



French and English

Language background

French is a Romance language spoken by more than 300 million people across Europe, Africa, Canada and many other parts of the world. It developed from Latin and belongs to the Indo-European language family. English has been strongly influenced by French historically, particularly in vocabulary, which means many words in the two languages share similar origins.

French uses the Roman alphabet, the same writing system as English. However, the relationship between spelling and pronunciation differs significantly. In French, many final consonants are not pronounced, and vowel combinations represent sounds that differ from those found in English.

French grammar also differs from English in several ways. French nouns have grammatical gender and adjectives often follow the noun rather than preceding it. French verb systems and tense usage also differ from English, which can influence how French speakers construct sentences in English.

Key linguistic differences from English

- French uses the Roman alphabet, the same writing system as English
- many final consonants are silent in French pronunciation
- French nouns have grammatical gender
- adjectives often follow the noun in French
- French has fewer vowel contrasts than English
- spelling patterns in French often differ from pronunciation
- French verb systems differ from English tense structures
- French and English share many cognates

What teachers may notice in English

Teachers may notice patterns such as:

- omission of final consonant sounds in pronunciation
- difficulty distinguishing certain English vowel sounds
- sentence structures influenced by French adjective placement
- spelling patterns influenced by French pronunciation
- recognition of familiar vocabulary due to cognates

These patterns are often predictable forms of language transfer between French and English.



Why this happens

In French pronunciation, many final consonants are silent. When producing English words, speakers may omit final sounds that are expected in English pronunciation.

French nouns are assigned grammatical gender, and adjectives often follow the noun in French sentences. When learners produce English sentences, they may initially transfer familiar word order patterns.

Although French and English share many vocabulary roots, pronunciation and spelling patterns often differ. This can lead to confusion when learners encounter English words that appear similar but are pronounced differently.

English also contains more vowel contrasts than French, which can make it challenging for learners to distinguish certain vowel sounds.

Classroom strategies

- model clear pronunciation of final consonant sounds
- highlight English vowel contrasts during speaking activities
- explicitly teach adjective placement in English sentences
- draw attention to differences between English spelling and pronunciation
- use cognates to support vocabulary development
- encourage oral rehearsal before writing

Strengths to leverage

French-speaking pupils often bring valuable strengths to the classroom, including:

- familiarity with alphabetic writing systems
- recognition of shared vocabulary roots
- strong awareness of grammatical patterns
- confidence in discussion
- strong listening comprehension

Reflective questions for teachers

- Are pronunciation patterns influencing spelling?
- Are sentence structures reflecting French grammar?
- Could cognates support vocabulary development?