

Building a clear French essay

French 4 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: A French essay has three blocks: an introduction, a body of two or three paragraphs and a conclusion. The introduction moves from a hook (l'accroche) to one guiding question (la problématique) and a preview of the plan. Each paragraph develops one idea with an example, and connectors link every step.

Level: French 4 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Mid) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Mid, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 4.1 Language Comparisons

What are the parts of a French essay?

A French essay is built like a short argument. The introduction opens the subject, the body develops two or three ideas, and the conclusion answers the question asked at the start. Nothing is added by chance: every sentence serves the guiding question.

Introduction

accroche, contexte, problématique, annonce du plan
1 paragraphe

I. Première partie

idée + explication
exemple + transition

II. Deuxième partie

idée + explication
exemple + transition

Conclusion

réponse à la question + ouverture

The skeleton of a French essay.

How do you write the introduction?

Move from the general to the specific, in four steps. The example below answers the topic Les réseaux sociaux rapprochent-ils vraiment les gens ?

Step	Example
Accroche (hook)	Chaque soir, des lycéens de Montréal ou de Dakar répondent à leurs amis en quelques secondes.
Contexte	Les réseaux sociaux occupent donc une place majeure dans leur vie.

Step	Example
Problématique	Mais rapprochent-ils vraiment les gens ?
Annonce du plan	Nous verrons d'abord comment ils facilitent les contacts, puis nous examinerons leurs limites.

Common mistake

An English thesis statement takes a side ("Social media is harmful"). A French problématique is a real question that both sides could answer. Also avoid "I will argue": French uses nous or an impersonal form, as in Nous verrons...

How do you build a body paragraph?

Follow the order idea, explanation, example, mini-conclusion. This model paragraph supports the first part of the plan.

Model paragraph

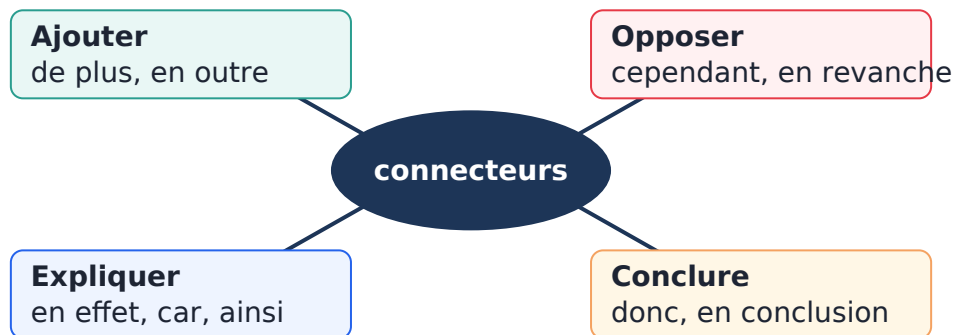
Tout d'abord, les réseaux sociaux facilitent le contact à distance. En effet, une élève de Liège peut parler chaque jour avec sa cousine de Tahiti. Par exemple, elles partagent des photos et des vidéos en direct. Ainsi, la distance compte moins.

End each paragraph with a bridge toward the next one: Cependant, ces avantages ont aussi des limites. — However, these benefits also have limits. This sentence is a transition, and it keeps the reader on the path of your plan.

How do you write the conclusion?

Do two things. First, answer the guiding question in one clear sentence, summing up the parts without repeating them word for word. Then open onto a wider issue, with a question or a prediction: En conclusion, les réseaux sociaux rapprochent, mais ils ne remplacent pas une vraie conversation. Demain, comment équilibrer écran et rencontres ? Never introduce a new argument in the conclusion.

Which connectors link the ideas?



Four jobs for connectors.

Culture note

In French lycées, the classic essay is the dissertation. Its popular plan is dialectical: a thesis, an antithesis, then a synthesis that settles the question.

Zoé's tip

Write the problématique first, on a sticky note. Then check that every paragraph helps to answer it.

Key points to remember

- The introduction has four steps: hook, context, guiding question, announcement of the plan.
- The problématique is a question, not a statement of opinion.
- Each body paragraph holds one idea, one explanation, one example and a short link to the next paragraph.
- Connectors (de plus, cependant, donc) show addition, contrast and consequence.
- The conclusion answers the guiding question and may open onto a wider issue.

Building a Clear French Essay: frequently asked questions

What is a problématique?

It is the central question the essay answers. It comes after the hook and context, and it must be open, not a yes-or-no slogan. The whole plan follows from it.

How many paragraphs does a French essay need?

For school writing, one introduction, two or three body paragraphs and one conclusion are enough. Each body paragraph develops a single idea with an example.

Can I use je in a French essay?

Use it sparingly. Many essays prefer nous in the plan announcement or an impersonal form like on peut penser que. Personal opinion should be supported by reasons.

How do I announce the plan?

Use the future tense with ordered markers: Nous verrons d'abord..., puis nous examinerons... Keep it to one or two sentences.

Which connectors show contrast?

Cependant, pourtant, en revanche and mais mark an opposition. Use them between sentences or paragraphs, not at random.