

Introducing your family with mon, ma and mes

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: French possessive adjectives agree with the noun that is owned, not with the owner: mon/ma/mes (my), ton/ta/tes (your), son/sa/ses (his, her), notre/nos (our), votre/vos (your) and leur/leurs (their). Before a feminine noun that starts with a vowel, use mon, ton or son: mon amie.

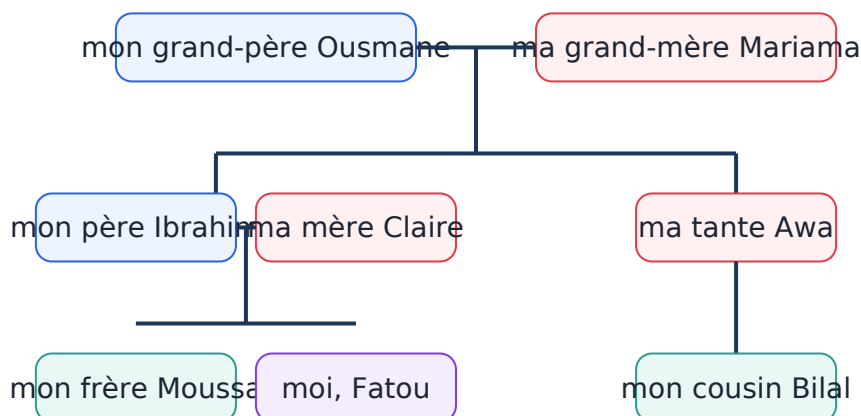
Level: French 1 (high school, ACTFL Novice) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice Mid, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 2.1 Cultural Practices

What are the main family words in French?

Learn each noun with its article, because the gender decides which possessive you need.

Masculine	Feminine
le père — father	la mère — mother
le frère — brother	la sœur — sister
le grand-père — grandfather	la grand-mère — grandmother
l'oncle — uncle	la tante — aunt
le cousin — cousin	la cousine — cousin
le fils — son	la fille — daughter

Plurals: les parents (parents), les grands-parents (grandparents), les enfants (children).



Fatou's family tree. Notice mon with masculine nouns and ma with feminine nouns.

More relatives: le neveu (nephew), la nièce (niece), le petit-fils (grandson), la petite-fille

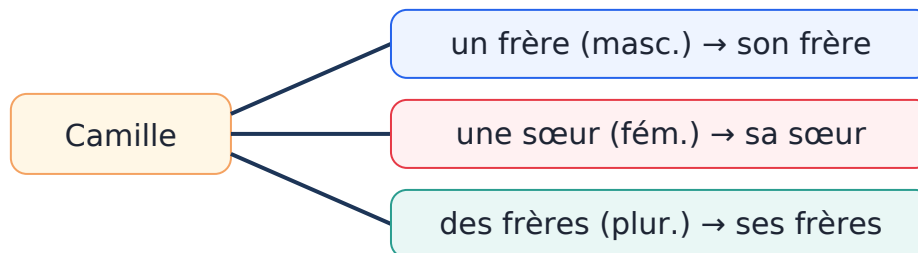
(granddaughter), le demi-frère (half-brother or stepbrother), la belle-mère (stepmother or mother-in-law). Beware of one false friend: les parents means "mom and dad," while "relatives" is la famille or les proches. To introduce someone, say Voici ma tante Awa — Here is my aunt Awa — or Je te présente mon frère. — Let me introduce my brother.

How do you say my, your, his and her in French?

Owner	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
my	mon	ma	mes
your (tu)	ton	ta	tes
his / her	son	sa	ses
our	notre		nos
your (vous)	votre		vos
their	leur		leurs

Agree with the thing owned

The possessive looks at the noun that follows, not at the owner. Léa aime **son** frère and Léo aime **son** frère use the same word because frère is masculine. Before a feminine noun that starts with a vowel, use the masculine form: **mon** amie, **ton** école, **son** idée.



The owner is the same; the possessive changes with the noun.

Examples

- Notre tante habite à Montréal. — Our aunt lives in Montréal.
- Leurs cousins jouent au foot. — Their cousins play soccer.

Common mistake

English speakers choose son or sa according to the owner's gender. Wrong: Marie aime sa père. Correct: Marie aime son père. Also wrong: ma amie. Correct: mon amie.

Culture note

Many French families call grandparents Mamie and Papi (or Mémé and Pépé). In West Africa, children often say tonton and tata for uncles, aunts and older family friends.

Zoé's tip

To choose the right word, point at the thing, not the person. Ask: is the noun masculine, feminine or plural? Then pick the possessive for that noun.

Key points to remember

- Possessive adjectives agree with the thing owned: son frère can mean his brother or her brother.
- Mon, ton and son are used before feminine nouns that start with a vowel sound: mon école.
- Notre, votre and leur have one singular form; nos, vos and leurs are plural.
- Les parents means parents only; relatives is les membres de la famille.
- In French you can say ma sœur but not a possessive 's: la sœur de Léa.

Introducing Your Family with Mon, Ma and Mes: frequently asked questions

How do you say "my mother" and "my father" in French?

Say "ma mère" and "mon père." Mon goes with masculine nouns, ma with feminine nouns. The plural is mes for both: mes parents.

Why do we say "mon amie" and not "ma amie"?

Before a vowel sound, ma, ta and sa would be hard to say, so French uses mon, ton and son. The noun is still feminine: mon amie, ton école, son idée.

How do you know if son means "his" or "her"?

You cannot tell from the word alone. Son, sa and ses can all mean his or her. Context or a name clears it up: son frère, Lucas can be understood from the story.

What is the difference between notre and nos?

Notre is singular: notre maison, notre chien. Nos is plural: nos amis, nos cousines. The same pattern works for votre and vos, and for leur and leurs.

Does French use an apostrophe s for possession?

No. French uses de plus the owner after the noun: le frère de Karim, la maison de mes grands-

parents. A possessive adjective can replace the whole phrase: son frère.