

Kindly Dr. Powell's guide to French

I. Vowels

All French vowels have two pronunciations: one *regular* and one *nasal*.

Final “M” and “N” cause the preceding vowel to change its sound (the consonants are **Absolument SILENT!**).

A is pronounced as a slightly brighter “ah” than in the word “father.”
(not “ae” (cat), however)

AN, AEN, AON are all nasal “ah.”

AU, EAU are pronounced as closed “o.”

E is pronounced as a closed “e” when accented acute [é], in verbs “er,” in word “et.”

E and EI are pronounced “eh” when accented grave [è] or circumflex [ê], when followed by a consonant in the same syllable, in monosyllables “les,” “mes,” “ses,” “est,” etc.

E is a “schwa” [neutral] sound when ending a syllable, in final “es,” in verb “ent” ending. The lips must be forward and rounded for the French schwa.

EN and EAN are pronounced nasal “ah.” (Same sound as “an”—go figure . . .)

EU and OEU are pronounced as German “ö” (lips shape “O” but place tongue as for “ee”).

I, Î and Y are pronounced “ee,” as in “feet.” [Never as “I” in “fit.”]

IN, IEN, EIN, AIN are nasal “eh.”

O can be closed or open. It is closed when it has a circumflex [ô], when it’s followed by a silent, final consonant, when followed by a voiced “s” [z]. Otherwise it is open.

ON is pronounced closed, nasal “oh.”

OU, OI, OY produce a glide ([w])—start on “oo” and move to the next sounded vowel; “oui” = oo-ee).

U is pronounced “ü” as in German u-umlaut (shape lips in “oo” but place tongue as for “ee”). It is never “oo” (moon) or “U” (foot).

UI is a glide (think of “y” in English “yes”—UI begins with French ü and moves to “ee”).

UN and EUN are pronounced nasal “ö.” [see sound for EU, above]

II. Consonants

French consonants are pronounced more gently than English consonants.

The following consonants are normally silent at the end of words:

D, G, M, N, P, S, T, S, Z

B [final] is silent when preceded by a nasal vowel; otherwise it is sounded.

C [final] is silent when preceded by a nasal vowel; otherwise it is sounded (with minor exceptions).



L [final] is usually silent when preceded by “I”; otherwise it is sounded.

H is silent. B, P, D, T are pronounced as in Latin.

G is hard when followed by “A,” “O,” “U,” and any consonant. It is soft when followed by “E,” “I,” or “Y.” (Think of the English word “garage”—the first g is hard, the second is soft.)

C is hard when followed by “A,” “O,” “U,” and any consonant. It is soft when followed by “E,” “I,” or “Y.” (Hard c is a “K” sound, soft c is an “S.” Ç is also an “S.”)

CH is pronounced “sh” as in “shoot.”

R is flipped—never use an American “arrrr.” Do not use the uvular R in sung French.

S is voiced [pronounced “z”] between vowels (“intervocalic”), otherwise it is unvoiced [“S”].