

Painting a portrait with French adjectives

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: French adjectives agree with the noun they describe in gender and number: add -e for feminine and -s for plural (grand, grande, grands, grandes). Most adjectives go after the noun, but a small group (BANGS: beauty, age, number, goodness, size) goes before it. Beau, vieux and nouveau have special forms.

Level: French 1 (high school, ACTFL Novice) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice Mid, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

How do adjectives agree with the noun?

In English, "tall" never changes. In French, the adjective copies the gender and number of the noun. Start with the masculine singular, then add endings.

Masc. sing.	Fem. sing.	Masc. plural	Fem. plural	Meaning
grand	grande	grands	grandes	tall
timide	timide	timides	timides	shy
sportif	sportive	sportifs	sportives	athletic
paresseux	paresseuse	paresseux	paresseuses	lazy
gentil	gentille	gentils	gentilles	kind

Examples

- Mon voisin est sportif, mais sa sœur est timide. — My neighbor is athletic, but his sister is shy.
- Les jumelles sont gentilles et drôles. — The twin girls are kind and funny.

Where does the adjective go?

Most adjectives follow the noun: un élève sérieux. The BANGS group goes before it. Learn the letters as a list.

B Beauty beau joli	A Age jeune vieux nouveau	N Number premier dernier	G Goodness bon mauvais	S Size petit grand gros
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BANGS adjectives usually go before the noun.

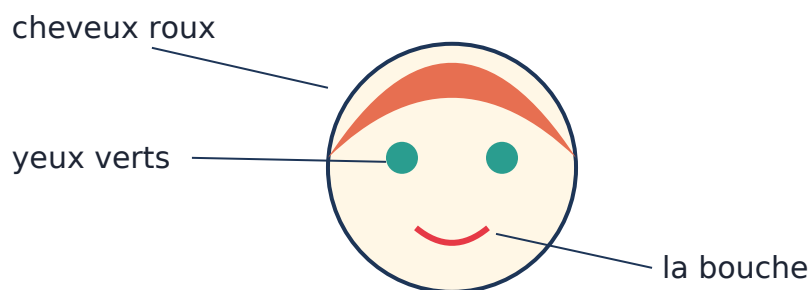
Irregular beautiful, old, new

Masc.	Before vowel	Fem.	Masc. pl.	Fem. pl.
beau	bel	belle	beaux	belles
vieux	vieil	vieille	vieux	vieilles
nouveau	nouvel	nouvelle	nouveaux	nouvelles

un **bel** homme but un **beau** garçon.

How do you describe hair, eyes and personality?

Colors follow the noun and agree with it: des yeux verts, une jupe rouge. The words orange and marron never change: des chaussures marron. For red hair, roux becomes rousse: Maëlle est rousse.



Describe hair and eyes with avoir: Elle a les cheveux roux et les yeux verts.

Looks	Personality
mince — slim	courageux / courageuse — brave
fort / forte — strong	curieux / curieuse — curious
frisé / frisée — curly	bavard / bavarde — talkative
raide — straight (hair)	têtu / têtue — stubborn

Use être for general traits (Il est curieux.) and avoir with hair and eyes (Elle a les cheveux frisés.). Do not forget: the adjective still agrees with the noun it describes, here cheveux.

Common mistake

English speakers put the color first and forget agreement: une rouge voiture and les filles sont grand. Correct: une voiture rouge and les filles sont grandes.

Culture note

In Québec French, ma blonde means "my girlfriend" whatever her hair color, and mon chum means "my boyfriend."

Zoé's tip

Say the phrase aloud as a song: "une belle fille rousse, un beau garçon roux." Your ears will remember the endings before your brain does.

Key points to remember

- An adjective agrees with its noun: un garçon content, une fille contente, des amis contents.
- Adjectives ending in -e, such as timide, keep the same form in the feminine.
- BANGS adjectives (beau, jeune, vieux, bon, petit, grand...) usually go before the noun.
- Beau, vieux and nouveau change to bel, vieil and nouvel before a masculine vowel sound.
- Colors go after the noun; orange and marron never change.

Painting a Portrait with French Adjectives: frequently asked questions

How do you make a French adjective feminine?

Usually add an -e to the masculine form: grand becomes grande. If the adjective already ends in -e (timide, jeune), it does not change. Some adjectives change more: sportif becomes sportive, gentil becomes gentille.

What does BANGS mean in French grammar?

BANGS stands for Beauty, Age, Number, Goodness and Size. Adjectives from these groups, such as beau, jeune, premier, bon and petit, usually go before the noun. Most other adjectives go after it.

When do you use bel, vieil and nouvel?

Use them before a masculine singular noun that starts with a vowel or silent h: un bel hôtel, un vieil ami, un nouvel élève. Before a consonant, use beau, vieux and nouveau.

Do colors agree in French?

Yes, most colors agree with the noun: des chaussures noires, une robe verte. Exceptions are orange and marron, which stay the same. Colors also go after the noun.

How do you plural an adjective that ends in -x or -s?

Adjectives that already end in -x or -s do not add another s in the masculine plural: un garçon heureux, des garçons heureux. In the feminine, add -es: des filles heureuses.