

Ordering coffee and paying the bill

French A1 (beginner) · Lesson

Quick answer: To order in a French café, greet the server, say Je voudrais followed by un or une and the item, and add s'il vous plaît. Ask for the bill with L'addition, s'il vous plaît. Say prices as euros then cents, for example trois euros vingt for 3,20 €.

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

How do you order politely in a French café?

Start with Bonjour, then use Je voudrais (I would like) plus the item. Finish with s'il vous plaît. This one pattern works for coffee, water, a snack, or the bill, and it sounds polite everywhere in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Québec.

Bonjour ! Vous désirez ?
(server)

Je voudrais un café crème,
s'il vous plaît.

Et avec ça ? — Une carafe d'eau.

Three lines of a typical café order.

The pattern

Je voudrais + un / une / deux + item + s'il vous plaît.

French	English
Je voudrais un café.	I would like a coffee.
Je voudrais une carafe d'eau.	I would like a carafe of water.
Je voudrais deux thés.	I would like two teas.
L'addition, s'il vous plaît.	The bill, please.

Which words does the server use?

- Vous désirez ? — What would you like?
- Et avec ça ? — Anything else?
- Sur place ou à emporter ? — Here or to go?
- Ça fait trois euros cinquante. — That's €3.50.

Note that un café alone means a small, strong espresso. Ask for un café crème if you want coffee with milk.

Café du Port — La carte

un café	1,50 €
un café crème	3,20 €
un thé	3,50 €
un chocolat chaud	4,00 €
un jus d'orange	4,50 €
un croissant	1,40 €
une tartine	3,50 €
un sandwich	6,50 €
une carafe d'eau	gratuite

A café menu board with prices.

How do you say prices?

Say the euros, then euros, then the cents: 3,20 € is trois euros vingt. French writes a comma where English uses a point. For cents, you need numbers up to 50 in this lesson.

Numbers for prices

1-10	11-20	Tens
un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq	onze, douze, treize, quatorze, quinze	dix, vingt, trente
six, sept, huit, neuf, dix	seize, dix-sept, dix-huit, dix-neuf, vingt	quarante, cinquante

Un croissant, un euro quarante. — One croissant, €1.40.

Café du Port	
Table 4	
2 cafés crème	6,40 €
1 croissant	1,40 €
1 jus d'orange	4,50 €
TOTAL	12,30 €
Merci et à bientôt !	

A receipt: the total is twelve euros thirty.

Common mistake

English speakers say *Je veux un café*, which sounds like a demand. Use *Je voudrais*. Also remember gender: *un café*, *un thé*, but *une carafe*, *une limonade*.

Counter or table?

In France, a coffee standing at the bar (*au comptoir*) usually costs less than the same coffee at a table or on the terrace. Many servers expect you to ask for the bill: *L'addition, s'il vous plaît*.

Zoé's tip

Say the whole order in one breath before you walk in: *bonjour, je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît*. Then smile and listen for the price at the end.

Key points to remember

- *Je voudrais* means I would like and is the polite way to order.
- *Un café* is an espresso; *un café crème* has milk.
- A *carafe d'eau* (tap water) is normally free with a meal.
- Prices use a comma: 3,20 € is trois euros vingt.
- To pay, say *L'addition, s'il vous plaît*.

Ordering Coffee and Paying the Bill: frequently asked questions

What is the difference between *je veux* and *je voudrais*?

Je veux means I want and sounds blunt. *Je voudrais* means I would like and is polite. Use it with

servers, shopkeepers, and strangers.

What do I get if I order un café?

You get a small, strong espresso. For a longer drink with milk, ask for un café crème or un café au lait. A tea is un thé.

Is tap water free in France?

In a restaurant, a carafe d'eau is normally offered free with a meal. In a café, ask politely: Une carafe d'eau, s'il vous plaît. Bottled water is charged.

How do I ask how much something costs?

Say C'est combien ? or Ça fait combien ? To hear the total, wait for Ça fait followed by the amount, for example ça fait six euros.

How do I call the server?

Make eye contact and say S'il vous plaît or Excusez-moi. Avoid snapping fingers. When you are ready to leave, say L'addition, s'il vous plaît.