

Counting to 100, telling your age, phone numbers

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: French numbers from 0 to 100 are regular up to 69. After that, French counts in twenties: soixante-dix is $60 + 10$ and quatre-vingts is 4×20 . To give your age, use avoir, never être: J'ai quinze ans. Phone numbers are said in pairs of digits, such as zéro six, douze, trente-quatre.

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 you count from 0 to 20 in French?

The first twenty numbers are worth memorizing as a block, because they appear inside every larger number.

0-10	11-20
0 zéro · 1 un · 2 deux · 3 trois · 4 quatre · 5 cinq · 6 six · 7 sept · 8 huit · 9 neuf · 10 dix	11 onze · 12 douze · 13 treize · 14 quatorze · 15 quinze · 16 seize · 17 dix-sept · 18 dix-huit · 19 dix-neuf · 20 vingt

How do the tens from 30 to 69 work?

The tens are trente (30), quarante (40), cinquante (50) and soixante (60). Add the unit after a hyphen: quarante-deux, cinquante-neuf. For 1, use et un: vingt et un, trente et un, soixante et un.

Why are 70 to 99 so strange?

Counting in twenties

From 70, French builds numbers with soixante (60) and quatre-vingts (4×20). So soixante-dix = $60 + 10$, soixante-douze = $60 + 12$, quatre-vingt-dix = $80 + 10$. Only 71 takes et: soixante et onze. The s of quatre-vingts disappears when another number follows: quatre-vingt-trois. And 100 is cent.

$$70 = \text{soixante-dix} = 60 + 10$$

$$80 = \text{quatre-vingts} = 4 \times 20$$

$$90 = \text{quatre-vingt-dix} = 4 \times 20 + 10$$

Three number puzzles solved with addition and multiplication.

Septante and nonante

In Belgium and in much of Switzerland, people say septante (70) and nonante (90). Some Swiss cantons also say huitante (80). Both systems are correct French; the school form is the one above.

How do you say how old you are?

Age with avoir

French uses avoir (to have) for age, and the word ans is always said. J'**ai** quinze ans. — I am fifteen. Tu **as** seize ans. Elle **a** quatorze ans. To ask: Quel âge as-tu ? or Tu as quel âge ?

Common mistake

English speakers say “I am fifteen” and write Je suis quinze ans. That is wrong. French never uses être for age: say J'ai quinze ans, and do not drop ans.

When do you hear the z in deux ans?

Before a vowel sound, the last letter of deux, trois, six and dix sounds like z: deux ans, six ans, dix ans. Neuf ans sounds like « neuv ans », and vingt ans pronounces the t. Before a consonant, nothing is linked: deux livres.

How do you read a phone number?

A French number has ten digits and is read in pairs. Mobiles start with 06 or 07.

06

zéro six

12

douze

34

trente-quatre

58

cinquante-huit

71

soixante et onze

Five pairs, not ten separate digits

*Reading a number in pairs.***Zoé's tip**

For 70 to 99, say the pieces in your head first: soixante + dix-sept makes soixante-dix-sept. Do the sum, and the word falls into place.

Key points to remember

- Numbers 0–16 are unique words; 17–19 are dix plus sept, huit or neuf.
- 70 is soixante-dix and 90 is quatre-vingt-dix; 80 is quatre-vingts.
- Age uses avoir and the word ans: J'ai seize ans.
- The final consonant of deux, trois, six and dix sounds like z before a vowel.
- French phone numbers have ten digits, read in five pairs.

Counting to 100, Telling Your Age, Phone Numbers: frequently asked questions

Why does French say quatre-vingts for 80?

Older French used a base of twenty, so 80 is four twenties. Quatre-vingts keeps its s only when nothing follows, as in quatre-vingt-trois.

How do I say my age in French?

Use avoir and ans: J'ai seize ans. Never use être for age. To ask a friend, say Quel âge as-tu ?

When is there a hyphen or et in numbers?

Use et for 21, 31, 41, 51, 61 and 71, as in vingt et un. Other compound numbers use a hyphen, such as vingt-deux and quatre-vingt-un.

How are French phone numbers said?

In pairs of digits, so 06 12 34 58 71 becomes zéro six, douze, trente-quatre, cinquante-huit, soixante et onze.

Do Belgium and Switzerland use the same numbers?

Mostly, but Belgians and many Swiss say septante for 70 and nonante for 90. Some Swiss cantons

also say huitante for 80.