

KS2, KS3, KS4

# Mastering pronunciation

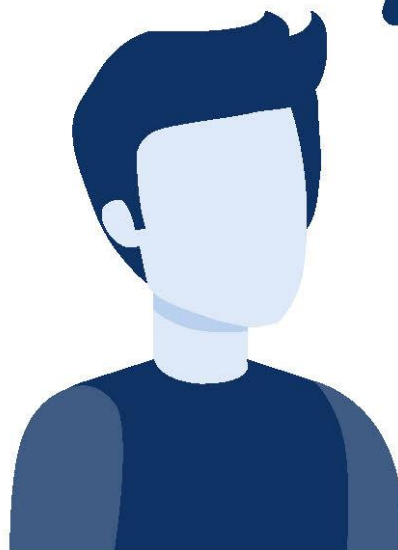
TEACHING  
PACK

les enfants

la fille  
la ville

chaud

- Phonics activities and games
- Pronunciation in complete sentences and longer texts
- Suitable for key stages 2, 3 and 4



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Teachit sample

## Introduction

The phonics activities in this pack offer a manageable and practical starting point for developing students' French pronunciation skills and equipping them with effective strategies to recognise and reproduce different sound–symbol correspondences (SSCs). This pack can be used at key stages 2, 3 and 4. The resources are research- and evidence-based, drawing on:

- *Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review* (Teaching Schools Council)
- National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP)
- AQA examiner reports from GCSE listening papers
- Department for Education revised national MFL curriculum
- French primary school phonics textbooks

The aim of this pack is to provide straightforward advice on French pronunciation through listening and speaking activities at sound, word, sentence and paragraph level, and to provide engaging activities which encourage students to overcome the embarrassment of speaking French and to be confident and gain enjoyment from communicating in another language.

The teaching of phonics significantly enhances phonological decoding, i.e. the ability to sound out words. This in turn improves students' ability to learn vocabulary autonomously, to spell accurately and to be able to easily spot cognates. The understanding of individual phonemes and how they carry meaning enhances grammar skills, in particular the conjugation of verbs, e.g. knowing the difference between a past participle such as 'allé' and the imperfect form 'allait'.

There is a positive impact across all key language skills, from reading and writing to listening and speaking. A visible improvement in these skills will in turn have a positive impact on motivation and confidence in the acquisition of a new language. If a student understands the sounds of the target language, they greatly increase their ability to communicate effectively with native speakers.

Changes to the MFL curriculum and examiner's reports

### **MFL Pedagogy Review 2016**

The *Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review* was published by the Teaching Schools Council in 2016, and it provided key recommendations for changes in the way MFL is taught in schools, with a focus on three cornerstones:

- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Phonics

The review outlines the importance of learning the phoneme–grapheme or sound–symbol correspondence (SSC) in order to be able to communicate effectively in a new language. French can be particularly challenging for native English speakers owing to the prevalence

of silent letters, accents, ‘nasal’ sounds and liaisons. The review says that ‘pupils who are not systematically taught the phoneme–grapheme correspondences of their new language very often read and speak using the English system they already know, leading to multiple errors in communication and understanding’ (*MFL Pedagogy Review*, 2016, p.12).

The review concludes that ‘direct and systematic teaching of phonics in the new language is a more reliable method for assuring accurate pronunciation and spelling’ but that explicit phonics teaching is ‘still relatively rare’ in schools (*MFL Pedagogy Review*, 2016, p.12). One key recommendation made by the review is that ‘the phonics component of language courses is concentrated in the early stages, certainly within the first year, so that incorrect pronunciation habits do not become embedded’ and ‘that a pupil can pronounce most words accurately from the written form, including those not yet explicitly taught; and that they can produce a potentially accurate spelling of new words’ (*MFL Pedagogy Review*, 2016, p.12).

### Revised national curriculum 2022

In January 2022, the Department for Education published the revised national curriculum for 2024, including the new GCSE subject content for French. The report provides a list of ‘key differences in sound–spelling correspondences between French and English which students will need to learn at GCSE to be able to read out loud and transcribe with sufficient accuracy at this level’. It states that ‘students will be expected to pronounce words with stress patterns that allow their speech to be clear and comprehensible’. (DfE, 2022, pp.18–19).

### Examiner reports

Examiner reports highlight common errors made by students which could be addressed by explicit phonics teaching. For example, the AQA GCSE French examiner report in June 2019 notes that in the listening paper that ‘there was some confusion over the article *du* [some] which many misunderstood for *deux* [two]’. In addition, in the speaking paper ‘the pronunciation of *idéal* was frequently anglicised’. Both these common errors could easily be eliminated by teaching the correct pronunciation of the SSCs [u], [eu] and [é].

## Approaches to teaching French phonics

### Associating sounds with gestures

Using visual-auditory-kinaesthetic (VAK) learning styles can be an effective approach to mastering pronunciation. Dr Rachel Hawkes (2014) says: ‘The words are learnt in a multi-layered way through seeing a vivid image, hearing and repeating the sound of the word and doing an accompanying gesture. The three strands of this VAK approach strengthen memory, making the knowledge robust and secure enough for easy retrieval at any time, and more importantly, for application to new words in new contexts.’

In this pack, each SSC is associated with a word, an image and a gesture as a starting point for teaching the French sound. The words, images and gestures are provided throughout the activities, as well as being brought together in printable posters/handouts.

The most effective way of using the VAK posters in this resource is to ask the students to stand up and repeat the SSC and word they hear while carrying out the associated gesture. Practising the sounds and gestures as a matter of routine in the classroom will reinforce retention of the sounds in the long-term memory.

### Phonics in French primary schools

The first year of formal instruction in reading and phonics in French primary schools is in the class known as CP (Cours Préparatoire), to children of six and seven years old. The sequence of teaching usually begins with the simple vowel sounds, moving into consonants, and then the more complex diphthongs, nasal sounds and blended sounds.

Essentially, they begin with words such as **la** and **le** [the], and finish with words such as **grenouille** [frog]. It is advised that teachers using this pack also begin with the simple vowels and consonants before tackling the more complex sounds in the third PowerPoint of blended sounds.

French schools often use a method of chanting groupings of letters similar to Underhill's technique to practise phonics, which can be easily implemented in teaching phonics to native English speakers.

For example, in the early stages of the French CP textbook *Gafi le fantôme* (2005) students chant series of letters such as this:

**u – lu – i – lu – a – lu – la – lu – li – i – ulu – li – lulu – ilu – lali – alu**

Later, the sequences become more complex, such as these nasal sounds:

**non – mon – ton – son – mou – tou – avon – pou – ron – bon – bou**

### How this pack is structured

The pack is divided into four sections:

1. Simple vowels
2. Consonants
3. Diphthongs, nasals and blends
4. Additional activities

This document contains summaries of the four accompanying PowerPoints, including posters, worksheets and vocabulary cards which can be printed for students as handouts.

The activities PowerPoint provides additional words, sentences (including tongue-twisters) and longer texts for students to practise applying and deepening their knowledge of French phonics. All the resources can be easily adapted and used flexibly throughout lessons.

### Sound–symbol correspondences in this pack

The SSCs in this pack are those listed by the Department for Education (2022, pp.18–19) as presenting the greatest challenge for students of French. In the three SSC PowerPoints, they are grouped as follows:

**Simple vowels**

1. [a/â/à]
2. silent final [e]
3. [e] [é/er/ez] [è/ê/ai]
4. [i/y]
5. [open o] [closed o/ô] [au/eau]
6. [u] [ou]
7. [closed eu] [open eu/œ/œu]

**Consonants**

1. silent final consonant (SFC)
2. CaReFuL consonants
3. Words ending with -ent
4. [h muet] [h aspiré]
5. liaisons
6. [hard c/k] [ç / soft c]
7. [j / soft g] [hard g] [gn]
8. [ss / soft s] [hard s/z]
9. [r]
10. [ch] [qu] [th]

**Diphthongs, nasals and blends**

1. [oi] [oy]
2. [ain/in/aim/im]
3. [en/an/em/am]
4. [on/om]
5. [un/um]
6. [ien]
7. [tion]
8. [-aill/-ail]
9. [-ill/-ille]
10. [-eill/-eil]
11. [-euill/-euil/-ueill/-ueil/-œill/-œuil]
12. [-ouill/-ouil]

For each SSC covered in the pack, instruction is sequenced as follows:

- a. Recognising the sounds
- b. Producing the sounds in familiar words
- c. Recognising and producing the sounds in unfamiliar words
- d. Recognising and producing the sounds in sentences and discourse

## Native speakers

Three native speakers have been used throughout the resources to provide authentic French voices, enabling students to listen to and copy French pronunciation correctly. Throughout the PowerPoints, pictures can be clicked on to hear individual words again.

## Vocabulary

As this pack is not aimed at one specific year group, no assumptions are made concerning vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, English translations are provided throughout the resources to maximise understanding and assist in crucial vocabulary acquisition.

While the pack contains a large amount of commonly used vocabulary, less common vocabulary is also used as a tool to focus students' attention on sounds in words they do not already know how to spell.

The pack also contains a large selection of cognates, which are a useful tool to highlight the contrasting sounds in French and English through words with similar or identical spellings.

Minimal pairs are frequently used, and these are particularly helpful in working with vowels – for example, differentiating between the [u] sound in **bulle** [bubble] and the [ou] sound in **boule** [ball].

## Liaisons

Throughout the resources, liaisons (denoted by the symbol  $\_$ ) are provided in order to reinforce the learning of where they need to be made in spoken French.

## Teaching notes

Each slide within the four PowerPoints comes with a learning objective, instructions and audio transcript within the teaching notes, along with gestures where relevant

## About the author

*Mastering pronunciation – French* was written for Teachit by Louise Bibbey.

Louise holds a PGCE in Secondary MFL (French and German) and an MA in Translation Studies (French), and she has recently returned to the UK after living in south-west France for almost 20 years. With a passion for educating children about the French language and culture, she has raised three bilingual children in the French education system, during which time she gained a deep understanding of French phonics. She is currently working on the resource development team at NCELP.

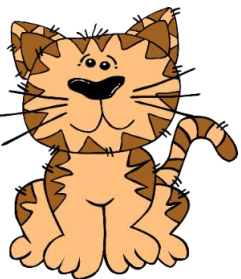


# Simple vowels: sounds and gestures

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**chat**

[a/â/à]



[cat]

**je**

[e]



[I]

**clé**

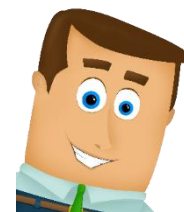
[é/er/  
ez]



[key]

**tête**

[è/ê/ai]



[head]

**ami**

[i/y]



[friend]

**porte**

[open o]



[door]

**dos**

[closed  
o/ô]



[back]

**chaud**

[au/eau]



[hot]

**tu**

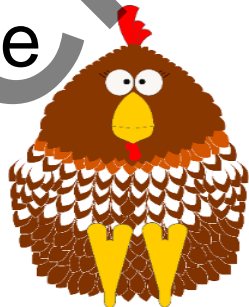
[u]



[you]

**poule**

[ou]



[hen]

**deux**

[closed  
eu]



[two]

**cœur**

[open eu/  
œu]



[heart]



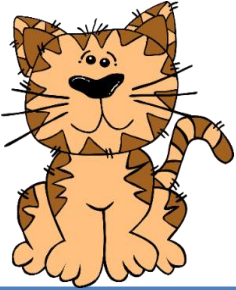
[a/â/à]

# Pronunciation rules

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chat

[a/â/à]



[cat]

The [a] in French sounds like the [a] in the English word cat.

Be careful to avoid using the English sound 'ay' in cognates like **table** and **âge**!

Écoute et répète:

animal

[animal]



papa

[daddy]



là

[there]



table

[table]



pas

[not]



aller

[to go]



quatre

[four]



âge

[age]



[a/â/à]

Lis les phrases, puis écoute et répète

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- ▶ C'est l'**anniversaire** de **la** dame.  
[It's the lady's birthday.]
- ▶ **La** dame fait **la** décoration de **la** table.  
[The lady does the decorating of the table.]
- ▶ **La** radio et le **gâteau** sont sur **la** table.  
[The radio and the cake are on the table.]
- ▶ L'**animal** a une place **à** **la** table.  
[The animal has a place at the table.]
- ▶ Le **pirate** arrive aussi **à** **la** table.  
[The pirate also arrives at the table.]



# Les mots invariables 1

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pronunciation

**ailleurs**

[elsewhere]

**ainsi**

[in this way]

**alors**

[so]

**après**

[after]

**assez**

[enough]

**aujourd'hui**

[today]

**aussi**

[also]

**avant**

[before]

**avec**

[with]

**beaucoup**

[a lot]

**bien**

[well]

**bientôt**

[soon]

**car**

[because]

**cela**

[that]

**cependant**

[however]

**chez**

[at]

**combien**

[how many]

**comme**

[like]

**comment**

[how]

**contre**

[against]

**d'abord**

[firstly]

**dans**

[in]

**déjà**

[already]

**demain**

[tomorrow]



Harry Potter est né en Angleterre, au Royaume-Uni. Ses parents, Lily et James Potter, ont été tués par un sorcier maléfique nommé Lord Voldemort. Voldemort voulait aussi tuer Harry. Harry s'est échappé, mais il est resté avec une cicatrice en forme d'éclair sur la tête. Harry est allé vivre avec sa tante Pétunia, son oncle Vernon et son cousin Dudley, mais ils n'étaient pas gentils avec lui. Quand il était petit, Harry ne savait pas qu'il était un sorcier. Quand Harry a eu onze ans, un hibou a apporté une lettre pour inviter Harry à aller dans une école pour les sorciers et les sorcières, appelée Poudlard. Dans le train, le Poudlard Express, il a rencontré Ron Weasley et Hermione Granger, et ils sont devenus amis.

