

Why Study French?

With French, you can ...

1. Communicate with French speakers around the world.

- French is spoken by over 300 million people on 5 continents as a first or second language.
- French is the only language with English taught as a foreign language in every country.
- French has the status of official language in 32 countries and governments world-wide.
- About 2 million people in the US speak French or French Creole in the home.
- 9.6 million people speak French in Canada, where French is one of two official languages.
- Six million people in America speak French fluently as a second or foreign language. (Some estimate this number to be as high as 11 million people.)
- New York, California, Texas, and Florida have joined Louisiana, Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire as the main centers of French in the US.
- French is among the top five languages in terms of number of web pages used on the Internet.

2. Boost your academic skills.

- The richest source of vocabulary in English derives, not directly from Latin, but from French.
- Since at least one out of three words in English has been borrowed from French, students studying French will improve their scores on comprehension of reading texts and vocabulary on standardized tests, such as SAT, ACT, GRE, and LSAT.
- French has been valued for its words with precise definitions. It was this reason that the founding member countries of the United Nations found it useful to work both in English and in French.
- Knowledge of French, with its imbedded Cartesian logic, can improve creative and critical thinking and problem solving in English speakers. It also stimulates brain function and memory.
- Knowing French enriches language usage in English in many domains, e.g., legal, administrative, political, architectural, artistic, culinary, aeronautical, and engineering terms.

3. Become proficient more quickly than with most world languages.

- French is among the languages that require the least amount of instructional hours in order for an English speaker to reach a high level of speaking proficiency, according to the Defense Language Institute.
- It requires approximately 720 hours (5 contact hours a day) for a mature learner to reach an advanced level of speaking proficiency in French; whereas, after 1,000 hours a student of Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, or Korean may only reach a low level of speaking proficiency.
- Having studied French, the learner can more easily develop proficiency in other languages.
- French is a natural choice for speakers of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese because of their common roots in Latin.

4. Increase options for undergraduate and graduate studies.

- Many students of French opt to complement or complete their studies in a variety of disciplines in a French-speaking country.
- Researchers, particularly in science, technology, medicine, business, and history, have an edge on their competitors when they can read studies in the original language, i.e., French, without having to wait for a translation. Not all research is translated into English.
- Most graduate schools require knowledge of at least one foreign language, and French is a popular choice for many fields of study.
- The *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* networks 630 French-language universities and more than 350 French faculties worldwide.

5. Connect your future to cutting-edge fields in science and technology.

- French-speaking countries have been at the forefront of medical research in field such as, HIV virus research, medical genetics (the Human Genome Project), reconstructive surgery, and gene editing (CRISPR technology).
- French-speaking countries are on the cutting edge of scientific discoveries and technological innovations: for example, nanotechnology, nuclear energy, voice compression, fiber optics, microchips, video gaming, commercial satellites, aerospace technology, and high-speed rail services.

6. Invest in your career.

- French speakers are in demand in banking and finance, international market analysis, diplomacy, hotel management, international trade, journalism and media, aviation, national security, education, translation and interpretation, health care, customer service, tourism, and law enforcement.
- Knowing French can help one gain a valuable understanding of cultural and business practices in other places.
- Knowing French can be a plus in getting a job or advancing in one's field.
- French can provide opportunities for networking globally.
- Well-known French-owned companies in the US include Michelin, L'Oréal, BiC, Atari, Louis Dreyfus Property Group, and Air Liquide.
- French is an official language of our largest bilateral trading partner, Canada. Quebec alone is the 6th largest trading partner of the US.
- The US is the leading investor in France. Over 3,700 American companies operate in France.
- France is the fifth largest investor in the US.
- Among foreign countries doing business in the US, France employs the 3rd largest number of Americans.
- France is the world's 7th largest economy and Europe's 2nd largest market.

7. Enjoy special leisure-time activities.

- In the US, half of the foreign films watched and 30% of the foreign books read are in French.
- French and Quebec films have experienced international recognition and are shown in the US. France is a top producer of films (500 films a year).
- French is always an official language used to announce events and winners at the Olympic Games.
- Sports enthusiasts can follow their favorite events and athletes in a number of sports popular in the French-speaking world. Examples are:
 - cycling in the Tour de France and Paris-Brest-Paris;
 - tennis in the French Open;
 - horseracing at Longchamps
 - motorcycle racing and Formula 1 automobile racing, 24 Heures du Mans;
 - Formula 1 automobile racing, Monaco's Grand Prix;
 - hockey matches against Canadian teams.

8. Benefit more from travel experiences.

- French is an influential language spoken and understood in this hemisphere. Over 33 million people in the Americas know French. Some destinations include Quebec, New Brunswick, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, St. Martin, French Guyana, Maine, and Louisiana.
- Most major American cities, including New York, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston, have an active French community, which organizes numerous Francophone and Francophile programs and events. The largest French cultural network, the Federation of the Alliances Françaises, has 130 active chapters in the US and Puerto Rico. (There are over 1,135 chapters found in 138 countries around the world.)
- Every continent offers French-speaking destinations, which are enjoyed more when the traveler can interact with the local residents in their language.
- France is the most visited country in the world, with over 100 million tourists each year.

9. Appreciate Francophone contributions to world culture.

- The impact of French speakers on literature, philosophy, and the arts (music, painting, sculpture, film, photography, theatre, dance, cuisine, fashion, and architecture) is particularly noteworthy. A small sample includes
 - Literature: Albert Camus (France), Antonine Maillet (New Brunswick), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Jean-Marie Le Clézio (France)
 - Philosophy: Jean-Paul Sartre (France), Simone de Beauvoir (France), Ferdinand de Saussure (Switzerland); Michel Foucault (France), Jacques Derrida (Algeria/France)
 - Comics: Tintin (Hergé, Belgium), Astérix (René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, France)
 - Painting: René Magritte (Belgium), Pierre Auguste Renoir (France)
 - Sculpture: Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel (France), Yves Trudeau (Quebec)
 - Film: François Truffaut (*La Nuit américaine (Day for Night)* France), Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (*La Promesse*, Belgium) ; Denys Arcand (*Les Invasions barbares*, Quebec) ; Jean-Pierre Jeunet (*Amélie*, France)
 - Photography: Robert Doisneau (France), Léonard Misonne (Belgium)
 - Theatre: *Le Médecin malgré lui (The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, Molière, France); *Comme Deux Frères, (Like Two Brothers*, Maryse Condé, Guadeloupe)
 - Musical Theatre: *Les Misérables*, (Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, France), *Notre Dame de Paris* (Richard Cocciante and Luc Plamondon, Quebec)
 - Vocal music: Jean-Jacques Goldman (France), Natalie Dessay (France), BeauSoleil (USA), Céline Dion (Quebec), Isabelle Boulay (Quebec) ; Les Cowboys Fringants (Quebec)
 - Dance: Ballet Folklorique d'Haïti, Le Ballet Jazz de Montréal, Béjart Ballet Lausanne (Maurice Béjart (France/Switzerland)

- Cuisine: Normand Laprise (Quebec), Paul Bocuse (France)
 - Fashion: Jean-Paul Gautier (France), Jean-Claude Poitras (Quebec)
 - Architecture: Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, Le Corbusier (Switzerland/France), Gustave Eiffel (France)
- American history is replete with allusions to the presence of the French and French-Canadians on this continent and across our country. These references to people and events have been imbedded in the local, regional, and national culture of the US.
 - The French came first to the New World as explorers in the 16th century. Later, in the 17th and 18th centuries, they undertook trading with Native Americans *as coureurs des bois* (runners of the woods) and *voyageurs* (participants in the fur trade). The names of Champlain, Cartier, La Salle, Marquette, and Jolliet (a French-Canadian trader) are readily identified with the period of exploration of North America. The French established successful settlements in North America (New France) and the Caribbean, and added to the cultural life of the American colonies as they evolved in the 17th and 18th centuries. Many U.S. towns and geographical features have names that recall the French presence: Vincennes, Indiana; LaCrosse, Wisconsin; Mille Lacs Lake, Minnesota; Ste. Genevieve and St. Louis, Missouri, for example.
 - Known as *le Grand Dérangement* or *Great Expulsion* of the Acadians from Nova Scotia by the British in 1755, the deportation of the French-Canadian population brought many refugees to New England and to the Louisiana Territory.
 - The American Revolution is also remembered for the contributions and military exploits of the French, such as Lafayette, Fleury, Rochambeau, and De Grasse.

10. Understand a variety of world perspectives.

- French is spoken in more than 56 countries in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.
- Knowing French enables one to understand and appreciate cultural diversity, which will not only enhance one's competitive advantage abroad and help maintain political and security interests, but also promote a better understanding of cultural diversity within the US.
- With a knowledge of French, one will be able to work toward global consensus and peace and participate in humanitarian efforts, since French is an official language or a working language in many international agencies and organizations, including:

African Union
 Agence Universitaire de la
 Francophonie
 Amnesty International
 Council of Europe

Doctors without Borders
 European Court of Justice
 European Tribunal of First
 Instance
 European Union

French Advocacy Resource Bank
 American Association of Teachers of French

International Labor Bureau
International Olympic Committee
International Red Cross
Interpol
NATO
Organisation Internationale de la
Francophonie
Organization for Economic
Cooperation and Development

Press Room at the European
Commission
UNESCO
Union of International
Associations
United Nations
Universal Postal Union
World Health Organization

Bibliography

- Barlow, Julie and Nadeau, Jean-Benoît. “40 Surprising Facts about French: From *The Story of French*,” *French Advocacy Resource Bank*. Carbondale, IL: American Association of Teachers of French, 2009.
- Bullock, Barbara, “The Ease and Challenges for an English Speaker Learning French,” *French Advocacy Resource Bank*. Carbondale, IL: American Association of Teachers of French, 2009.
- Business France. Annual Report: Foreign Investment in France 2025.
<https://en.media.businessfrance.fr/download-pdf/697a7171cd023f6d260a0c3e>
- Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques. <http://www.francophoniedesameriques.com/> .
- The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center Catalog*, Chapter 2, 2025-26.
https://www.dliflc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2025-26_General_Catalog.pdf
- Eddy, P. A. *The effect of foreign language study in high school on verbal ability as measured by the scholastic aptitude test-verbal, final report*. U.S.; District of Columbia, from ERIC database, 1981.
- Francophonie*. Lyon: Collection du Moutard, 2009.
- French Heritage Corridor, <https://frenchheritagecorridor.org>.
- “French Major,” The Princeton Review.
<http://www.princetonreview.com/Majors.aspx?page=1&cip=160901>
- “Top 10 Languages,” Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics.
<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>

Invest in France – <https://www.businessfrance.fr/en> ; <https://www.businessfrance.fr/en/our-expertise/invest-in-france> ; <https://en.media.businessfrance.fr/news/annual-report-2025-foreign-investment-in-france-92920-aba4d.html>

La langue française dans le monde. Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Service de communication de la Francophonie, 2022. <https://www.francophonie.org/la-langue-francaise-dans-le-monde-305>

Nadeau, Jean-Benoît and Barlow, Julie. “Modern Quebec: Cutting Edge Culture in French,” *French Language Advocacy Kit: The World Speaks French* (CD). Carbondale, IL: American Association of Teachers of French: 2009.

Nadeau, Jean-Benoît. *Le Français : Autre Langue de mondialisation et où va le français*, Speech presented at the Alliance Française de Chicago, March 12, 2008.

Nadeau, Jean-Benoît and Barlow, Julie. *The Story of French*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006.

Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. <http://www.francophonie.org/oif/>

Timpe, E. “The effect of foreign language study on ACT scores.” *ADFL Bulletin*, 11 (2), 10-11, 1979.

University of Virginia Department of French. <https://french.as.virginia.edu/why-study-french>

U.S. Census. <http://www.census.gov/>

U.S. Embassy and Consulates in France. <https://fr.usembassy.gov/business/#overview>