

Around the world in French

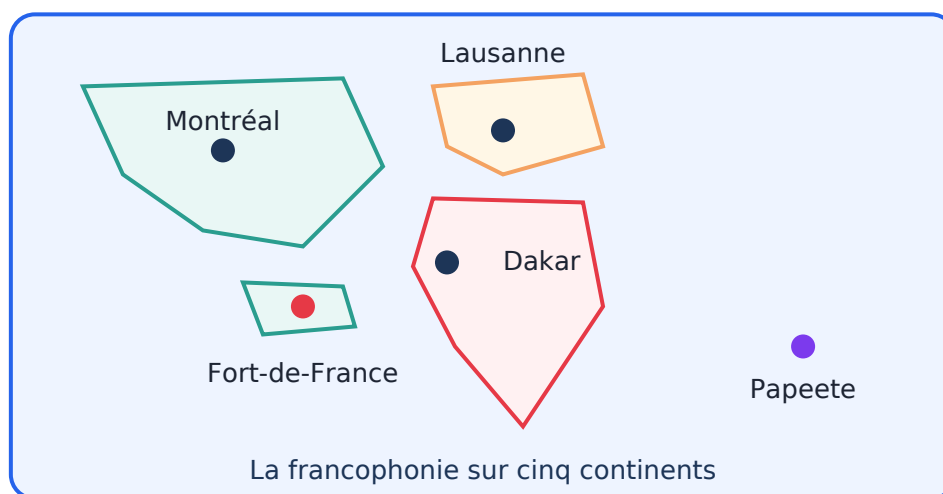
French 3 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: French is spoken on five continents by more than 300 million people, from Québec and Martinique to Senegal, Belgium, Switzerland and Tahiti. To say where you are or where you go, use à with cities, au with masculine countries, en with feminine countries and aux with plural ones. To say where you come from, use de, du or des.

Level: French 3 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Low) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Low, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 2.1 Cultural Practices

Where is French spoken around the world?

French is not only the language of France. Speakers live in Europe, North America, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and a French-speaking person is called un francophone. Here are six places you should know.



Five francophone cities on a simplified map.

Place	Main city	Language fact
le Québec	Montréal	French is the only official language of the province.
le Sénégal	Dakar	French is official; Wolof is widely spoken.
la Belgique	Liège, Bruxelles	Three official languages: Dutch, French, German.
la Suisse	Lausanne, Genève	Four national languages; French is spoken in the west.
la Martinique	Fort-de-France	Part of France; Creole is spoken alongside French.
Tahiti	Papeete	In French Polynesia, an overseas collectivity of France.

Which preposition goes with which place?

Rule: prepositions with places

Use **à** with cities. With countries, check the gender: feminine countries (most end in -e) and countries starting with a vowel take **en**; masculine countries take **au**; plural names take **aux**. To say where someone comes from, use **de**, **du**, **des**.

à villes à Dakar de Dakar	au masculin au Maroc du Maroc	en féminin en Suisse de Suisse	aux pluriel aux États-Unis des États-Unis
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Four place patterns, with the matching form for where someone comes from.

Examples

Ma cousine habite **à** Liège, **en** Belgique. — My cousin lives in Liège, in Belgium.

Nous allons **au** Sénégal et **aux** Antilles. — We are going to Senegal and to the Antilles.

Elle vient **du** Québec, il vient **d'**Algérie. — She comes from Québec, he comes from Algeria.

Islands vary: **à** Tahiti, **à** Madagascar, **à** La Réunion, but **en** Martinique and **en** Guadeloupe (you will also hear **à** la Martinique).

How do you link cultural products to places?

Use **venir de** with the same pattern: La poutine vient **du** Québec. Tintin vient **de** Belgique. Le zouk vient **des** Antilles. Le thiéboudienne vient **du** Sénégal.

Common mistake

English uses "in" or "to" for every place. In French, never write **à** Sénégal or **en** États-Unis. Also, **à** Québec is the city, while **au** Québec is the province.

Culture note

Each year on March 20, the International Day of La Francophonie celebrates the French-speaking world. Switzerland, Belgium and Canada have several official or national languages, so many speakers there are multilingual.

Zoé's tip

Cities always take à. For countries, look at the ending: -e usually means en, otherwise au. Then swap for "from": à → de, au → du, aux → des, en → de.

Key points to remember

- French is spoken on five continents by more than 300 million people.
- Cities take à (à Dakar); feminine countries take en (en Belgique); masculine countries take au (au Sénégal); plural countries take aux (aux États-Unis).
- To say where someone comes from, à becomes de, au becomes du, aux becomes des, and en becomes de or d'.
- Belgium has three official languages and Switzerland has four national languages.
- Francophone cultural products include zouk, Tintin, poutine and thiéboudienne.

Around the World in French: frequently asked questions

How many people speak French in the world?

More than 300 million people speak French, on five continents. Besides France, large French-speaking communities live in Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, many African countries, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

When do you use en, au or aux before a country?

Use en before feminine countries and countries that start with a vowel, like en Belgique. Use au before masculine countries, like au Maroc, and aux before plural ones, like aux États-Unis.

How do you say where someone comes from?

Use venir de with the same pattern: de Dakar, de Suisse, du Sénégal, des États-Unis. En becomes de or d' before a vowel, and au becomes du.

What is the difference between à Québec and au Québec?

À Québec means in Québec City, the capital of the province. Au Québec means in the province of Québec, so à Montréal, au Québec is correct.

Is Martinique a country?

No. Martinique is an island in the Caribbean that is part of France. People there speak French and Creole, and the main city is Fort-de-France.