354

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following for their permission to reproduce extracts from copyright material: Grasset, Paris, Roger Vailland, *Un Jeune Homme Seul*, 1951 (p. 77) *Le Monde* 23.3.95 and 17.9.03 (pp. 83, 88); Plon, Paris, for H.Troyat, *Grandeur Nature*, 1936 (p. 86); *The Guardian* 16.2.95 (p. 104); M.Noailles for G. Moustaki, 'Le Métèque' (p. 134); Editions La Découverte, collection Repères, Paris, for J.Vallin, *La Population française*, 1989 (p. 139); Documentation européenne for P.Fontaine, 'Les Grandes Phases historiques' in *Dix Leçons sur l'Europe*, 1992 (p. 164); *Journal Officiel des Communautés Européennes* for Débats du Parlement européen 15.2.90 (p. 205); *Capital*, August 1994 (p. 245).

Introduction

This book is designed to provide the essential elements of French grammar, for students in the final year of school and in the first and later years of higher education. Advanced learners will find much that is useful for extending their knowledge of French, and for revision. The book is organized in two major sections: a reference section containing the structures of grammar and a section containing functional grammar. Each section includes cross-references to the other.

The reference grammar, which is as comprehensive as possible, has been structured around the noun phrase—dealing with all the elements related to the noun: articles, pronouns, adjectives and numbers—and the verb phrase—dealing with all the elements related to the verb: tenses, mood, participles and adverbs.

The functional grammar is composed of three parts, each demonstrating how to do things with language in order to communicate. The three principal functions identified are exposition, attitude and argumentation. Each of these is divided into smaller function areas related to the principal function.

The functions

Exposition

Communication involves both giving and obtaining information: we make statements and we ask questions about someone or something. This involves

- (a) referring to people, things and places
- (b) narrating events in some sort of sequence
- (c) reporting what we or other people say or think.

In other words, we are giving or obtaining information about who, what, when, how, where and why. Exposition includes three groups of functions identified, very broadly, as *referring*, *narrating* and *reporting*.

Referring to people, things and places involves giving and obtaining information about physical characteristics, personality, relationships, age,

ownership dimensions, quantity and number, quality or distinguishing characteristics, comparison, direction, location and manner.

Narrating involves talking about events or actions in terms of present, past and future time, dates and time, and sequence. *Reporting* describes what we or other people say and write. Reporting is usually clearly indicated by the presence of an introductory verb. There are many verbs which can introduce reported speech of which the commonest is 'say'. Some of the others are 'think, remind, ask; hope, believe, want, suggest, answer, admit, forget'. Interrogative structures are included in this section because we need to know how to obtain information, and to do this we ask questions, and negation is included because, of course, sometimes we need to say that something is not the case.

Attitude

Expressing an attitude towards someone or something usually means that we are introducing a personal, subjective element into communication: we are indicating our reaction to someone or something, we are evaluating, and making judgements—in a non-detached way. And we may do so spontaneously or intentionally.

Closely related to attitudes are the emotions and feelings which most of us experience and express from time to time. These, too, are personal and subjective, and, on occasion, they may in fact be attitudes. The focus of this section is, then, on the communication of attitudes, emotions and feelings and how we express them. We look first at the ways in which we *greet* or *take leave* of people when we are speaking or writing to them. Then we turn to the ways in which we express *congratulations* and *appreciation*, *apologies* and *sympathy*, and *surprise* and *disgust*. Finally, we consider ways in which we express contrasting attitudes, emotions and feelings: *likes*, *dislikes* and *preference*, *love* and *hate*, *enthusiasm* and *indifference*, *hopes* and *fears*, *approval* and *disapproval*.

Argumentation

Effective communication usually requires a certain amount of planning, and this involves the need to

- (a) structure what we want to say or write
- (b) determine the best strategies to employ
- (c) select the means of expression most suited to the structure, to the strategies, and, above all, to a specific context or situation.

The structure is the *plan* in what we are saying or writing, the strategy is the *function* we are employing, and the means of expression is the *grammatical* or *lexical* structure (for example, verb construction, noun phrase) which is most appropriate for the plan and the function.

It may be that a single word is enough to achieve what we want, but more frequently we are involved in a discussion or explaining something or arguing a case and so on. Often, there is simply not enough time to plan carefully what we want to say— though there is more time when we are writing. Also, it would be virtually impossible to try to learn every function and every means of expression. However, if we are familiar with some kinds of plan, with various types of function, and with some of the means for expressing them, then we can not only use them ourselves, but recognize them when we are listening to or reading what other people are saying or writing.

There are many kinds of plan in what is said and written, and these plans vary in complexity. Examples of plans, or planning, are the following:

- (a) creating a clear overall structure with an introduction, middle section and conclusion
- (b) listing a series of points
- (c) putting another point of view and defending it
- (d) proceeding from cause to effect, or vice versa.

In some situations, parts of plans may be enough and indeed appropriate for achieving what we want, for example, only part of (c). At other times we may need to put into action a fully developed plan, for example, a combination of (a)–(d). Finally, we must remember that there is no single, perfect plan suitable for every situation or context.

The functions available to us when we want to achieve something in argumentation are many. We may, for example, want to agree, indicate doubt, reject, criticize. We may wish to emphasize, persuade, influence, express obligation. Whatever it may be, whether we are initiating a discussion, making a speech, contributing to a conversation, reacting to a comment, broadcast or report, we have at our disposal a wide range of possible moves. We cannot, of course, know how someone is going to react to what we are saying or writing, so we need to have access to a range of responses in order to adapt to an unforeseen reaction, and respond appropriately.

The section on argumentation provides a comprehensive range of functions—and the means of expressing them—which are in fairly common use. You will recognize them when people are speaking and writing. It is recommended that you try to put them into practice in speech and writing whenever appropriate. The functions are presented as follows—*agreeing* and *disagreeing*, *asserting* and *confirming*, *admitting* and *conceding*, *correcting* and *protesting*, *contradicting* and *criticizing*, *suggesting* and *persuading*, expressing *volition*, *permission* and *obligation*, *doubt* and *certainty*, *logical relations*, *opposition*, and *structuring*.

The examples

The examples in the reference section are simple illustrations of the grammar structure in question. In the functional section the examples are selected from contemporary spoken and written French to demonstrate the function in question. They are actual examples which have been used in our own experience, and they are quoted within as much context as possible to illustrate the function and the related grammar structure.

The translations

The examples in both the reference and the functional sections are translated into English. In the reference section, translations are kept as close as possible to the French, in the functional section, on the other hand, where there is usually a substantial amount of context, the English equivalent is provided, rather than a direct and possibly, therefore, stilted version of the original.

Forms and functions

The forms in any living language are flexible and changing. At any one time they can vary according to the individual speaker or writer, to the part of the country he/she comes from or lives in, and indeed to fashion. There is seldom only one way of saying or writing something, and not very often a one-to-one equivalence of form and function.

This is clearly illustrated in the section on the imperative (A.44) where this one grammar structure is shown to have a variety of functions: the imperative form can be used to express an order, an instruction, an invitation, etc. It is also illustrated in the many functions of each of the tenses. Similarly, in the functional section, many forms are suggested for expressing one function: giving directions (B.49.10), for example, can be expressed through the imperative, the future tense, a combination of the two, etc.

Just as there is a network of relations between forms and functions, so there is a network of functions related to each single function. Agreeing (B.63.1), for example, is naturally associated with its opposite—disagreeing (B.63.2), and then also with a combination of the two—agreeing to differ (B.63.3)

Register

Register refers by and large to the different vocabulary and grammar structures we use when we are talking or writing to different people, and the levels of formality and informality we use. For example, we would be more formal with a teacher, a doctor, a policeman, at an interview..., but fairly informal with members of our family, friends or when simply chatting. We usually take into

account the status, age, and the relationship we have with other people, and the situation we are in, and we automatically adjust our language to them.

At times, we switch from formality to informality, when, for example, we begin to feel more comfortable with a person, or from informality to formality if, for example, a conversation with our bank manager switches from friendly conversation to a request for an increase in a loan.

What we are doing is quite normal and acceptable and is simply adapting to a situation.

In the grammar it is not possible to cover the wide range of levels that exist between formality and informality, but we have indicated in the examples where the register is formal or informal. Otherwise, examples should be taken as standard register—the register used by an average, educated speaker or writer.

Don't you want to take them round all the museums?

Tu veux pas les balader dans tous les musées? (informal)

Voulez-vous leur faire visiter tous les musées? (formal)

How to use this book

This book brings together two sets of guidelines on the French language:

A—A reference grammar covering the major points which need to be mastered so that you get things right.

B—A functional grammar covering the major types of communication you may want or need to carry out.

At your disposal, then, you have the essentials of grammar (section A) and applications of the grammar in a wide selection of functions (section B). When we were preparing this book, we kept in mind the frequent changes which any living language undergoes, and we have, therefore, included comments on exceptions to the guidelines. And, wherever appropriate, we have included informal ways of saying or writing something. The majority of examples have cross-references to information concerning one or more grammar points or concerning additional details on the function.

How, then, will you use the book? If, for example, you want to greet someone you look up B.54.1. In this section you will find a number of suggestions on different ways of saying ‘Hi!’ or ‘Good morning!’, for example. It’s not very difficult to know how to say hello, of course, but, are you aware of the difference between **Bonjour!** and **Bonsoir!?** On the other hand, you might want to persuade someone to do something. To find a suitable way of doing this you look up B.68.3 and you will again find a number of suggestions for persuading, and cross-references to the appropriate grammar guideline. When you are looking at the functions, we suggest that you also consider the much longer context that is provided to see what happens to a grammatical form when it is in use.

There are other ways of saying and writing the same things—the examples given here are only suggestions, and you are bound to come across other means of expression the more you come into contact with French either at university or in your professional life. We recommend that you consider the suggestions provided here, select the form, or forms, that suit you best and learn them; when you meet alternative ways of saying or writing something, add them to your repertoire.

Before the verb tables we have included a section with the sounds of French, and several words for you to practise the sounds. Your teacher will be able to help you with them.

Glossary

Many of the terms used in this grammar are explained at the beginning of the section in which they are used, but there are some terms which are not explained in a specific section because they occur in several sections, and there are some which may cause difficulty for students. The short list which follows includes the terms which we think need special attention. We have assumed that most students using this grammar are familiar with most of the traditional grammar terms such as noun, verb, adjective.

Adverb

A word or phrase which gives information about how, where and/or when something occurs. There are adverbs of manner, place, time, degree, duration and frequency. Adverbs can modify a verb (**faire avec soin**), an adjective (**très difficile**), or another adverb (**beaucoup trop**). Adverbs are always invariable, unlike some other parts of speech, that is, they never change their spelling to agree with another part of speech.

Antecedent

A word or group of words which precedes another word or group of words. Relative pronouns, or words such as **ce**, have antecedents to which they refer back (**L'homme qui a donné un pourboire n'a pas beaucoup d'argent**).

Apposition

The placing of a word or phrase directly beside another word or phrase in order to provide more information about the other one (**Jacques Chirac, Président de la République**). There is no article between the words in apposition.

Cohesion

The linking of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs by means of **cohesive devices**, which may be clauses, adverbs, pronouns, negatives, etc. (the adverbs include **et, mais, par contre, d'abord**).

Complement

A word or phrase which completes the meaning of, or gives more information about, something. The complement may be a word in apposition (see above), a direct object (**Elle a mangé la pomme**), an indirect object (**Il le leur a vendu**), the agent in a passive sentence (**La tarte a été volée par le petit garçon**)

....

Conjugation

This refers to all the endings of a verb. Verbs are usually classified according to one of four main conjugations in French: **-er, -ir, -re, -oir**. Each of the conjugations has its own set of six endings for each tense. Regular verbs have the set of endings which belong to a particular conjugation, so grammar books are able to give a model verb for each conjugation which all the regular verbs of that conjugation will follow (regular **-er** verbs follow **donner**, for example). Irregular verbs are those which do not follow either the stem or the endings of a conjugation. The most useful irregular verbs are included in verb tables in grammar books.

Determiners

These are words which are part of the noun group. There are many of them in French— all the articles (**le, un, du...**); the possessive adjectives (**mon, ton,**

son...); the demonstrative adjectives (**ce, cet, cette...**); the interrogative and exclamatory adjective **quel** (as in *Quelle maison?!/!*); indefinite adjectives (**certain, chaque, différents, divers, maint, plusieurs, quelque, tout**); **aucun**, normally in the singular (**Elle n'a aucun talent**); the cardinal numbers used as adjectives (as in **deux journaux**).

Direct and indirect objects

The direct object is a noun or pronoun referring to a person or thing directly affected in some way by an action. The direct object is never introduced by a preposition (**Il a lu le livre**). The object is indirect when it is introduced by a preposition, usually **à** or **de** (**Nous le donnons à nos parents. Ça dépend de nos parents**). Indirect object pronouns are **me, te, lui, nous, vous, leur**. These pronouns are not preceded by **à**—it is built into the pronoun (**Nous le leur donnons**). Following **de**, and other prepositions, the emphatic pronouns are used (**Ça dépend de toi**).

Finite

Refers to the many parts of verbs which have endings. These endings indicate whether the subject is singular or plural, the tense and the mood. The **infinitive** is the part of the verb which ends in **-er, -ir, -re, -oir**, and in this case there is no finite ending giving information about whether the subject is singular or plural, or the tense.

Gender and number

These are very important grammar concepts in French. If you forget to make adjectives agree with nouns or verbs with subjects, then you have simply made mistakes, and that can cost you marks! Gender in French is either masculine (**il, il...**), or feminine (**la, elle...**), and all nouns are masculine or feminine, and adjectives have to agree with their noun. Number refers to whether a noun or pronoun is singular (just one person, thing or action), or plural (two or more people, things or actions). Verbs have to agree with their noun or pronoun subject.

Impersonal verb

A verb of which the subject is **il** 'it' (**il faut** 'it is necessary'). The impersonal verb can sometimes become personal by the addition of a personal pronoun (**il me faut** 'I must').

To modulate

To change or influence the meaning of a word or phrase in some way. There are various ways of doing this, using nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs which have specific nuances. You can also, for example, in greeting and leave-taking—merely by altering the intonation you use—make what you say courteous or discourteous, friendly or aggressive. A slight change of meaning is called a *nuance* (of meaning). You can achieve a different nuance simply by adding, or changing, the intonation you use.

Mood

This refers to the different forms in the conjugation of a verb which indicate the functions for which the verb is used. So, you have the indicative mood (fact), the subjunctive mood (non-fact); the interrogative mood (questions), the conditional mood (conditions and hypotheses), the imperative mood (orders). The mood of the verb can be changed according to what you want to express; for example, fact, non-fact, questions.

Transitive and intransitive verbs

Verbs can be transitive or intransitive. A transitive verb is a verb with a direct object (**Il a lu le livre**). An intransitive verb does not have an object (**Il travaille bien**). Verbs may be directly transitive (**Il a lu le livre. Mange ta soupe**) or indirectly transitive (**Pense à nous**). Almost all normally transitive verbs can be used intransitively (**Il boit un verre. Il ne boit pas**). And some normally intransitive verbs can be used transitively (**Il sort. Il sort sa voiture**).

Abbreviations used in the grammar

f—feminine, m—masculine, s—singular, pl—plural
qn—quelqu'un, qch—quelque chose

Section A

Structures

I

The noun group

1

Articles

French has three articles: the definite article, the indefinite article and the partitive article. They agree with nouns in gender and number. In general, they are used in a similar way to English articles, but there are several important differences.

1.1 Forms

	Definite	Indefinite	Partitive
Masculine singular	le (l')	un	du (de l')
Feminine singular	la (l')	une	de la (de l')
Plural	les	des	des
		+de/d'	+de/d'

2

The definite article

The definite articles are **le, la, les** 'the'. Contracted forms are used when the prepositions **de** 'of, from' or **à** 'to' (and sometimes 'from': **emprunter à** 'to borrow from') precede the articles **le, les**: **de+le>du, de+les>des, à+le>au, à+les>aux**.

C'est le livre *du* professeur.

It's the teacher's book.

Ce sont les copies *des* étudiants.

They are the students' papers.

English frequently uses 's (singular) or s' (plural) to indicate possession, rather than 'of the'. It would sound odd to say: 'It is the book of the teacher'.

Elle parle *au* président.

She is speaking to the president/
chairman.

Nous avons donné les billets aux enfants. We have given the tickets to the children.

But there is no change when **de** or **à** precede **la** or **l'**:

La porte de l'école est fermée. The school door is shut.
Elle va à la maison. She is going home.

2

2.1 Contracted forms

When they precede words beginning with a vowel or a mute **h**, **le** and **la** are shortened to **l'** (see 81.1):

<i>l'issue</i>	the exit	<i>l'accident</i>	the accident
<i>l'histoire</i>	history, the story	<i>l'homme</i>	man, the man

NOTE The articles are not necessarily translated into English.

2.2 Place of the article

The article precedes nouns, and adjectives which precede nouns:

la petite table the little table *le grand garçon* the big boy

but note that they *follow* **tout**, **tous**, **toute(s)** 'all, every, the whole' (see 11.1):

<i>tout le vin</i>	all the wine	<i>toute la famille</i>	the whole family
<i>tout l'argent</i>	all the money	<i>toutes les filles</i>	all the girls
<i>tous les mois</i>	every month		

2.3 How the definite articles are used

The definite article refers to specific people or things:

Le livre est sur la table. The book is on the table.

In lists of nouns, the article is usually repeated before each noun:

Il aime les chats, les chiens et les chevaux. He likes cats, dogs and horses.

but increasingly today, in written French, the article is omitted from lists:

Chats, chiens, chevaux, il les aime tous. Cats, dogs and horses—he loves them all.

2.4 Differences between French and English articles

In certain contexts French and English articles are used differently.

(a) where the noun is used in a general sense:

L'herbe est verte.	Grass is green.
Aime-t-il le vin?	Does he like wine?
Elle aime la musique.	She loves music.
Les ordinateurs deviennent de moins en moins chers.	Computers are becoming less and less expensive.

(b) with parts of the body, or mind, where English uses the possessive adjective ('my, your...') French uses the definite article (see 49.1):

2

Il secoua la tête.	He shook his head.
Ouvre les yeux.	Open your eyes.
Il a froid aux pieds.	He has cold feet.
Elle a mal à la tête.	She has a headache.
Elle a perdu la mémoire.	She has lost her memory.
Il souffre du dos.	He has back problems.

and with reflexive verbs (see 42.3 for agreement of participle, 49.5e) referring to the owner:

Elle s'est lavé les cheveux.	She washed her hair.
-------------------------------------	----------------------

When something is done to someone else, that other person is indicated by including an indirect object pronoun (see 49.5e):

Elle lui a saisi la main.	She took his/her hand.
Elle lui a lavé les cheveux.	She washed his/her hair.

The definite article is also used with parts of the body in description following **avoir** (see 49.1):

Le bébé a les mains dodues.	The baby has chubby hands.
Elle a les cheveux longs.	She has long hair.

Note the use of the possessive adjective **mon, ton...** 'my, your...' with verbs other than **avoir**:

Il caressa sa longue barbe noire.	He stroked his long black beard.
--	----------------------------------

And note the following descriptive phrases where English uses 'with' (see 49.1):

la femme <i>aux yeux verts</i>	the woman with the green eyes
la maison <i>aux fenêtres ouvertes</i>	the house with the open windows
Il marchait <i>les mains derrière le dos.</i>	He was walking with his hands behind his back.

French normally uses the singular form of nouns if they refer to something of which we have only one, e.g. **la vie** 'life', **la tête** 'head/face', **le cou** 'neck':

Elle leur a sauvé *la vie.* She saved their lives.

(c) in many expressions of time, and with seasons, dates and festivals (see **50.4**):

à trois heures <i>du matin/de l'après-midi</i>	at three in the morning/ afternoon
Il arrivera vers <i>les sept heures.</i>	He'll arrive about seven o'clock.
Elle le fera pendant <i>la semaine.</i>	She will do it during the week.

Note the English equivalent with the use or omission of the articles:

<i>la semaine dernière/prochaine</i>	last/next week
<i>au jour le jour</i>	from day to day
Elle travaille <i>le matin.</i>	She works in the morning(s).
Ils viennent <i>le jour.</i>	They come during the day.
tous <i>les vendredis</i>	every Friday
toutes <i>les semaines</i>	every week
tous <i>les deux jours</i>	every second/other day

2

but

Elle le rencontre trois fois par semaine. She meets him three times a week.

Some examples with the seasons:

<i>L'hiver est merveilleux.</i>	Winter is wonderful.
<i>On y va l'été prochain.</i>	We are going there next summer.

The article is omitted with **en**: ***en hiver, en été, en automne*** 'in winter, summer, autumn', but not in ***au printemps*** 'in spring'.

Some examples with dates and use of the article:

<i>Nous sommes le mardi 11 décembre.</i>	It's Tuesday, 11th December.
<i>le 26 mai 1968</i>	26th May 1968

Le jeudi on va au marché. On Thursdays we go to (the) market.
(every Thursday)
On se voit le 7. See you on the 7th.

but no article

Nous sommes mardi. It's Tuesday.
Il me le donnera jeudi. He'll give it to me on Thursday.
lundi dernier last Monday

Some examples with festivals, which are usually feminine:

à la Toussaint at Hallowe'en/on All Saints' Day
à la Pentecôte at Whitsun

but

à Noël at Christmas
à Pâques at Easter

(d) in certain expressions of price, pay, quantity and speed:

Cela se vend à 30 euros le kilo. That costs 30 euros a kilo.
Cela se vend à 2 euros cinquante les 100 grammes. That costs 2 euros fifty (for) a hundred grammes.
Ce tissu coûte 500 euros le mètre. This material is 500 euros a metre.

but

Il est payé à l'heure. He is paid by the hour.
La voiture roulait à 100 km/h. (you would say 100 kilometres heure) The car was travelling at 60 mph.

or

Elle roulait à 80 à l'heure. It was going at 50 mph.

(e) with names of towns and cities 'from, to/in' are expressed by **de, à**: 'from Paris' **de Paris**, 'to/in Paris' **à Paris**. But if the town or city is qualified by an adjective, the article is used: **le vieux Paris** 'the old part(s) of Paris' (see **49.10, 49.11**). The names of some towns and cities include the article as part of the name. In such cases the rules for **de, à** and the article (see **2**) are followed:

Il revient <i>du Mans, de La Rochelle, des Echelles.</i>	He is just back from Le Mans, La Rochelle, Les Echelles.
Elle habite <i>Le Havre.</i>	She lives in Le Havre.
Elle va <i>au Havre.</i>	She is going to Le Havre.
Il est à <i>La Rochelle.</i>	He is in La Rochelle.

With countries and regions the article is usually included if the name of the country is masculine singular, or masculine or feminine plural:

Il revient <i>des Philippines.</i>	He is just back from the Philippines.
Elle va <i>au Portugal.</i>	She is going to Portugal.

But when names of countries and regions are feminine and singular—and most of them are **-en** is used for ‘to/in’ and there is no article: **aller/demeurer *en Allemagne, en Ecosse, en Charente*** ‘to go to/live in Germany, Scotland, the Charente’. **De** is used for ‘from’ and there is no article: **revenir *de Russie, d’Espagne, de Provence,*** ‘to return from Russia, Spain, Provence’.

NOTE If the town or country is qualified by an adjective, the article is used: ***la Chine moderne*** ‘modern China’. The article is also used when expressing north, south, east and west: ***le nord de la France*** ‘the north of France’, ***le sud de l’Angleterre*** ‘the south of England’.

There is no precise pattern in some expressions. They simply have to be learned. Some examples:

les vins <i>de France</i>	the wines of France/French wines
l’histoire <i>de France</i>	the history of France/French history

(Many phrases have the pattern **de+noun** which is very similar to an adjective: **une écharpe *de soie blanche*** ‘a white silk scarf’, **une maison *de campagne*** ‘a house in the country’.)

but

la géographie <i>de la France</i>	the geography of France/French geography
la capitale <i>de la France</i>	the capital of France/the French capital

and

le président <i>de la République</i>	the president of France/the French president
---	--

There is a rule of thumb for a few phrases: feminine countries—*no* article, masculine countries—*include* an article:

la reine d'Angleterre	the Queen of England
l'ambassade d'Autriche	the Austrian embassy

2
but

l'empereur du Japon	the Emperor of Japan
l'ambassade du Sénégal	the Senegalese embassy

(f) in titles, forms of address, and qualified proper nouns:

le général de Gaulle	General de Gaulle
As-tu connu le Président Mitterrand?	Did you know President Mitterrand?
Voilà le docteur Knock.	Here/there is Doctor Knock.
M.le Président...	(Mr) President,...
Messieurs les délégués...	Delegates,...
le vieux M.Guiat	old Mr Guiat
la petite Isabelle	little Isabelle

But the article is normally omitted before a noun in apposition:

le général de Gaulle, Président de la république	General de Gaulle, (the) President of France
Paris, capitale de la France	Paris, the capital of France

Articles are not used in titles such as **Elizabeth II** 'Elizabeth the Second', **Henri IV** 'Henry the Fourth': in French you would say **Elizabeth deux, Henri quatre**.

(g) with names of languages, use of the article is also variable, but it is normally omitted after **parler**:

Parlez-vous italien?	Do you speak Italian?
Il ne parle pas français.	He doesn't speak French.
Il est difficile de trouver un équivalent en anglais.	It is difficult to find an equivalent in English/an English equivalent.

but

Apprenez-vous l'espagnol à l'école?	Are you learning Spanish at school?
L'allemand est une langue compliquée.	German is a complicated language.

Note the use of capital letters in English, but not in French, for names of languages. Capitals are used in French *only* if referring to a human being—whatever his/her nationality:

le Français, la Française	the Frenchman, the Frenchwoman
le français	(the) French (language)
français, française(s)	French (adjective)

(h) with meals, games and musical instruments:

pendant le dîner	during dinner
jouer au tennis	to play tennis
jouer du violon	to play the violin

(i) with other parts of speech to form nouns:

les pauvres	the poor (people)
le manger et le boire	food and drink

3

les blessés	the injured
les dires	statements, sayings
le savoir	knowledge
le rouge	red (colour), red wine
le primaire, le secondaire	the primary, secondary level of education

(j) note that if the nouns are qualified, by a relative clause for example, **de**+the definite article are used:

Il a bu une carafe du vin qu'on a acheté en Australie.

He drank a carafe of the wine we bought in Australia.

Un ciel couvert des nuages qui annoncent une tempête.

A sky full of storm clouds.

3

The indefinite article

The indefinite articles are **un(e), des, de/d'** 'a, an; some, any'. Indefinite articles are repeated in lists; their English equivalents are often omitted.

J'ai un hérisson et un chat à la maison.

I have a hedgehog and a cat at home.

Il y a des livres intéressants dans ce magasin.

There are some interesting books in this shop.

Une femme m'a téléphoné ce soir.

A woman telephoned me this evening.

Ya-t-il des voitures devant la mairie?

Are there (any) cars in front of the town hall?

3.1 Differences between French and English indefinite articles

In certain contexts French and English articles are used differently.

(a) the article is used with abstract nouns qualified by an adjective:

un équilibre parfait	perfect balance/equilibrium
avec une grande émotion	full of emotion

(b) the article is not used when talking about occupations, religions, nationality:

Il est professeur.	He is a teacher.
J'ai été nommé ministre.	I've been appointed minister.
Son fils est protestant.	His/her son is a Protestant.
Sa femme est écossaise.	His wife is Scottish.

but when the noun is qualified, the article *is* used:

Son cousin est un peintre célèbre.	His/her cousin is a famous painter.
---	-------------------------------------

Note the alternative possibilities:

4

Il est député./C'est un député.	He is a member of the National Assembly.
Elle est italienne./C'est une Italienne.	She's (an) Italian.

(c) the article is also omitted when two nouns are in apposition:

Le gouvernement, représentant du peuple, n'a pas le droit de lui refuser un référendum.

The government, the representative of the people, does not have the right to refuse them a referendum.

(d) the article is used for emphasis:

Elle a des pieds!	What feet she's got!
Il fait un temps!	What amazing weather!

(e) the singular forms **un** and **une** are the same as the number ‘one’—as opposed to another number:

Il a bu un verre de vin. He drank a/one glass of wine.

(f) there is no article after the exclamatory **quel!** ‘what (a/an)!’:

Quel imbécile!	What an idiot!
Quelle coïncidence!	What a coincidence!
Quelles drôles d’histoires!	What strange tales!
Quels hommes distingués!	What distinguished men!

4

The partitive article

The partitive articles are **du, de la, des, de/d** ‘some, any’. Before a word beginning with a vowel or a mute **h**, **du** and **de la** > **de l’**: **de l’honneur** ‘honour’, **de l’ail** ‘garlic’, **de l’herbe** ‘grass’, **de l’eau** ‘water’. The article may be omitted in English, but not in French. The article is repeated in lists.

Il a demandé du sucre et du lait. He asked for (some) sugar and milk.
Tu veux de la moutarde et du sel? You want (some, any) mustard and salt?

4.1 How the indefinite and partitive articles are used

(a) in a negative context **un, une, du, de la, des** > **de/d** when the noun they precede is made negative, and their meaning is ‘no, not a, not any’:

pas de monnaie, plus d’eau	no change, no more water
Il n’a pas d’argent.	He hasn’t any money.
Elle n’a plus de patience, d’humour, de tendresse.	She has no patience, humour or affection left.

But if the speaker or writer intends the negative to focus on something in the sentence other than the noun, the articles remain unchanged:

4

Il ne m’a pas donné de conseils.	He didn’t give me any <i>advice</i> .
Il ne m’a pas donné des conseils, il me les a vendus!	He didn’t <i>give</i> me any advice, he <i>sold</i> it to me!

(b) the articles also remain unchanged when expressing a contrast:

Elle n’achète pas du vin mais de la bière.
 She doesn’t buy wine, she buys beer.

Elle n'a pas donné *des* livres mais *des* CD pour l'anniversaire de son neveu.

She didn't give books to her nephew for his birthday, she gave him CDs.

(c) when the article **un(e)** expresses a number, there is no change:

Le gouvernement n'avait pas *un* député honnête.

The government did not have one honest member.

Il n'y avait pas *une* femme au gouvernement.

There was not a single woman in the government.

Note the meanings in the following examples:

Elle n'a pas *une* paire de chaussures. Elle en a trente.

She doesn't have one pair of shoes. She has thirty.

Elle n'a pas *de* chaussures. Elle n'a que des pantoufles.

She hasn't any shoes. She only has slippers.

(d) the articles are not changed when the negative form used is **ne...que** 'only':

Elle n'a qu'*un* mouchoir.

She has only one handkerchief.

Elle ne vend que *des* chapeaux.

She only sells hats.

Il ne boit que *du* vin.

He only drinks wine.

(e) after **ni...ni** 'neither...nor' or **sans** 'without' the partitive articles are omitted (see 53a):

Elle ne prend *ni* sel, *ni* poivre, *ni* moutarde. She doesn't take salt, pepper or mustard.

Il boit du thé *sans* lait. He drinks tea without milk./He doesn't take milk in his tea.

Il est sorti *sans* chapeau. He has gone out without a hat.

But if the noun is qualified in some way the articles are included:

Elle est sortie *sans un* chapeau qui pourrait la protéger.

She has gone out without a hat which could give her some protection.

Nous n'avons *ni le* temps *ni l'* argent pour le faire.

We have neither the time nor the money to do it.

If the verb is **être**, the articles remain unchanged:

Ce n'est pas *un* désastre.

It's not a disaster.

Ce ne sont pas des chaussures.

They're not shoes.

Note that when the definite articles **le, la, les** are preceded by **de** in verb constructions such as **se souvenir de** 'to remember', **parler de** 'to speak about', they are changed to **du, de la, de l', des**. They remain in these forms in a negative context:

4

Nous ne parlions pas des victimes de la guerre.

We were not speaking about the victims of the war.

Elle n'a pas peur des chiens.

She is not afraid of dogs.

4.2 Forms of the indefinite and partitive articles when an adjective precedes a noun

The indefinite and partitive articles **des>de/d'** when an adjective precedes a noun:

Elle a de grands yeux bleus.

She has big blue eyes.

Il nous raconte toujours d'intéressantes histoires.

He always tells us interesting stories.

J'ai eu de ses nouvelles.

I've had some news about him/her.

Note that there are some exceptions to this rule when the adjective and noun form a unit:

C'est du bon café!

It's good coffee!

des petits pains

rolls

If the adjective follows the noun, or is virtually part of it, **des** remains unchanged.

Il nous raconte toujours des histoires incroyables. He always tells us unbelievable stories.

and **des** always>**d'** before **autre(s)**:

On a d'autres devoirs à faire.

We have (more) other homework.

Il en a d'autres.

He has others/more of them.

4.3 Forms of the partitive articles in expressions of quantity

The partitive articles>**de/d'** in expressions of quantity (see 21, 49.7).

(a) with adverbs such as **assez de** 'enough', **autant de** 'as much, as many', **beaucoup de** 'a lot of, many', **combien de?** 'how much, how many?', **moins de**

'less', **(un) peu de** '(a) little', **plus de** 'more', **tant de** 'as much/many, so much/many', **trop de** 'too much/many':

Combien de gens?	How many people?
peu de gens	few people

Note that **bien** 'a lot of, many' is followed by the full partitive:

Il a bien du mal à suivre les cours d'allemand.

He is having a lot of difficulty following the German classes.

(b) with adjectives which express an amount, or lack, of something, such as **entouré de** 'surrounded by', **couvert de** 'covered in/with', **vide de** 'empty of, lacking in':

vide de sens	meaningless
rempli de livres	full of books

5

(c) with nouns such as **une bouteille de** 'a bottle of', **un manque de** 'a lack of':

une bouteille de (vin) rouge	a bottle of red wine
un manque de ressources	a lack of resources

4.4 Forms of the partitive articles after indefinite, neuter and negative pronouns

De/d' is also used after indefinite, neuter and negative pronouns: **quelqu'un** 'someone', **quelque chose** 'something', **ceci/cela** 'this/that', **ce qui/ce que** 'what', **que** 'what', **quoi?** 'what?', **personne** 'nobody', **rien** 'nothing':

quelqu'un d'intéressant	someone interesting
quelque chose d'acceptable	something acceptable
rien d'urgent	nothing urgent
Quoi de neuf?	What's new?
Tout ce qu'il avait de valable a été volé.	Everything valuable he had has been stolen.

Note the expression **la plupart de** 'most of' which is followed by the full partitive (the verb is plural) (see 22.3.1):

La plupart des étudiants ont réussi dans les trois matières.

Most of the students have passed in the three subjects.

And note the preposition **d'après** 'according to':

D'après la météo il va pleuvoir.

According to the weather forecast it's going to rain.

Articles are omitted from many expressions in French, of which the following represent a very small selection:

rendre service à	to help	tomber par terre	to fall down
faire signe de	to indicate	avoir envie de	to want to
mettre fin à	to end	en auto	by car
en vélo/à bicyclette	by bicycle	sous prétexte de	on the pretext of
par hasard	by chance	sans gêne	without embarrassment

<i>soit indifférence, soit ressentiment</i>	either indifference or resentment
<i>Plus il crie, moins elle écoute.</i>	The more he shouts, the less she listens.
<i>Plus elle travaille, plus elle gagne.</i>	The more she works, the more she earns.

5

Demonstrative adjectives

There are three singular forms but only one plural form of the demonstrative adjective. They agree in gender and number with the noun, and the English equivalent is 'this, these, that, those', or simply 'the'.

5

5.1 Forms

	Singular	Plural
Masculine	ce (cet)	ces
Feminine	cette	ces

The form **cet** is used before masculine singular nouns beginning with a vowel or a mute **h**: **cet enfant** 'this child', **cet hommage** 'this tribute', **cette addition** 'this addition', **cette habitation** 'this house', **ces amis** 'these friends', **ces activités** 'these activities', **ces hommes** 'these men', **ces histoires** 'these stories'.

Il a lu ce livre.

He has read this book.

Elle n'aime pas cet homme.

She does not like the man.

Cette jeune étudiante n'a pas travaillé cette année.

That young student has not done any work this year.

On a vu trop de *ces films* dont vous avez parlé.

We've seen too many of those films you spoke about.

5.2 Adding *-ci* and *-là* to nouns

By adding *-ci* to the noun it is possible to emphasize *proximity* in space or time, and by adding *-là* to the noun it is possible to emphasize *distance* in space or time. Addition of *-ci* or *-là* also helps to distinguish between two or more people or things.

Il est entré par *cette fenêtre-ci*.

He entered by this window.

Elle est venue *ce matin-là*.

She came that morning.

Laquelle préfères-tu? *Cette robe-ci* ou *cette robe-là*?

Which do you prefer? This dress or that one?

5.2.1 The demonstrative adjective, or the demonstrative adjective+noun+*-là* often carry a pejorative, obsequious or contemptuous overtone.

Ce Jean est un peu insolent, n'est-ce pas? That John is a bit rude, isn't he?

Ces dames sont servies? You are being served, ladies?

Elle ne pouvait tolérer cet homme-là. She couldn't stand that man.

5.2.2 *-ci* and *-là* are present in **voici**, **voilà**, **ici**, **là** 'here, there' denoting proximity or distance. But increasingly today the forms **voilà** and **là** are used in preference to **voici** and **ici**:

Voilà ton livre.

Here/there is your book.

6

Je ne sais pas quand il va arriver. Il est là maintenant.

I don't know when he'll arrive. He's here now.

5.3 Repetition of the demonstrative adjective in lists

Like the definite article (see 2.3) the demonstrative adjective is usually repeated in lists.

Cette maison et ce beau jardin me plaisent beaucoup.

I like this house and the lovely garden very much.

6

Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are simple or compound. Unlike demonstrative adjectives there are separate forms for the masculine and feminine plurals (see 5.1). They agree in gender and number with the noun, and the English equivalent is ‘this one, these, that one, those’. There is also a small group of neuter demonstrative pronouns meaning ‘this, it, that’.

6.1 Simple forms

	Singular	Plural
Masculine	celui	ceux
Feminine	celle	celles

6.1.1 The simple forms are always followed by a relative pronoun **qui**, **que**, **dont**... (see 15) or by a preposition **de**, **pour**...

On a visité beaucoup d’appartements dans cet immeuble mais on préfère ceux qui ne donnent pas sur la rue.

We have seen a lot of flats in that building but we prefer those/the ones which don’t overlook the street.

Il y a deux écoles. Celle des filles et celle des garçons.

There are two schools. The girls’ (one) and the boys’ (one).

Note that there is no need to translate ‘one(s)’ into French.

6.2 Compound forms

	Singular	Plural
Masculine	celui-ci/-là	ceux-ci/-là
Feminine	celle-ci/-là	celles-ci/-là

6.2.1 The compound forms usually express a contrast or distinguish between two people or things ‘this (one), these/that (one), those’.

J’ai apporté deux romans policiers. Veux-tu celui-ci ou celui-là?

I’ve brought two detective novels. Do you want this one or that one?

6

Le frère ou la sœur? Celle-ci est charmante, celui-là pas du tout!

The brother or the sister? She’s delightful, he’s just awful!

NOTE *Celui-là/-ci* may mean ‘the former, the latter’. In sentences where only ‘the latter’ is used, **ce dernier** sometimes replaces **celui-ci**.