

Getting around by metro, bus and train

French A1 (beginner) · Lesson

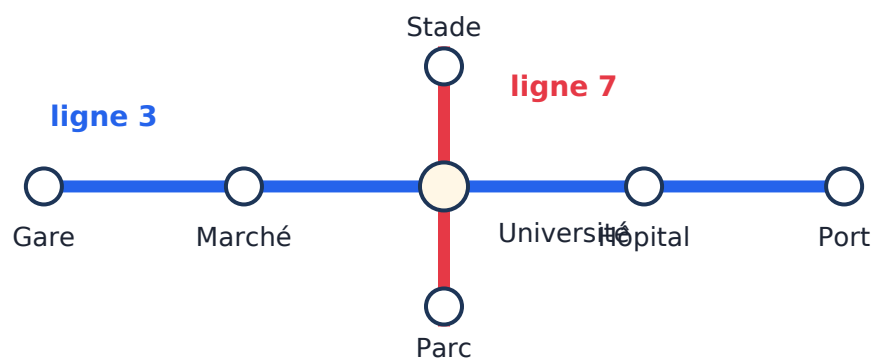
Quick answer: To use public transport in French, name the line or stop (la ligne 3, l'arrêt), ask Quel quai ? or À quelle heure part le train ?, and read the 24-hour timetable. Use prendre for the vehicle, partir for departures, and remember that quel agrees with the noun.

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

How do you ask for a ticket and find your platform in French?

In a station, a few nouns and two question frames get you almost everywhere. Learn each noun with its article, because the gender decides which form of quel you need.

French	English
le ticket, le billet	ticket (métro/bus), ticket (train)
la station, l'arrêt (m.)	métro station, bus stop
le quai, la voie	platform (métro), track number (train)
la ligne, la direction	line, direction (last stop)
l'horaire (m.), le retard	timetable, delay
la correspondance	connection, transfer



correspondance à Université
Two lines cross at Université: that is where you change (changer).

Which platform? Which line?

Quel agrees with the noun it asks about: quel quai (m. sg.), quelle ligne (f. sg.), quels horaires (m. pl.), quelles stations (f. pl.). Pronunciation never changes.

Quel quai pour Lyon ? — Which platform for Lyon? À quelle heure part le bus ? — What time does the bus leave?

Which verbs do you need in transit?

	prendre (to take)	partir (to leave)
je	prends	pars
tu	prends	pars
il / elle	prend	part
nous	prenons	partons
vous	prenez	partez
ils / elles	prennent	partent

In real life

- Je prends la ligne 3, direction Port. — I take line 3, toward Port.
- Le train pour Tours part à 9h30, voie 1. — The train for Tours leaves at 9:30, track 1.
- Vous descendez à Université et vous changez. — You get off at Université and transfer.

How do you read a French timetable?

Timetables use the 24-hour clock: 17h40 is 5:40 p.m. The three words to spot are départ (departure), arrivée (arrival) and retard (delay). A line saying retard 10 min means the train is ten minutes late.

Ligne 3 · direction Port

Sortie · Rue du Marché

Correspondance ligne 7

Interdit de fumer

Signs you will meet underground. Follow the direction, not the name of your own stop.

Watch out

English puts the preposition last: “Which platform does it leave *from*?” French moves it to the front: De quel quai part le train ? Also, prendre goes with the line or vehicle, not with the purchase: you buy with acheter un ticket and then valider son ticket.

Validate your ticket

In most French and Belgian cities a ticket is only valid once you stamp or scan it. An inspector can fine a passenger with an unvalidated ticket, even if it was bought.

Zoé's tip

Before you step on, say the last stop of your line out loud: direction Port. If you can say it, you will not take the train the wrong way.

Key points to remember

- Quel becomes quelle, quels or quelles to match the noun: quel quai, quelle ligne.
- Prendre is irregular: je prends, nous prenons, ils prennent.
- Timetables use 24-hour time: 17h40 means 5:40 p.m.
- Le quai is used in the métro, la voie is the track number at a train station.
- Retard on a board means the vehicle is late.

Getting Around by Metro, Bus and Train: frequently asked questions

How do you ask which platform a train leaves from in French?

Say De quel quai part le train ? or simply Quel quai pour Tours ? For a train station you can also ask Quelle voie ?. The word quel must match the gender of the noun.

What is the difference between un ticket and un billet?

Un ticket is usually for the métro, bus or tram, while un billet is used for the train or a plane. In everyday speech people sometimes mix them, but the pairing above is the safe one.

How do you read 17h40 on a French timetable?

17h40 is read dix-sept heures quarante and equals 5:40 p.m. French timetables use the 24-hour clock, so subtract 12 from any hour above 12 to get English time.

Which verb means to get off a bus or train?

Use descendre: Je descends à la prochaine station. The opposite is monter, to get on. Both are regular verbs in the present tense.

What does retard mean on a departure board?

Un retard is a delay. If a board shows retard 10 min, the train will leave ten minutes after the printed time.