

Dictionary skills

Using a dictionary is a skill you can improve with practice and by following some basic guidelines. This section gives you a detailed explanation of how to use the *Collins Easy Learning French Dictionary* to ensure you get the most out of it.

The answers to the questions in this section are on page 11.

Make sure you look on the right side of the dictionary

The French – English side comes first: you look there to find the meaning of a French word. The second part is English – French. That’s what you need for translating into French. (To remind yourself which side is which, you could remember the phrase *French first*.) At the side of every page, you will see a tab with either **French – English** or **English – French**. The **French – English** side has a blue tab, the **English – French** side has a black tab, so you can see immediately if you’ve got the side you want.

- 1 Which side of the dictionary would you need to look up to translate ‘le vélo’?

Finding the word you want

When you are looking for a word, for example **nouveau**, look at the first letter – **n** – and find the **N** section in the French – English side. Look at page 182. At the top of the page, you’ll find the words **normalement** → **nouvel**. These are the first and last words on that page. Remember that even if a letter has an accent on it, it makes no difference to the alphabetical order.

- 2 Which comes first – ‘nager’ or ‘nécessaire’?
- 3 Does ‘nouveau’ come before or after ‘Noël’?
- 4 Does ‘chou-fleur’ come before or after ‘chocolat’?

To help you expand your vocabulary, we also have suggested possible alternatives in the WORD POWER features at the most common adjectives in English – try looking up **big** on page 318 and learning some of the words you could use.

Make sure you look at the right entry

An entry is made up of a **word**, its translations and, often, example phrases to show you how to use the translations. If there is more than one entry for the same word, then there is a note to tell you so. Look at the following example entries:

flat ADJECTIVE

▷ see also **flat** NOUN

1 plat (FEM plate)

□ a flat roof un toit plat □ flat shoes des chaussures plates

2 crevé (FEM crevée) (tyre)

□ I've got a flat tyre. J'ai un pneu crevé.

flat NOUN

▷ see also **flat** ADJECTIVE

l'appartement *masc*

□ She lives in a flat. Elle habite un appartement.

5 Which of the two entries above will help you translate the phrase 'My car has a flat tyre'? Look for the two clues which are there to help you:

- > an example similar to what you want to say
- > the word ADJECTIVE



Look out for information notes which have this symbol on the left-hand side. They will give you guidance on grammatical points, and tell you about differences between French and British life.

Choosing the right translation

The main translation of a word is shown on a new line and is underlined to make it stand out from the rest of the entry. If there is more than one main translation for a word, each one is numbered.

Often you will see phrases in **light blue**, preceded by a white square □. These show how the translation they follow can be used. They also help you choose the translation you want because they give you examples of the context in which it can be used.

6 Use the dictionary to translate 'That's a very hard question'.

Words often have more than one meaning and more than one translation: if you don't *get* to the station on time, you don't arrive on time, but if you say 'I don't *get* it', you mean you don't understand. When you are translating from English, be careful to choose the French word that has the particular meaning you want. The dictionary offers you a lot of help with this. Look at the following entry:

- pool** NOUN
- 1 la flaque (*puddle*)
 - 2 l' étang *masc* (*pond*)
 - 3 la piscine (*for swimming*)
 - 4 le billard américain (*game*)

A **pool** can be a puddle, a pond or a swimming pool; **pool** can also be a game. Underlining highlights all the main translations, the numbers tell you that there is more than one possible translation and the words in brackets in *italics* after the translations help you choose the translation you want.

7 How would you translate 'I like playing pool'?

Never take the first translation you see without looking at the others. Always look to see if there is more than one translation underlined.

Phrases in **bold type** preceded by a blue or black square ■/■ are phrases which are particularly common or important. Sometimes the phrases have a completely different translation from the main translation; sometimes the translation is the same. For example:

le **dommage** NOUN

damage

□ La tempête a causé d'importants **dommages**. The storm caused a lot of damage.

■ **C'est dommage**. It's a shame. □ C'est **dommage que tu ne puisses pas venir**. It's shame you can't come.

to **go out** VERB

1 sortir (*person*)

□ Are you going out tonight? **Tu sors ce soir?**

■ **to go out with somebody** **sortir avec quelqu'un** □ Are you going out with him? **Est-ce que tu sors avec lui?**

2 s'éteindre (*light, fire, candle*)

□ Suddenly the lights went out. **Soudain, les lumières se sont éteintes.**

When you look up a word, make sure you look beyond the main translations to see if the entry includes any **bold phrases**.

8 In a job advert you read that applicants '**doivent tous passer une visite médicale**'. What must they all do?

Look up '**visite**' and find the answer as quickly as possible by skimming down the *bold phrases*.

Making use of phrases in the dictionary

Sometimes when you look up a word you will find not only the word, but the exact phrase you want. For example, you might want to say 'What's the date today?'. Look up **date** and you will find:

date NOUN

1 **la date**

□ my date of birth **ma date de naissance**

■ **What's the date today?** **Quel jour sommes-nous?**

Sometimes you have to adapt what you find in the dictionary. If you want to say 'I play darts' and look up **dart** you will find:

dart NOUN

la fléchette

□ to play darts **jouer aux fléchettes**

You have to substitute **je joue** for the infinitive form **jouer**. You will often have to adapt the infinitive in this way, adding the correct ending for **je, tu, il** etc and choosing the present, future or past form. For help with this, look at the verb tables. On the **French - English** side of the dictionary, you will notice that verbs are followed by a number in square brackets, which correspond to verb tables on pages 22-27 in the middle section of this dictionary. **Jouer** is a verb ending in **-er** so it follows the same pattern as verb number [28] **donner**, which is set out on page 35.

9 How would you say '*We played football*'?

Phrases containing nouns and adjectives also need to be adapted. You may need to make the noun plural, or the adjective feminine or plural. Remember that some nouns and adjectives have irregular feminine or plural forms and that this is shown in the entry.

10 How would you say '*The jewels are beautiful*'?

Don't overuse the dictionary

It takes time to look up words so try to avoid using the dictionary unnecessarily, especially in exams. Think carefully about what you want to say and see if you can put it another way, using words you already know. To rephrase things you can:

> Use a word with a similar meaning. This is particularly easy with adjectives, as there are a lot of words which mean *good*, *bad*, *big* etc and you're sure to know at least one.

> Use negatives: if the cake you made was a total disaster, you could just say it wasn't very good.

> Use particular examples instead of general terms. If you are asked to describe the sports facilities in your area, and time is short, don't look up *facilities* – say something like *'In our town there is a swimming pool and a football ground.'*

- 11** You want to ask *'Have you got any pets?'*. How could you avoid using the word *'pet'* if you don't know it?
- 12** How could you say *'The palace of Versailles is huge'* without looking up the word *'huge'*?

You can also often guess the meaning of a French word by using others to give you a clue. If you see the sentence *'j'écoute de la musique rap'*, you may not know the meaning of the word **écoute**, but you do know it's a verb because it's preceded by **j'**. Therefore it must be something you can do to music: **listen**. So the translation is: *I listen to rap music.*

- 13** In a description of a holiday centre you see a picture of bikes and read *'On peut louer des vélos: 10€ la journée'*. You may not know the meaning of *'louer'*, but you can see that you have to pay 10 euros, which gives you a clue to what it could mean. What can you do – ride bikes, borrow bikes or hire bikes?

Parts of speech

There are two entries for **flat** because this word can be a noun or an adjective. It helps to choose correctly between entries if you know how to recognize these different types of words.

Nouns and pronouns

Nouns often appear with words like *a, the, this, that, my, your* and *his*. They can be singular (abbreviated to SING in the dictionary):

his dog her cat a street

or plural (abbreviated to PL in the dictionary):

the facts those people his shoes our holidays

They can be the subject of a verb:

Vegetables are good for you

or the object of a verb:

I play tennis

Words like *I, me, you, he, she, him, her* and *they* are pronouns. They can be used instead of nouns. You can refer to a person as *he* or *she* or to a thing as *it*.

I bought my mother a box of chocolates.

- 14 Which three words are nouns in this sentence?
- 15 Which of the nouns is plural?
- 16 Which word is a pronoun?

French nouns are either masculine or feminine (abbreviated to MASC and FEM). Masculine nouns are shown by **le**:

le bateau le chien le jardin

Feminine nouns are shown by **la**:

la porte la robe la souris

If a noun starts with a vowel or a vowel sound, then **le** or **la** becomes **l'**:

l'ami l'eau l'orage l'histoire

The plural forms of **le**, **la** and **l'** is **les**. As in English, the plural of most French nouns is made by adding **s**:

les chiens *les portes* *les tables*

If the singular form already ends in **s**, or if it ends in **x**, then you don't have to add anything:

l'ananas *les ananas*

la voix *les voix*

Sometimes, however, the plural form is irregular and this is shown in the entry:

le **cheval** (PL **les chevaux**) NOUN
horse

horse NOUN
le **cheval** (PL **les chevaux**)

Je me brosse les dents tous les soirs.

- 17 Two words in this sentence are nouns. Which ones?
- 18 Are they singular or plural?
- 19 What is the plural form of 'le choix'?
- 20 Look in the dictionary to find the plural form of 'le travail'.

Adjectives

Flat can be an adjective as well as a noun. Adjectives describe nouns: your tyre can be **flat**, you can have a pair of **flat** shoes.

- 21 'Dark' is an adjective in one of these sentences and a noun in the other. Which is which?

I'm not afraid of the dark.

She's got dark hair.

French adjectives can be masculine or feminine, singular or plural, depending on the noun they describe:

un **petit** garçon (MASC SING)

une **petite** fille (FEM SING = masculine singular + **e**)

trois **petits** garçons (MASC PL = masculine singular + **s**)

trois **petites** filles (FEM PL = masculine singular + **es**)

The masculine and feminine singular forms of regular adjectives are shown on both sides of the dictionary.

So if you want to find out what sort of shoes **des chaussures plates** are, look under **plat**.

To form the plural of adjectives in French, you generally add **s** to both masculine and feminine forms.

If the masculine form ends in **s** or **x**, then you don't need to add **s** to make the masculine plural.

MASC SING	FEM SING	MASC PL	FEM PL
passé	passée	passés	passées
gris	grise	gris	grises
anxieux	anxieuse	anxieux	anxieuses
agréable	agréable	agréables	agréables

Some adjectives remain the same whether they're masculine, feminine or plural. This is also shown in the dictionary:

arrière (FEM+PL **arrière**) ADJECTIVE
▷ see also **arrière** NOUN
back

back ADJECTIVE, ADVERB
▷ see also **back** NOUN, VERB
arrière (FEM+PL **arrière**)

- 22 What is the feminine singular form of '**vert**'?
- 23 What is the masculine plural form of '**aimable**'?
- 24 What forms can '**heureux**' be?
- 25 What is the masculine plural form of '**gras**'? And the feminine singular (look in the dictionary for this one)?

Verbs

She's going to record the programme for me.

His time in the race was a new world record.

Record in the first sentence is a verb. In the second, it is a noun.

One way to recognize a verb is that it frequently comes with a pronoun such as **I**, **you** or **she**, or with somebody's name. Verbs can relate to the present, the past or the future. They have a number of different forms to show this: **I'm going** (present), **he will go** (future), and **Nicola went by herself** (past). Often verbs appear with **to**: **they promised to go**. This basic form of the verb is called the infinitive.

In this dictionary, verbs are preceded by 'to', so you can identify them at a glance. No matter which of the four previous examples you want to translate, you should look up 'to **go**', not '**going**' or '**went**'. If you want to translate '**I thought**', look up 'to **think**'.

26 What would you look up to translate the verbs in these phrases?

I went

she's crying

he was lying

I did it

he's out

they've gone

Verbs have different endings, depending on whether you are talking about **je**, **tu**, **nous**, **ils** etc: **j'aime**, **tu aimes**, **nous aimons**, **ils aiment** etc. They also have different forms for the present, future, past etc. **Nous mangeons** (*we eat* = present), **nous avons mangé** (*we ate* = past). **Manger** is the infinitive and is the form that appears in the dictionary.

Sometimes the verb changes completely between the infinitive form and the **je**, **tu**, **ils** etc form. For example, *I go* is **je vais**, but *to go* is **aller**, and **nous faisons** (*we do*) comes from **faire** (*to do*). **J'ai fait** (*I have done* or *I did*) also comes from **faire**.

On pages 28-48 of the middle section of this dictionary, you will find 21 of the most important French verbs shown in full. On the French - English side of the dictionary you will find a number beside all French verbs. When you look up that number in the verb tables on pages 22-27, you will be shown the verb forms for that type of verb. This will help you to work out which is the correct verb form you need, whether that verb is regular or irregular.

27 Which verb form does the verb **plaisanter** follow?

Adverbs

An adverb is a word that describes a verb or an adjective:

Write **soon**.

Check your work **carefully**.

They arrived **late**.

The film was **very** good.

In the sentence ‘*The swimming pool is open daily*’, **daily** is an adverb describing the adjective **open**. In the phrase ‘*my daily routine*’, **daily** is an adjective describing the noun **routine**. We use the same word in English but to get the right French translation, it is important to know if it’s being used as an adjective or an adverb. When you look up **daily** you find:

daily ADJECTIVE, ADVERB

1 quotidien (FEM quotidienne)

□ It’s part of my daily routine. *Ça fait partie de mes occupations quotidiennes.*

2 tous les jours

□ The pool is open daily. *La piscine est ouverte tous les jours.*

The examples show you **daily** being used as an adjective and as an adverb and will help you choose the right French translation.

Take the sentence ‘*The menu changes daily*’.

- 28 Does ‘*daily*’ go with the noun ‘*menu*’ or the verb ‘*changes*’?
- 29 Is it an adverb or an adjective?
- 30 How would you translate ‘*daily*’ in this sentence?

Prepositions

Prepositions are words like **for**, **with** and **across**, which are followed by nouns or pronouns:

*I’ve got a present **for** David. Come **with** me. He ran **across** the road.*

*The party’s **over**.*

*The shop’s just **over** the road.*

- 31 In one of these sentences ‘*over*’ is an adjective describing a noun, in the other it is a preposition followed by a noun. Which is which?

Answers

- 1 the French side
- 2 **nager**
- 3 **nouveau** comes after **Noël**
- 4 **chou-fleur** comes after **chocolat**
- 5 the first entry (the ADJECTIVE entry)
- 6 **C'est une question très difficile.**
- 7 **J'aime jouer au billard américain.**
- 8 they must all have a **medical examination**
- 9 **Nous avons joué au football.**
- 10 **Les bijoux sont beaux.**
- 11 you could ask 'Have you got a cat or a dog?'
- 12 you could say 'Very big.'
- 13 you can **hire** bikes
- 14 **mother, box** and **chocolates** are nouns
- 15 **chocolates** is plural
- 16 **I** is a pronoun
- 17 **dents** and **soirs** are nouns
- 18 they are both plural
- 19 **les choix**
- 20 **les travaux**
- 21 **dark** in the first sentence is a noun and in the second, it's an adjective
- 22 **verte**
- 23 **aimables**
- 24 masculine singular or plural
- 25 the masculine plural form is **gras** and the feminine singular form is **grasse**
- 26 to **go**, to **cry**, to **lie**, to **do**, to **be**, to **go**
- 27 **plaisanter** follows the same verb form as **donner**, number [28]
- 28 **daily** goes with the verb **changes**
- 29 it is an adverb
- 30 **tous les jours**
- 31 in the first sentence, **over** is an adjective and in the second, it's a preposition