



toutou  
(teddie bear)

 \tüü\ in French



tutu  
(tutu)

 \tüü\ in English

Your  ?

Où est  
mon  ?



# Introduction to French Pronunciation

*There are 37 speech sounds in French.  
You already use most of them in English.  
Learn how to distinguish them to gain  
confidence when you speak French.*

# Exceptions, Exceptions, Exceptions!

Please note that the rules presented in this work are general rules. Some exceptions are noted, but they are not exhaustive. You will undoubtedly come across exceptions not covered in this course; with time you'll come to learn them, but the important thing is that you will have a benchmark of what is *normal*.

My aim is to provide you with a good foundation of French pronunciation so that you can speak confidently in French.

You'll find English translations (in brackets) along the way. Please note that sometimes words have more than one translation, but for the purpose of this course only one is noted.

Have fun learning!

## **This is a work in progress...**

If you have any comment or question about this work, please visit my blog at <http://french-pronunciation-plus.blogspot.com/> and leave a comment.

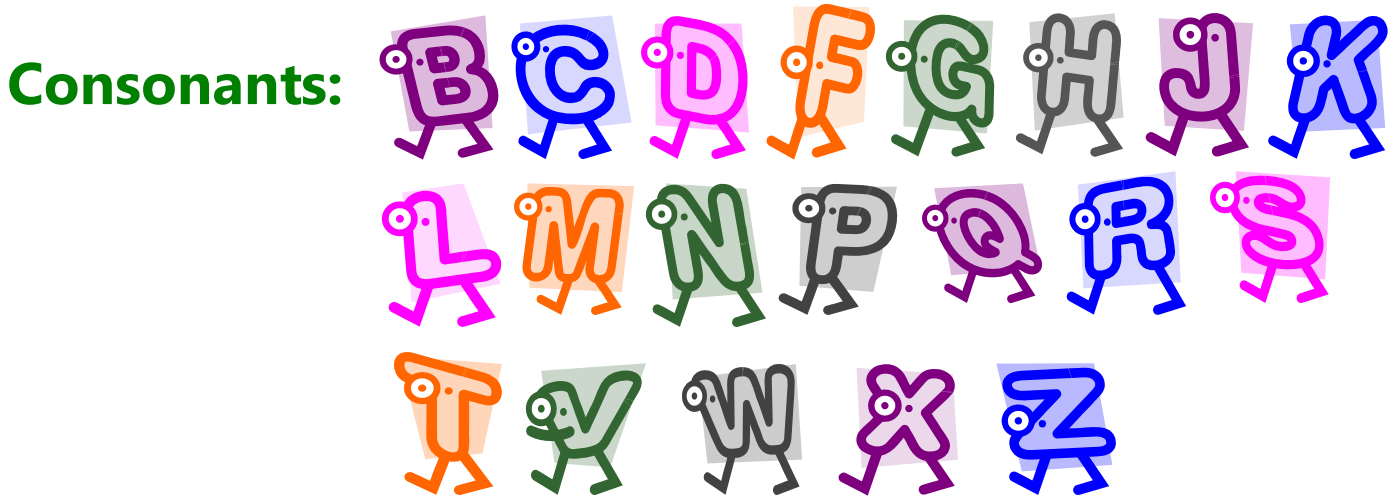
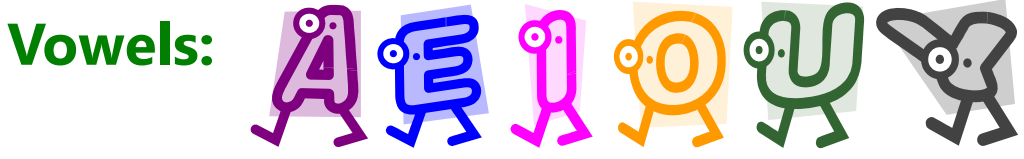
Your comment or question may help me improve this course and others like you will benefit.

Thank you,

*Yolaine Petitclerc-Evans*

# Speech sounds

Speech sounds are the sounds of vowels and consonants on their own or in a group.



## IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)

To catalogue speech sounds the International Phonetic Association devised the **IPA** to graphically represent speech sounds of spoken languages all around the world.

French-English dictionaries usually use the **IPA** to indicate the **French pronunciation**. IPA symbols are always in square brackets [ ].

## How to use the following pages:

In this example, the **sound you are looking for** is the **a** in **pat**; or put another way, **pat** without **p & t**.

IPA Sound	Written form(s) in French	As in... (French)	As in... (English)
[a]	a	papa, garage, tache	pat

IPA symbol in square brackets; look up your dictionary to see if it uses IPA symbols.

# Vowels

IPA Sound	Written form(s) in French	As in... (French)	As in... (English)
[a]	a	papa, garage, tache	pat
[ɑ]	â	âge, câble, tâche	paw
[e]	é, er, ai, ez	dé, écouter, cachera <i>ai</i> , aimez	say
[ɛ]	ê, et, e, ai, ei	fête, ballet, merci, laine, neige	festive, let
[ə]	e	cela, demain, le	uh
[i]	i, î, y	ami, cycle, île	bee
[o]	o, ô, au, eau	rose, côte, gauche, bateau	coat
[ɔ]	o	cote, donner, corne, poche	cot
[ø]	eu, œu (oeu)	deux, feu, vœux, œufs	put*
[œ]	eu, œu (oeu)	heure, meuble, œuf	turn*
[u]	ou	fou, toutou, vous, doux	you
[y]	u, û	connu, mur, tu, flûte	mule*

\* closest sound when pronounced slowly

## Notes:

For the sound [e], \ay\ in English (the IPA sound [e] not the letter e)

[e]	é, er, ai, ez	dé, écouter, cachera <i>ai</i> , aimez	say
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The written forms **er**, **ai** and **ez** relate most of the time to **verbs** (action words). Verbs get conjugated; for example the verb *to love* (the **infinitive** form where nothing has happened to it yet) is conjugated in the Present tense like this:

1st person singular	I love	1st person plural	we love
2nd person singular	you love	2nd person plural	you love
3rd person singular	he/she loves	3rd person plural	they love

When **er**, **ai**, and **ez** relate to a verb, they are found at the end of an action word:

The form <b>er</b> indicates the infinitive, for example: to listen = écouter <b>er</b>	The form <b>ai</b> indicates the future tense for the first person singular, for example: I will hide = je cachera <b>ai</b> ;	The form <b>ez</b> indicates the present tense for the second person plural (and a few other tenses in combination with other letters): you love = vous aime <b>ez</b> .
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# Semi-vowels

Semi-vowels are a sub category of vowels.

IPA Sound	Written form(s) in French	As in... (French)	As in... (English)
[j]	i, ll, y	<b>pie</b> d, <b>lieu</b> , <b>billet</b> , <b>yo-yo</b>	<b>yet</b> , <b>yell</b>
[w]	ou, o	<b>ouate</b> , <b>ouest</b> , <b>coin</b> , <b>moins</b>	<b>west</b> , <b>watt</b>
[ɥ]	u	<b>lui</b> , <b>huile</b>	<b>suite</b> *

\* closest sound when pronounced slowly

# Nasal vowels

Nasal vowels are a sub category of vowels.

IPA Sound	Written form(s)	As in... (French)	As in... (English)
[ɑ̃]	an, am, en, em	<b>tante</b> , <b>cambr</b> ier, <b>tente</b> , <b>membre</b>	<b>Khan</b>
[ɛ̃]	in, im, ym, ein, ain	<b>pin</b> , <b>limbes</b> , <b>cymbale</b> , <b>plein</b> , <b>pain</b>	<b>paint</b>
[ɔ̃]	on, om	<b>bonbon</b> , <b>pompier</b>	<b>song</b> , <b>font</b>
[œ̃]	un, um	<b>un</b> , <b>brun</b> , <b>lundi</b> , <b>parfum</b>	

## Notes:

- The letter **n** in front of **b** or **p** becomes **m**.
- Khan as in Genghis Khan. If you don't know how to pronounce it, the closest way would be saying Kha (while pinching your nose!).

An online French-English dictionary (unfortunately it does not have the IPA symbols):

<http://www.wordreference.com/fren/>

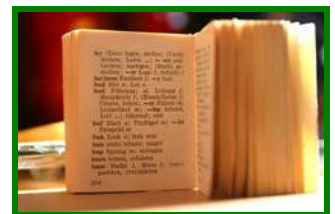
A website that has audio file of all the French sounds (this site is all in French, but it has the IPA symbols):

<http://www.colby.edu/lrc/projects/phonetique.php>

**Cool!** A website that will pronounce text you type in French (with a choice of male and female voices with different accents):

[http://www.oddcast.com/home/demos/tts/tts\\_example.php?sitepal](http://www.oddcast.com/home/demos/tts/tts_example.php?sitepal)

## Online Tools



# Consonants

IPA Sound	Written form(s)	As in... (French)	As in... (English)
[b]	<b>b, bb</b>	<b>b</b> ébé, <b>b</b> ien, <b>b</b> ar, <b>abb</b> é	<b>b</b> aby, <b>b</b> ar
[d]	<b>d</b>	<b>d</b> ame, <b>d</b> anse, <b>d</b> îner	<b>d</b> ance, <b>d</b> iner
[f]	<b>f, ph</b>	<b>f</b> ermer, <b>ph</b> oto, <b>f</b> er	<b>f</b> irst, <b>ph</b> oto,
[g]	<b>g, gu</b>	<b>g</b> are, dro <b>g</b> ue	<b>g</b> arage, drug
[k]	<b>c, k, qu</b>	<b>c</b> oco, <b>k</b> épi, <b>qu</b> i	<b>c</b> oco, <b>k</b> ernel, <b>kit</b>
[l]	<b>l, ll</b>	<b>l</b> a, <b>bal</b> le, <b>al</b> to	<b>l</b> ast, <b>bal</b> loon, <b>al</b> to
[m]	<b>m, mm</b>	<b>m</b> er, <b>pom</b> me, <b>m</b> aman	<b>m</b> an, <b>Amer</b> ican
[n]	<b>n, nn</b>	<b>n</b> ous, <b>bon</b> ne, <b>â</b> ne	<b>n</b> ever, <b>n</b> one
[p]	<b>p, pp</b>	<b>p</b> êche, <b>app</b> artement, <b>p</b> li	<b>p</b> each, <b>ap</b> artment, <b>p</b> ly
[R]	<b>r, rr</b>	<b>r</b> oi, <b>bar</b> rette, <b>r</b> adio	<b>ar</b> e, <b>r</b> adio, <b>bar</b> ring
[s]	<b>s, ss, c, ç, t</b>	<b>s</b> oie, <b>mes</b> se, <b>c</b> ela, <b>ç</b> a, <b>attent</b> ion	<b>s</b> in, <b>mass</b> , <b>c</b> ent,
[t]	<b>t, tt</b>	<b>t</b> abac, <b>bot</b> te, <b>pet</b> it, <b>pet</b> ite	<b>mat</b> , <b>pet</b> , <b>tent</b>
[v]	<b>v</b>	<b>v</b> in, <b>av</b> ion, <b>rav</b> in	<b>v</b> ine, <b>envoy</b> , <b>rav</b> ine
[z]	<b>s, z</b>	<b>r</b> ose, <b>mai</b> son, <b>z</b> èbre, <b>z</b> one,	<b>r</b> oses, <b>z</b> ebra, <b>z</b> one
[ʃ]	<b>ch, sh</b>	<b>ch</b> anter, <b>ch</b> oix, <b>sh</b> érif	<b>sh</b> eriff, <b>sh</b> ot
[ʒ]	<b>j, g,</b>	<b>j</b> uste, <b>j</b> oli, <b>G</b> eorges, <b>g</b> ifle	<b>f</b> usion, <b>meas</b> ure
[ɲ]	<b>gn</b>	<b>vi</b> gnoble, <b>ga</b> gner	<b>ma</b> ñana (spanish)

## ◆◆◆ Your notes ◆◆◆


# Sound combos

IPA Sounds	Written form(s)	As in... (French)	As in... (English)
[ɛj]	eil, eille	orteil, abeille	
[œj]	euil, euille, œil	écureuil, feuille, œil	
[jɛ̃]	ien	bien, viens	
[wa]	oi	toi, moi, pois	wham
[wi]	oui	oui	we
[wɛ̃]	oin	coin, moins	wayne
[uj]	ouille	ratatouille, rouille	oo-ee
[yi]	ui	lui, huile	suite*

\* closest sound when pronounced slowly

## Unexpected pronunciation



les secondes



la femme



le monsieur

Word	Exception	IPA transcription
les se <b>c</b> ondes (the seconds)	the letter <b>c</b> is pronounced <b>g</b>	[səgɔ̃d]
la fe <b>m</b> e (the woman)	the letter <b>e</b> is pronounced <b>a</b>	[fam]
le mo <b>n</b> sieur (mister)	the letters <b>on</b> are pronounced <b>e</b>	[mɛsjø]
le pa <b>o</b> n (the peacock)	the letters <b>aon</b> are pronounced <b>an</b>	[pɑ̃]



# Silent letters

## The silent



In French, an **e** at the end of a word is **seldom pronounced**. For example:

Word	IPA
garage <b>e</b> (garage)	[garaʒ]
tache <b>e</b> (stain)	[taʃ]
poche <b>e</b> (pocket)	[pɔʃ]
âge <b>e</b> (age)	[ɑʒ]

Word	IPA
île <b>e</b> (island)	[il]
meuble <b>e</b> (furniture)	[mœbl]
flûte <b>e</b> (flute)	[flyt]
tante <b>e</b> (aunt)	[tãt]

The most notable **exceptions** are the small words like **je, le, me, te, se, de, que**.

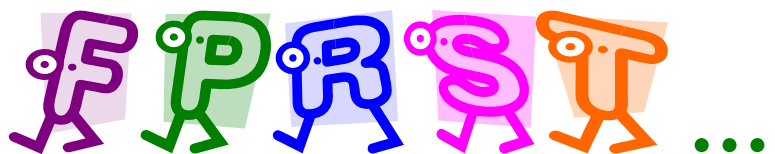


## is always silent

**H**, in French, is **never** pronounced.

Word	IPA
<b>h</b> abiter (to dwell)	[abite]
<b>h</b> omme (man)	[ɔm]
<b>h</b> uile (oil)	[yil]

## Consonant at the end of a word



Usually, in French, a consonant at the end of a word is **not pronounced**. There are many exceptions like the word **jour**, but there is no rule. To find out if you pronounce a consonant at the end of a word look it up in your dictionary.

Word ending with a consonant	IPA
grand <b>d</b> (tall)	[grã]
petit <b>t</b> (small)	[pəti]
anana <b>s</b> (pineapple)	[anana]
loup <b>p</b> (wolf)	[lu]



# Misc. pronunciations

## Soft



**c** is soft [s] in front of the vowels **e** and **i**— including **é, è, ê** and **y**.  
For example:

Word	IPA
<b>ce</b> ci (this)	[səsi]
<b>cé</b> dille (cedilla)	[sedij]
<b>cè</b> dre (cedar)	[sɛdr]
<b>ci</b> dre (cider)	[sidr]
<b>cy</b> an (cyan)	[sjɑ̃]

The **cedilla** under the **c** (**ç**) softens the **c** [s] in front of the vowels **a** and **o**; it is seldom used with the vowel **u**.

For example:

Word	IPA
<b>ç</b> a (that, this)	[sa]
le <b>ç</b> on (lesson)	[lɛsɔ̃]
re <b>ç</b> u (receipt)	[rɛsy]

## Hard

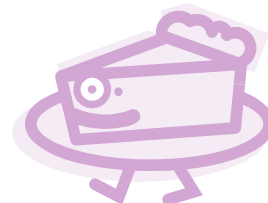


**c** is hard [k] in front of the vowels **a**, **o**, and **u**.

For example:

Word	IPA
<b>ca</b> baret (music hall)	[kabaʁɛ]
<b>co</b> de (code)	[kɔd]
<b>cu</b> be (cube)	[kyb]

Think of the words **soft pie**  
to help you remember  
that **i** and **e** soften the **c**.



# Soft



**g** is soft [ʒ] in front of the vowels **e** and **i**, including **é, è, ê, y**.

For example:

Word	IPA
<b>g</b> el (frost)	[ʒɛl]
<b>g</b> irafe (giraffe)	[ʒiraf]
<b>g</b> énérique (generic)	[ʒenerik]
<b>g</b> êne (embarrassment)	[ʒɛn]
É <b>g</b> yppte (Egypt)	[ɛzipt]

The vowel **e** can be use to soften the **g** [ʒ] in front of the vowels **a** and **o**.

For example:

Word	IPA
<b>g</b> eai (jay)	[ʒɛ]
<b>G</b> eorges (George)	[ʒɔʁʒ]

# Hard



**g** is hard [g] in front of the vowels **a, o, and u**.

For example:

Word	IPA
<b>g</b> are (train station)	[gar]
<b>g</b> olfe (golf)	[gɔlf]
lé <b>g</b> ume (vegetable)	[ləgym]

The vowel **u** can be use to harden the **g** [g] when **u** is followed by **e** and **i**, including **é, è, ê** and **y**.

For example:

Word	IPA
long <b>g</b> ue (long (fem.))	[lɔ̃g]
<b>g</b> uide (guide)	[gid]
<b>g</b> uépard (cheetah)	[gɛpaʁ]
<b>G</b> uy (proper name)	[gi]

Think of the words **soft pie**  
to help you remember  
that **i** and **e** soften the **g**.





## between 2 vowels is pronounced



An **s** between two vowels is pronounced **z**. For example:

Word	IPA
maison (house)	[mɛzɔ̃]
oiseau (bird)	[wazo]
chaise (chair)	[ʃɛz]

# Feminine or masculine?



In French, nouns (name of things) have a gender, for example the word house (maison) is feminine. There is **no rule** to determine if a noun is masculine or feminine. You'll have to learn them as you go, **but** there is something you can do to help remember the gender.

When you learn a new word, look it up in the dictionary; depending on your dictionary it will say feminine noun (or masculine noun), or it might be abbreviated like this: **n. f.** or **n. m.**

As you learn a new noun, also learn its gender; memorize it with the appropriate definite article (the). **The** in French translates into **le** for a **masculine** noun and **la** for a **feminine** noun.

When a word start with a vowel, you use **l'** instead of **le** or **la** (see Elision). For example, the word **armoire** (cupboard) is feminine and you say **l'armoire** (the cupboard), but **l'** does not indicate the gender. So when you have established the word's gender, learn the word with an adjective (a quality) between the definite article and the noun, for example: **la belle armoire**.

Try the following exercise:

Look up the following nouns in your dictionary, note the translation and the gender; write the translated word again with le or la.	Noun	Translation	F or M	le or la (adjective) ...
	house	<i>maison</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>la maison</i>
	boat			
	chair			
	school			

By learning a new noun with its appropriate definite article, le or la (and if necessary with an adjective), **you'll never have to guess** its gender.

# French Alphabet

The **name** of each letter in French, as opposed to its **sound**.



Letter	IPA Sounds	As in English...
a	[a]	a as in pat
b	[be]	\bay\
c	[se]	\say\
d	[de]	\day\
e	[ə]	\uh\
f	[ɛf]	\ef\
g	[ʒe]	\jay\ (without the d sound*)
h	[aʃ]	\ash\
i	[i]	\e\
j	[ʒi]	\gee\ (without the d sound*)
k	[ka]	\ka\
l	[ɛl]	\el\ (the Spanish word)
m	[ɛm]	\em\
n	[ɛn]	\en\
o	[o]	same as in English
p	[pe]	\pay\
q	[ky]	
r	[ɛr]	\air\
s	[ɛs]	same as in English
t	[te]	\tay\
u	[y]	
v	[ve]	\vay\
w	[dubləve]	\dublevay\
x	[iks]	\eeks\
y	[igrek]	\egrek\
z	[zed]	\zed\

\* When you pronounce **g** or **j** in English there is a **d** sound right at the beginning; the **d** sound is achieved when your tongue touches the back of your upper teeth—don't do it.

# Elision

In French, **elision** usually happens when a final vowel becomes silent in front of a word starting with a vowel. **Think of elision as removing a vowel.** In French when a word ends in a vowel and the next word starts with a vowel it is awkward to pronounce.

Elision can also be used in the spoken language to shorten words.

When a vowel has become silent, it is marked in the written form by an **apostrophe** ('). See examples below.

With the articles **le** and **la**:

la église (church fem.)	=	l'église
le ouvrier (worker, masc.)	=	l'ouvrier

With the pronouns, **je**, **me**, **te**, **se**, **le**, and **la**:

je aime (I like)	=	j'aime
je me aime (I like myself)	=	je m'aime
je te aime (I like you)	=	je t'aime
ils se aiment (they like themselves)	=	ils s'aiment
je la aime (I like her)	=	je l'aime
je le aime (I like him)	=	je l'aime

With the invariable words, **de**, **ne**, **que**, **jusque**, **lorsque**, **puisque**, and **quoique**:

souvenirs de enfance (childhood memories)	=	souvenirs d'enfance
je ne ai pas (I do not have)	=	je n'ai pas
ce que on a (what we have)	=	ce qu'on a
lorsque on aura (when we will have)	=	lorsqu'on aura
puisque on va (since we are going)	=	puisque on va
quoique il aime (although he likes)	=	quoiqu'il aime

In the spoken language:

le p'tit bateau (the small boat)	=	le petit bateau
la p'tite fille (the little girl)	=	la petite fille

# Liaison



**Liaison** in French is the **connection** of two words **when you speak**. Words that need connecting are words that start with a **vowel**; they need to be connected to the ending **consonant** of the previous word.

For example:

le petit **o**iseau (the small bird)  
[lə pəti twazo]

In this example, it means that you pronounce the last **t** in **petit** (which you normally do not pronounce) by adding it to the next word; **phonetically** it alters the word **oiseau** to become **toiseau**.

## VARIATION:

Some consonants may **change sound** when liaison occurs.

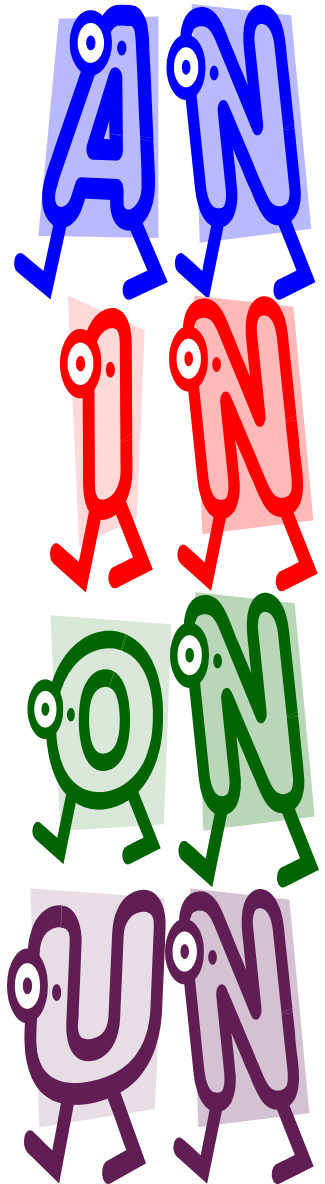


Word ending consonant	As in...	IPA
<b>d</b> becomes <b>t</b>	le grand <b>h</b> omme (the tall man)	[lə grɑ̃ tɔm]
<b>s</b> becomes <b>z</b>	les petits <b>o</b> iseaux (the small birds)	[lə pəti zwazo]
<b>x</b> becomes <b>z</b>	les faux <b>a</b> mis (the false friends)	[lə fo zami]

In the example **le grand homme**, **homme** starts with an **h** which we don't pronounce—so the word for pronunciation purposes starts with an **o**— and the **d** in **grand** becomes a **t**, adding it to the word **homme**.

With **les petits oiseaux**, normally the last two consonants of the word **petits** are not pronounced (the **plural s** in French is not pronounced except when liaising), so **s** becomes **z** and gets added to the next word, in this case **oiseaux**.

**VARIATION:** When the last consonant (of the previous word) is an **n** from a **nasal vowel**, liaison is treated **differently**.



The **general rule** is that the **n** (of a **nasal vowel**) is **denasalised** during liaison, for example:

un **bon** **a**mi (a good friend)  
[œ̃ bɔ nami]

In this example, the **n** of the nasal vowel **on** is added to the word **ami**, and the **o** (staying with the **b**) sounds like the **o** of the word **cot**.

There is an **exception rule** with the following words:

<b>mon</b>	(my)
<b>ton</b>	(your)
<b>son</b>	(his/her)
<b>un</b>	(a, one)
<b>aucun</b>	(none)

With these words the **nasal vowel** is **kept** and an **n** is **added** to the following word, which starts with a vowel, for example:

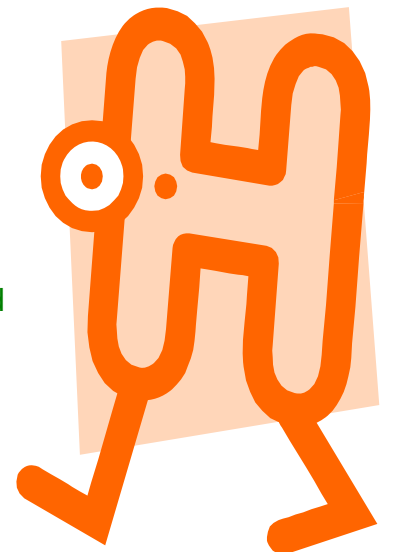
mon (n)ami	[mɔ̃ nami]
ton (n)ami	[tɔ̃ nami]
son (n)ami	[sɔ̃ nami]
un (n)ami	[œ̃ nami]
aucun (n)ami	[okœ̃ nami]

## SOME EXCEPTIONS with the letter **H**

Although **h** is no longer aspirated in French (i.e. never pronounced), some words beginning with an **h** retain the annotation **h aspiré** (aspirated h) only **to prevent liaison** and **elision**.

The IPA uses the single quotation mark ['] in front of a word that has an h aspiré. For example, the word **héros** (heroes) in a dictionary that uses the IPA symbols would be represented this way: [ˈɛʁo]. **There is no liaison with an h aspiré**. Again, you'll need to check the dictionary to see if you can make the liaison or not for a particular word starting with an h.

Note: If you were to make the liaison between the words **les héros**, you would be saying **the zeroes**.



## LIAISON with inverted verbs

In French as in English, verbs (action words) are inverted in a question.

For example:

Il vend des pommes.	(He sells apples.)
Vend-il des pommes ?	(Does he sell apples?)

In inverted constructions, the consonant **t** is **obligatorily pronounced** between the verb and a pronoun that starts with a vowel: **il** (he), **ils** (they masculine.), **elle** (she), **elles** (they feminine), and **on** (one).

Orthographically, the two words are joined by a **hyphen**, or by **-t-** if the verb does not end in **t** or **d**:

English	French	French Inverted Form	IPA
She sleeps.	Elle dort.	Dort-elle ?	[dɔʁ tel?]
He sells.	Il vend.	Vend-il ?*	[vɑ̃ til?]
They speak.	Ils parlent.	Parlent-ils?	[paʁl til?]
One eats.	On mange.	Mange-t-on?	[mɑ̃ʒ tɔ̃?]

\* Remember, with liaison *d* becomes *t* (in speech).

# The French Syllable

A syllable is a sequence of speech sounds; a **sequence of consonant(s) and vowel(s)**.

Syllables are words' building blocks and in French the **basic** structure of a syllable is: consonant + vowel (CV).

For example:

English	French
friend	a-mi
chair	chai-se
cat	chat
kids	en-fants
table	ta-ble
mouse	sou-ris

- A syllable can be a **single vowel** (or group of vowels), but **only** at the **beginning** of a word.
- When **sounding out words** you need to use the French syllable structure, for example: a-mi, chai-se, chat, en-fant, ta-ble, sou-ris, etc.
- You pronounce **the silent e** at the end of a word **when sounding out words or spelling them**.
- The plural **s** is **not pronounced** when **sounding out words**, but **pronounced** when **spelling**. (When the plural **s** is not pronounced, small words like **les, des, mes** (contextual clues) indicate the plural and tell the listener that there are more than one thing or person.)

