

False friends

achever - not to achieve but to finish, complete as in *Il vient d'achever son service militaire* - He's just finished his military service. The English to achieve can be translated by *atteindre, réaliser, accomplir*.

actuel(lement) - not actual(ly) but current(ly): *Elle est actuellement en Suisse* - She's currently in Switzerland. The English *actually* is usually translated by *en fait*.

agenda (m) - not an agenda in a meeting (*ordre du jour*) but a diary.

amateur (m) - although as in English this can have the meaning of *non-professional*, it more commonly means *enthusiast* (as in *un amateur de jazz* - a jazz lover).

apprécier - not just appreciate but also to estimate or assess : *apprécier les conséquences* - to assess the consequences.

assister / assistance - when used with *à* means to be present at, as in *Il n'a pas assisté à la réunion* - He wasn't present at the meeting. Note also that *assistance* can mean audience as well as assistance.

assumer - not to assume (= *supposer*) but to take on (responsibility) or accept (a situation).

assurance (f) - means insurance as well as assurance.

balancer - not to balance (= *équilibrer, se tenir en équilibre*) but to sway.

blâmer - not to blame (= *reprocher qch à qn / en vouloir à qn*) but to criticize.

caméra - not a camera for taking photos (= *un appareil photo*) but a film / TV camera.

casserole (m) - not a casserole (= *un ragoût*) but a saucepan.

caution (f) - not caution (= *prudence, circonspection* or *avertissement*) but deposit, security or bail.

cave (m) - not a cave (= *une grotte*) but a cellar.

change - The English *change* is most commonly translated by *un changement*: *un changement de direction* = a change of direction. The English *change* in the sense of loose change = *la monnaie*, whilst the French *change (m)* means *foreign currency* as in *bureau de change*.

chauffeur (m) - not just an English *chauffeur*, but any kind of professional driver e.g. *un chauffeur de taxi* - a taxi driver.

chips (mpl) - not *chips* (= *frites* - *fppl*) but *crisps*. The English *chip* in the computer sense is *une puce*.

cohérent - more commonly *consistent* as in *une position cohérente* - *a consistent position*. The sentence *He was barely coherent* = *On avait peine à le comprendre*.

collège (m) - not *college* as in *university* but a *secondary school* up to the age of 16.

comédien(ne) (m) - not *comedien* (= *comique*) but *actor*.

commande (f) - not *command* (= *ordre*) but *order* in the commercial or restaurant sense. *Une télécommande* is a *remote-control*.

compléter - more commonly means *to supplement* or *complement* rather than to complete (= *terminer, achever*).

conception (f), concevoir - in the commercial sense means *design, to design* rather than *conceive, conception*.

conducteur (m) - not the *conductor* of a bus (= *contrôleur*) or an orchestra (*chef d'orchestre*) but a *driver*.

conférence - not a *conference* (= *un congrès, une réunion*) but a *lecture* or *speech*.

conforter - not *to comfort* (= *réconforter*) but *to support, strengthen*.

contrôler - more commonly means *to check* (as in *contrôler les billets / passeports*). The English *to control* is most often translated by *dominer, maîtriser* etc.

courage (m) - not just *courage* but also *energy*. The expression *bon courage* means variously *good luck, cheer up* or other positive wishes depending on the context.

cours (m) - means an individual *class* as well as a *course*. A course in a school is *un programme* and in a university is *un cursus*.

décevoir, deception - not *to deceive* (= *tromper*) but *to disappoint*. Note also the noun *déception* (*f*) meaning not *deception* (= *une tromperie*) but *disappointment*.

dégoûter - although can mean *to disgust*, is often translated by the milder *to put off*: *Ne te laisse pas dégoûter par la couleur* - *Don't let the colour put you off*.

délai (m) - not *delay* (= *retard*) but a *timeperiod* for doing something: *Tu as un délai de 30 jours pour payer* - *You have 30 days in which to pay*. Note also the expression *dans les meilleurs délais* - *as soon as possible*.

demander - not *to demand* (= *exiger*) but *to ask for*.

député (m) - not *deputy* (= *un adjoint*) but a member of the Assemblée Nationale (the French Parliament).

dessin - not *design* (= *la conception*) but a *drawing*. *Un dessein* = a *project, plan*.

déstiné - often means *to be aimed at, intended for*. For example, *Des mesures destinées à réduire le taux de chômage* = *Measures aimed at reducing unemployment*

détail (m) - means not only *detail* but also *retail* (as in *le prix de détail* - *retail price*). Note also *un détaillant* - a *retailer* (as opposed to *un grossiste* - *wholesaler*) and *acheter au détail* - *to buy retail* (as opposed to *acheter en gros* - *to buy wholesale*).

détenir - not *to detain* (= *retenir, placer en détention*) but *to possess*.

disposer de - not *to dispose of* (= *se débarrasser de*) but *to have (at your disposal)*.

dossier (m) - not just *file* or *dossier*, but in a media context commonly used to mean *issue, affair*.
Le dossier Elf - *The Elf affair*.

éditeur (m) - not *editor* (= *rédacteur*) but *publisher*.

effectif (m) - none of the meaning of the adjective *effective* (= *efficace*) but *workforce* (or in an educational context *number of students*).

énergétique - not *energetic* as used to describe a person (= *energique*) but relating to energy as a resource: *les ressources énergétique* - *energy resources*.

engin (m) - not *engine* (= *un moteur*) but *device*: *un engin de fermeture* - a *locking device*.

enquête (f) - much broader meaning than *inquest*, including *inquiry, investigation* and *survey*.

équipement (m) - not only *equipment* (more commonly = *matériel*) but *facilities*: *équipements sportifs* - *sports facilities*.

éventuel(lement) - not *eventual(ly)* (= *finalement*) but *possible / possibly*.

exercice (m) - not just *exercise* but in a business context can also mean *financial year*.

expérience (f) / expérimenté - not just *experience* but can also mean *experiment*. By contrast, *expérimenté* means *experienced*. The verb *to experience* is most commonly translated by *connaître* or, for an emotion, *éprouver*.

exploiter - generally used with the more neutral sense of *to run, operate* rather than the pejorative *to exploit*: *exploiter un réseau - to operate a network*. The noun *un exploitant* is commonly translated as *operator*, but can be more specific according to the context, e.g. *un exploitant agricole - a farmer*.

faculté (f) - generally means *university* rather than *faculty*. Often shortened to *fac*: *elle est en fac - she's at university*.

faillir - not to fail (= *échouer, rater*) but *to nearly to something*: *J'ai failli tomber - I nearly fell over*.

figure (f) - not *figure* (= *un personnage* in the sense of *person*, *un chiffre* in the sense of *number* and *la ligne* in the sense of *body shape*) but *face*.

forfait (m) - not a *forfeit* in a game (= *un gage*) but something paid at a fixed rate, especially a *package holiday*.

formulaire (m) - not a *formula* (= *une formule*) but a *form*, as in *remplir un formulaire - to fill in a form*.

global - not so much *global* as *total* or *overall*, as in *croissance globale - overall growth*.

grappe (f) - not *grape* (= *une raisin*) but a *bunch of grapes*.

gratuité (f) - not a *gratuity* (= *un pourboire*) but the noun from *gratuit* meaning *free* or *gratuitous*. Thus *la gratuité de l'enseignement* means *free education*.

grief (m) - not *grief* (= *la douleur, le chagrin*) but a *grievance*.

humeur (m) - not *humour* (= *humour*) but *mood* or *temperament*.

huile (f) - *oil* that is edible and not that which can be burned (= *la pétrole*).

ignorer - although can mean *to ignore*, most commonly means *not to know* e.g. *J'ignore les détails - I don't know the details*.

impliquer - not just *to implicate* but also more neutrally *to involve* : *se sentir impliqué - to feel involved*.

important - most commonly *important*, but in a numerical context can mean *significant* or *considerable*: *un nombre important de candidats - a considerable number of candidates*; *une hausse importante - a significant increase*.

impression (une) - not only *impression* but also *printing*. *Lancer une impression - to launch a print-out*.

inciter - usually means *to encourage / urge* rather than *to incite*. *Le journal a incité le gouvernement d'investir dans l'éducation* - *The paper encouraged the government to invest more in education.*

ingénieur (m) - broader meaning than *engineer*, including most technical and commercial domains.

inhabitable - not *inhabitable* but *uninhabitable*.

injurer (f) - not *an injury* (= *une blessure*) but *an insult*.

intéressant - in the context of money can mean *attractive*: *Il le vend à un prix intéressant* - *He's selling it at an attractive price.*

interroger - broader meaning than *to interrogate*, including *to question* or *to put questions to*: *Les journalistes ont interrogé le président sur l'Europe* - *The journalists questioned the President on Europe.*

intervention (f) - not only *intervention* but also a *surgical operation* and a *speech* or *lecture*.

inutile - not just *useless*, but also *unnecessary*: *Inutile de dire qu'il n'y est pas rentré* - *Needless to say, he didn't go back.*

isolation (f) - not *isolation* (= *isolement*) but *insulation*.

issue (m) - not an *issue* (= *question, dossier*) but an *exit, solution* or *outcome*.

joindre - not *to join* in the sense of an organization (= *devenir membre de, adhérer à, s'inscrire à* or *entrer*), but *to get hold of (someone), to enclose* or *to attach together*.

large - not *large* (= *grand*) but *wide*.

lecture (f) - not a *lecture* in the academic sense (= *une conférence* if a public talk, *un cours magistral* if part of a series of academic lectures) but the act of *reading*.

libéralisme (m) - just as commonly refers to *economic liberalism* (i.e. right-of-centre) as to *social liberalism* (i.e. left-of-centre).

librarie (f) - not a *library* (= *une bibliothèque*) but a *bookshop*.

licence (m) - not a *licence* (= *un permis*) but a three-year bachelor's degree.

local (m) - when used as a noun means *premises*.

location (m) - not *location* (= *emplacement* if referring to site or *localisation* if referring to act of locating).

lunatique - not *mad* but *moody, changeable*.

matériel (m) - not *material* (= *du tissu, de l'étoffe* - *f* - for making clothes etc., or *la matière* for stories etc.) but *equipment*. In a computer context *matériel* means *hardware*, the opposite of *le logiciel* (= *software*).

militant (m) - not a *militant* (= *un agitateur*) but *an activist*.

mobile (m) - when used as a noun means *motive: le mobile du crime - the motive for the crime*.

moteur (m) - not just a *motor* but also a *car engine*.

muter, mutation (f) - not just *mutate, mutation* in the biological sense but more commonly *transfer* : *être muté à une filiale - to be transferred to a subsidiary*.

nouvelle (f) - in the literary sense not *novel* but *short story*.

occasion (f) - not just an *occasion* but also an *opportunity*.

offre (f) / offrir - not just an *offer* but also *supply* in the commercial sense: *l'offre et la demande - supply and demand*. *Offrir* means not only *to offer* but also *to buy* : *Je te l'offre - I'll buy it for you*.

onéreux - not *onerous* (= *lourd*) but *expensive*.

parc (m) - not just *park* but also in a commercial sense *total number of* or *stock*.

part (f) - not *a part* (= *une partie* in general or *un rôle* in a play) but a *share*: *Une part de marché - a market share*.

passer - in the expression *passer un examen* means *to take an exam*, not *to pass an exam* (= *réussir un examen*).

pension (f) - not just *pension* but also *boarding house, boarding school* and *board in general: pension complète - full board*.

percevoir - not just *perceive* but also *to receive money: percevoir des droits d'auteur - to receive royalties*. *Un percepteur* is a *tax inspector*.

pétrole (m) - not *petrol* (= *de l'essence*) but *oil* that can be made into fuel etc. *L'huile* is edible oil.

photographe (m) - not *photograph* (= *une photographie*) but *a photographer*.

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phrase (f) - not a phrase (= *une expression, une locution*) but a *sentence*.

plan (m) - not *plan* (= *un projet, dessein*) but a *map* of a town, transport system etc.

politique (m) - not just *politics* but also a *policy*: *la politique étrangère* - *foreign policy*.

préjudice (m) - not *préjudice* (= *des préjugés*) but *harm*. *Porter préjudice à* - *To cause harm to*.

président (m) - often translated by *chairman / chairwoman* rather than *president*: *Le président d'une entreprise* - *the chairman of a company*.

prétendre - not *to pretend* (= *faire comme si / faire semblant de faire*) but *to claim*: *Il prétend tout ignorer* - *He pretends not to know anything*.

procès (m) - not a *process* (= *un processus*) but a *trial*.

prune (f) - not a *prune* (= *un pruneau*) but a *plum*.

raisin (m) - not a *raisin* (= *un raisin sec*) but a *grape*.

réaliser - the use of this verb to mean *to realise* in the sense of *to become aware of* is not fully accepted. It is preferable to use *se rendre compte de qch*.

reporter - not *to report* (= *signaler, faire le compte rendu de*) but *to postpone*.

rude - not *rude* (= *impoli*) but *rough*.

sensible - not *sensible* (= *raisonnable, sensé*) but *sensitive*.

sérieux - can mean *reliable* or *conscientious* as well as *serious*: *C'est une compagnie très sérieuse* - *It's a very reliable company*.

service (m) - in addition to *service* can also mean *favour* (as in *Tu peux me rendre un service?* - *Can you do me a favour?*) and *department* (as in *le service du personnel* - *personnel department*).

sinistre (m) - when used as a noun means variously a *disaster*, an *accident* or *damage*.

société (f) / social - in a commercial sense not a *society* (= *une association*) but a *company*.

sommaire (m) - not a *summary* (= *un résumé*) but a *table of contents*.

supporter - only means *to support* in the sense of *to bear the weight of* or *to follow a sports team*.
Otherwise means *to put up with*. *To support* in the sense of *to provide moral backing for* is generally translated by *soutenir*.

susceptible - not *susceptible* (= *sensible*) but *touchy*. Also the expression *être susceptible à* - *to be likely to*.

sympathique - not *sympathique* (= *compatissant*) but *friendly, pleasant*.

terrible - not only *terrible* but in some contexts the opposite i.e. *great* : *Il n'est pas terrible ce film*
- *It's not great this film*.

tissu (m) - not a *tissue* (= *un kleenex*) but *material, fabric*.

user - not *to use* (= *utiliser*) but *to wear out*.

veste (f) - not a *vest* (= *un maillot*) but a *jacket*.