

**Bianca McHale**

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An annotated bibliography of books, audio courses, movies, music and websites for self-directed learners of French.

Suitable for all levels and ages.

***Effective Resources  
for Learning French***

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This book provides an annotated bibliography of resources that I have found useful for learning French. These resources include audio courses, books, music, movies and websites. You may notice the lack of overlap between these recommendations and the British school curriculum. This is deliberate because I find that schoolbooks and most curriculum-orientated websites suffer from some serious problems: they tend to not be varied enough; they are cluttered with unnecessary vocabulary and exercises; and they are confusing to use. If you have to follow the school curriculum then use my suggestions *alongside* your schoolbooks to build on variety and quality.

I have arranged the resources into chapters and sections for ease of reference. Because I have kept the list short in each section—I advocate *quality over quantity*—the resources are listed arbitrarily rather than in any particular order. I do not think the order of resources is important here. I also provide practical suggestions on how to do your own search to find more French learning resources.

French is the official language of 32 countries on five continents. These French-speaking countries are part of the Francophone world (*la francophonie*). If you are interested to learn about the Francophone world, visit [www.francophonie.org](http://www.francophonie.org) or read the Francophone entry on [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org), the free online encyclopedia. You should be aware that just as English spoken in England is slightly different from English spoken in the USA or Australia, likewise each French-speaking country has its own slightly different version of French. If you learn French specific to one country then you should find it easy to adjust to French spoken in another country. This book focusses on French spoken in France because that is my area of expertise. You can use a search engine, such as [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk), to find region-specific dictionaries, for example, Canadian French, to help you with variations of French in other countries.

**Feedback:** I may release updated versions of this book in the future, and would appreciate your feedback to help me do so. If you have any ideas for improving this book then please email me at [BiancaMcHale@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:BiancaMcHale@yahoo.co.uk) or call me on my mobile telephone: +44-(0)7974-314-251.



# Chapter 2

## Where to Find French Resources

### 2.1 Bookshops and Music Shops in England

Many big bookshops have a section called *Foreign Languages* where you can find books in different languages. Likewise, many big CD and DVD shops have sections entitled *World Music* and *World Cinema*. In most of these shops, the French language has the most extensive collection.

#### **Oxfam Bookshop and Music Shop**

You can find some second-hand books, CDs and DVDs in most charity shops, but some Oxfam charity shops *specialise* in second-hand books and music.

#### **The European Bookshop**

The European Bookshop is dedicated to foreign languages. It has a selection of French books, newspapers, CDs, DVDs and games such as *Scrabble*. It is located at 5 Warwick Street, London W1B 5LU and its website is [www.europeanbookshop.com](http://www.europeanbookshop.com).

#### **Grant and Cutler**

Grant and Cutler is another good bookshop dedicated to foreign languages. It has a great selection of French books, and a small selection of newspapers, CDs, DVDs and games such as *Scrabble*. It is located at 55–57 Great Marlborough Street, London W1F 7AY and its website is [www.grantandcutler.com](http://www.grantandcutler.com).

#### **Waterstone's**

You can find this chain of bookshops in most towns. You can find a big branch at 19–23 Oxford Street (near Tottenham Court Road tube station) in London.

#### **Borders**

This shop has books, music and movies. You can find a big branch at 197–203 Oxford Street (near Oxford Circus tube station) in London.

#### **WHSmith**

WHSmith is a chain of shops known for selling stationary products, and national newspapers and magazines. What many people do not realise is that it also sells some *international* newspapers and magazines. This is a good place to buy some of the famous French newspapers without having to visit France.

## 2.2 Bookshops and Music Shops in France

If you go to France, you should consider visiting some bookshops and music shops. I mention the two most famous bookshops and music shops in France, but there are many more around. Do not worry if you cannot go to France regularly, these shops can also be visited online.

If you wish to buy French grammar books and other books for studying, you can find these in the section *Le français pour les étrangers* (**French for foreigners**) or *Français langue étrangère* (**French as a Foreign Language**), often abbreviated as FLE.

### Gibert & Joseph

This is my favourite chain of shops. It has both new and second-hand books, DVDs, and CDs. You can browse the shop online at [www.gibertjoseph.com](http://www.gibertjoseph.com).

### Fnac

Fnac is a large chain of shops all over France selling books, music, movies, and computers. You can also book tickets for concerts. A quick word of warning. Do not buy a computer from France or any other foreign country because the layout of the keyboard is different and is going to create problems for you. You can browse and order online at [www.fnac.com](http://www.fnac.com).

## 2.3 Internet

Physical shops are not the only places to buy resources useful for learning French. Some Internet-based organisations can also be useful.

### Freecycle

The concept of *Freecycle* is that if you no longer need something then, instead of throwing it into a bin, you can give it, free of charge, to somebody else. In this way, items can be reused instead of being put into landfill sites. Freecycle is organised as a collection of mailing lists, one per town or city. The first Freecycle mailing list was created in May 2003 and, by March 2009, Freecycle has expanded to have over 4500 mailing lists (to which 6.5 million people are subscribed) in over 85 countries. You can find links to regional Freecycle mailing lists on the main Freecycle website: [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org).

On a Freecycle mailing list people can post messages to offer items that they no longer need, or post messages to request items. For example, if you need a French dictionary then you could post a message to ask if anyone in your area has one to spare.

### eBay

Ebay is an online auction and shopping website where you can buy and sell new and second-hand products. Visit [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk) or [www.ebay.fr](http://www.ebay.fr).

### Amazon

Amazon was originally an online bookshop, but over the years it has expanded to sell other items, including CDs and DVDs. One of the best features of Amazon is that you can read other customers' reviews of products (and write your own); these reviews often provide useful information that help you choose a product. Visit [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) or [www.amazon.fr](http://www.amazon.fr).

# Chapter 3

## Audio Courses

Let's assume you are looking for a book to help you learn French. You can go to the languages section in a bookshop and browse through the books available. When you find a book with an interesting cover, you can flick through the book's contents to get a better idea if it is suitable for you.

Unfortunately, you do not have the same luxury when looking for an audio course. Most shops do not provide CD players for you to listen to parts of an audio course. And if an audio course is sold in a shrink-wrapped box then you will not even be able to open the box to see if there is a table of contents for what is on the CDs. So how can you decide which audio course is most suitable for you? You might have to rely on the words printed on the audio course's packaging, but that is likely to be meaningless and full of empty promises, such as:

- Learn effortlessly, without any need to study.
- You will be fluent in conversational French in just a few days.
- This course is based on the natural way to learn a language.

Do such product descriptions help you decide which course is most suitable for you? Probably not. And when audio courses range in price from tens to hundreds of pounds, it seems foolish to randomly pick one and *hope* that it will be suitable for your needs.

In this chapter I provide an analysis of French audio courses from two companies: Linguaphone (one of the early pioneers in audio courses and a brand name known worldwide), and Michel Thomas (who became the market leader in audio courses in England). This analysis provides you with more useful information than you are likely to find in the marketing blurb on product boxes.

### 3.1 Linguaphone

The *Linguaphone All Talk, Levels 1 & 2* audio course contains 16 CDs and has a recommended retail price of £99.80. However, you will probably find it *significantly* cheaper on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).

The course follows the story of a businessman who is sent on a trip to France without knowing any French. During this trip he learns dialogue for a variety of situations: renting a car, checking into a hotel, asking for directions, and so on. The narrator introduces new

vocabulary by saying a word or phrase in French, then its English equivalent, and then again in French. After that, there is a pause (denoted by “-----” in the transcript below) for the listener to repeat the French word or phrase. Here is an example from the course.

*monsieur* mister or sir *monsieur* -----  
*vous* you *vous* -----  
*vous êtes* you are *vous êtes* -----  
*de* of or from *de* -----  
*n'est-ce pas?* aren't you? or isn't it? *n'est-ce pas?* -----  
*eh bien?* well? *eh bien?* -----  
*bienvenue* welcome *bienvenue* -----  
*à* to *à* -----  
*Bienvenue à Paris.* Welcome to Paris. *Bienvenue à Paris.* -----  
*et* and *et* -----  
 And finally, the greeting *bonsoir* good evening *bonsoir* -----

The course then combines some of the new vocabulary to form longer sentences.

*Monsieur Saville? Bonsoir et bienvenue à Paris.* -----

Some sections of the course contain extended dialogues to test listening comprehension, and also dialogues that contain pauses, so the listener can respond to questions.

Teaching via “repeat after me” is used in many brand names of audio courses; this is reassuringly familiar to many people because it mimics an approach used in many schools. However, I have a reservation about this approach: the course comes across as being the audio equivalent of a phrase book. The problem with a phrase book (or an audio-course equivalent) is the danger that people may end up learning to parrot the phrases provided without developing sufficient knowledge to be able to construct their own sentences.

I do not offer the above criticism to imply that this Linguaphone course is without merit. I think it *can* have a role to play in learning French; but its role should *not* be that of an initial introduction to the language. I think a better approach is to use a different technique (which I will mention in a moment) to learn how to construct sentences. Once the skill of basic sentence construction has been acquired, *then* a “repeat after me” approach can be used to improve pronunciation or increase your range of vocabulary.

So, how can you learn to construct sentences? I recommend you listen to the Michel Thomas *Foundation* and *Advanced* audio course because those courses focus much more on sentence-building skills than learning an extensive range of vocabulary or set phrases.

### 3.2 Michel Thomas *Foundation* and *Advanced* Courses

Michel Thomas offers seven French audio courses, but in this section I focus on just two of them: an 8-hour *Foundation* course (8 CDs) and a 5-hour *Advanced* course (4 CDs). The recommended retail price of these courses are £68.50 and £50, respectively. However, you will probably find them *significantly* cheaper on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).

Both courses follow the same format, in which Michel Thomas teaches two students to speak French. The *Foundation* course focuses on the present tense and two categories of vocabulary: *glue words and phrases*, and *cognates*. The *Advanced* course introduces other tenses and provides more examples of *glue words and phrases*, and *cognates*.

### 3.2.1 Glue Words and Phrases

The following, slightly abridged, transcript is representative of both the *Foundation* and *Advanced* courses.

Michel Thomas: **I would like** is *je voudrais*. Again?  
 Student 1: *Je voudrais*  
 Michel Thomas: Once more.  
 Student 2: *Je voudrais*  
 Michel Thomas: Yes. **To speak** is *parler*. And **to speak French** would be *parler français*. So, **I would like to speak French** would be?  
 Student 2: ...  
 Michel Thomas: **I would like**?  
 Student 2: Je voudrais...  
 Michel Thomas: Uh-uh  
 Student 2: ... parler français.  
 Michel Thomas: Right. *Je voudrais parler français*. **With** is *avec*. **With you** would be *avec vous*. **With me** would be *avec moi*. So, **I would like to speak French with you**?  
 Student 1: Je voudrais... parler français...  
 Michel Thomas: **With you**  
 Student 1: ...  
 Michel Thomas: *Avec*  
 Student 1: *Avec vous*  
 Michael Thomas: Right. *Je voudrais parler français avec vous*.

At the start of the transcript, Michel Thomas asks the students to repeat the phrase *je voudrais*, so he can check their pronunciation. That is the *only* time in this transcript he asks students to repeat a phrase verbatim. The rest of the time, he asks students to construct a sentence from words and phrases he has given them. Asking the students to *construct* a sentence forces them to think much more than if he had just asked them to *repeat* a sentence. The listener is supposed to construct the same sentence concurrently with the student. After a student has finished constructing a sentence, Michel Thomas repeats the entire sentence so the student (and listener) can verify their construction of it.

Many audio courses provide words and phrases grouped by theme, for example, shopping, the family, asking for directions, and vacations. The Michel Thomas course is *not* organised by such themes. Instead, his course focusses on what I call *glue words and phrases*. These are the small words and phrases that tie together a sentence. For example, I have underlined the glue words in the following sentence.

John is sitting on a chair.

I estimate that glue words and phrases account for about 40% of the words in a sentence. So if the first thing you learn about a foreign language is its most common glue words and phrases then you will automatically be able to understand almost half of every sentence you encounter. That is quite an achievement when you consider that there are only a few hundred glue words and phrases in a language.

As an example, consider the following long sentence, which I took from a random newspaper article.

Marwan Mohammed, sociologue et coauteur des *Bandes de jeunes*, réagit après l'intervention du chef de l'Etat, mercredi 18 mars à Gagny (Seine-Saint-Denis), qui a proposé de punir de trois ans d'emprisonnement l'appartenance "*en connaissance de cause*" à une bande ayant des visées agressives sur les biens et les personnes.

I have underlined the glue words in that sentence. Pretend you understand all those glue words and now look at the *other* words in the sentence. You might be able to guess that the first two words of the sentence are a person's name, *sociologue* has something to do with sociology (actually, it means **sociologist**), and *coauteur* means **co-author**. How about *bandes*? Perhaps you would guess it means **bands** or **groups**. Actually, **gangs** works better in this context: *bandes de jeunes* means **gangs of youths**. About 40% of English words are similar to French words, called *cognates*, so as you look through the rest of the sentence you can probably guess the meaning of many of the other words. If you know the meaning of the glue words and you can guess the meaning of many of the other words then you are quickly on the way to understanding the entire sentence.

If you look back at the transcription from the Michel Thomas course, you can see that he is teaching the glue phrase *je voudrais* (**I would like**), the glue word *avec* (**with**), plus some simple vocabulary: *parler* (**to speak**), *français* (**French**) and *vous* (**you**, the polite form). By focussing his teaching on the glue words and phrases, and by getting students to *construct* (rather than *repeat*) sentences, he gives listeners confidence to speak (and understand) French sentences. By the end of the course, the students may not know enough grammar to reliably construct grammatically correct sentences, but they will be able to make themselves understood.

### 3.2.2 Cognates

Along with glue words and phrases, Michel Thomas also focuses a lot on *cognates*. These are words with similar spellings and meanings in French and English, but pronounced differently.

Michel Thomas: Words in English ending in **-ent** and **-ant** come from French.

They're the same; same spelling; same meaning; pronounced [nasalised "on"]; **-ent** and **-ant** is pronounced [nasalised "on"]. Like, **different** would be?

Student 1: *Différent*

Michel Thomas: *Différent*. Yes. **Important** would be?

Student 2: *Important*.

Michel Thomas: *Important*. Yes.

About 1700 English words are cognates of French words. Not all these words end in **-ent** and **-ant**; some cognates have other endings, such as **-able**, **-ism**, **-ary** or **-tion**. By teaching the French pronunciation for some of the more common cognate word endings, Michel Thomas gives listeners the confidence that they *already* have a reasonable French vocabulary even before they start to learn French.

### 3.2.3 Criticisms

Before you start thinking that the Michel Thomas course is perfect, I need to point out some of its flaws. First, Michel Thomas speaks both English and French with a strong foreign

accent and this results in him mispronouncing some words.<sup>1</sup> Second, the students on the CD can be annoying at times, as they hesitate and make mistakes. Third, the course jumps from topic to topic in a random, unpredictable manner, and some people find this frustrating.

Michel Thomas offers a 2-hour *Introductory* course (£14.99), but this is simply the first two hours of the 8-hour *Foundation* course. This introductory course is not sufficient by itself for learning sentence construction, and, in my opinion, it is too expensive as a taster for the *Foundation* course.

### 3.3 Other Michel Thomas Courses

There are several other audio CDs in the Michel Thomas series, but they have a different format to the *Foundation* and *Advanced* courses discussed in the previous section.

As their names suggest, the 2-CD *Foundation Review* course (£20) and a 1-CD *Advanced Review* course (£10) are intended for people who have already completed the *Foundation* and *Advanced* courses. These review courses do *not* have any student participation. Instead, they are, in essence, vocabulary and phrase lists. For example, the following transcript, which is taken from the *Foundation Review* course, provides a terse summary of the transcript shown near the start of the previous section.

**I would like** ----- *Je voudrais*  
**I would like to speak French** would be ----- *Je voudrais parler français*  
**I would like to speak French with you** ----- *Je voudrais parler français*  
*avec vous*

A quick word of warning. The pauses in these review courses are much shorter than the time taken by students to speak in the *Foundation* and *Advanced* courses (and also much shorter than the pauses in the Linguaphone course), so you will have to use the pause and rewind buttons frequently.

The 2-CD *Language Builder* course (£20) uses the same terse format as the review courses, but it introduces some new vocabulary and expressions.

The 5-CD *Vocabulary* course was recorded after Michel Thomas died and his place is taken by another instructor. At first listen, the course appears to use the same format as the *Foundation* and *Advanced* courses. However, there is an important difference: the instructor who replaces Michel Thomas has clearer accents in both English and French, and the two “students” are actually native French speakers.

The clearer French accents of the instructor and students can help you improve your pronunciation. Unfortunately, the instructor and students speak much faster than do Michel Thomas and his non-native students from the earlier courses. The fast pace of speaking in this course can make it difficult for you to follow, so you may find yourself hitting the rewind button frequently.

Reviews on Amazon indicate that while many people find the frequent hesitations and mistakes of students in the original courses to be annoying, just as many people are annoyed by the perfection of the native speakers in the *Vocabulary* course. Indeed, the idea of using native speakers as students seems fake and contrived.

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Thomas was born in Poland but lived in many countries, including Germany, Austria, France, and America. He speaks many European languages, but none with what you would consider to be a native accent.

### 3.4 Advice

When learning French, I advise you to *initially* focus on learning how to construct simple sentences. The Michel Thomas *Foundation* and *Advanced* courses can help you with that. Once you are comfortable with sentence construction, you may then wish to improve your pronunciation and increase your vocabulary. You can use a variety of methods to achieve those goals. For example, you could use a “repeat after me” audio course that uses native French speakers. Alternatively, you might prefer to listen to French radio stations that can be accessed via the Internet (Section 8.5 on page 35). Of course, reading French-language books (Chapter 5), watching movies (Chapter 6) and listening to songs (Chapter 7) can also help.

Unfortunately, many audio courses are packaged in a flimsy plastic box that does not hold the CDs in place securely. If you use audio course CDs frequently then you may want to find a sturdier case for storing them. One option is to buy empty CD jewel cases, that is, the cases commonly used to package music CDs. Another option is to buy a “CD wallet”; this is a case, about the size of a photograph album, that has dozens of pockets for CDs; you can find some examples of CD wallets on [www.caselogic.com](http://www.caselogic.com). Many music CD shops sell empty CD jewel cases and CD wallets.

If you have a ring binder for French notes then you may like to store your audio course CDs in the same ring binder. Some office supply shops sell products that enable you to do this. Look for transparent sheets of plastic that are the same size as a sheet of paper (that is, A4-size in Europe or US Letter-size in America) with built-in pockets to hold two or three CDs. You can see an example of this type of CD holder if you visit [www.staples.co.uk](http://www.staples.co.uk) and do a search for *Elba CD holders*.

# Chapter 4

## French Speakers

You cannot learn French effectively through just one tactic. Rather, you need to use a combination of tactics. One important tactic is to have access to somebody who already speaks French fluently so you can practise your conversation skills and they can correct your pronunciation and grammar. In this chapter I discuss some of the options available for gaining access to people already fluent in French.

### 4.1 French Tutors

If you decide to hire a French tutor then it is important to choose one who is on the same wavelength as you. Or at least one who is willing to change her or his teaching style to match your preferred learning style, whether that be conversation-oriented or reading- and writing-oriented. If you are not sure yet what is your preferred learning style then, through experimentation, you will discover what suits you best.

One way to find a local tutor is to check advertisements in the French Department of your local school or university, at your local library, in local newspapers, and so on. Some tutors advertise on website such as [www.tutors4me.co.uk](http://www.tutors4me.co.uk).

If you have an irregular schedule or if you cannot find a tutor in your neighbourhood then you could visit [www.myngle.com](http://www.myngle.com) to find an Internet-based tutor with whom you communicate using Skype (a telephone service that runs over computer networks).

### 4.2 French Clubs

A French club is a gathering where its members meet regularly in a relaxed environment to practise speaking French and learn more about French culture. If there are no French clubs in your neighbourhood then you could form one with your friends and neighbours. Your club members can meet up anywhere—in your home, in cafés, parks or museums—and you can organise trips together. You can invite people who speak French fluently to help you with pronunciation, and answer any questions you might have.

In such a club you can exchange language learning ideas and French learning materials. When learning with friends, you help each other. For example, if you are good in pronunciation, but bad in spelling, while someone else is the other way round then you can barter tutoring in your respective skills.

Here are just a few ideas for your French club:

- Cook recipes written in French.
- Read French books (Chapter 5).
- Listen to French music (Chapter 7) and watch French films (Chapter 6).
- Help the younger or beginner learners. When you explain a concept to someone else, it sticks to your mind better.
- Share with others what you have learnt, for example prepare a presentation on the French language, culture, history or anything else to do with French, and present it to your friends and family.

Also, you can play French board games. Regardless of your age, playing *jeux de société* (**board games**) provides a way to learn while having fun. A lot of vocabulary is repeated during a game, thus giving you an opportunity to learn those words and phrases very well. In addition, you normally play such games with at least one other person, so it improves your conversation skills.

Many board games that are popular in England are also popular in France, and some of these have similar or even identical names in both countries. Examples include *Scrabble*, *Monopoly* and *Pictionary*. Chapter 2 provides some suggestions on where you can buy these, and other, French-language games.

### 4.3 Host a French Person

You could host a French native speaker in your home for a few months or a year. This will enable you to practise and improve your French daily, and you will also learn about French culture. Check with your city council, local library, local school or university if there are any foreign exchange schemes in your town. Alternatively do a Google search to find out other possibilities, such as [www.homestaybooking.com](http://www.homestaybooking.com).

### 4.4 Study or Work in France

You can boost your oral French skills by studying or working in a French-speaking country. You can find language courses and volunteer work abroad through websites such as [www.cactuslanguage.com](http://www.cactuslanguage.com). Alternatively, perhaps your employer takes part in a work exchange scheme. If you are a university student, you can go on a student exchange organised, for example, by the British Council: see [www.britishcouncil.org/erasmus](http://www.britishcouncil.org/erasmus).

If you decide to work or study in France then make the most of the opportunity. While there, take the effort to hang around, or share a house, with native speakers instead of taking the easy option of speaking English with other English people. If you think you might miss speaking English, you can offer private tuition in English and make some extra money too. Alternatively, you can barter English lessons for French ones. For advertisements on this topic, see local newspapers and shops, local libraries and schools, or just ask around.

The best thing about being in France is that you are surrounded totally by French sounds. By talking to local French natives, you will pick up a regional accent along with the slang terms you are dying to know but cannot get from a language course. Both the regional accent and the slang will help you sound more fluent.

Above all, relax and take in as much as you can without being obsessed with your linguistic progress. Here are a few language acquisition ideas for you to take on board while abroad.

- Listen carefully to tenses, sentence structure and the pace native speakers use when speaking. Too fast for you? Ask them to slow down until you get more accustomed to their accent.
- Pay attention to the way native speakers start and finish a conversation, and also to how they switch between formal and informal language when talking to different people.
- Listen to how children talk; they are such chatterboxes who use simple, yet useful language.
- While on a bus, on a train, or standing in a queue, listen to the conversations of other people. There is nothing wrong with eavesdropping in public places. It can be both entertaining and educational.
- Why not get talking to strangers while waiting in a queue or travelling on a bus? For example, compliment someone on their shirt, ask the time, talk about the weather, and so on.
- As you walk around, pay attention to French writing wherever you see it: an advertisement, the opening and closing hours of a shop, the name of a shop, the headlines in newspapers, and so on.
- If you have a hobby then join a relevant club while in France. For example, if you like swimming, you can go to a local swimming pool. You will pick up vocabulary relevant to your hobby and make some friends along the way. If you happen to be in Montpellier, try the Olympic swimming pool (*la piscine olympique d'Antigone*), or if you are in Paris, try *la piscine flottante Joséphine Baker*, which is a swimming pool in a (very large) barge that floats on the Seine river.

What can be more carefree and yet educational? Window-shopping, of course. You will certainly never forget the conversation you might have with a shop assistant when you want something in a particular size and colour. Never mind if you do not get the item you want; it is still a good opportunity to improve your vocabulary. Did you know that if you buy a gift in France, you can have it gift wrapped for free?

By talking to French natives, you learn more about their culture and traditions. Following the saying *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*, when in France, do as the French do. Try to blend in with the locals, instead of standing out. Here are a few cultural ideas for you to consider while abroad.

- Dress like the locals. Many foreigners can be spotted from afar by the way they dress. When you are studying or working in France, you are not a tourist anymore, you are one of them, and you should try to blend in.

- Eat local food and explore French customs. For example, are table manners different?
- Find out about the French public holidays and their significance.
- Go to a cinema to see a French movie. It does not matter if you cannot understand most of the words, it is the experience that counts!

# Chapter 5

## Books

You cannot learn French without using a combination of good books. In this chapter I offer my recommendations for a wide variety of books, including dictionaries, grammar books, vocabulary books, novels and cultural books.

### 5.1 Dictionaries

When learning French, you can guess the meaning of many new words from the context of their use. However, occasionally, context will not be sufficient and this is when you will find it useful to have a dictionary. A *bilingual* dictionary, that is, an English-French, French-English dictionary, can be invaluable. For many people, a bilingual dictionary is the only dictionary they ever need. However, if your knowledge of French grows to a reasonable fluency then you might find it useful to get a *monolingual*, that is, French-only, dictionary. There are two reasons for this. First, French-only dictionaries tend to provide deeper explanations of words—with more synonyms and expressions of use—than do bilingual dictionaries. Second, use of a French-only dictionary helps you to make connections between different parts of the language *directly*—without having to translate between French and English—and this deepens your knowledge of the language.

**French-English Visual Bilingual Dictionary**, published by DK (Dorling Kindersley)

This is an unusual dictionary because it has lots of pictures. It organises words into chapters by theme and offers a fun way to learn vocabulary for all ages and levels. Once you have learnt a few words, you should try to build up your own sentences. In this way you will learn vocabulary effectively because you will be using the new words in a context that is useful to you. You will need a good grammar book to help you make sentences in French (Section 5.2).

**Tintin Illustrated Dictionary**, published by Harrap's

This bilingual dictionary illustrates words and phrases with comic strips from the famous Belgium comics, *Tintin* by Hergé. It is a fun way to learn new vocabulary.

**French Dictionary: French-English, English-French**, published by Oxford Hachette

This is more than “just” a bilingual dictionary; it contains a lot of other useful reference material too. For example, one section of the dictionary provides many sample French- and English-language documents, including invoices, faxes, staff memos, CVs and letters for different occasions. Some concepts in the dictionary, such as *date*, *time* and *quantity*, have tables

that provide useful expressions involving those concepts, and the last page of the dictionary contains a handy index of those tables.

**Le Petit Robert**, published by Le Robert, France

Once your language skills have evolved, you should use a French-only dictionary. Though *petit* means **small**, this is actually a large dictionary. It is useful because when looking for a word, you will learn new vocabulary, including synonyms from the definition of the word you needed. You also find some verb tables at the end of the dictionary. Many French households own *Le Petit Robert*.

### Specialised Dictionaries

You might want to have a synonyms or idioms dictionary, and perhaps a slang *dico* (in French slang, *dico* is short for *dictionnaire*). If you study French for business, get a French business dictionary. Some dictionaries are also available on CD-rom to use with your computer, which is really handy for those who travel a lot because printed dictionaries can be bulky. Alternatively, purchase a pocket dictionary that is small enough to carry everywhere with you. I do not have any strong preference for particular brands of specialised dictionaries, so I do not offer specific recommendations. Instead, you should browse through the selection you can find in a bookshop or read readers' reviews on Amazon.

## 5.2 Grammar Books

Grammar is one of those topics that makes most people of all ages have nightmares. It should not be like this. In the beginning, you just need to get the hang of how French works, and then play and experiment with it, until it makes sense. Forget about French verb drills and other exercises. Instead, read a good easy-to-understand French grammar book until you understand it.

### 5.2.1 Grammar Books for Learners of French

There are a lot of grammar books available, which fall into two categories: those that give you a bit of theory and a lot of exercises to do, and those that give you only or mainly the theory. Avoid those that give you plenty of exercises to do; too much drilling does not help, it is just tedious work. Instead, pick a grammar book that gives you the theory in simple language and does not look daunting. Build up your own sentences based on the rules and examples you find in these theory books. You will remember the sentences that you created because they are meaningful and personal to you. All grammar books listed here can be used at all levels.

**English Grammar for Students of French**, Jacqueline Morton

There is a problem that many English learners face when studying French: they do not have a good knowledge of the grammar of their own language. This slim book comes to the rescue of such people. It plainly explains the structure of both languages in parallel, which makes it valuable to all levels.

**French Grammar**, William Rowlinson

This little handy theory book gives you an overview of all aspects of French grammar.

**Modern French Grammar**, Margaret Lang and Isabelle Perez

This theory-based grammar book should be used as a reference guide. The first part offers grammatical explanations and uses examples to show the structure of the language. The second part covers a range of topics, such as expressing surprise and sympathy. Though, it is aimed at more advanced learners, the clear and concise explanations make it accessible to the beginner learner too.

**Practice in French Grammar**, Michael Gross

What I like about this book is that each grammar point is illustrated with a dialogue or a small paragraph. This gives the learner the opportunity to see grammar in action, instead of grammar being meaningless.

**La grammaire en clair**, Paul Rogers and Jeremy Long

This is a funny, yet useful grammar book for learners of French. Each grammar point is illustrated with funny stories and jokes that appeal to most ages.

**Grammaire en dialogues**, Claire Miquel

This comes in two volumes: *niveau débutant* (**beginner's level**) and *niveau intermédiaire* (**intermediate level**). Each grammar point is illustrated with a dialogue that you can also find on the provided CD. You can listen to the dialogues at your own leisure; not necessarily together with the book.

**La grammaire des premiers temps**, Dominique Abry and Marie-Laure Chalaron

This is a grammar exercise book. If you are a person who likes doing grammar exercises, then this book is for you. It comes in two volumes: volume 1 for *niveau débutant* (**beginner's level**) and volume 2 for *niveau intermédiaire* (**intermediate level**). The two volumes have their own booklets with the *corrigé des exercices* (**solutions to exercises**) and their own CDs that also contain exercises. However, these exercise solution booklets and the CDs have to be bought separately.

**Difficultés expliquées du français... for English Speakers**, Alain Vercollier, Claudine Vercollier and Kay Bourlier

This book explains the most frequent errors made by native English speakers when learning French. Though, it is for *niveau intermédiaire et avancé* (**intermediate and advanced levels**), beginner learners can find it useful to know what typical mistakes to avoid. There is a booklet with the *corrigés* (**solutions**), but you need to buy that separately.

## 5.2.2 Grammar Book for French Natives

Many French natives consider language accuracy to be important. This is why dictation competitions are such a popular hobby among French people of all ages. All grammar books listed here are theory based.

**Bescherelle, la Conjugaison pour tous**, published by Hatier

Most verb books laboriously conjugate hundreds or thousands verbs in their entirety, and this results in massive duplication because many verbs conjugate in a similar manner. In contrast, *La Bescherelle*, as the French call it, conjugates about 80 verbs that, between them, represent all possible variations in conjugation across all the regular and irregular verbs. An index at

the back of the book cross-references thousands of French verbs with those 80 example verb conjugations. Color coding in the example conjugations is used to highlight the tricky parts of conjugations. In this way, *La Bescherelle*, offers conjugations for all the 12,000 French verbs in approximately 200 pages. In contrast, another famous verb book takes almost 700 pages to conjugate 501 verbs.

*La Bescherelle* is the best verb book ever written. It has been widely used in French schools for generations and many households have a copy. Would you not feel good about yourself to know that you learn French verbs the way the French themselves do?

By the way, the book's name, *La Bescherelle*, comes from its original author, who has long since died, and the publisher, Hatier, now uses *La Bescherelle* as a brand name for a series of grammar books. All three books in the series have a distinctive, red hardback cover and are quite slim, which makes them very portable.

**Bescherelle, La Grammaire pour tous**, published by Hatier

This grammar book is from the famous *La Bescherelle* series. It uses colour-coding for easy understanding, and it has a distinctive, red hardback cover, as you would expect.

**Bescherelle, l'orthographe pour tous**, published by Hatier

This is the final title in the *La Bescherelle* series, and it deals with the spelling of French words. Like the other books in the series, it uses colour-coding for easy understanding and has a distinctive, red hardback cover.

**Le bon usage**, Vaugelas Grevisse and André Goosse

This large French theory-based grammar book is in many French households. Be forewarned that *Le bon usage* is not very accessible to foreign learners of French language because it is very detailed and daunting. So, unless you are a linguist, you do not necessarily need it.

### 5.3 Vocabulary and Conversation Books

Vocabulary means all the words contained in a language. You cannot learn vocabulary mainly from dictionaries or vocabulary lists. Vocabulary, like grammar, is best learnt in action, how it is used in daily life. Still, it is important to have some vocabulary books that concentrate on teaching you vocabulary in a systematic way. These books should be used as reference material on as needed-basis. The books listed here are accessible to learners of all ages and levels. And most of them give you the opportunity to listen to vocabulary and dialogues on CDs for pronunciation purposes.

You might also want to get a phrase book. There are many phrase books on the market. You should examine a few and pick one that best suits your needs. These phrase books provide ready-made sentences to help you with speaking French when you go on holidays. But be warned that relying exclusively on ready-made sentences will not help you becoming independent in speaking French.

**Using French Vocabulary**, Jean H.Duffy

This book has detailed lists of words, arranged by theme and on three levels of difficulty, and split into chapters for easy access. Each chapter has exercises on the three levels of difficulty, and you can find the answer to these exercises at the end of the book.

**French for Homebuyers**, Peter Macbride and Monique Perceau

If you want to buy a house in France, then this book—from the *Teach Yourself* series—can help you with vocabulary required for this task. The book comes with a CD that contains tutorials to practise listening and speaking.

**The Oxford French Cartoon-strip Vocabulary Builder**, Marie-Hélène Corréard

On one page you have a vocabulary list, while on the facing page you have small dialogues in a cartoon-strip format. You might think because of the cartoon-strips that the book is aimed at beginner learners of French but, it is actually accessible to all.

**Vocabulaire en dialogues**, Évelyne Siréjols

Like *Grammaire en dialogues* by Claire Miquel (Section 5.2.1), *Vocabulaire en dialogues* teaches you French in action, the way you use it in real life. Listen to the dialogues on the CD that accompanies the book.

**Conversations, pratiques de l'oral**, Cidalia Martins and Jean-Jacques Mabilat

This book contains small dialogues and other phrases that are taken from everyday life. The included CD provides key phrases and tips on pronunciation.

**Tune Up your French**, Natalie Schorr

This book helps you improve your spoken French, and gives you tips on using slang. Listen to key phrases and tips on pronunciation on the included CD.

## 5.4 Novels

Reading novels is far more interesting than reading individual sentences and short paragraphs in textbooks. This is important because being interested in what you read provides a motivation to continue reading, and this facilitates learning.

Whenever you encounter an unknown word, do not immediately reach for the dictionary. Instead, try to understand the word from the context. In the beginning, it is important that you are able to follow the plot and get the gist of the story. Aim to understand the main ideas on each page, and gradually you will build on that. Read a book as many times as you want. It is like listening to a song, if you like it you keep going back to it, and you build a sort of emotional link with the artist.

Novels that have a lot of dialogue rather than a lot of description are better for learning purposes because dialogue language is easier to grasp. Also, the vocabulary you get from dialogues is more useful to your immediate needs than a lot of descriptive words. The words that stick in your mind are the words you encounter most often. Thus, the more you read, the more you will remember. Some people may argue that learning vocabulary from novels and articles requires more time to accumulate than learning from vocabulary lists. However, when you learn words in context, it is easier to remember them.

It is best to not read French-language novels primarily for learning because that turns reading into a chore. Instead, you should read for pleasure; if you do that then learning will occur naturally. The following subsections provide some recommendations for novels in several genres. Do not forget that novels are often turned into movies. It can be useful to watch a movie version of a novel, before or after reading the book: *before* to increase your chance of fully understanding the story, or *after* to check that you understood the story. You

should take note of any differences between a novel and its movie version, as this could be an interesting topic of conversation with other speakers of French.

### 5.4.1 Children's Books

Children's stories are your best choice to start with when you are learning French because they are written in easy-to-understand language. Get an encyclopedia written for French children, and you are guaranteed to learn a lot of new useful vocabulary and interesting facts too. Instead of using vocabulary lists to learn vocabulary, get children's books that talk about nature, animals, the human body, weather, history and so on to help you build up your vocabulary by themes.

Read fairy tales (*contes de fées*), sit back and enjoy their magic world. Would you not be tempted to read *Cinderella* as *Cendrillon*, *Little Red Riding Hood* as *Le petit chaperon rouge* and so on? What about reading Harry Potter in French?

Some children's stories are also available as audio CDs (*livre audio*) or in comic-book format. By the way, the French of all ages love reading comics (*les bandes dessinées* or *les BDs* as they are also known). Some popular comics include *Tintin* and *Astérix*.

#### **Nouveaux contes de fées**, Comtesse de Ségur

Comtesse de Ségur, the daughter of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian diplomat, married a French count and lived in a mansion near Paris. She started writing fairy tales to entertain her granddaughters. She was persuaded to publish them, and they became popular. *Nouveaux contes de fées* enchanted my childhood, and will remain with me forever. She continued writing stories for children, and her writings are still popular among French children today. *Les malheurs de Sophie* is one of her most famous writings, but others such as *Les vacances*, *Les petites filles* and so on are equally entertaining.

#### **Le petit Nicolas**, Goschinnny and Sempé

This is a book of short stories about a boy called Nicolas. There are other books in the *Le petit Nicolas* series, such as *Le petit Nicolas a des ennuis*, *Les vacances du petit Nicolas*, and *Le petit Nicolas et les copains*. Being written from a child's point of view, it is really light-hearted, funny, and uses easy French, which makes it an excellent tool for people learning French.

#### **Le Petit Prince**, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

**The Little Prince** is a philosophical fairy tale. It tells the story of a little prince and his perspective on the world. It is the *all-time* best-selling French book in the world, and it is the most widely translated French book too.

#### **Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours**, Jules Verne

This book, known in English as **Around the World in Eighty Days**, takes you on a fantastic imaginary journey around the globe. Jules Verne wrote other science-fiction and adventure novels equally fun to read, such as *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (**Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea**), *De la Terre à la Lune* (**From the Earth to the Moon**), and *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (**Journey to the Center of the Earth**). Jules Verne is, after Agatha Christie, the second-most translated author of all time. Some of his writings have been turned into movies.

**Le meilleur des perles des enfants**, Éric Devrot and Sophie Decoudun

This slim book is not a novel, but rather is a hilarious collection of bloopers made by children when answering and asking questions.

**5.4.2 Contemporary Novels**

If you like reading contemporary literature, then you are spoiled for choice.

**Comme un roman**, Daniel Pennac

This book is the story of a teacher who tells his students that they have the right to read what and when they want, and even to not read at all. Other titles by this author that you might consider adding to your reading list include *Au bonheur des ogres*, *La fée carabine* and *Messieurs les enfants*.

**La grammaire est une chanson douce**, Erik Orsenna

This book celebrates language and the power of words in an easy-to-understand writing style.

**Ensemble, c'est tout**, Anna Gavalda

Although quite long—around 600 pages—this book is an easy read due to the large amount of dialogue. You might also want to watch the movie with the same title. The author's first novel, *Je voudrais que quelqu'un m'attende quelque part*, is a collection of lively short stories.

**Stupeur et tremblements**, Amélie Nothomb

Amélie Nothomb, daughter of Belgian diplomats, was born in Japan where she lived until the age of 5. When the author became an adult she returned to Japan for a year. This book humorously describes her difficulties of working in a strictly hierarchical, Japanese company.

**Où es-tu?**, Marc Lévy

This is a love story, full of emotions and surprises.

**Un sac de billes**, Joseph Joffo

This is a captivating story about two boys on the run during the Nazi occupation of Paris. The story is told through the eyes of the author as a boy.

**Elise ou la vraie vie**, Claire Etcherelli

This book deals with the Arab-French identity during the French occupation of North Africa. This emotional personal story with historical connotations opens your eyes to a far away world.

**La statue de sel**, Albert Memmi

This is another excellent novel dealing with the Arab-French identity topic.

**La Gloire de mon père**, Marcel Pagnol

This book and *Le Château de ma mère* form the collection *Souvenirs d'enfance* in which the author describes the magic world of childhood. Another of the author's most celebrated series is *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources*. In these two novels, the author makes us discover, one by one, characters together with their good and bad points, their happiness and misery. All four of these books were turned into highly acclaimed movies.

**Bonjour Tristesse**, Françoise Sagan

This book describes and endorses a hedonistic lifestyle. It is no wonder the book was acclaimed by some and seen as a scandal by others in the 1950s when it first appeared. You might also want to watch the film version of this book to complement your understanding of the book.

**Je vais bien, ne t'en fais pas**, Olivier Adam

This slim novel is easy to read because of its very short sentences and simple language. The story is quite captivating. I suggest you also watch the movie version of the story.

**Exercices de style**, Raymond Queneau

This book contains a short story that is told in 99 different styles! And no, it is not boring. You can also read it as **Exercises in Style**, translated by Barbara Wright.

### 5.4.3 Classic Novels

If you like reading classics, then you have a lot of choice within French literature. However, be forewarned that many of these books are rather long, and do not have much dialogue. Still, it is worth reading at least a few from the list below. Like the English classics, many of the French classics were made into films.

**Les trois mousquetaires**, Alexandre Dumas

History, adventure, fights, love stories, and three courageous men are only a few of the topics in this book whose English title is **The Three Musketeers**. Although a long story, it knows how to capture the reader's attention throughout. If Dumas' writing has charmed you then you should also read *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (**The Count of Monte Cristo**). The movie versions of both books are regarded as classics.

**Le Père Goriot**, Honoré de Balzac

You can learn a lot about human nature, greed and Parisian high class by reading this story.

**Le rouge et le noir**, Stendhal

This book deals with themes similar to Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*.

**Madame Bovary**, Gustave Flaubert

This book tells the story of a bourgeoisie woman who is unhappily married, and engages in adulterous affairs to escape her endless boredom of a provincial life. It was made into a highly acclaimed movie.

**La peste**, Albert Camus

This book is a metaphor for France's suffering under the Nazi occupation, and the human bravery in the face of a gloomy existence. Other existentialist novels by the same author include *La chute* and *L'étranger*. Though Camus is a 20<sup>th</sup> century writer, his books are viewed as classics and widely studied.

**Les Misérables**, Victor Hugo

This is a great story about early 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris. In case you cannot take the plunge to read this rather long book, I recommend you watch the film in English, starring the world famous

French actor Gérard Depardieu. Alternatively, watch the theatre play. Or get the Easy Reader version that comes with a CD. You might also like reading *Notre-Dame de Paris* by the same author, and watch its Disney adaptation known as *Le Bossu de Notre-Dame*.

**Candide**, Voltaire

This satirical book contains a lot of dialogue. I recommend you get the dual-language book translated and edited by Shane Weller.

**Tartarin de Tarascon**, Alphonse Daudet

This is a short, funny story of a man who dreams of going to Africa to hunt, and in the meantime he acts and tells stories as if he is already the biggest hunter around.

## 5.5 Cultural Books

When learning French, sooner or later you will read about French culture, art, geography and history.

**Speak the Culture: France**, published by Thorogood

Although written in English, this book is a good read because it gives you an overview of the French lifestyle, literature, art, cinema, music, media, food and politics.

**Chez vous en France**, Geneviève Brame

This book is written in French for both native and foreign readers. It contains everything you need to know about the practicalities of French life, from working and residing in France to health and education.

**French Toast**, Harriet Rochefort

Although the title is in English, this book is written in French. The author is an American woman married to a French man, and living in France. She gives her opinion on the French nation.

**Guides Voir: France**, published by Hachette

This book, written in French, covers all areas of France, describing and showing photographs of the places worth visiting. It also has maps of the regions and the town centres.

## 5.6 Miscellaneous Books

You can improve your French vocabulary by reading books on whatever topics or hobbies interest you. For example, if you like cooking then get a cooking book in French and try your hand at some recipes. Do you want to find out about the highway code in France? Then get the *Code de la route*. Do you want to see the world through French eyes? Then get a French-language atlas. If you love jokes (*les blagues*) then get a French joke book, and laugh in French!

In the children's section of many bookshops you can find reference books that use simple language to explain a wide variety of subjects: the human body, aeroplanes, the weather, history, geography, animals, sports, and so on. You can buy these as a separate reference

book for each topic, or as a single-volume children's encyclopedia. These reference books provide an excellent way to learn subject-specific vocabulary in context.

There are bilingual (also known as *parallel text* or *dual-language*) versions of many French novels. This means that one page is in French, and the facing page contains an English translation. Many people find these books a useful aid to learning sentence structure and new vocabulary. However, I recommend you use them in moderation because the ease of looking at the translation can hinder you in building up the skills required to increase your reading fluency.

There are series called *Easy Reader*, *Lectures Faciles*, *Lecture CLE en français facile*, *Lire et s'entraîner*, and so on that are rewrites of famous novels, written especially for foreign readers, with different stages of difficulty and sometimes with an included CD. There is also a series called *Teen Readers* with stories for teenagers.

# Chapter 6

## Movies

Watching French-language movies can be part of your learning French. Depending on your level of understanding, you can choose to watch a DVD with English or French subtitles, or no subtitles at all. In the beginning of your learning French, listening to the dialogues while reading the subtitles of a French-language movie and trying to understand what is happening can be both interesting and nerve-racking. Relax, watch the movie again, and each time you will understand a bit more.

Look at the English-language DVDs you already have at home or can rent from a local DVD shop. Some of them may offer French subtitles or French-language dubbing. Turning on these options will give you a chance to improve your French skills without having to buy French-language DVDs.

If you do decide to buy DVDs of French-language movies then I need to forewarn you of a potential problem. Many French-language movies are produced and distributed by a large company in France called Pathé. Amazon readers' reviews of movies complain that some Pathé DVDs sold in English-language markets have English subtitles that cannot be turned off. When I checked my own DVD collection I was able to confirm this complaint for *Les Choristes* and *Le dîner de cons*. If you want to watch these movies without English subtitles then you have to buy them from a French-speaking country (try [www.amazon.fr](http://www.amazon.fr)). The French-market version of *Les Choristes* has French subtitles (which can be turned off) but does not have English subtitles. The French-market version of *Le dîner de cons* has both English and French subtitles which can be turned on and off as you please.

Instead of watching French-language DVDs, another option is to watch French-language television stations. You could ask your satellite or cable television company if they provide French-language stations.

### 6.1 Children's Movies

Like children's books (Section 5.4.1 on page 20), children's movies are very good tools for learning French because of their simple, yet useful language.

#### **Kirikou et la sorcière**

This is an animated movie based on an African folk tale. Kirikou—a small, courageous boy—saves his village from the wicked witch. This movie is a delight for children and adults alike.

**Être et avoir**

This is a documentary which follows a year of ups and downs in the life of a bunch of rural France primary school children, aged 4–10, and their teacher. You will be spellbound by the patience and dedication of this teacher, and you will be unable to resist smiling when the camera turns towards little Jojo. This documentary has a simple, yet touching plot.

**Les Choristes**

*The Chorus*, as it was known in English cinemas, is a touching movie with a simple plot. A teacher defies the cruel headmaster and turns a bunch of poor boys into a rather talented chorus.

**6.2 Movies for All Ages**

Like French music (Chapter 7), French movies have a particular style that sets them apart, and the French are proud of their native talent. France is at third place in movie making, after America and India. France has produced many famous movie stars, for example Jean Gabin, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jeanne Moreau, Catherine Deneuve, Gérard Depardieu, Jean Réno, Audrey Tautou, and so on.

**L'auberge espagnole**

This is the story of a French student who goes to Barcelona to study. Students who went abroad on Erasmus exchanges to study might feel nostalgic watching this movie. In England, you might find the DVD under the name *Pot Luck*.

**La Haine**

Dealing with themes of violence and hatred, this movie follows the lives of young immigrants living in a Paris ghetto.

**District 13**

*Banlieue 13*—under its French name—is a James Bond-style adventure in which an undercover policeman and a vigilante join forces to bring some justice to a Parisian slum. Although, it does not have much of a plot, it has lots of great action and some amazing *parkour* (free running) scenes.

**Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain**

This movie, more widely known under its abbreviated title *Amélie*, tells us to enjoy the small pleasures in life as the main character does. This movie was popular in English cinemas when it first came out in 2001.

**Le dîner de cons**

A group of arrogant friends regularly have dinner parties to which each person must invite somebody who is stupid or eccentric. This farcical movie follows Pierre who invites the biggest idiot of all time, but his idiot guest manages to accidentally ruin Pierre's life in a series of comic mishaps.

**8 Femmes**

This murder mystery musical is also a light comedy. The movie is sprinkled with many

famous French actresses including Catherine Deneuve and Emmanuelle Béart. You can learn useful vocabulary from the lyrics of this movie's songs because they deal with relationships. For this reason, you may find it useful to buy the soundtrack too.

### **La Môme**

*La vie en rose*—under its name in England—came out in 2007. It is based on the tumultuous life of Edith Piaf, the famous French singer.

### **Jules et Jim**

This is the story of a love triangle. The famous French actress Jeanne Moreau plays the main female character. The beautiful song *Le Tourbillon de la vie* that she sings in this movie contains many verbs, which makes it a useful learning tool.

### **La cage aux folles**

Adapted from a widely successful play, this movie and its sequel, *La cage aux folles 2*, are top quality French farce, with a lot of humour and adventure about the life of a French gay couple.

## **6.3 Comedians**

When you are able to watch French films without English subtitles, you are definitely more advanced in your French understanding. If you like watching comedians, try your taste for the French ones. In the beginning, watch them with French subtitles for a clearer understanding because they are full of idioms and slang. You will *not* find the DVD suggestions below with English subtitles.

### **Jamel Debbouze**

He is one of the most popular French comedians at the moment. He is hilarious to both listen and watch. I recommend the live show *Jamel 100% Debbouze*.

### **Coluche**

Coluche, famous comedian and actor, died prematurely in a traffic accident in 1986. Reruns of his television and radio shows are still popular today. He is also known for being the founder of *Le Restos du Coeur*, a charitable organisation, which distributes food packages and hot meals to the homeless.

### **Louis de Funès**

This comedian, now unfortunately dead, starred in many comedy movies. I particularly recommend the series called *Le Gendarme* of which *Le gendarme et les extra-terrestres* is a favorite of mine. The adventures of a bunch of policemen as they try to capture extra-terrestrials are full of humour and unexpected twists.



# Chapter 7

## Music

Most of us think of a song as entertainment, but a song can also be educational. If we listen more carefully to its lyrics we realise a song has a message to give. Many songs deal with topics such as relationships, politics, war, nature, health, education and love. Therefore, the lyrics of a song can improve your vocabulary on themes. Even though most lyrics are not written in full sentences, they are written in different tenses, such as present, past and future; they use singular and plural nouns and adjectives, and so on.

My music suggestions include French singers who are both easy to understand and beautiful to listen to. If you find it difficult to understand the lyrics, check if the CD liner notes contain the lyrics. Alternatively, with the help of an online search engine—for example, [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk)—search the title of the song you want followed by *paroles* (lyrics). Listen to the song while reading the lyrics so you can make the connection between what you hear and what you see.

Chapter 2 suggests some places where you can buy French music. However, before spending your money, watch video clips and listen to music on [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com) to see if you actually like it. Read the users' comments as well to find out what other people think about a particular singer. Such users' comments are also a good source for learning French slang. You can also read customer reviews on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) or [www.amazon.fr](http://www.amazon.fr).

### 7.1 Educational Music

In this section I list some music CDs intended *primarily* for education.

#### **French on the Move, for Kids**

This CD contains music for young learners of French, ranging from learning greetings to how to talk about the weather. Some tunes are quite catchy.

#### **Le top des tout-p'tits**

This is a series of CDs for French children that can also be useful for learners of French. There are songs such as *Joyeux anniversaire* (**Happy Birthday**) and many others.

#### **Génération française 4**

This is one of a CD series distributed, free-of-charge, by *Le Plaisir d'Apprendre*. Unfortunately, you need to be a teacher to get one of these CDs. It is worth finding a way to get it. The CD is a compilation of French music and comes with a booklet containing lyrics

and exercises based on the songs. On the same website, [www.leplaisirdapprendre.com](http://www.leplaisirdapprendre.com), you can find *Chansons engagées*, a DVD with video clips that have the lyrics appearing on the screen at the same time with the music. All the music is modern and very good. It is ideal for learning French!

## 7.2 French Singers

French music, like French movies (Chapter 6), has a particular tonality that sets it apart, and the French are proud of their native artists. I mention some famous French singers and give a few examples of their songs and albums.

### Diam's

Originally from Cyprus, Diam's became the Queen of Rap in France. She is also known for her political activism, which comes out in her lyrics. For example, she openly expresses her political views against the current French president, Nicolas Sarkozy; an example is the song *Ma France à moi* from her *Dans la bulle* album.

### Grand Corps Malade

Grand Corps Malade specialises in *slam*, which is poetry recited over background music. He made his debut with the *Midi 20* album in 2006. He sings, using a lot of slang, about many topics, but especially about life in ghettos.

### Alizée

With a style similar to Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, Alizée became famous in 2000 with her hit single *Moi... Lolita* from her debut album, *Gourmandises*.

### Chimène Badi

This young voice sings beautifully and clearly in easy-to-understand language. I recommend her *Entre nous* album.

### Florent Pagny

Pagny sings about life in general in songs such as *Ailleurs Land* and *Ma Liberté de penser* (both from his *Ailleurs Land* album).

### Hélène Ségara

This singer is well known in France and abroad with her albums *Coeur de verre* and *Au nom d'une femme*. Some say her music resembles that of Canadian singer Céline Dion.

### Christophe Willem

Willem becomes famous with the song *Double je* (from his debut album, *Inventaire*) in 2007. The video clip shows the singer participating in a group therapy, to express his dual personality. You can watch this video clip on [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com).

### Jean-Jacques Goldman

This singer has remained successful across several decades. His classic *En Passant* album came out in 1997, and is still popular today.

**Vanessa Paradis**

Vanessa Paradis, an actress and singer, is married to Johnny Depp. One of her famous early songs is *Joe le taxi* from her debut album, *M&J*.

**Francis Cabrel**

The album *Fragile* has both melancholic and upbeat songs worth listening to.

**Nana Mouskouri**

Greek of origin, she sings like an angel in many languages. I recommend you get her “best-of” compilation album in French. *Je chante avec toi Liberté* is a beautiful freedom song.

**Patrick Bruel**

This pop singer is famous in France and abroad. One of his great albums is *Alors Regarde*.

**Edith Piaf**

She is the diva who is famous for singing *La vie en rose*. I recommend you get her “best-of” compilation album. I also suggest you watch the 2007 movie *La Môme* (known as *La vie en rose* in England) about her life.

**La Sélection du Club**

This is a series of compilation CDs containing French music that has survived the passing of time.

## 7.3 African-French Singers

France had many colonies in Africa, and therefore there is a strong African community in France that has enriched French music culture.

**MC Solaar**

Mc Solaar is a Senegalese French rap singer. You can learn a lot of French slang language while listening to his music. A good CD to start with is *Mach 6*.

**Faf Larage**

Another excellent rap singer is Faf Larage. His *Rap Stories* album contains *Pas le temps*, which was used on the soundtrack of the *Prison Break* television series in France.

**Yannick Noah**

This former world-champion tennis player became famous in the early 90’s with his single *Saga Africa*. He sings about the human race, about fighting against poverty, and so on. He also sings about his African roots—he has a Cameroonian father and a French mother—and had hits with many songs including *Métisse(s)* and *Simon Papa Tara*. I highly recommend all his albums because his music is full of wonderful African beats. If you get the chance to see him in a concert then do not pass up the opportunity.

**Angélique Kidjo**

Originally from Benin, she enchanted the whole world with her fusion of different musical styles. She sings in French, English, Fon (her native language), and Yoruba (another language of Benin). All her albums are equally of high quality. One powerful song—written in

French—from her *Black Ivory Soul* album is *Ne cédez jamais*. It encourages you to not be ashamed to be different and to never stop resisting those who want to control you.

### **Salif Keita**

With an enchanting voice from Mali, he makes you dream of colourful Africa. One of his songs, *Madan*, was turned into a parody called *Zidane y va marquer* during the 2006 World Cup. You can watch it on [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com).

### **Faudel**

A second-generation Algerian in France, many of his songs are about his parents's country. Songs like *Mon pays*, *Tellement je t'aime*, and *Je veux vivre* are wonderfully powerful. I recommend you get his “best-of” album.

### **Magic System**

This group, originally from the Ivory Coast, sing Zouglou. One of their famous albums is *Cessa kié la vérité*, and they are well known in discos with songs like *Bouger Bouger* and *Petit Pompier*.

### **Ismaël Lô**

This singer with an amazing voice from Senegal touched French hearts with his song *L'amour à tous les droits* from the *Jammu Africa* album.

### **Daara J**

This group from Senegal sing a beautiful mixture of hip-hop, rap and ragga. Amongst their greatest songs in French are *Esperanza* and *Exodus* from the *Boomerang* album.

### **Amadou & Mariam**

This talented blind couple, originally from Mali, reached fame in France in 2005 with their album *Dimanche à Bamako*, which contained the hit single *Beaux Dimanches*.

### **Alpha Blondy**

He comes from the Ivory Coast, and is internationally famous for African singing. Since the death of Bob Marley, Blondy was named the reggae king. His album *Masada* is full of great songs, such as *Multipartisme* and *Ça me fait si mal*.

### **Tiken Jah Fakoly**

Originally from the Ivory Coast, he sings politically charged songs, such as *Y'en a marre* and *Le pays va mal* (*Francafrique* album).

### **Zêdess**

He is a militant reggae singer from Burkina Faso. You can find the song *Un Hongrois chez les Gaulois* (known also as *Nicolas Sarkozy, pourquoi ton père a fui la Hongrie?*) on [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com). In this song, Zêdess denounces the immigration politics of the French president by asking him a straightforward question. Find *Un Hongrois chez les Gaulois* on his album entitled *Sagesse Africaine*.

### **Rokia Traoré**

Originally from Mali, this singer mixes African and European beats, and the result is really good. Written in French, the song *Château de sable*, on the album *Wanita*, uses simple language to describe her childhood in Africa.

# Chapter 8

## Websites

Most French websites end in *.fr*, but some end in *.com*, *.org*, or *.net*. All websites ending with *.gouv.fr* are websites of the French government. Some French websites also have an English version, but you should resist the temptation to navigate them.

If you feel too intimidated by some websites, leave them aside until you feel more comfortable with your French. Even though most websites that I mention here are for French native speakers, the novice learners of French can get a feel for the language, and learn a few new words from just browsing them.

Most of the websites can be used by all levels and ages. I recommend you pick a subject matter that interests you, and research it in French. The websites are to be used not as substitutes for books (Chapter 5), but rather as an extra aid to help you get accustomed to French.

Please contact me at *BiancaMcHale@yahoo.co.uk* if any of the websites listed in this book change or stop working.

### 8.1 Websites for Younger and Older Learners of French

Websites that are written for a young audience use simple language, like you find in children's books (Section 5.4.1 on page 20). Because of this, these websites are a useful learning tool for all ages and levels.

#### ***www.momes.net***

This website is written by French children for other children. You can read stories and poems online, find out which are children's favourite toys, films, music, books, museums, and so on. You can also read facts about animals, culture, food, science, and so on in the *mini-dossiers* (**mini files**). You can definitely find something for everybody on this website.

#### ***www.filsantejeunes.com***

*Fil santé jeunes* is a website where teenagers can find useful information about health and safer sex, and also answers to their problems about relationships.

#### ***www.asterix.fr***

This is the official website for one of the most famous comic books, *Astérix*. You can read some of the *Astérix* stories, news about them, and you can also take quizzes to test your knowledge of the topic.

***www.tintin.com***

Belgium of origin, this comic book series became famous worldwide. You can read *Tintin* stories (and turn the pages like in a paper book). You can also take part in the fan club discussions.

***www.membres.lycos.fr/simpsons/***

Read in French about the famous cartoon characters of the Simpson family.

## 8.2 General Information Websites

If you are already familiar with how online search engines work then you will find it easy to navigate the French-language websites below.

***www.google.fr***

This is the French-language version of *Google*, a famous free online search engine.

***www.fr.wikipedia.org***

This is the French-language version of *Wikipedia*, a free online encyclopedia.

## 8.3 Movie Websites

If you are passionate about movies then discover the French productions and read movie reviews online. Two of the most popular cinema chains in France are *UGC* ([www.ugc.fr](http://www.ugc.fr)) and *Gaumont* ([www.cinemasgaumontpathe.com](http://www.cinemasgaumontpathe.com)).

***www.premiere.fr***

On this website you can read movie reviews of French- and English-language movies shown in French cinemas. You can also read interviews with movie stars.

***www.festival-cannes.com***

This is the official website for the yearly Cannes International Film Festival. You can find not only the current year's news, but also archives of older news stories.

## 8.4 Newspaper and Magazine Websites

Rather than buying French-language newspapers and magazines, you could visit their websites and read both new and old news at your own leisure. You do not have to read entire articles in the beginning of your learning French, just browse and read the headlines, making a note of new vocabulary. You can also watch small news clips on their websites.

***www.lemonde.fr***

*Le Monde* is one of the most famous daily newspapers. It used to be described as left wing, but it is more moderate nowadays.

***www.lefigaro.fr***

*Le Figaro* is another leading daily newspaper. Its editorial line is conservative.

**www.leparisien.fr**

*Le Parisien* is a daily newspaper covering Paris local news, national and international news.

**www.nouvelobs.com**

*Le Nouvel Observateur* is a weekly news magazine of liberal orientation that covers political and cultural world matters.

**www.parismatch.com**

*Paris Match* is a weekly magazine covering national and international news, along with celebrity lifestyle information and practical suggestions for your home and health.

**www.elle.fr**

*Elle* is a monthly fashion magazine that is famous worldwide. It is written for women, and covers a wide range of topics, including fashion, food recipes and beauty tips.

**www.vogue.fr**

*Vogue* is a monthly fashion and lifestyle magazine, which is very popular among women worldwide.

## 8.5 Radio Websites

You can listen to French radio online. You need to get a media player, such as *Real Player* (available as a free download from [www.realplayer.com](http://www.realplayer.com)) to be able to listen online. You will not understand much in the beginning, but you might catch some words, and hear different accents that you can imitate.

**www.radiofrance.fr**

*Radio France* broadcasts current affairs information, and it has seven national stations: *France Inter* (news, music and entertainment), *France Info* (news), *France Culture* (culture), *France Musique* (classical music and jazz), *France Bleu* (network of regional stations), *FIP* (a wide range of music), and *Le Mouv'* (pop music).

**www.rfi.fr**

On *Radio France International* (RFI) you can find news with subtitles by following the links: *Langue française* → *Journal en français facile*. You can listen to music on *Musique*.

**www.rtl.fr**

*RTL* is a popular commercial radio station that provides music and French news.

**www.listenlive.eu**

On *Listen Live* you can find local radio stations from all over France and other European countries where French is spoken. In this way you can experience a variety of French accents.

## 8.6 Television Websites

If you do not have a television set at home, you can still watch some news and documentaries online on the respective television websites. You will not understand much in the beginning,

but do not worry; listen while reading the headlines, and that will help you get the gist of the stories. The more you listen, the more your ear will get trained to the sound of the French language.

***www.tf1.fr***

*TF1* is a privately-owned television channel with mainly entertainment programmes. You can find the subtitles of headlines for each story in the news section.

***www.canalplus.fr***

*Canal Plus* is another privately-owned channel, which broadcasts entertainment programmes. Online, it gives you a compilation of a few minutes' highlights from different channels that you can find on *Zapping*, named after the motion of flicking from one channel to another.

***www.tv5.org***

*TV5* is a public television channel for French-speaking countries. Some of its programmes and news can be viewed online. Some parts of the website provide easy access to topic-specific video clips that can be useful for learners of French. For example, *La langue française* contains video-clips about grammar and the origins of certain words. As another example, *Apprendre le français* provides video clips (with optional, written transcriptions) of news stories and provides questions to test your comprehension of what was said during those clips.

***www.francetv.fr***

On *France Télévisions* you can find programmes from public French televisions. To find news with subtitles of some headlines, follow the links *France2* → *Info* (an abbreviation for *Information*) → *JT* (an abbreviation for *journaux télévisés*). It has five stations: *France 2* (primary channel), *France 3* (network of regional stations), *France 4* (arts, music and entertainment), *France 5* (health, education and employment), and *RFO* (stations from French colonies).

***www.euronews.net/fr***

*Euronews* broadcasts mainly news. You can find some of its news programmes online. There is also the transcript of the video clips, but some words may be changed. There is an English version, but this is not a word-by-word translation. Look at the subtitles as you listen, and try to listen carefully to the pronunciation to get your ear used to the French language. Do not worry if you understand nothing or only a little in the beginning. With time, your understanding will improve. Watch a video clip as many times as you like, and jot down new vocabulary. You might want to build your own sentences with that new vocabulary for more efficient learning.

***www.m6.fr***

*M6* broadcasts reality shows and programmes for teenagers and young adults. You can watch movie trailers and read synopses in French.

## 8.7 Travel Websites

By browsing the websites in this section, you can learn travel-related vocabulary, such as terminology for booking flights and hotels, weather and driving conditions.

***www.pagesjaunes.fr***

*Pages Jaunes* (**Yellow Pages**) is a telephone directory website on which you can find the contact details for businesses. If you want to find a person's contact details, you should follow the link *Pages Blanches* (**White Pages**).

***www.voyages-sncf.com***

*SNCF* (*Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer*) is the French national railway system—France's equivalent of British Rail. You can browse timetables of train journeys in France, and read about other useful information that you need for your journey, such as hotels, camping and ideas about what to visit.

***www.airfrance.fr***

*Air France* is the French national airline. You can browse flights and find out other important information (such as hotels and renting a car) that you might need when travelling by aeroplane.

***www.viamichelin.fr***

On *Via Michelin* you can find road maps. The website also provides details on how to get to a place in France or somewhere else in the world by car and how long will take. To see a route, just type in your starting and destination addresses and click on the link *Voir l'itinéraire pas à pas* (**See the route step by step**). This provides an excellent way to learn French-language vocabulary for directions. If you are not sure you understand everything correctly then you can visit the English-language version of the website: *www.viamichelin.co.uk*.

***www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr***

*Bison Futé* provides real-time information on the state of roads within France, for example, which roads are closed or where you are likely to find traffic jams.

***www.infotraffic.com***

*Info Traffic* is another website that provides information on the state of roads within France.

***www.preventionroutiere.asso.fr***

*L'Association Prévention Routière* provides tips on driving and information about driving in France.

***www.meteo.fr***

You can hear the weather forecast on most news programmes, but *Météo* is a website dedicated to weather news.

***www.voyage.fr***

*Voyage* is a website, based on a TV show, that tells you about world travel.

***http://fr.franceguide.com/***

*France Guide* is the official website for tourism in France.

***www.123france.fr***

*123 France* is a website where you can book hotel rooms worldwide. You can learn useful vocabulary by idly perusing the website.

***www.parisbalades.com***

*Paris Balades* takes you on a virtual tour of Paris by **arrondissement** (**administrative sector**). The virtual tour provides information on history and culture associated with many tourist attractions, so it is a great way to learn culture- and history-related vocabulary.

***www.paris.fr***

*Paris* is a website mainly for those living in Paris, but it also has a section for tourists. It has information on many things you need to know if you are a citizen of Paris—living, studying, working, relaxing, and so on.

***www.paris-tourisme.com/indexf.html***

*Paris Tourisme* is a tourist-oriented website, telling you about tours you can take, and many other things of interest when you visit Paris.

***www.ratp.fr***

*Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens (RATP)* is a website where you get information about Parisian transport, such as buses and **le métro** (**the underground train system**).

## 8.8 Shopping Websites

You might want to window-shop online to learn vocabulary related to shopping for clothes, music, house items, cars, and so on.

***www.amazon.fr***

This is the French-language version of *Amazon*, a famous online shop. You can order new and second-hand music, movies, books, and other things. You can also read reviews of products to see what a product is like before you buy it.

***www.ebay.fr***

This is the French-language version of *eBay*, an online auction. You can buy new and second-hand products.

***www.fnac.com***

*Fnac* is a large chain of shops, which you find everywhere in France, selling books, music, computers, and so on. You can also book tickets for concerts. A quick word of warning. Do not buy a computer from France or any other foreign country because the layout of the keyboard is different and is going to create problems for you.

***www.gibertjoseph.com***

*Gibert Joseph* is my favourite shop. It has both new and second-hand books, DVDs, and CDs. It is also a stationary shop.

***www.fnaim.fr***

*Fnaim* is a real-estate agency. By browsing their website, you can pick up useful vocabulary.

***www.maison-travaux.fr***

*Maison Travaux* gives advice on household DIY projects.

***www.mr-bricolage.fr***

*Mr Bricolage* (literally, **Mr. DIY**) is a DIY store, similar to *Homebase* or *B&Q* in England, where you can buy almost anything for your home and garden.

***www.laredoute.fr***

*La Redoute* is an online catalogue from which you can order clothes and accessories.

***www.monoprix.fr***

*Monoprix* is a famous supermarket in France. By browsing online, you can learn a lot of useful vocabulary.

***www.champion.fr***

*Champion* is another famous supermarket in France.

***www.gallerieslafayette.com***

This is the website of *Les Galeries Lafayette*, a popular department store in France.

***www.actimania.fr***

At *Actimania* you can browse through advertisements for cars, houses, work, and so on.

## 8.9 Food Websites

By perusing the following websites, you can learn useful vocabulary to do with food and drinks, ordering in restaurants and reading recipes.

***www.chezclément.com***

*Chez Clément* is the website for a chain of restaurants in and around Paris. You can see pictures of different kind of specialities and you can even read their menu online.

***www.cuisineaz.com***

At *Cuisine AZ* you can find many recipes, as well as pick up tips on cooking techniques.

## 8.10 Websites Concerning Life in France

By visiting the following websites, you can increase your knowledge, and vocabulary related to, many aspects of life in France, including health, education, finance, work, leisure and citizen rights.

***www.avf.asso.fr***

*L'Accueil des Villes Françaises (AVF)* accustoms new residents with the French region to which they have recently moved, and helps them feel at home.

***www.pratique.fr***

At *Pratique* you can find information about leisure, health, education, finance, employment, citizen rights in France, and so on.

**[www.service-public.fr](http://www.service-public.fr)**

*Le Service Public* has a lot of information about public service organisations and provides useful links to other websites.

**[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr)**

*Diplomatie* provides information about politics, education, and business in France and abroad.

**[www.ambafrance-uk.org](http://www.ambafrance-uk.org)**

This is the French Embassy's website in the United Kingdom. It has information both in English and French.

**[www.education.gouv.fr](http://www.education.gouv.fr)**

This government website provides information about the French educational system.

**[www.francebenevolat.org](http://www.francebenevolat.org)**

At *France Bénévolat* you can read about volunteer work in France.

**[www.anpe.fr](http://www.anpe.fr)**

*L'Agence nationale pour l'emploi*—or *ANPE* as it is best known—provides help with job seeking and unemployment benefits.

**[www.laposte.fr](http://www.laposte.fr)**

This is the website for *La Poste* (the Post Office) in France.

**[www.letour.fr](http://www.letour.fr)**

This website provides information about the world-famous *Le Tour de France* cycling race.

**[www.bnf.fr](http://www.bnf.fr)**

At this website you can access *La Bibliothèque de France* (The National French Library).

**[www.vivre-ecologique.org](http://www.vivre-ecologique.org)**

*Vivre Écologique* gives you a lot of information about living ethically in France.