

# Written v spoken French

## 1 Introduction

In French, as with many languages, there are large disparities between writing and speech. Written language is mainly associated with more formal contexts such as school or university studies, professional work, our commercial or administrative dealings or high culture, although it can also be used in informal contexts such as personal letters or e-mails. In addition, when we write we have time to plan our language, correct mistakes, choose more appropriate words, use more complicated grammatical structures, and so on. As such written language tends to conform much more to the rules and conventions that are found in dictionaries and grammars, the language that has come to be known as the linguistic standard for a given language group.

Spoken language, on the other hand, is more commonly used in less formal contexts such as communication with family, friends, and closer acquaintances or work colleagues, although it can also be used in formal contexts such as speeches, meetings, classes and so on. Most spoken language is unplanned, a spontaneous expression of our intentions and opinions as we react to people and phenomena in the world around us. As such spoken language tends to differ from standard or written language in a number of important respects. For example, when we speak we make more mistakes and false starts, change direction in mid-sentence, hesitate or forget things, use “fillers” such as *er, I mean, you know*. We also tend to make much more use of clause juxtaposition (*I told him to be quiet. He was being too loud*) rather than clause subordination (*I told him to be quiet because he was being too loud*). Furthermore there are many devices in spoken language that are not available to us when we write, and which form a large part of the communication process. These include emphatic stress, changes in intonation, raising or softening our voice, changing our tone or accent, hand and facial gestures such as smiles, glares and so on, and the ability to point to things in our environment.

One of the central differences between written and spoken language lies in the focus of its message. Written language is broadly speaking “message-centered”, meaning we are more focussed on the message we are trying to convey rather than any emotional factors that might surround it. As such it tends to be more impersonal and abstract in its tone, presenting facts, ideas and so on in a logically progressive manner towards a goal that is usually multifaceted (compared to the relatively simple ideas we exchange in spoken dialogue), and quite often contains a high degree of nuance and complexity. This complexity leads to a greater need for clarity, accuracy and thematic expressivity, hence the importance in written language of broad vocabulary, correct spelling, grammatical accuracy, clause subordination and so on.

By contrast spoken language is to a greater extent “person-centered”, that is to say we are more focussed on expressing our feelings towards both the subject matter and the person we’re talking to. This means that not only do we get more *I* and *you* and *we* forms, and verbs serving to express attitudes and emotions and so on, but also more emotionally charged language, such as such as exclamations, intensifiers, and expletives, as well as pejorative or loaded words and terms of affection and abuse. Furthermore the scope of registers in spoken language is generally greater than in written language, ranging from everyday, informal and vulgar to standard and formal. Through these different registers we are not only selecting the tenor that is most expressive of our thoughts and emotions, but also conveying to others our understanding of the nature of social interaction (displaying our “social skills”) and expressing our idea of our relationship towards them.

Written and spoken language, then, tend respectively to gravitate towards more formal and less formal language registers, although each can accommodate the full range of language registers. These registers, although in reality far from distinct, are for the purposes of this unit divided into the following headings:

- **Formal (F)**: the register language most commonly found in academic, bureaucratic, ceremonial or literary language.
- **Standard (S)**: Language that is grammatically correct and which is neither informal nor overly formal.
- **Everyday (E)**: the register of less formal or guarded situations, such as conversation with family or friends.
- **Non-standard (N)**: the register of very informal situations where there are no obvious social restrictions. Care should be taken when using certain non-standard words and expressions as inappropriate use can create a bad impression or even offend (this is especially true of words marked **N!**).

Where language is thought to lie in between two registers, e.g. between Everyday and Non-standard, both indicators are given: e.g. **E/N**.

## 2 Grammatical forms

### Spoken French

**S**: Use of perfect:

*Il est mort est 1965*

**S**: Use of present subjunctive:

*Il fallait qu'il revienne immédiatement*

**S**: Use of pluperfect:

*Dès qu'il était arrivé, ils commencèrent*

**S**: Questions formed using *est-ce que*:

*Est-ce que Pierre peut venir?*

**E**: Questions formed using intonation / dislocation:

*Pierre peut venir? Il peut venir, Pierre?*

**E**: Dislocation

*Mon cousin, lui, s'y intéresse beaucoup*

**S/E**: Extraction

*C'est Pierre qui a gagné*

**S**: Non-inversion:

*Comment est-ce que dirais...*

*Il faudra peut-être...*

### Written French

**F**: Use of past historic:

*Il mourut en 1965*

**F**: Use of imperfect subjunctive:

*Il fallait qu'il revînt immédiatement*

**F**: Use of past anterior:

*Dès qu'il eut arrivé, ils commencèrent*

**F**: Inversion in questions:

*Pierre peut-il venir?*

**S**: Non-dislocation

*Mon cousin s'y intéresse beaucoup*

**S**: Non-extraction

*Pierre a gagné*

**F**: Inversion after certain words:

*Comment dirais-je...*

*Peut-être faudra-t-il...*

Asking for questions to be repeated: E: <i>Hein? E/N: Quoi?</i>	S: Asking for questions to be repeated: <i>Pardon? Comment?</i>
E: No preceding direct object agreement <i>La lettre que j'ai écrit</i>	S: Preceding direct object agreement <i>La lettre que j'ai écrite</i>
S: <i>Tu</i> form - close relationships <i>Tu as reçu ma lettre?</i>	S: <i>Vous</i> form - distant relationships <i>Avez-vous reçu ma lettre?</i>
E: Use of <i>on</i> for 2nd person plurals: <i>On est allé(s) au cinéma</i>	S: Use of <i>nous</i> for 2nd person plurals: <i>Nous sommes allés au cinéma</i>
E: Absence of <i>ne</i> in negatives: <i>Je l'ai pas vu</i>	S: Use of <i>ne</i> in negatives: <i>Je ne l'ai pas vu</i>
E: Use of <i>c'est</i> <i>C'est mes parents qui l'ont acheté</i>	S: Use of <i>ce sont</i> <i>Ce sont mes parents qui l'ont acheté</i>
E: Use of <i>ça</i>	S: Use of <i>cela</i>
E: Use of <i>c'est</i> + adjective: <i>C'est surprenant qu'il soit en retard</i>	S: Use of <i>il est</i> + adjective: <i>Il est surprenant qu'il soit en retard</i>
E: Use of <i>que</i> instead of <i>pour que, quand, parce que</i> : <i>Apporte-le ici que je puisse le voir</i> <i>Il est venu que j'étais pas là</i> <i>Il ne peut plus marcher qu'il est si saoul</i>	S: Use of standard conjunctions: <i>Apporte-le ici <b>pour que</b> je puisse le voir</i> <i>Il est venu <b>quand</b> j'étais pas là</i> <i>Il est si saoul qu'il ne peut plus marcher</i>
E: Use of <i>que</i> after <i>peut-être, sans doute</i> : <i>Peut-être / sans doute qu'il viendra</i>	S: Inversion after <i>peut-être, sans doute</i> : <i>Peut-être / Sans doute viendra-t-il</i>
E/N: Use of <i>que</i> after words such as <i>si, quand, comme</i> : <i>Comme que je t'ai déjà dit ...</i>	S: Use of standard conjunctions, relative pronouns etc.: <i>Comme je t'ai déjà dit ...</i>
E: Use of nouns as prepositions <i>Question / Côté travail ...</i>	S: Use of standard prepositions <i>En ce qui concerne le travail ...</i>
N: Use of prepositions at end of sentence <i>Son chapeau neuf, elle est sortie avec?</i>	S: Use of pronoun after prepositions <i>Son chapeau neuf, elle est sortie avec lui?</i>

### 3 Pronunciation

#### 3.1 General

##### Spoken French

- N: *j'ui ai donné*
- N: *ezagérer*
- N: *esprès, espliquer etc.*
- N: *meh, donneh etc.*

##### Written French

- je lui ai donné*
- exagérer*
- exprès, expliquer etc.*
- mais, donnais etc.*

### 3.2 Liaison

E: Restricted to that between determiner and noun (*les enfants*) and between pronoun and noun (*ils ont*). N: Sometimes introduced before an aspirate *h* : *des haricots*.

(see 7:3 above)

### 3.3 Contraction (merging words together)

(All E unless stated)

*chuis*

*y'a*

*t'as*

*c't'à dire*

*v'la*

*chais pas*

*t' à l'heure*

*pro'lème*

*pasque*

*capab*

*aut'chose*

*j'trouve*

*je suis*

*il y a*

*tu as*

*c'est-à-dire*

*voilà*

*je ne sais pas*

*tout à l'heure*

*problème*

*parce que*

*capable*

*autre chose*

*je trouve*

### 3.4 Elipsis (missing words out)

*faut pas*

*début / fin septembre*

*il ne faut pas*

*au début / à la fin de septembre*

## 4 Vocabulary

### 4.1 General

#### Spoken French

(All E unless stated)

*à plus*

*à tout*

*au pieu*

*au pif*

*avoir la dalle*

*avoir un creux*

*bagnole* (f)

*bahut* (m)

*balles* (f)

*baraque* (f)

*blague* (f)

*bled* (m)

*boire un coup, prendre un pot*

*bordel* (m), *pagaille* (f)

*bossier*

*bouffer*

*boulot* (m)

*bouquin* (m)

*brailler, chialer*

#### Written French

*à plus tard*

*à tout l'heure*

*au lit*

*approximativement*

*avoir soif*

*avoir un petit faim*

*voiture*

*lycée*

*francs*

*maison*

*plaisanterie*

*village*

*boire un verre*

*désordre*

*travailler*

*manger*

*travail*

*livre*

*crier*

*bringue* (f)  
*ça te dis de ...*  
*c'est la galère*  
*clébard* (m)  
*clope* (f)  
**N!**: *con* (m)  
*crevé / lessivé*  
*déconner*  
  
**N**: *dégueulasse*  
**N**: *se démerder*  
*dingue, taré, barjo*  
**N**: *emmerder*  
*en avoir marre / ras le bol (de)*  
*en avoir marre / ras-le-bol*  
**N**: *engueuler*  
*filer, se casser*  
*flic* (m)  
*foutre*  
*je m'en fous*  
*j'en ai rien à foutre*  
*qu'est-ce qu'il fout?*  
*fous-moi la paix*  
*j'en sais foutrement rien*  
*une foutue idée / un foutu temps*  
*cette machine est foutue*  
*fric* (m) (also *pognon, tune, blé, sous*)  
*fringues* (fpl)  
*frousse / trouille* (f)  
*gaffe* (f)  
*fais gaffe!*  
*galère* (f)  
*c'est la galère*  
*galérer*  
*tu vas galérer pour trouver à te garer*  
*godasse* (f)  
*gonflé: être gonflé*  
*gueule* (f)  
*ta gueule*  
*faire la gueule*  
*se casser la gueule*  
*il en fait une gueule*  
*guibolles* (f)  
*les tifs* (npl)  
*mec / type / gars* (m)  
*moche*  
*môme / gosse / mioche* (mf)  
*ouais*  
*pas cap / pas chiche*  
*patate* (f)

*fête*  
*est-ce que t'intéresserais de ...*  
*c'est embêtant*  
*chien*  
*cigarette*  
*bête*  
*fatigué*  
 [personne] *dire des bêtises; plaisanter;*  
*mal agir; [appareil] mal fonctionner*  
*épouvantable*  
*se débrouiller*  
*fou*  
*embêter*  
*en avoir assez (de)*  
*en avoir assez*  
*gronder*  
*s'en aller*  
*agent de police*  
  
*je m'en moque*  
*je m'en moque*  
*qu'est-ce qu'il fait?*  
*laisse-moi tranquille*  
*je n'en sais absolument rien*  
*une idée stupide / un temps mauvais*  
*cette machine est en panne*  
*argent*  
*vêtements*  
*peur*  
*erreur*  
*fais attention!*  
*situation pénible*  
*c'est vraiment embêtant*  
*avoir du mal*  
*tu auras du mal à trouver à te garer*  
*chaussure*  
*avoir de l'audace*  
*visage, bouche*  
*tais-toi*  
*bouder*  
*tomber / écraser / échouer*  
*il est déprimé*  
*jambes*  
*les cheveux*  
*homme*  
*laid*  
*enfant*  
*oui*  
*je ne suis pas capable*  
*pomme de terre / idiot*

<i>pépin (m)</i>	<i>ennui</i>
<i>piaule (f)</i>	<i>chambre</i>
<i>piquer</i>	<i>voler</i>
<i>pote (m)</i>	<i>copain</i>
<i>que dalle</i>	<i>absolument rien</i>
<i>j'y comprends que dalle</i>	<i>je n'y comprends rien</i>
<i>rigolo, marrant</i>	<i>drôle</i>
<i>rouspeter</i>	<i>se plaindre</i>
<b>N!</b> <i>salaud (m)</i>	<i>homme</i>
<b>N!</b> <i> salope (f)</i>	<i>femme</i>
<i>saloperie (f)</i>	<i>acte méprisable; objet de rebut;</i>
<i>saoul / bourré</i>	<i>ivre</i>
<i>schmilblick (m)</i>	
<i>faire avancer le schmilblick</i>	<i>faire avancer la situation</i>
<i>se casser, se tirer, se barrer</i>	<i>s'en aller</i>
<i>se pointer</i>	<i>arriver</i>
<i>super</i>	<i>excellent</i>
<i>taper</i>	<i>quémender, mendier</i>
<i>taule: en taule (f)</i>	<i>en prison</i>
<i>trouille: avoir la trouille</i>	<i>avoir peur</i>

## 4.2 Exclamations

N: merde (alors)  
**N!**: putain  
N: bordel  
N: nom de Dieu

## 4.3 Insults (descriptions)

### adjective

*pauvre*  
*espèce de*  
*sale*

### noun

*idiot(e)*  
*con(ne)*  
*connard (connasse)*  
*salaud ( salope)*  
*enfoiré(e)*

### tag

*de merde*

## 4.4 Insults (instructions)

N: va / tu peux aller te faire voir  
**N!** va / tu peux aller te faire mettre  
**N!** va / tu peux aller te faire foutre  
N: fous-moi le camp! / la paix!

## 4.5 Intensifiers

*hyper*  
*super*  
N: *vachement*  
N: *sacrément*

## 4.6 Fillers

(All E unless stated)

*euh*  
*bien, 'ben*  
*enfin, 'fin*  
*tu sais*  
*quand-même*  
*quoi*  
*bof* (expressing lack of enthusiasm)  
*vous voyez*  
*écoute(z)*  
*bref*

(Not applicable)

#### 4.7 Redundancy

*comme par exemple*  
*et puis après*  
*descendre en bas*  
*monter en haut*

*comme / par exemple*  
*et puis / et après*  
*descendre*  
*monter*

#### 4.8 Abbreviations

*appart*  
*resto*  
*sympa*  
*Macdo*  
*dico*  
*ciné / cinoche*  
*promo*  
*canap*  
*bibli*  
*fac*  
*ordi*  
*labo*  
*sécu*  
*accro*  
*bachot*  
*hebdo*  
*amphi*  
*intello*  
*proprio*

*appartement*  
*restaurant*  
*sympathique*  
*Macdonald*  
*dictionnaire*  
*cinéma*  
*promotion*  
*canapé*  
*bibliothèque*  
*faculté*  
*ordinateur*  
*laboratoire*  
*sécurité sociale*  
*accroché*  
*baccalauréat*  
*hebdomadaire*  
*amphithéâtre*  
*intellectuel*  
*propriétaire*