French sound chart

35 learner-facing French sounds with IPA, common spellings, example words, and one physical mouth cue.

> Use one row at a time: hear the sound online, model the mouth cue, contrast two examples, then place one word in a short sentence.

/a/

a · chat à · là â · pâte

Open your mouth wide, as in “chat” or “là.”

/y/

u · lune û · sûr u · rue

Say an /i/ sound with rounded lips, as in “lune” or “rue.”

/e/

é · été er · parler ez · chez

Stretch your lips, as in “été” or “aller.”

/ø/

eu · feu œu · vœu eu · deux

Lips rounded and forward, as in “jeu” or “deux.”

/ɛ/

è · mère ê · être ai · lait

Your mouth is more open than for /e/, as in “mère” or “lait.”

/œ/

eu · peur œu · cœur eu · jeune

Your mouth is more open than for /ø/, as in “peur” or “fleur.”

/i/

i · lit î · île y · style

Stretch your lips as far as you can, as in “lit” or “île.”

/ə/

e · le e · petit e · demain

A short, weak sound that may disappear in everyday speech, as in “le,” “petit,” or “demain.”

/o/

o · vélo ô · hôtel au · beau

Round your lips, as in “beau” or “chaud.”

/ɑ̃/

an · enfant am · champagne en · vent

Air passes through the nose, as in “enfant” or “temps.”

/ɔ/

o · porte o · bonne o · homme

Your mouth is more open than for /o/, as in “porte” or “bonne.”

/ɔ̃/

on · bon om · tomber ont · ont

A rounded nasal sound, as in “bon” or “pont.”

/u/

ou · tout où · où oû · goût

Lips are very rounded and pushed forward, as in “tout” or “roue.”

/ɛ̃/

in · vin im · simple ain · pain

An open nasal sound, as in “vin” or “main.”

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French semi-vowels

> Move quickly into the next vowel. These glides should not become an extra syllable.

/j/

i · piano y · payer ill · fille

A gliding sound, as in “fille” or “yeux.”

/ɥ/

ui · lui ui · nuit ui · puis

A glide typical of French, as in “lui” or “nuit.”

/w/

ou · oui oi · roi w · week-end

A glide with rounded lips, as in “oui” or “roi.”

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French consonants

Aim for clean placement and a light release. Written letters do not always equal pronounced consonants.

/p/

p · papa pp · nappe p · pont

Lips close then open, as in “papa” or “pont.”

/b/

b · bateau bb · abbaye b · robe

Like /p/ but voiced, as in “beau” or “robe.”

/t/

t · table tt · cette th · thé

The tongue touches the upper teeth, as in “table” or “thé.”

/d/

d · date dd · addition d · deux

Like /t/ but voiced, as in “deux” or “date.”

/k/

c · café k · kilo qu · queue

The back of the tongue touches the palate, as in “quand” or “café.”

/g/

g · gare gu · guerre g · bague

Like /k/ but voiced, as in “gare” or “bague.”

/f/

f · feu ff · effet ph · photo

Upper teeth touch the lower lip, as in “faire” or “photo.”

/v/

v · vie w · wagon v · vert

Like /f/ but voiced, as in “vie” or “vert.”

/s/

s · sac c · ceci ç · garçon

Air passes between the tongue and the teeth, as in “sac” or “garçon.”

/z/

z · zéro s · rose x · deuxième

Like /s/ but voiced, as in “zéro” or “rose.”

/ʃ/

ch · chat ch · cher sch · schéma

Air flows out in a diffuse way, as in “chat” or “cher.”

/ʒ/

j · je g · gentil ge · rouge

Like “sh” in “chat” but voiced, as in “je” or “rouge.”

/m/

m · maman mm · femme m · merci

Lips close and air passes through the nose, as in “maman” or “femme.”

/n/

n · nous nn · anneau n · nez

The tongue touches the teeth and air passes through the nose, as in “nous” or “bonne.”

/ɲ/

gn · montagne gn · signe gn · ligne

The middle of the tongue touches the palate, as in “montagne” or “signe.”

/ŋ/

ng · parking ng · camping ng · shopping

A nasal sound borrowed from English, as in “parking” or “camping.”

/l/

l · lire ll · belle l · la

The tongue touches the teeth; air passes at the sides, as in “lire” or “belle.”

/ʁ/

r · rouge rr · terre r · Paris

The sound comes from the back of the throat, as in “rouge” or “Paris.”

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