

[Home](#)

ThoughtCo.

How to Fake a French Accent

Learn How to Sound French While Speaking English

by **ThoughtCo**

Updated March 11, 2019

We love the beautiful accent that the French have when they speak English, and it can be fun or even useful to imitate it. If you're an actor, comedian, *grand séducteur*, or even if you just have a French-themed [Halloween](#) costume, you can learn how to fake a French accent with this in-depth look at how the French speak English.*

Please note that the [pronunciation](#) explanations are based on American English; some of them won't sound right to British and Australian ears.

**Si vous êtes français, ne m'en voulez pas ! J'ai écrit cet article parce qu'il s'agit d'un sujet intéressant et potentiellement utile. Franchement, j'adore votre langue et j'adore également votre accent quand vous parlez la mienne. Si vous voulez, vous pouvez utiliser ces tuyaux pour réduire les traces de français dans votre anglais. Mais, à mon avis, ce serait dommage.*

French-infused Vowels

Nearly every English vowel is affected by the French accent. French has no diphthongs, so vowels are always shorter than their English counterparts. The long A, O, and U sounds in English, as in *say*, *so*, and *Sue*, are pronounced by French speakers like their similar but un-diphthonged French equivalents, as in the French words *sais*, *seau*, and *sou*. For example, English speakers pronounce *say* as [seɪ], with a diphthong made up of a long "a" sound followed by a sort of "y" sound. But French speakers will say [se] - no diphthong, no "y" sound. (Note that [xxx] indicates [IPA spelling](#).)

English [vowel sounds](#) which do not have close French equivalents are systematically replaced by other sounds:

short A [æ], as in *fat*, is pronounced "ah" as in *father*

long A [eɪ] followed by a consonant, as in *gate*, is usually pronounced like the short e in *get*

ER at the end of a word, as in *water*, is always pronounced *air*

short I [ɪ], as in *sip*, is always pronounced "ee" as in *seep*

long I [aɪ], as in *kite*, tends to be elongated and almost turned into two syllables: [ka it]

short O [ɑ], as in *cot*, is pronounced either "uh" as in *cut*, or "oh" as in *coat*

U [ʊ] in words like *full* is usually pronounced "oo" as in *fool*

Dropped Vowels, Syllabification, and Word Stress

When faking a French accent, you need to pronounce all schwas (unstressed vowels). For *reminder*, native English speakers tend toward "r'mind'r," but French speakers say "ree-ma-ee-n-dair." They will pronounce *amazes* "ah-may-zez," with the final e fully stressed, unlike native speakers who will gloss over it: "amaz's." And the French often emphasize the -ed at the end of a verb, even if that means adding a syllable: *amazed* becomes "ah-may-zed."

Short words that native English speakers tend to skim over or swallow will always be carefully pronounced by French speakers. The latter will say "peanoot boo-tair and jelly," whereas native English speakers opt for *pean't butt'r 'n' jelly*. Likewise, French speakers will usually not make contractions, instead pronouncing every word: "I would go" instead of *I'd go* and "She eez reh-dee" rather than *She's ready*.

Because French has no word stress (all syllables are pronounced with the same emphasis), French speakers have a hard time with stressed syllables in English, and will usually pronounce everything at the **same stress**, like *actually*, which becomes "ahk chew ah lee." Or they might stress the last syllable - particularly in words with more than two: *computer* is often said "com-pu-TAIR."

French-accented Consonants

H is always silent in French, so the French will pronounce *happy* as "appy." Once in a while, they might make a particular effort, usually resulting in an overly forceful H sound - even with words like *hour* and *honest*, in which the H is silent in English.

J is likely to be pronounced "zh" like the G in *massage*.

R will be pronounced either **as in French** or as a tricky sound somewhere between W and L. Interestingly, if a word starting with a vowel has an R in the middle, some French speakers will mistakenly add an (overly forceful) English H in front of it. For example, *arm* might be pronounced "hahrm."

TH's pronunciation will vary, depending on how it's supposed to be pronounced in English:

1. voiced TH [ð] is pronounced Z or DZ: *this* becomes "zees" or "dzees"

2. unvoiced TH [θ] is pronounced S or T: *thin* turns into "seen" or "teen"

Letters that should be silent at the beginning and end of words (**psychology**, **lamb**) are often pronounced.

French-Tinted Grammar

Just as English speakers often have trouble with French possessive adjectives, mistakenly saying things like "*son femme*" for "his wife," French speakers are likely to mix up *his* and *her*, often favoring *his* even for female owners. They also tend to use *his* rather than *its* when talking about inanimate owners, e.g., "This car has 'his' own GPS."

Similarly, since all nouns have a gender in French, native speakers will often refer to inanimate objects as *he* or *she* rather than *it*.

French speakers often use the pronoun *that* for a subject when they mean *it*, as in "that's just a thought" rather than "it's just a thought." And they'll often say *this* instead of *that* in expressions like "I love skiing and boating, things like this" rather than "... things like that."

Certain singulars and plurals are problematic, due to differences in French and English. For example, the French are likely to pluralize *furniture* and *spinach* because the French equivalents are plural: *les meubles*, *les épinards*.

In the present tense, the French rarely remember to conjugate for the third person singular: "he go, she want, it live."

As for the past tense, because spoken French favors the passé composé to the passé simple, the French tend to overuse the former's literal equivalent, the English present perfect: "I have gone to the movies yesterday."

In questions, French speakers tend not to invert the subject and verb, instead asking "where you are going?" and "what your name is?" And they leave out the helping verb *do*: "what mean this word?" or "what this word mean?"

French-flavored Vocabulary

Faux amis are just as tricky for French speakers as they are for English speakers; try saying, as the French often do, "actually" instead of "now," and "nervous" when you mean *énervé*.

You should also throw in occasional French words and phrases, such as:

au contraire - on the contrary

au revoir - good-bye

bien sûr! - of course!

bon appétit - bon appetit, enjoy your meal

bonjour - hello

c'est-à-dire - that is

comment dit-on ___ ? - how do you say ___?

euh - uh, um

je veux dire - I mean

merci - thank you

non - no

oh là là ! - oh dear!

oui - yes

pas possible ! - no way!

s'il vous plaît - please

voilà - there you go

French Faces

And, of course, there's nothing like gestures to make you look more French. We particularly recommend les bises, la moue, the Gallic shrug and délicieux.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-fake-a-french-accent-1368758>