

Ordering politely at the café

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Prendre (to take, to have) is conjugated je prends, nous prenons, ils prennent; apprendre and comprendre follow it. Boire (to drink) is je bois, nous buvons, ils boivent. To order politely in a café, say Je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît, and ask for the bill with L'addition, s'il vous plaît.

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 conjugate prendre, apprendre and comprendre?

Prendre means *to take*, and in a café it also means *to have* something to eat or drink. Apprendre (to learn) and comprendre (to understand) are built on it, so one pattern covers all three verbs.

Subject	prendre	Example
je	prends	Je prends un thé. — I'll have a tea.
tu	prends	Tu comprends la carte ? — Do you understand the menu?
il / elle / on	prend	Salma prend un croissant. — Salma has a croissant.
nous	prenons	Nous apprenons le français. — We are learning French.
vous	prenez	Vous prenez un dessert ? — Are you having a dessert?
ils / elles	prennent	Elles prennent le tram. — They take the tram.

Rule: singular d, plural double n

The singular forms end in -ds, -ds, -d. The plural forms drop the d: prenons, prenez, and the third person plural doubles the n: prennent. Apprendre is often followed by à + infinitive: J'apprends à nager.

How do you conjugate boire?

Subject	boire	Subject	boire
je	bois	nous	buvons
tu	bois	vous	buvez
il / elle / on	boit	ils / elles	boivent

Boire takes the partitive: Mathis boit du lait. — Mathis drinks milk. Nous buvons de l'eau. — We drink water.

Common mistake

Do not say Je veux un café to a waiter: it sounds like a demand. Say Je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît. Also, the stem of boire changes in the plural, so nous boivons is wrong; the form is nous buvons.

How do you order politely in a café?

Café de la Gare — Annecy

un café	2,40 €
un thé	3,50 €
un chocolat chaud	4,20 €
une limonade	3,00 €
un jus d'orange	4,50 €
un croissant —	1,60 €

A café menu with prices in euros.

Useful phrases

- Bonjour, je voudrais un chocolat chaud, s'il vous plaît. — Hello, I'd like a hot chocolate, please.
- Je prends un café et un croissant. — I'll have a coffee and a croissant.
- Qu'est-ce que vous désirez ? — What would you like? (waiter)
- L'addition, s'il vous plaît. — The check, please.
- Ça fait 7,70 €. — That comes to 7.70 euros.

Bonjour

Je voudrais...

L'addition

Merci

The four steps of a polite order.

Zoé's tip

Start with Bonjour every time, even before the order. Then stack the politeness: Je voudrais..., s'il vous plaît, merci. Say prices out loud too: 3,50 € is trois euros cinquante.

Culture note

In France, service is already included in the printed prices, so leaving a tip is a small gesture, not an obligation. You can also ask for une carafe d'eau, a jug of tap water, which restaurants provide free of charge with a meal.

Key points to remember

- Prendre, apprendre and comprendre share one pattern: prends, prends, prend, prenons, prenez, prennent.
- Boire has three stems: bois / boit, buvons / buvez, boivent.
- Je voudrais means I would like and is the polite way to order; je veux sounds too direct.
- At a café, prendre means to have (eat or drink): Je prends un thé.
- In France, service is included in the printed prices, so tipping is optional.

Ordering Politely at the Café: frequently asked questions

How do you conjugate prendre in French?

Je prends, tu prends, il/elle/on prend, nous prenons, vous prenez, ils/elles prennent. Apprendre and comprendre use the same endings, so you learn three verbs at once.

How do you conjugate boire?

Je bois, tu bois, il boit, nous buvons, vous buvez, ils boivent. The stem changes from boi- to buv- in nous and vous, and to boiv- in the third person plural.

How do you order politely in a French café?

Greet the waiter with Bonjour, then say Je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît or Je prends un thé. Finish with Merci, and ask L'addition, s'il vous plaît when you are ready to pay.

Why is je voudrais better than je veux?

Je voudrais means I would like and is the polite form used with strangers and servers. Je veux means I want and sounds like an order, even though the grammar is correct.

Does prendre always mean to take?

No. It means to take (prendre le bus) but also to have food or drink (Je prends un croissant). With apprendre and comprendre it forms the verbs to learn and to understand.