

**F328 French Phonology ~ French Orthography**  
 sound system VS spelling conventions

Close *e* Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u> [e]	<u>in spelling by:</u> é e + final silent consonant (not a t) + s of plural -ai in verb endings -ai in <i>sais, vais, gai, gaieté</i> , etc.	<u>as in:</u> <i>pré</i> <i>chez, et, clefs, pieds</i> <i>j'ai, je serai, je portai</i>
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- *bébé, préféré, célébré, nez, sciez, gai, été, clefs, créer, j'ai, irai, répétais, quai, thé*

Open *e* Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u> [ɛ]	<u>in spelling by:</u> è ê ë e + 2 consonants e + final sounded consonant <i>ai</i> (except in verb endings), <i>aî</i> <i>ei</i>	<u>as in:</u> <i>père</i> <i>rêve</i> <i>Noël</i> <i>ferme</i> <i>sel</i> <i>plaine, maître</i> <i>reine</i>
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- *peine, sel, chêne, laine, tête, terre, bel, règle, serre, jette, Raphaël, perle, peine, laine*

Open *e* (yet somewhat closed) Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u> [ɛ̃]	<u>in spelling by:</u> e + final silent t <i>ay</i> + consonant <i>ay</i> + vowel <i>ey</i> final e in <i>ey</i> + vowel e in <i>eil, eill</i> + vowel ê + silent consonant	<u>as in:</u> <i>jet</i> <i>Raymond</i> <i>ayons</i> <i>Jersey</i> <i>asseyez</i> <i>soleil, veille</i> <i>forêt</i>
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- *payez, sommeil, réveil, objet, sujet, éveil, jockey*

Close **a** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[a]

in spelling by:

*a* final

*a* + final silent consonant(s)

*a* in most nonfinal syllables

*a* in all closed syllables

*a* in endings *-ail, -aille*

*à*

*â* in verb endings

*a* in adverbial ending *-amment*

*e* in adverbial ending

*e* in words like:

*e, ê* in a few words like:

*i, î, y* in *-oi, -oî, -oy*, not

preceded by *r, o* being

pronounced [wa]

as in:

*sa, ma, la*

*chat, chats, rats*

*canalisé, parla*

*patte, natte*

*bail, travaille*

*là*

*portâmes, donnât*

*constamment*

*prudemment*

*femme, solennel*

*couenne, moelle, poêl*

*moi, boîte,*

*oyons, loi, soi,*

*ployez, croît*

- *la, ta, chat, rat, paragraphe, caractère, rage, flatte, femme, à, dame, tabac, prêtâmes, soif, poêle, moelle, foi, boîte, oie, papa, récemment, constamment, aboi, cloison, travail, taille, soie, noyer, alla, Anne*

Open **a** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ɑ]

in spelling by:

*a* + final consonants either

silent or sounded, except in *bras*

*â* (except in verb endings)

*a* in endings *-asse, -ation,*

*-assion, -ason, -azon*

*a* in endings *-abre, -adre,*

*-acle, -able* (not suffix), *-avre*

*i* in *-roi, roi* (many exceptions)

*y* in *-roy* (many exceptions)

as in:

*matelas, pas, hélas*

*pâle, mâle*

*passe, nation,*

*passion, gazon*

*sabre, cadre, oracle*

*sable, havre*

*trois, croître*

*croyez*

- *gâteau, sable, bois, âne, passe, gaze, débacle, cas, chasse, cable, climat, gras, ration, froideur, lilas, gaz, domination, poids, mois*

Close **o** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[o]	<i>o</i> final in sound	<i>numéro, dos</i>
	<i>ô</i>	<i>pôle, rôle</i>
	<i>o</i> + <i>s</i> + vowel	<i>rose, pose</i>
	<i>o</i> in ending <i>-otion</i>	<i>potion</i>
	<i>o</i> sometimes in endings <i>-ome, -one</i>	<i>zone</i>
	<i>o</i> in:	<i>grosse, fosse</i>
	<i>au, eau</i> , if not followed by <i>r</i> (exception <i>Paul</i> )	<i>caution, autant, beau</i>

- *drôle, épauLe, zone, émotion, arôme, diplômé, saut, eau, aube, domino, héros, auberge, galops, vôtre, lotion, clos, pot, sabot, rôder, bravo*

Open **o** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[ɔ]	<i>o</i> in closed syllables	<i>porte, poste</i>
	<i>o</i> in nonfinal open syllables	<i>voler, propre</i>
	<i>au</i> + <i>r</i>	<i>aura, aurore</i>
	<i>au</i> in:	<i>Paul</i>
	<i>u</i> in the Latin ending <i>-um</i>	<i>album, maximum</i>
	<i>oo</i> in:	<i>alcool</i>

- *pomme, fort, donne, sotte, auréole, colosse, aurons, colonel, minimum, rhum, lors, opium, soleil, nord, oracle, héroïque, Laure, alcoolique*

Close **ou** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[u]	<i>ou</i>	<i>sou, vous, roue, soucoupe</i>
	<i>où</i>	<i>où</i>
	<i>oû</i>	<i>goût, voûte</i>
	<i>aoû</i>	<i>août</i>

- *tout, partout, tous, bout, bouche, loup, glouglou, où, nous, coucou, bourré*

Schwa Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[ə]	<i>e</i> unaccented: phrase-initial or surrounded by 3 sounded consonants	<i>petit, je crois</i> <i>mercredi, prenez</i>
	<i>e</i> before <i>ri</i> [rj] and <i>li</i> [lj]	<i>de rien, appelez</i>
	<i>e</i> before noun endings <i>-lier, -nier</i>	<i>chandelier, batelier, denier</i>
	<i>e</i> before an aspirate <i>h</i>	<i>le huit, une haute</i>
	<i>e</i> before <i>un</i> and <i>onze</i> , used as nouns	<i>le un, le onze</i>
	<i>e</i> in monosyllabic words	<i>me, se, le, de</i>
	<i>on</i> (exceptionally)	<i>monsieur</i>
	<i>eu</i> (exceptionally)	<i>peut-être</i>
	<i>ai</i> (exceptionally)	<i>faisons</i>
	<i>e</i> in prefixes <i>des-</i> , <i>res-</i> + <i>s</i>	<i>dessous, dessus, ressentir</i>
	<i>e</i> in:	<i>cresson</i>

- *que, te, le, centenier, le onze mai, le huit juin, ressent, ressort, faiseur, monsieur, appelez, batelier, de rien, peut-être, justement, mercredi, faisant, lestement, ressortir*

French **u** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[y]	<i>u</i>	<i>nu, rude, une</i>
	<i>û</i>	<i>flûte</i>
	<i>ü</i>	<i>Esäu</i>
	<i>eu</i> and <i>eû</i> in past participle, preterite, and imperfect subjunctive of <i>avoir</i>	<i>eu, eus, eûmes,</i> <i>eusse, eussions,</i> <i>eût</i>

- *bu, lu, su, vu, dû, mûr, lune, unité, eussiez, usine, eurent, eûtes, tunique, brûle, issu, tissu, fût, fussent, cruche, bûche*

Close **eu** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ø]

in spelling by:

*eu* or *œu* final

*æ* or *œu* + final silent  
consonants

*eu* in endings *-euse*, *-eute*,  
*-eutre*, and derivatives

*eux* in adjective ending *-eux*

*eu* in a few words like:

*eu* in prefixed *eu-* with or  
without *r* following

*eû*

as in:

*feu*, *voeu*

*peut*, *veux*, *nœud*

*œufs*

*flatteuse*, *émeute*

*neutre*

*orgueilleux*, *ennuyeux*

*jeudi*, *meunier*

*euphonique*,

*Euphrate*, *Europe*

*jeûne*

- *Dieu*, *lieu*, *bleu*, *pieu*, *vœu*, *deux*, *œufs*, *neutre*, *pleutre*, *yeux*, *cieux*, *jeûne*, *meute*, *jeudi*, *eux*, *creux*, *bœufs*, *Eugénie*, *heureux*, *heureuse*

Open **eu** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[œ]

in spelling by:

*eu*, *œu* in closed final  
syllables

*eu*, *œu* in a few nonfinal  
open syllables

*eu* + *il* or *ill*

*æ* + *il* or *ill*

*ue* + *il* or *ill* preceded by *c*  
or *g*

as in:

*peur*, *bœuf*, *cœur*

*œuf*

*veuvage*, *œuvre*

*cerfeuil*, *veille*

*œil*, *œillet*

*écueil*, *cueillir*

*orgueil*

- *orgueilleux*, *chœur*, *cœur*, *heure*, *bœuf*, *écueil*, *fleuve*, *peuvent*, *sœur*, *gueule*, *veuvage*, *fureur*, *œuvre*, *meurtre*, *feuille*, *veuillez*, *meurt*, *œil*, *jeunesse*, *œillet*, *beurrer*, *épeuré*, *jeune*

Nasal **an, en** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ã]

in spelling by:

*am, an* final  
*am, an, em, en* + final silent  
 consonants  
*am, an, em, en* + sounded  
 consonant other than *m* or *n*

as in:

*Adam, an, ban*  
*champs, chant,*  
*temps, dent*  
*camper, cantique,*  
*ensemble*

- *venge, plan, Adam, sang, vent, semble, rend, gens, pendant, quand, attend, tante, planche, lampe, remplit, tremble, commande, s'en allant, embaumant, enfant*

Nasal **in** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ɛ̃]

in spelling by:

*im, in, yn* + consonant other  
 than *m* or *n*  
*in, ym* final  
*aim, ain, eim, ein* final or  
 + consonants  
*en* in endings *-ien, -yen,*  
*-éen*  
*en* in *-ien* + consonant  
*en* in some foreign words  
  
*in* in *-oin* (*o* sounded [w])

as in:

*importe, intime,*  
*synthèse*  
*vin, Rhin, thym*  
*paimpolois*  
*faim, pain, Rheims, rein*  
*italien, bien,*  
*citoyen, européen*  
*viens, tient*  
*appendice, agenda,*  
*Pennsylvanie*  
*loin, coin*

- *larynx, impossible, Paimpol, timbre, prince, thym, fin, nymphe, ceint, saint, sein, sain, lien, vaurien, tient, vient, européen, méditerranéen, soin, poing, moins, lointain, agenda, benjoin*

Nasal **on** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[ $\tilde{\text{o}}$ ]	<i>om, on</i> final or + consonant <i>um, un</i> in some foreign words	<i>nom, non, comte, conte, lumbago, secundo</i>

- *plomb, on, prompte, don, rions, tomber, dom, pompe, impromptu, vont, rond, de profundis, long, racontez, compte, conte, comte*

Nasal **un** Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[ $\tilde{\text{œ}}$ ]	<i>um</i> final or + consonants & <i>un</i> final or + consonants (silent or sounded) <i>eun</i> in a few words	<i>parfum, parfums, humble un, brun, emprunt, emprunter à jeun, Meung</i>

- *humble, Humbert, aucun, emprunt, tribun, alun, chacun, opportun, Verdun, Dunkerque, commun, bruns, parfum, défunt, lundi, importun*

Semiconsonant **i, y** “yod” Sound. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[j]	<i>i, y, or ĩ</i> when initial <i>i</i> in consonant + <i>i</i> + vowel <i>ĩ, y</i> intervocalic <i>ill</i> intervocalic <i>ill</i> when final in sound but but not in spelling <i>il</i> final in sound and spelling	<i>ïonique, yeux, iambe bien, lien, sien païen, payons, soyez bâïller, taïller travaille, taille bail, éveïl</i>

- *ïota, yacht, yeux, aïeux, hier, viande, bail, brille, fiacre, balaye, paye, cercueil, moitié, sien, iambe, païen, croyez, travail, soleil, vieïl, brouillard, sciure, piège*

NOTE: *Ii, yi, and ill* are sounded [ij] in *priions, criions, fille, bille*. The *illi* and *y* in words like *saïllir, pays*, and derivatives also have [j]; *abbaye*, however, is sounded [ei], that is, no yod [j].

Semiconsonant **ou** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[w]

in spelling by:

*ou* + vowel (stressed)

*o* in *oi, oî, oin*

*o* in *oê, oe, oy*

*u* in *-gua, -qua* of some foreign words

as in:

*oui, Louis*

*trois, boîte, soie, soin*

*poêle, moelle, aboyer, moyen*

*lingual, aquatique,*

*quadrupède*

- *ouï, oui, ouest, voile, bois, coin, foyer, soir, loyaux, couard, ouate, voici, moelle, poêle, couenne, ouaille, lingual, enfoui, quoi, Louis, nouer, souhait*

Semiconsonant **u** Sound. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ʏ]

in spelling by:

*u* + vowel

as in:

*huile, lui, duel, nuée, suave,*

*nuée, suer*

The spelling *uy* + yod is represented by the phonetic notation [ʏij], as in *fuyons* [fʏijɔ̃].

- *pluie, nuire, salua, autrui, nuage, tortueux, linguiste, nuée, situé, puits, suède, écuyer, suite, rituel, ensuite, ambiguïté, estuaire, fuir, tuer*

NOTE: In a word formed by consonant + *r* or *l* + *ou*, *ou* must not be considered a semiconsonant, but a simple vowel: *prou-esse* [pru.ɛs], *clou-age* [klu.ɑʒ]. When preceded by *bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gl, gr, pl, pr, tr,* or *vr,* etc., belonging to the same syllable, *u* + any vowel, excepting *i*, form two distinct syllables: *cru-el, cru-auté, monstreu-eux,* but *fruit, truite, bruit.*

As a general rule, *qu* and *gu* are pronounced [k] and [g], respectively: *qui* [ki], *que* [kə], *guêpe* [gɛp], *guitare* [gitar]. Such words as *aiguiser* and its derivatives are pronounced either [e.gʏi.ze] or [e.gi.ze].



Sound **c**. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[k]	<i>c + a, o, or u</i> <i>cc + a, o, or u</i> <i>c or cc + l, r</i> <i>qu, cqu + a, o, i, or e</i> (Exceptions, e.g. <i>quarz</i> [kwarts]) <i>ch</i> in some foreign words <i>ch + r</i> in foreign words <i>k</i> in some foreign words and their derivatives <i>g</i> in liaison	<i>car, cor, cure</i> <i>occasion, accord</i> <i>acclamer, clair, accru</i> <i>quant, qu'on, qui, que, acquis</i>  <i>écho</i> <i>chrétien</i> <i>kilo</i>  <i>sang impur</i>

- *canne, corps, quand, court, occuper, éclairer, crampe, cholérique, kilomètre, acquièrent, occlusion, qui, qu'on, long espoir*

Sound **t**. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[t]	<i>t</i> <i>tt</i> <i>th</i> <i>d</i> in liaison	<i>tête, bête, tire</i> <i>jette, mettent</i> <i>thé, synthèse</i> <i>quand il, grand âge</i>

- *ton, tel, tout, tu, terre, tertre, tumeur, tuer, thermomètre, thème, battent, bâtir, quand on, grand ami*

Sound **p**. It is represented:

<u>in phonetics by:</u>	<u>in spelling by:</u>	<u>as in:</u>
[p]	<i>p</i> <i>pp</i> <i>b</i> before <i>s</i> or <i>t</i> or <i>r</i>	<i>père, pire, port, pur</i> <i>appartenir, appel</i> <i>absoudre, obtenir</i>

- *parer, parier, papier, portier, apporter, supprimer, pressentir, proposer, opposer, poire, pis, observer, obscur, obstacle, abricot*

Sound **ch**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ʃ]

in spelling by:

*ch*

*sch* in foreign words

as in:

*chercher, champs,*

*bouche, souche*

*schisme, schéma*

- *chambre, chère, couche, chien, chemin, chuchoter, sache, cache, chiffon, chute, choc, schismatique, chinois*

Sound **j**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ʒ]

in spelling by:

*j* before *a, e, i, o, u*

*g* before *e, i, y*

as in:

*jamais, je, j'imagine, joli,*

*gèle, gilet, page, gymnase*

- *janvier, gémir, girafe, jeudi, rage, neige, geindre, jumeaux, jour, gypseux, joie, juste*

Sound **s**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[s]

in spelling by:

*s* initial

*-ss-* intervocalic

*c* before *e, i, y*

*ç*

*sc* before *i, y, e*

*x* in numbers and *Bruxelles*

as in:

*série, sont, su*

*tasse, dessert*

*ceci, ici, cycle*

*ça, garçon, reçu*

*scier, scythe, scène*

*dix, six, soixante*

- *sans, sourd, sur, sortie, transiger, fils, mars, gratis, sens, six, soixante, commençons, Bruxelles, poisson, dessert*

Sound **z**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[z]

in spelling by:

*z* initial or medial

*s* intervocalic

*s* in prefixes: *dés-*,

*rés-, més-, trans-, prés-*,

+ vowel

as in:

*zèle, zizanie*

*rose, pose, désert*

*désunion, résister,*

*mésaventure,*

*transit, présumer*

- *zone, gazon, zinc, mise, réservoir, présage, transalpin, bêtise, vise, poison, désert*

Sound **gn**. It is represented:

in phonetics by:

[ɲ]

in spelling by:

*gn*

Exceptions, e.g. *stagnant* [stag nã]

as in:

*campagne, signe*

- *digne, gagne, montagne, craigne, règne, peignent, joigne, cygne, compaignon, campagne, ceignez, signe, signaler, geigne*