

F328 French Phonology ~ French Orthography
 sound system VS spelling conventions

Close *e* Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u> [e]	<u>in spelling by:</u> é e + final silent consonant (not a t) + s of plural -ai in verb endings -ai in <i>sais, vais, gai, gaieté</i> , etc.	<u>as in:</u> <i>pré</i> <i>chez, et, clefs, pieds</i> <i>j'ai, je serai, je portai</i>
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✿ *bébé, préféré, célébré, nez, sciez, gai, été, clefs, créer, j'ai, irai, répétais, quai, thé*

Open *e* Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u> [ɛ]	<u>in spelling by:</u> è ê ë e + 2 consonants e + final sounded consonant <i>ai</i> (except in verb endings), <i>aî</i> <i>ei</i>	<u>as in:</u> <i>père</i> <i>rêve</i> <i>Noël</i> <i>ferme</i> <i>sel</i> <i>plaine, maître</i> <i>reine</i>
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✿ *peine, sel, chêne, laine, tête, terre, bel, règle, serre, jette, Raphaël, perle, peine, laine*

Open *e* (yet somewhat closed) Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u> [ɛ̃]	<u>in spelling by:</u> e + final silent t <i>ay</i> + consonant <i>ay</i> + vowel <i>ey</i> final e in <i>ey</i> + vowel e in <i>eil, eill</i> + vowel ê + silent consonant	<u>as in:</u> <i>jet</i> <i>Raymond</i> <i>ayons</i> <i>Jersey</i> <i>asseyez</i> <i>soleil, veille</i> <i>forêt</i>
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✿ *payez, sommeil, réveil, objet, sujet, éveil, jockey*

Close **a** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[a]	<i>a</i> final	<i>sa, ma, la</i>
	<i>a</i> + final silent consonant(s)	<i>chat, chats, rats</i>
	<i>a</i> in most nonfinal syllables	<i>canalisé, parla</i>
	<i>a</i> in all closed syllables	<i>patte, natte</i>
	<i>a</i> in endings <i>-ail, -aille</i>	<i>bail, travaille</i>
	<i>à</i>	<i>là</i>
	<i>â</i> in verb endings	<i>portâmes, donnât</i>
	<i>a</i> in adverbial ending <i>-amment</i>	<i>constamment</i>
	<i>e</i> in adverbial ending	<i>prudemment</i>
	<i>e</i> in words like:	<i>femme, solennel</i>
	<i>e, ê</i> in a few words like:	<i>couenne, moelle, poêl</i>
	<i>i, î, y</i> in <i>-oi, -oî, -oy</i> , not preceded by <i>r, o</i> being pronounced [w]	<i>moi, boîte, oyons, loi, soi, ployez, croît</i>

❁ *la, ta, chat, rat, paragraphe, caractère, rage, flatte, femme, à, dame, tabac, prêtâmes, soif, poêle, moelle, foi, boîte, oie, papa, récemment, constamment, aboi, cloison, travail, taille, soie, noyer, alla, Anne*

Open **a** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[ɑ]	<i>a</i> + final consonants either silent or sounded, except in <i>bras</i>	<i>matelas, pas, hélas</i>
	<i>â</i> (except in verb endings)	<i>pâle, mâle</i>
	<i>a</i> in endings <i>-asse, -ation, -assion, -ason, -azon</i>	<i>passé, nation, passion, gazon</i>
	<i>a</i> in endings <i>-abre, -adre, -acle, -able</i> (not suffix), <i>-avre</i>	<i>sabre, cadre, oracle, sable, havre</i>
	<i>i</i> in <i>-roi, roî</i> (many exceptions)	<i>trois, croître</i>
	<i>y</i> in <i>-roy</i> (many exceptions)	<i>croyez</i>

❁ *gâteau, sable, bois, âne, passe, gaze, débacle, cas, chasse, cable, climat, gras, ration, froideur, lilas, gaz, domination, poids, mois*

Close **o** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[o]	<i>o</i> final in sound	<i>numéro, dos</i>
	<i>ô</i>	<i>pôle, rôle</i>
	<i>o</i> + <i>s</i> + vowel	<i>rose, pose</i>
	<i>o</i> in ending <i>-otion</i>	<i>portion</i>
	<i>o</i> sometimes in endings <i>-ome, -one</i>	<i>zone</i>
	<i>o</i> in:	<i>grosse, fosse</i>
	<i>au, eau</i> , if not followed by <i>r</i> (exception <i>Paul</i>)	<i>caution, autant, beau</i>

✿ *drôle, épauLe, zone, émotion, arôme, diplôme, saut, eau, aube, domino, héros, auberge, galops, vôtre, lotion, clos, pot, sabot, rôder, bravo*

Open **o** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[ɔ]	<i>o</i> in closed syllables	<i>porte, poste</i>
	<i>o</i> in nonfinal open syllables	<i>voler, propre</i>
	<i>au</i> + <i>r</i>	<i>aura, aurore</i>
	<i>au</i> in:	<i>Paul</i>
	<i>u</i> in the Latin ending <i>-um</i>	<i>album, maximum</i>
	<i>oo</i> in:	<i>alcool</i>

✿ *pomme, fort, donne, soLte, auréole, colosse, aurons, colonel, minimum, rhum, lors, opium, soleil, nord, oracle, héroïque, Laure, alcoolique*

Close **ou** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[u]	<i>ou</i>	<i>sou, vous, roue, soucoupe</i>
	<i>où</i>	<i>où</i>
	<i>oû</i>	<i>goût, voûte</i>
	<i>aoû</i>	<i>août</i>

✿ *tout, partout, tous, bout, bouche, loup, glouglou, où, nous, coucou, bourré*

Schwa Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[ə]	<i>e</i> unaccented: phrase-initial or surrounded by 3 sounded consonants	<i>petit, je crois</i> <i>mercredi, prenez</i>
	<i>e</i> before <i>ri</i> [rj] and <i>li</i> [lj]	<i>de rien, appelez</i>
	<i>e</i> before noun endings <i>-lier, -nier</i>	<i>chandelier, batelier, denier</i>
	<i>e</i> before an aspirate <i>h</i>	<i>le huit, une haute</i>
	<i>e</i> before <i>un</i> and <i>onze</i> , used as nouns	<i>le un, le onze</i>
	<i>e</i> in monosyllabic words	<i>me, se, le, de</i>
	<i>on</i> (exceptionally)	<i>monsieur</i>
	<i>eu</i> (exceptionally)	<i>peut-être</i>
	<i>ai</i> (exceptionally)	<i>faisons</i>
	<i>e</i> in prefixes <i>des-</i> , <i>res-</i> + <i>s</i>	<i>dessous, dessus, ressentir</i>
	<i>e</i> in:	<i>cresson</i>

❁ *que, te, le, centenier, le onze mai, le huit juin, regarde, ressent, ressort, faiseur, monsieur, appelez, batelier, de rien, peut-être, justement, mercredi, faisant, lestement, ressortir*

French **u** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[y]	<i>u</i>	<i>nu, rude, une</i>
	<i>û</i>	<i>flûte</i>
	<i>ü</i>	<i>Esäu</i>
	<i>eu</i> and <i>eû</i> in past participle, preterite, and imperfect subjunctive of <i>avoir</i>	<i>eu, eus, eûmes,</i> <i>eusse, eussions,</i> <i>eût</i>

❁ *bu, lu, su, vu, dû, mûr, lune, unité, eussiez, usine, eurent, eûtes, tunique, brûle, issu, tissu, fût, fussent, cruche, bûche*

Close **eu** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ø]

in spelling by:

eu or *œu* final

œ or *œu* + final silent
consonants

eu in endings *-euse*, *-eute*,
-eutre, and derivatives

eux in adjective ending *-eux*

eu in a few words like:

eu in prefixed *eu-* with or
without *r* following

eû

as in:

feu, *voeu*

peut, *veux*, *nœud*

œufs

flatteuse, *émeute*

neutre

orgueilleux, *ennuyeux*

jeudi, *meunier*

euphonique,

Euphrate, *Europe*

jeûne

✿ *Dieu*, *lieu*, *bleu*, *pieu*, *vœu*, *deux*, *œufs*, *neutre*, *pleutre*, *yeux*, *cieux*, *jeûne*, *meute*,
jeudi, *eux*, *creux*, *bœufs*, *Eugénie*, *heureux*, *heureuse*

Open **eu** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[œ]

in spelling by:

eu, *œu* in closed final
syllables

eu, *œu* in a few nonfinal
open syllables

eu + *il* or *ill*

œ + *il* or *ill*

ue + *il* or *ill* preceded by *c*
or *g*

as in:

peur, *bœuf*, *cœur*

œuf

veuvage, *œuvre*

cerfeuil, *veuille*

œil, *œillet*

écueil, *cueillir*

orgueil

✿ *orgueilleux*, *chœur*, *cœur*, *heure*, *bœuf*, *écueil*, *fleuve*, *peuvent*, *sœur*, *gueule*,
veuvage, *fureur*, *œuvre*, *meurtre*, *feuille*, *veillez*, *meurt*, *œil*, *jeunesse*, *œillet*,
beurrer, *épeuré*, *jeune*

Nasal **an, en** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ã]

in spelling by:

am, an final

am, an, em, en + final silent consonants

am, an, em, en + sounded consonant other than *m* or *n*

as in:

Adam, an, ban

champs, chant,

temps, dent

camper, cantique,

ensemble

✿ *venge, plan, Adam, sang, vent, semble, rend, gens, pendant, quand, attend, tante, planche, lampe, remplit, tremble, commande, s'en allant, embaumant, enfant*

Nasal **in** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ɛ̃]

in spelling by:

im, in, yn + consonant other than *m* or *n*

in, ym final

aim, ain, eim, ein final or + consonants

en in endings *-ien, -yen, -éen*

en in *-ien* + consonant

en in some foreign words

in in *-oin* (*o* sounded [w])

as in:

importe, intime,

synthèse

vin, Rhin, thym

paimpolois

faim, pain, Rheims, rein

italien, bien,

citoyen, européen

viens, tient

appendice, agenda,

Pennsylvanie

loin, coin

✿ *larynx, impossible, Paimpol, timbre, prince, thym, fin, nymphe, ceint, saint, sein, sain, lien, vaurien, tient, vient, européen, méditerranéen, soin, poing, moins, lointain, agenda, benjoin*

Nasal **on** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[\tilde{o}]	<i>om, on</i> final or + consonant <i>um, un</i> in some foreign words	<i>nom, non, comte, conte, lumbago, secundo</i>

✿ *plomb, on, prompte, don, rions, tomber, dom, pompe, impromptu, vont, rond, de profundis, longl, racontez, compte, conte, comte*

Nasal **un** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[\tilde{u}]	<i>um</i> final or + consonants & <i>un</i> final or + consonants (silent or sounded) <i>eun</i> in a few words	<i>parfum, parfums, humble un, brun, emprunt, emprunter à jeun, Meung</i>

✿ *humble, Humbert, aucun, emprunt, tribun, alun, chacun, opportun, Verdun, Dunkerque, commun, bruns, parfum, défunt, lundi, importun*

Semiconsonant **i, y** “yod” Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[j]	<i>i, y, or ĩ</i> when initial <i>i</i> in consonant + <i>i</i> + vowel <i>ĩ, y</i> intervocalic <i>ill</i> intervocalic <i>ill</i> when final in sound but but not in spelling <i>il</i> final in sound and spelling	<i>ïonique, yeux, ïambe bien, lien, sien païen, payons, soyez bâïller, taïller travaille, taille bail, éveïl</i>

✿ *ïota, yacht, yeux, aïeux, hier, viande, bail, brille, fiacre, balaye, paye, cercueil, moitié, sien, ïambe, païen, croyez, travail, soleil, vieil, brouillard, sciure, piège*

NOTE: *Ii, yi, and ill* are sounded [ij] in *priions, criions, fille, bille*. The *illi* and *y* in words like *saïllir, pays*, and derivatives also have [j]; *abbaye*, however, is sounded [ei], that is, no yod [j].

Semiconsonant **ou** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[w]

in spelling by:

ou + vowel (stressed)

o in *oi, oî, oin*

o in *oê, oe, oy*

u in *-gua, -qua* of some foreign words

as in:

oui, Louis

trois, boîte, soie, soin

poêle, moelle, aboyer, moyen

lingual, aquatique,

quadrupède

* *ouï, oui, ouest, voile, bois, coin, foyer, soir, loyaux, couard, ouate, voici, moelle, poêle, couenne, ouaille, lingual, enfoui, quoi, Louis, nouer, souhait*

Semiconsonant **u** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ɥ]

in spelling by:

u + vowel

as in:

huile, lui, duel, nuée, suave,

nuée, suer

The spelling *uy* + yod is represented by the phonetic notation [ɥij], as in *fuyons* [fɥijɔ̃].

* *pluie, nuire, salua, autrui, nuage, tortueux, linguiste, nuée, situé, puits, suède, écuyer, suite, rituel, ensuite, ambiguïté, estuaire, fuir, tuer*

NOTE: In a word formed by consonant + *r* or *l* + *ou*, *ou* must not be considered a semiconsonant, but a simple vowel: *prou-esse* [pru•ɛs], *clou-age* [klu•ɑʒ]. When preceded by *bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gl, gr, pl, pr, tr,* or *vr,* etc., belonging to the same syllable, *u* + any vowel, excepting *i*, form two distinct syllables: *cru-el, cru-auté, monstru-eux,* but *fruit, truite, bruit.*

As a general rule, *qu* and *gu* are pronounced [k] and [g], respectively: *qui* [ki], *que* [kə], *guêpe* [gɛp], *guitare* [gitar]. Such words as *aiguiser* and its derivatives are pronounced either [e•gɥi•ze] or [e•gi•ze].

Sound **c**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[k]

in spelling by:

c + a, o, or u

cc + a, o, or u

c or cc + l, r

qu, cqu + a, o, i, or e

(Exceptions, e.g. *quarz*

[kwarts])

ch in some foreign words

ch + r in foreign words

k in some foreign words

and their derivatives

g in liaison

as in:

car, cor, cure

occasion, accord

acclamer, clair, accru

quant, qu'on, qui, que, acquis

écho

chrétien

kilo

sang impur

✿ *canne, corps, quand, court, occuper, éclairer, crampe, cholérique, kilomètre, acquièrent, occlusion, qui, qu'on, long espoir*

Sound **t**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[t]

in spelling by:

t

tt

th

d in liaison

as in:

tête, bête, tire

jette, mettent

thé, synthèse

quand il, grand âge

✿ *ton, tel, tout, tu, terre, tertre, tumeur, tuer, thermomètre, thème, battent, bâtir, quand on, grand ami*

Sound **p**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[p]

in spelling by:

p

pp

b before *s* or *t* or *r*

as in:

père, pire, port, pur

appartenir, appel

absoudre, obtenir

✿ *parer, parier, papier, portier, apporter, supprimer, pressentir, proposer, opposer, poire, pis, observer, obscur, obstacle, abricot*

Sound **ch**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ʃ]

in spelling by:

ch

sch in foreign words

as in:

chercher, champs,

bouche, souche

schisme, schéma

✿ *chambre, chère, couche, chien, chemin, chuchoter, sache, cache, chiffon, chute, choc, schismatique, chinois*

Sound **j**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ʒ]

in spelling by:

j before *a, e, i, o, u*

g before *e, i, y*

as in:

jamais, je, j'imagine, joli,

gèle, gilet, page, gymnase

✿ *janvier, gémir, girafe, jeudi, rage, neige, geindre, jumeaux, jour, gypseux, joie, juste*

Sound **s**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[s]

in spelling by:

s initial

-*ss*- intervocalic

c before *e, i, y*

ç

sc before *i, y, e*

x in numbers and *Bruxelles*

as in:

série, sont, su

tasse, dessert

ceci, ici, cycle

ça, garçon, reçu

scier, scythe, scène

dix, six, soixante

✿ *sans, sourd, sur, sortie, transiger, fils, mars, gratis, sens, six, soixante, commençons, Bruxelles, poisson, dessert*

Sound **z**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[z]

in spelling by:

z initial or medial

s intervocalic

s in prefixes: *dés-*,

rés-, més-, trans-, prés-,

+ vowel

as in:

zèle, zizanie

rose, pose, désert

désunion, résister,

mésaventure,

transit, présumer

✿ *zone, gazon, zinc, mise, réservoir, présage, transalpin, bêtise, vise, poison, désert*

Sound **gn**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ɲ]

in spelling by:

gn

as in:

campagne, signe

Exceptions, e.g. *stagnant* [stag nɑ̃]

✿ *digne, gagne, montagne, craigne, règne, peignent, joigne, cygne, compaignon, campagne, ceignez, signe, signaler, geigne*