

Where you live and where you are from

French A1 (beginner) · Lesson

Quick answer: In French, the preposition before a place depends on its type: à with cities (à Dakar), en with feminine countries or countries starting with a vowel (en Italie), au with masculine countries (au Canada) and aux with plural ones (aux États-Unis).

Level: French A1 (CEFR beginner) · **Standards:** CEFR A1, Spoken production

Which preposition goes with a city or a country?

At a language school in Montréal, at the check-in of a Lisbon hotel or on a form at the town hall in Nantes, you will be asked where you live and where you come from. The preposition is the part that changes.

Place	Preposition	Example
city	à	J'habite à Rabat.
feminine country	en	Elle travaille en Pologne.
masculine country	au	Nous vivons au Portugal.
plural country	aux	Il habite aux Pays-Bas.
masculine, starts with a vowel	en	Ils sont en Iran.

Quick rule

A country ending in -e is almost always feminine: la France, l'Algérie, la Belgique. Exceptions: le Mexique, le Cambodge, le Zimbabwe. Most other countries are masculine: le Japon, le Brésil, le Maroc.

à à Dakar	en en Italie	au au Canada	aux aux États-Unis
city	feminine	masculine	plural

Four prepositions, four types of place.

How do you say where you come from?

With venir de, en becomes de (or d' before a vowel), au becomes du, aux becomes des.

Examples

- Je viens de Belgique. — I come from Belgium.
- Il vient du Cameroun. — He comes from Cameroon.
- Elles viennent des Philippines. — They come from the Philippines.
- Je suis d'Italie. — I am from Italy.

How do you give your nationality and languages?

Country	Man	Woman
l'Espagne	espagnol	espagnole
l'Italie	italien	italienne
le Maroc	marocain	marocaine
la Suisse	suisse	suisse

Languages use parler and have no article: Je parle français et un peu arabe. — I speak French and a little Arabic.

How do you talk about cities and islands?

Cities take à for "in" or "to" and de for "from", with no article: J'habite à Lyon. — I live in Lyon. Ma collègue vient de Dakar. — My coworker comes from Dakar. Before a vowel, de becomes d': Il arrive d'Annecy. — He is arriving from Annecy.

Many small islands also take à: à Tahiti, à Madagascar. To say where someone is from with a country, use de or d' for feminine countries and du or des for masculine and plural ones: Je reviens d'Italie, du Portugal et des Pays-Bas. — I am coming back from Italy, Portugal and the Netherlands.

à city à Lyon	en feminine country en Italie	au masculine country au Maroc	aux plural country aux États-Unis
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One preposition for each kind of place: city, feminine, masculine or plural country.

Watch out

English capitalizes "Spanish" and "Italian". French does not: Je suis espagnol, Je parle italien. Also, do not translate "in" word for word: Je suis en Canada is wrong; say Je suis au Canada.

Québec, the city and the province

For the city, say à Québec. For the province, say au Québec. French is the only official language of the province.

Zoé's tip

Learn each country with its preposition as one block: en France, au Japon, aux États-Unis. Say it aloud as if it were one word.

Key points to remember

- Cities take à: J'habite à Bordeaux.
- Most countries ending in -e are feminine and take en: en France, en Tunisie.
- Masculine countries take au; plural countries take aux.
- Nationalities and languages are written in lowercase: Je suis suisse. Je parle français.

Where You Live and Where You Are From: frequently asked questions

When do I use en and when do I use au with countries?

Use en with feminine countries and with masculine countries that start with a vowel. Use au with other masculine countries: en Espagne, au Brésil.

What preposition do I use with a city?

Use à with almost every city: à Lyon, à Montréal. A few cities include the article, like au Havre or à La Rochelle.

How do I say that I come from a country?

Use venir de or être de. The preposition changes: de France, du Maroc, des États-Unis.

Are nationalities capitalized in French?

Not as adjectives or languages: Je suis canadienne, Je parle anglais. Capital letters are used only for people as a group, like les Français.

How do I say I speak a little French?

Say Je parle un peu français. To say you speak very well, use Je parle très bien espagnol.