

Booking, ordering and paying in a restaurant

French A1 (beginner) · Lesson

Quick answer: To eat out in French, book with *Je voudrais réserver une table pour quatre personnes*, order with *Je voudrais...* or *Je vais prendre...*, choose your steak from *bleu* to *bien cuit*, and ask for *l'addition*. A meal has an *entrée* (starter), a *plat* and a *dessert*.

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

How do you book a table in French?

Phone or ask at the door with the polite *je voudrais* (I would like). The host then asks for three details: how many people, when, and whose name.

French	English
Je voudrais réserver une table pour quatre personnes.	I'd like to book a table for four.
C'est pour quelle heure ?	What time is it for?
Pour samedi, à 20 h.	For Saturday, at 8 p.m.
À quel nom ?	Under what name?
Au nom de Sy.	Under the name Sy.
Nous avons une réservation.	We have a reservation.

How is a French menu organized?

A meal has three courses: une *entrée* (the starter), un *plat* (the main course) and un *dessert*. Two words are easy to mix up. La *carte* lists every dish; le *menu* is a fixed-price meal. At lunchtime many places offer une *formule*, a cheaper deal with two courses.

Formule du midi

entrée + plat	15 €
plat + dessert	15 €
entrée + plat + dessert	19 €

A lunchtime chalkboard.

Watch out

Une entrée is NOT the main course. In France it is the starter, the first dish you eat. The main course is le plat principal.

How do you order politely?

Use Je voudrais... or Je vais prendre..., never Je veux, which sounds like a demand. Ask for advice with Qu'est-ce que vous recommandez ? Both ways of ordering lean on the verb prendre (to have, to take):

Subject	prendre
je	prends
tu	prends
il / elle	prend
nous	prenons
vous	prenez
ils / elles	prennent

How do you ask for the steak you want?

The waiter will ask Quelle cuisson ? Choose from four levels, from the rawest to the most cooked.



French levels run slightly rarer than the American names: saignant is close to medium-rare and à point is close to medium. Say Mon steak, à point, s'il vous plaît.

How do you pay, and do you tip?

Catch the waiter's eye and say L'addition, s'il vous plaît. Waiters do not bring the check on their own.

Tipping in France

Prices on a menu already include service, often shown as *service compris*. A tip is therefore optional: many diners leave a few coins or round up the amount as a thank-you. Tap water is free if you ask for *une carafe d'eau*.

Zoé's tip

Stack your sentences: *Bonjour + Je voudrais... + s'il vous plaît + Merci*. Four short pieces and you sound polite in any restaurant.

Key points to remember

- *Une entrée* is the starter, never the main course; the main course is *le plat*.
- *La carte* lists all dishes; *le menu* is a fixed-price meal; *une formule* is a lunch deal.
- Order politely with *Je voudrais...*, never *Je veux*.
- Steak cooking runs *bleu, saignant, à point, bien cuit*.
- Service is included in French prices, so a tip is optional.

Booking, Ordering and Paying in a Restaurant: frequently asked questions

What does *entrée* mean on a French menu?

It means the starter, not the main course. The main course is *le plat* or *le plat principal*, and the sweet course is *le dessert*.

What is the difference between *la carte* and *le menu*?

La carte lists all the dishes you can choose from, each with its own price. *Le menu* is a set meal, usually two or three courses, for one price.

How do you say how you want your steak cooked?

Choose *bleu, saignant, à point* or *bien cuit*, from rare to well done. Say *Mon steak, saignant, s'il vous plaît*.

Do you have to leave a tip in France?

No. Service is included in the price, which you may see written as *service compris*. Leaving a few coins is a polite extra, not a rule.

How do you ask for the check?

Say *L'addition, s'il vous plaît*. Do not say *le chèque*: in French that word means a bank check, not the restaurant bill.