



**Targamh**  
*Art Of Translation*

English ↔ Arabic ↔ French

## French Words and Expressions in English

### Learn the true meanings of French words and expressions commonly used in English

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#### French Words in English

Over the years, the English language has borrowed a great number of French words and expressions. Some of this vocabulary has been so completely absorbed by English that speakers might not realize its origins. Other words and expressions have retained their "Frenchness" - a certain *je ne sais quoi* which speakers tend to be much more aware of (although this awareness does not usually extend to actually pronouncing the word in French). The following is a list of French words and expressions which are commonly used in English.

French	Literal meaning	Notes
<b>adieu</b>	until God	Used like "farewell": when you don't expect to see the person again until God (when you die and go to Heaven)
<b>agent provocateur</b>	provocative agent	A person who attempts to provoke suspected individuals or groups into committing unlawful acts
<b>aide-de-camp</b>	camp assistant	A military officer who serves as a personal assistant to a higher-ranking officer
<b>aide-mémoire</b>	memory aid	1. Position paper 2. Something that acts as an aid to memory, such as crib notes or a mnemonic devices
<b>à la carte</b>	on the menu*	French restaurants usually offer a <i>menu</i> with choices for each of the several courses at a fixed price). If you want something else (a side order), you order from the <i>carte</i> . *Note that <i>menu</i> is in French and English.

<b>à la mode</b>	in fashion, style	In English, this means "with ice cream" - apparently someone decided that having ice cream on pie was the fashionable way to eat it.
<b>amour-propre</b>	self love	Self respect
<b>apéritif</b>	cocktail	From Latin, "to open"
<b>après-ski</b>	after skiing	The French term actually refers to snow boots, but the literal translation of the term is what is meant in English, as in "après-ski" social events.
<b>à propos (de)</b>	on the subject of	<p>In French, <i>à propos</i> must be followed by the preposition <i>de</i>. In English, there are four ways to use <i>apropos</i> (we leave out the accent and the space):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adjective - <i>appropriate, to the point</i>: "That's true, but it's not apropos."</li> <li>2. Adverb - <i>at an appropriate time, opportunely</i>: "Fortunately, he arrived apropos."</li> <li>3. Adverb/Interjection - <i>by the way, incidentally</i>: "Apropos, what happened yesterday?"</li> <li>4. Preposition (may or may not be followed by <i>of</i>) - <i>with regard to, speaking of</i>: "Apropos our meeting, I'll be late"; "He told a funny story apropos of the new president."</li> </ol>
<b>art déco</b>	decorative art	Short for <i>art décoratif</i>
<b>attaché</b>	attached	A person assigned to a diplomatic post
<b>au fait</b>	conversant, informed	<i>Au fait</i> is used in British English to mean "familiar" or "conversant": She's not really <i>au fait</i> with my ideas.
<b>au gratin</b>	with gratings	In French, <i>au gratin</i> refers to anything that is grated and put on top of a dish, like breadcrumbs or cheese. In English, <i>au gratin</i> means "with cheese."
<b>au jus</b>	in the juice	Served with the meat's natural juices.
<b>au naturel</b>	in reality, unseasoned	In this case <i>naturel</i> is a semi-false cognate. In French, <i>au naturel</i> can mean either "in reality" or the literal meaning of "unseasoned" (in cooking). In English, we picked up the latter, less common usage and use it figuratively, to mean natural,

untouched, pure, real.

<b>au pair</b>	at par	A person who works for a family (cleaning and/or teaching the children) in exchange for room and board
<b>avant-garde</b>	before guard	Innovative, especially in the arts
<b>avoirdufois</b>	goods of weight	Originally spelled <i>averdepois</i>
<b>bête noire</b>	black beast	Similar to a pet peeve: something that is particularly distasteful or difficult and to be avoided.
<b>billet-doux</b>	sweet note	Love letter
<b>blond blonde</b>	fair-haired	This is the only adjective in English which agrees in gender with the person it modifies: <i>blond</i> is for a man and <i>blonde</i> for a woman. Note that these can also be nouns.
<b>bon appétit</b>	good appetite	The closest English equivalent is "Enjoy your meal."
<b>bon vivant</b>	good "liver"	Someone who lives well, who knows how to enjoy life.
<b>bon voyage</b>	good trip	English has "Have a good trip," but <i>Bon voyage</i> is more elegant.
<b>brunette</b>	small, dark-haired female	The French word <i>brun</i> , dark-haired, is what English really means by "brunette." The <i>-ette</i> suffix indicates that the subject is small and female.
<b>carte blanche</b>	blank card	Free hand, ability to do whatever you want/need
<b>cerise</b>	cherry	The French word for the fruit gives us the English word for the color.
<b>c'est la vie</b>	that's life	Same meaning and usage in both languages
<b>chaise longue</b>	long chair	In English, this is often mistakenly written as "chaise lounge" - which actually makes perfect sense.
<b>chargé d'affaires</b>	charged with business	A substitute or replacement diplomat

<b>cheval-de-frise</b>	Frisian horse	Barbed wire, spikes, or broken glass attached to wood or masonry and used to block access
<b>cheval glace</b>	horse mirror	A long mirror set into a moveable frame
<b>chic</b>	stylish	<i>Chic</i> sounds more <i>chic</i> than "stylish."
<b>cinéma vérité</b>	cinema truth	Unbiased, realistic documentary filmmaking
<b>coup de grâce</b>	mercy blow	Deathblow, final blow, decisive stroke
<b>coup d'état</b>	state blow	Overthrow of the government
<b>crème brûlée</b>	burnt cream	Baked custard with carmelized crust
<b>crème caramel</b>	caramel cream	Synonym of flan - custard lined with caramel
<b>crème de cacao</b>	cream of cacao	Chocolate-flavored liqueur
<b>crème de la crème</b>	cream of the cream	Synonymous with the English expression "cream of the crop" - refers to the best of the best.
<b>crème de menthe</b>	cream of mint	Mint-flavored liqueur
<b>crème fraîche</b>	fresh cream	This is a funny term. Despite its meaning, <i>crème fraîche</i> is in fact slightly fermented, thickened cream.
<b>crêpe de Chine</b>	Chinese crepe	Type of silk
<b>critique</b>	critical, judgment	Critique is an adjective and noun in French, but a noun and verb in English; it refers to a critical review of something or the act of performing such a review.
<b>cuisine</b>	kitchen, food style	In English, <i>cuisine</i> refers only to a particular type of food/cooking, such as French cuisine, Southern cuisine, etc.
<b>cul-de-sac</b>	bottom of the bag	Dead-end street

<b>debutante</b>	beginner	In French, <i>débutante</i> is the feminine form of <i>débutant</i> - beginner (noun) or beginning (adj). In both languages, it also refers to a young girl making her formal debut into society. Interestingly, this usage is not original in French; it was adopted back from English.
<b>décolletage</b> <b>décolleté</b>	low neckline lowered neckline	The first is a noun, the second an adjective, but both refer to low necklines on women's clothing.
<b>dégustation</b>	tasting	The French word simply refers to the act of tasting, while in English "degustation" is used for a tasting event or party, as in wine or cheese tasting.
<b>déjà vu</b>	already seen	This is a grammatical structure in French, as in "Je l'ai déjà vu" => I've already seen it. It can also disparage a style or technique that has already been done, as in "Son style est déjà vu" => His style is not original. In English, <i>déjà vu</i> refers to the scientific phenomenon of feeling like you have already seen or done something when you're sure that you haven't.
<b>demimonde</b>	half world	1. A marginal or disrespectful group 2. Prostitutes and/or kept women
<b>demitasse</b>	half cup	Refers to a small cup of espresso or other strong coffee.
<b>démodé</b>	out of fashion	Same meaning in both languages: outmoded, out of fashion
<b>de rigueur</b>	of rigueur	Socially or culturally obligatory
<b>dernier cri</b>	last cry	The newest fashion or trend
<b>de trop</b>	of too much	Excessive, superfluous
<b>double entendre</b>	double hearing	A word play or pun. For example, you're looking at a field of sheep and you say "How are you (ewe)?"
<b>du jour</b>	of the day	"Soup <i>du jour</i> " is nothing more than an elegant-sounding version of "soup of the day."
<b>eau de cologne</b>	water from Cologne	This is often cut down to simply "cologne" in English. Cologne, which is the French/English name for the German city Köln, is capitalized in the French expression.

<b>eau de toilette</b>	toilet water	Toilet here does not refer to a commode - see <i>toilette</i> , below. <i>Eau de toilette</i> is a very weak perfume.
<b>en banc</b>	on the bench	Legal: indicates that the entire membership of a court is in session.
<b>en bloc</b>	in a block	In a group, all together
<b>encore</b>	again	A simple adverb in French, "encore" in English refers to an additional performance, usually requested with audience applause.
<b>enfant terrible</b>	terrible child	Refers to a troublesome or embarrassing person within a group (of artists, thinkers, etc).
<b>en garde</b>	on guard	Warning that one should be on his/her guard, ready for an attack (originally in fencing).
<b>en masse</b>	in mass	In a group, all together
<b>en route</b>	on route	On the way
<b>en suite</b>	in sequence	Part of a set, together
<b>esprit de corps</b>	group spirit	Similar to team spirit or morale
<b>fait accompli</b>	done deed	<i>Fait accompli</i> seems more fatalistic to me than done deed, which is so factual.
<b>faux</b>	false, fake	I once saw an ad for "genuine faux pearls." No worries that those pearls might be real, I guess - you were guaranteed fake ones. :-)
<b>faux pas</b>	false step, trip	Something that should not be done, a foolish mistake.
<b>femme fatale</b>	deadly woman	An alluring, mysterious woman who seduces men into compromising situations
<b>fiancé fiancée</b>	engaged person, betrothed	Note that <i>fiancé</i> refers to a man and <i>fiancée</i> to a woman.
<b>film noir</b>	black movie	Black is a literal reference to the stark black-and-white cinematography style, though <i>films noirs</i> tend to be

figuratively dark as well (e.g., morbid, bleak, depressing, etc).

<b>finale</b>	final	In French, this can refer to either the final in sport (e.g., quarter-final, semi-final) or the finale of a play. In English, it can only mean the latter.
<b>fin de siècle</b>	end of the century	Hyphenated in English, <i>fin-de-siècle</i> refers to the end of the 19th century.
<b>fleur-de-lis fleur-de-lys</b>	flower of lily	A type of iris or an emblem in the shape of an iris with three petals.
<b>folie à deux</b>	craziness for two	Mental disorder which occurs simultaneously in two people with a close relationship or association.
<b>force majeure</b>	greater force	Refers to superior/greater force, or to an unexpected or uncontrollable event.
<b>gamine</b>	playful, little girl	Refers to an impish or playful girl/woman.
<b>gauche</b>	left, awkward	Tactless, lacking social grace
<b>genre</b>	type	Used mostly in art and film - "I really like this <i>genre</i> ..."
<b>haute couture</b>	high sewing	High-class, fancy (and expensive) clothing styles
<b>haute cuisine</b>	high cooking	High-class, fancy (and expensive) cooking or food
<b>hors de combat</b>	out of combat	Out of action
<b>hors d'oeuvre</b>	outside of work	An appetizer. <i>Oeuvre</i> here refers to the main work (course), so <i>hors d'oeuvre</i> simply means something besides the main course.
<b>idée fixe</b>	set idea	Fixation, obsession
<b>je ne sais quoi</b>	I don't know what	Used to indicate a "certain something," as in "I really like Ann. She has a certain <i>je ne sais quoi</i> that I find very appealing."
<b>joie de vivre</b>	joy of living	The quality in people who live life to the fullest

<b>laissez-faire</b>	let it be	A policy of non-interference
<b>maître d' maître d'hôtel</b>	master of master of hotel	The former is more common in English, which is strange since it is incomplete: "The 'master of' will show you to your table."
<b>mal de mer</b>	sickness of sea	Seasickness
<b>matinée</b>	morning	In English, refers to the day's first showing of a movie or play. Can also refer to a midday romp with one's lover.
<b>mot juste</b>	right word	Exactly the right word or expression.
<b>née</b>	born	Used in genealogy to refer to a woman's maiden name: Anne Miller <i>née</i> (or nee) Smith.
<b>noblesse oblige</b>	obligated nobility	The idea that those who are noble are obliged to act noble.
<b>nom de guerre</b>	war name	Pseudonym
<b>nom de plume</b>	pen name	This French phrase was coined by English speakers in imitation of <i>nom de guerre</i> .
<b>nouveau riche</b>	new rich	Disparaging term for someone who has recently come into money.
<b>papier mâché</b>	mashed paper	Used for art
<b>par excellence</b>	by excellence	Quintessential, preeminent, the best of the best
<b>peau de soie</b>	skin of silk	Soft, silky fabric with a dull finish
<b>petite</b>	small, short	It may sound <i>chic</i> , but <i>petit</i> is simply the feminine French adjective "short."
<b>petit-four</b>	little oven	Small dessert, especially cake
<b>pièce de résistance</b>	piece of stamina	In French, this originally referred to the main course - the test of your stomach's stamina. In both languages, it now refers to an outstanding accomplishment or the final part of something

- a project, a meal, etc.

<b>pied-à-terre</b>	foot on ground	A temporary or secondary place of residence.
<b>protégé</b>	protected	Someone whose training is sponsored by an influential person.
<b>raison d'être</b>	reason for being	Purpose, justification for existing
<b>rendez-vous</b>	go to	In French, this refers to a date or an appointment (literally, it is the verb <i>se rendre</i> - to go - in the imperative); in English we can use it as a noun or a verb (let's <i>rendez-vous</i> at 8pm).
<b>repartee</b>	quick, accurate response	The French <i>repartie</i> gives us the English "repartee," with the same meaning of a swift, witty, and "right on" retort.
<b>risqué</b>	risked	Suggestive, overly provocative
<b>roman-fleuve</b>	novel river	A long, multi-volume novel which presents the history of several generations of a family or community. In both French and English, <i>saga</i> tends to be used more.
<b>rouge</b>	red	The English refers to a reddish cosmetic or metal/glass-polishing powder, and can be a noun or a verb.
<b>RSVP</b>	respond please	This abbreviation stands for <i>Répondez, s'il vous plaît</i> , which means that "Please RSVP" is redundant.
<b>sang-froid</b>	cold blood	The ability to maintain one's composure.
<b>sans</b>	without	Used mainly in academia, although it's also seen in the font style "sans serif" => without decorative flourishes.
<b>savoir-faire</b>	knowing how to do	Synonymous with tact or social grace.
<b>soi-disant</b>	self saying	What one claims about oneself; so-called, alleged
<b>soigné</b>	taken care of	1. Sophisticated, elegant, fashionable 2. Well-groomed, polished, refined
<b>soirée</b>	evening	In English, refers to an elegant party.

<b>soupçon</b>	suspicion	Used figuratively like hint: There's just a <i>soupçon</i> of garlic in the soup.
<b>souvenir</b>	memory, keepsake	A memento
<b>succès d'estime</b>	success of esteem	Important but unpopular success or achievement
<b>succès fou</b>	crazy success	Wild success
<b>tableau vivant</b>	living picture	A scene made up of silent, motionless actors
<b>table d'hôte</b>	host table	1. A table for all guests to sit together 2. A fixed-price meal with multiple courses
<b>tête-à-tête</b>	head to head	A private talk or visit with another person
<b>toilette</b>	toilet	In French, this refers both to the toilet itself and anything related to toiletries; thus the expression "to do one's toilette" - brush hair, do makeup, etc. See <i>eau de toilette</i> , above.
<b>touché</b>	touched	Originally used in fencing, now equivalent to "you got me."
<b>tour de force</b>	turn of strength	Something which takes a great deal of strength or skill to accomplish.
<b>trompe l'oeil</b>	trick the eye	A painting style which uses perspective to trick the eye into thinking it is real. In French, <i>trompe l'oeil</i> can also refer in general to artifice and trickery.
<b>vis-à-vis (de)</b>	face to face	In French, <i>vis-à-vis</i> must be followed by the preposition <i>de</i> . Used in English to mean "compared to" or "in relation with": His feelings <i>vis-à-vis</i> my ideas are irrelevant.
<b>vol-au-vent</b>	flight of the wind	In both French and English, a <i>vol-au-vent</i> is a very light pastry shell filled with meat or fish with sauce.