

Talking about looks and character

French A2 (elementary) · Lesson

Quick answer: To describe a person in French, use être + an adjective that agrees with the subject for personality, avoir + les cheveux or les yeux for appearance, avoir l'air + adjective for an impression, and ressembler à + a person to say who someone looks like.

Level: French A2 (CEFR elementary) · **Standards:** CEFR A2, Spoken production

How do you describe someone's personality in French?

Use être + an adjective that agrees with the person. The adjective goes after the verb and takes the gender and number of the subject.

Qualités

généreux / généreuse
travailleur / travailleuse
courageux / courageuse
patient / patiente
drôle / drôle
calme / calme

Défauts

paresseux / paresseuse
bavard / bavarde
têtu / têtue
jaloux / jalouse
naïf / naïve
timide / timide

Common character adjectives, masculine and feminine.

Feminine endings

Most adjectives add -e (patient → patiente). Endings change like this: -eux → -euse, -eur → -euse, -if → -ive. Adjectives ending in -e stay the same (drôle, calme). For the plural, add -s; -x stays -x (sérieux).

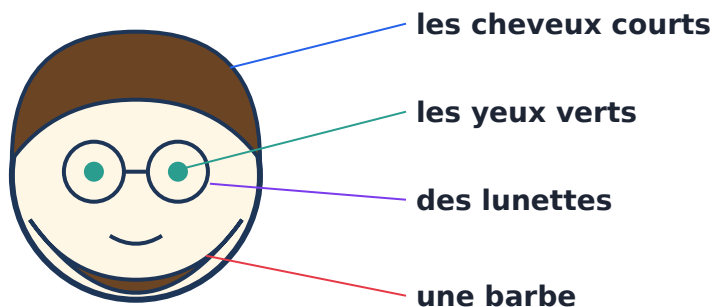
Examples

- Ma directrice est **ambitieuse** et **exigeante**. — My manager is ambitious and demanding.
- Les voisins de Dakar sont très **bavards**. — The neighbors in Dakar are very talkative.

Soften or strengthen with un peu, assez, plutôt, très and trop: Il est un peu timide.

How do you describe someone's appearance?

Use être for height and build (Il est grand et mince.). Use avoir for hair and eyes, and porter for glasses.



Parts of the face and how to name them.

Say	French
She has long dark hair.	Elle a les cheveux longs et bruns.
He has blue eyes.	Il a les yeux bleus.
She wears glasses.	Elle porte des lunettes.

Useful words: build and age (grand, petit, mince, jeune, âgé); hair (bruns, blonds, roux, gris, raides, bouclés, frisés); eyes (bleus, verts, marron, noirs). Hair color and style come after les cheveux, and they agree: Elle a les cheveux bouclés.

How do you say someone looks tired or looks like someone?

Avoir l'air

Avoir l'air + adjective gives an impression. The adjective agrees with the subject: Elle a l'air fatiguée. With a noun, add de: Il a l'air d'un acteur.

Ressembler à

Ressembler is followed by à, never directly by a noun: Elle ressemble à sa mère. Replace the person with lui or leur: Elle lui ressemble.

Watch out

Sympathique means “nice,” not “sympathetic.” Also, yeux marron stays invariable, the hair is

plural (les cheveux), and “takes after her mother” is ressemble à sa mère, without a preposition added.

Sympa

In everyday French, sympathique is shortened to sympa, the same for men and women: Il est sympa. Elle est sympa. The plural is sympas.

Zoé's tip

Build a description in three steps: first impression (Il a l'air...), then appearance, then personality. You will always have something to say.

Key points to remember

- Adjectives agree: généreux becomes généreuse, naïf becomes naïve.
- Hair and eyes use avoir: Elle a les yeux verts.
- Avoir l'air + adjective gives an impression: Il a l'air fatigué.
- Ressembler always takes à: Elle ressemble à sa mère.
- Sympathique means nice, not sympathetic.

Talking About Looks and Character: frequently asked questions

How do you describe someone's personality in French?

Use être + an adjective: Il est calme, Elle est drôle. The adjective agrees in gender and number with the subject.

How do you form feminine adjectives?

Most add -e. Endings -eux and -eur become -euse, -if becomes -ive, and adjectives already ending in -e do not change.

What does avoir l'air mean?

It means to look or seem. Add an adjective that agrees with the subject: Elles ont l'air contentes. With a noun, use avoir l'air de.

How do you say someone looks like another person?

Use ressembler à: Il ressemble à son père. A pronoun replaces the person: Il lui ressemble.

Does sympathique mean sympathetic?

No. Sympathique, or sympa in speech, means nice and likeable. To say sympathetic, use compatissant.