

Saying hello, introducing yourself and spelling names

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: French greetings change with the time of day and the relationship: bonjour by day, bonsoir at night, salut with friends, au revoir to leave. Use tu with friends and family, vous with adults you do not know. Introduce yourself with je m'appelle or moi, c'est, and spell names with French letter names.

Level: French 1 (high school, ACTFL Novice) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice Mid, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 2.1 Cultural Practices

How do you say hello and goodbye in French?

French greetings depend on the time of day and on how well you know the person. The word bonjour works from morning until early evening, while bonsoir takes over once it gets dark.

French	Meaning	When
Bonjour	Hello, good day	Anyone, daytime
Bonsoir	Good evening	Anyone, after dark
Salut	Hi / bye	Friends only
Au revoir	Goodbye	Any situation
À demain	See you tomorrow	Classmates, coworkers
Bonne nuit	Good night	Only before sleep

Should you say tu or vous?

Rule: tu or vous

Say tu to friends, classmates, relatives and children. Say vous to teachers, shopkeepers, and adults you meet for the first time. Vous is also the plural: it addresses two or more people.

tu : friends

Salut, Kofi !
Ça va ?

vous : respect

Bonjour, Madame.
Comment allez-vous ?

Same question, two levels of politeness

Casual tu on the left, polite vous on the right.

How do you introduce yourself and ask how someone is?

Meeting someone

- Comment tu t'appelles ? — What's your name? (informal)
- Comment vous appelez-vous ? — What's your name? (formal)
- Je m'appelle Awa. / Moi, c'est Awa. — My name is Awa.
- Enchanté (boy) / Enchantée (girl) — Nice to meet you.
- Ça va ? — Ça va bien, merci. Et toi ? — How are you? Fine, thanks. And you?
- Comme ci, comme ça. / Pas mal. — So-so. / Not bad.

Common mistake

American students often walk up and ask a question straight away, such as Excusez-moi, où est la gare ? In France this sounds abrupt. Open with Bonjour, Monsieur or Bonjour, Madame first.

How do you spell a name and use accents?

French letter names do not sound like English ones: G is « zhay », J is « zhee », and W is « doo-bluh-vay ». To ask for a spelling, say Comment ça s'écrit ? — How is that spelled?



Spelling KOFFI aloud, letter by letter.

Mark	Name	Example
é	accent aigu (acute)	élève — student

Mark	Name	Example
è, à	accent grave	très — very
ê	accent circonflexe	fête — party
ë	tréma (diaeresis)	Noël — Christmas
ç	cédille	ça — that

What phrases do you hear in a French classroom?

- Écoutez. — Listen. Répétez. — Repeat.
- Ouvrez votre livre. — Open your book. Levez la main. — Raise your hand.
- Je ne comprends pas. — I don't understand.
- Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire ? — What does that mean?

La bise

Friends and relatives in France often greet each other with la bise, light cheek kisses. The number of kisses varies by region, and teenagers meeting an adult for the first time usually shake hands instead.

Zoé's tip

Make *bonjour* a reflex. Say it when you enter a shop, a classroom or an elevator, and people will answer warmly.

Key points to remember

- *Bonjour* is used from morning to early evening; *bonsoir* once it gets dark.
- *Tu* is for friends, family and peers; *vous* is for respect and for groups.
- *Je m'appelle ...* and *Moi, c'est ...* both mean “My name is ...”.
- Five marks change French letters: é, è, ê, ë and ç.
- Always say *bonjour* before asking a stranger a question.

Saying Hello, Introducing Yourself and Spelling Names: frequently asked questions

What is the difference between *bonjour* and *salut*?

Bonjour is polite and works with everybody during the day. *Salut* is casual and means both hi and bye, so keep it for friends and classmates.

When do I use tu instead of vous?

Use tu with friends, relatives, children and classmates. Use vous with teachers, adult strangers and customers, and whenever you speak to more than one person.

How do I say my name in French?

Say Je m'appelle followed by your name, or the shorter Moi, c'est followed by your name. Literally, je m'appelle means I call myself.

How do I ask someone to spell a word?

Ask Comment ça s'écrit ? Then listen for the French letter names. Zoé suggests writing each letter down as you hear it.

Do accents change how a French word is pronounced?

Yes. É sounds like the ay in say, è sounds like the e in bed, and ç gives a soft s sound. Accents also separate words such as a (has) and à (to).