

# Coffee Break **French**

## Season 4, Episode 40

Email: Matthieu à Gabrielle



CoffeeBreak  
**French**

**SEASON 4**

Mark: Et voilà! On est arrivé à la fin!

PB: Je ne sais pas... je dois avouer, je dois dire à nos auditeurs que cela fait un quart d'heure que nous essayons d'enregistrer cet épisode.

Mark: Et à chaque fois on éclate de rire!

PB: On éclate de rire ou on se trompe. Enfin voilà quoi! Je crois que c'est l'émotion.

Mark: C'est l'émotion. C'est l'émotion d'arriver à la fin de cette série.

PB: Oui, oui. Parce que cet épisode c'est le dernier! C'est la der des der Mark!

Mark: La der des der des épisodes de Coffee Break French season 4.

PB: Oui, oui.

Mark: We have been following the story of Matthieu and Gabrielle and Sylvie and Monique, and over the past forty episodes we have got to know these characters, but more importantly we've got to know lots and lots of new and interesting French grammar and idiomatic expressions. And this episode is not alone in that because in this episode we have got some of the trickiest aspects of French

grammar we're going to be looking at today.

We have a text from Matthieu. It's the latest email from Matthieu to Gabrielle. [Alors nous allons commencer maintenant avec le texte de cette semaine.](#)

PB: [C'est parti!](#)

Salut Gabrielle, désolé de te faire languir mais j'avais la tête ailleurs la dernière fois que je t'ai écrit. Notre soirée au cinéma s'est très bien passée. A la sortie, comme il était un peu tard, je l'ai raccompagnée en voiture jusqu'à chez elle. J'étais beaucoup plus rassuré que de savoir qu'elle rentrait toute seule à pied, ça craint un peu dans ce quartier. Dans la voiture nous avons bien discuté et nous en avons conclu que nous aimerions bien apprendre à nous connaître un peu plus. Je dois avouer que le courant passe vraiment bien entre nous. Nous nous voyons un petit moment tous les matins lorsque nous prenons le RER et elle m'a invité à manger chez elle vendredi soir. Elle est vraiment très sympa donc je suis ravi. J'ai du mal à croire que cela m'arrive mais comme quoi, il faut savoir attendre! Je te promets qu'à partir de maintenant je te tiendrai au courant de l'évolution de cette histoire. Toutefois, certains détails sont et resteront secrets !

En ce qui concerne mon boulot, c'est vrai que tu as tout à fait raison. Cependant, tu me connais, je manque un peu de confiance en moi. En tout cas, depuis un an que je travaille dans cette boîte, je n'ai jamais été aussi comblé. J'aime vraiment ce que je fais et c'est un véritable plaisir de travailler avec mes collègues.

Tu as bien eu raison de te faire plaisir, la vie est trop courte pour ne pas en profiter ! Es-tu contente de ton iPad? Je n'ai jamais voulu en acheter un car je ne suis pas sûr de son utilité. Peux-tu vraiment faire tout ce que tu veux avec ? FaceTime est effectivement une bonne idée. On pourrait essayer de se donner rendez-vous une fois par semaine pour se parler. Ce serait aussi sympa que de s'écrire ! Enfin je dois quand même avouer que je suis toujours très impatient de lire tes messages !

Au fait, je viens de jeter un œil sur ton « profil ». J'ai fait deux ou trois petits changements mais rien de très important car je trouve que tu as très bien fait. On arrive bien à cerner ta personnalité mais pas trop, ce qui fait que nous souhaitons te rencontrer pour en savoir plus. C'est très bien. Vas-y lance-toi si c'est ce que tu veux faire. Souviens-toi quand même

que des fois, on trouve l'amour au moment où on ne le cherche plus ! Je ne croyais pas les gens qui me disaient ça, mais regarde mon histoire: je dois avouer que je suis en train de tomber amoureux... Enfin, on se parle bientôt. Bonne journée. Bises Matthieu

PB: Et voilà, ça c'est fait. Passons maintenant à la version anglaise.

Mark: Tout à fait. So, in this final instalment of our story, Matthieu is responding to Gabrielle's last email. He starts by apologising for having made her wait but he explains that he was a bit 'elsewhere' the last time he wrote to her:

j'avais la tête ailleurs la dernière fois que je t'ai écrit

He says that their evening at the cinema went well. Since it was late when they came out of the cinema he ran her home. He was much happier to do that since it's not really the best area and he didn't really want her to walk home alone. They talked a lot in the car and they've decided they are going to start seeing each other more regularly. Things are going well. They see each other briefly every morning when they get the train and Sylvie has invited him for dinner on Friday evening.

Matthieu says that he can't quite believe that it's all happening, but he promises to keep Gabrielle up to date with how things are going, although he may keep some of the details to himself!

Toutefois, certains détails sont et resteront secrets!

In response to Gabrielle's comments about Matthieu's work he says that she is right - he's referring here to the fact that he must be doing well if his bosses have given him the new Dubai job. Matthieu feels he lacks some confidence, but at the same time he admits that in the past year since he started the job, he's never been so content. He enjoys what he does and loves working with his colleagues.

Matthieu thinks Gabrielle was right to treat herself to the iPad. Life's too short. He asks her if she's happy with it and explains that he's never really wanted one as he's not sure how much use he'd get out of it. He asks 'can you really do everything you want to with it?'

Peux-tu vraiment faire tout ce que tu veux avec?

An interesting expression indeed, which we will certainly be talking about in our language episode. Matthieu agrees that it would be a good idea to arrange to talk on FaceTime once a week. That would be just as nice as writing to each other, although he does admit that he always looks forward to Gabrielle's messages.

Finally, Matthieu says that he's had a look at Gabrielle's profile that she sent him. He's made a couple of small changes but nothing too important because he thinks it's good. He says that he can see her personality from it, but not to too great an extent, so it will make people want to meet her, to get to know her more. He thinks she should go ahead and publish her profile. He does however say that she should remember that sometimes love turns up in the least likely places. He didn't believe people who told him that, but she need only look at him as an example: he's falling in love himself! Anyway, with these romantic words Matthieu finishes his email. *Et voilà! C'est romantique.*

PB: *Oh cette série, c'est superbe!*

Mark: *Alors, est-ce que tu as choisi tes quatre expressions?*

PB: *Oui. Je ne sais pas si elles sont romantiques.*

Mark: *On va voir. Allez!*

PB: Alors, la première, on l'écoute?

Mark: On l'écoute!

J'étais beaucoup plus rassuré que de savoir qu'elle rentrait toute seule à pied, ça craint un peu dans ce quartier.

**Trois petits points:**

dot dot dot (three little dot) ...

Mark: Ok, there's lots we could say about this, but let's bring it down to a basic level. We're looking at this final expression, ça craint un peu dans ce quartier. and let's contextualise this first of all. We are talking about Matthieu who didn't want Sylvie to home alone in the particular area from the cinema as it's not perhaps the best of areas.

PB: Yes, it's not safe, or it's dodgy.

Mark: Ok, and the word craint, ça craint, comes from the verb craindre, which is of course, to fear.

PB: And it's not an easy verb to use.

Mark: It's not. Je crains que tu ne viennes pas ce soir. I fear that you're not coming this evening, and it's followed by a subjunctive in that sense. Perhaps we're more used to the expression avoir peur!

PB: Très bien!

Mark: To be afraid, to be scared, to fret that something might happen. But here we're using craint, and we're using it with ça, ça craint.

PB: Which brings it at a kind of colloquial level.

Mark: And the **ça** is referring to everything about a particular place in this situation, **ça** being it, in that area **craint**.

PB: The neighbourhood.

Mark: The neighbourhood. So **ça craint un peu dans le quartier**. It's a little bit scary in that area. **ça craint un peu**. Now we can use **ça** with other verbs, for, indeed, similar situations or different situations, but using a different construction. Let's think, for example, I'm thinking of **ça bouge**.

PB: **Oui, ça bouge! Ça bouge. J'adore aller à Paris le week-end parce que ça bouge.**

Mark: Yes, so it's a happening place

PB: Yes, it's lively, there are a lot of things happening.

Mark: And what does the **ça** refer to there? Well, it's the life, it's everything exciting that's happening, everything that you don't say.

PB: These are the things that are exciting, **ça bouge**.

Mark: Are there other expressions that you can think of?

PB: **Ça parle**.

Mark: Ah, ok, We could have two situations there. Perhaps if you are in your classroom and you walk in and everyone is talking.



PB: And I'm quite a good mood and I say *oh ça parle aujourd'hui!* So, how would you translate that in English?

Mark: There's lots of chatter today, everyone's having a good, wee blether.

PB: Or I could come in in a bad mood, a foul mood and say *ah ça parle aujourd'hui.*

Mark: I think in that situation you want to say can everyone be quiet please? Which I'm sure never happens in your class!

PB: *Non, bien sûr.*

Mark: So *ça parle*, a third person verb, just like *ça bouge*, *ça craint*. Any other. Oh there was one that you mentioned earlier when we were talking. *Ça promet!*

PB: *Oh ça promet. Par exemple, il y a une fête organisée - je le dis en français, je l'explique en français - pour le week-end qui arrive et on me dit qu'il y aura beaucoup de personnes que je connais et que je n'ai pas vu depuis longtemps. Donc on va bien rigoler donc ça promet!*

Mark: It sounds like a promising event.

PB: It's going to be a good night.

Mark: It's going to be a good night. Yes. Absolutely. *Ça promet*, a third person verb with *ça!*

PB: Like with *ça parle* you could have a negative connotation should I say, *ah ça promet!*

Mark: Just your mention of a negative connotation. Obviously, *ça craint* is already relatively

negative. You can also use *ça craint* in another context.

PB: Yes, for example, if we are talking about a party and you just find out that your parents are coming a wee bit earlier, your friends might say, *oh ça craint!*

Mark: *Ça craint* in that sense it's more...?

PB: It stinks. That's not going to be a good night. That will fall flat on its face.

Mark: In that situation, *ça craint*, the *craindre* is, at the very basic level, it's bothersome. It's something that's going to cause a bother. It's obviously taking that further and I'm quite sure you can think of...

PB: It's going to spoil the whole thing. Very interesting that *ça craint*.

Mark: There's a lot in that one sentence. *OK alors on va passer à ta deuxième expression.*

PB: *Oui, écoutons-la!*

J'ai du mal à croire que cela m'arrive mais comme quoi, il faut savoir attendre!

Mark: Nice to hear. Quite different. *J'ai du mal à croire. Avoir du mal.*

PB: *Avoir du mal à* + infinitive.

Mark: So that is to find it difficult to do something or have difficulty in doing something.

APB: I always highlight *mal* because when people are learning the language, they always hear

mal and they think sore something. We've seen that before and I think it's important because in this expression there's nothing about harm or something sore. *Avoir du mal* is the same as *avoir des difficultés à*.

Mark: So *avoir mal à la tête*, to have a sore head, but *avoir du mal à faire quelque chose...?*

PB: Is to struggle, to have trouble doing something.

Mark: Exactly, so *avoir du mal*. *J'ai du mal à croire*, I find it difficult to believe.

PB: Yes, and do you see how difficult it is to put it back into English? You have to change the structure here.

Mark: *J'ai du mal à croire que cela m'arrive*, I find it difficult to believe that that's happening to me, that all this is happening to me. Matthieu is talking about starting this new relationship with Sylvie and so on, *mais comme quoi*.

PB: *Oh ! « comme quoi » trois petits points. C'est très très français.*

Mark: So, it just goes to show *comme quoi, il faut savoir attendre*. Literally, it is necessary to know how to wait, otherwise said, it just goes to show it's worth the wait.

PB: Worth the wait?

Mark: It's worth waiting, it's worth holding on. So, there we go, a couple of interesting things in there; *avoir du mal à faire quelque chose* and

then *comme quoi*. And *il faut savoir attendre*,  
That expression there.

PB: Yes, Mark, I was listening to you but I was  
thinking, there's an expression in English for  
this: *il faut savoir attendre*?

Mark: Euh...

PB: Good things and to wait?

Mark: Good things come to those who wait.

PB: That's the one! *Il faut savoir attendre*.

Mark: *Il faut savoir attendre*. ...

PB: You've got this *il* that makes it impersonal, very  
general.

Mark: Ok, it's worth the wait, worth holding on or in  
a slightly more figurative language, good  
things come to those who wait. *Très bien, on  
va passer à ta troisième expression!*

PB: Yes, and I can't wait!

Mark: Let's have a listen.

En ce qui concerne mon boulot, c'est vrai que  
tu as tout à fait raison.

Mark: Ok, where were you going with this one?

PB: Well, it's time now to talk about this. The wait is  
over!

Mark: *On vous a fait languir, en fait*.

PB: This one is tricky with the *c'est*.

Mark: Versus *il est*. OK. So, let's look at the  
expression again: *En ce qui concerne mon  
boulot*. So, as far as my job is concerned, *c'est*

vrai que tu as tout à fait raison. So, it is true that you are quite right, avoir raison, to be right.

PB: Yes, we've seen that avoir raison. I think here I chose the expression for the c'est vrai.

Mark: C'est vrai.

PB: Because some people might as, could you have said il est vrai?

Mark: Il est vrai.

PB: Right, so, let's just explain this in context like we did with ça craint, if you don't mind.

Mark: Absolutely.

PB: C'est vrai que tu as tout à fait raison. It's very specific.

Mark: Ok, so the thing that is true is something very specific.

PB: You're right and it's you, so I can't change it to il est vrai que tu as tout à fait raison! That doesn't sound right.

Mark: Because il est vrai is more for a general thing or a generic thing.

PB: A general thing, it's not specific. Let's make it as a kind of rule. For example, il est vrai que les Français mangent beaucoup.

Mark: Ok, if you say so.

PB: Il est vrai que les Français mangent des escargots.

Mark: Ok, there we are talking about a general thing. It's true that French people eat snails.

PB: Or, that they eat a lot.

Mark: When we're talking about a specific case though here, we're saying it's true that you are right.

PB: So change it to *c'est*. So let's use that as a first rule.

Mark: *C'est vrai que tu as tout à fait raison*. Can we have another example of where we'd use *c'est vrai* with a personal thing, a specific thing?

PB: *C'est vrai que ma soeur a bien rangé sa chambre*.

Mark: So, again it's specific here. We're not saying it's true that children have messy rooms. You're saying here that your sister cleaned her room.

PB: Yes, tidied up her room, yes. Very specific. I hope this is kind of clear that you can start with this whether it's general statement or a very specific statement.

Mark: And if it's general, it's *il est* and if it's specific, it would be *c'est*. Let's give one more example with both here, using a different adjective, not *c'est vrai* but, let's say, *intéressant*.

PB: *Oui. Il est intéressant de connaître plusieurs langues*.

Mark: Ok, it's an interesting idea to know lots of languages. *Il est intéressant de connaître beaucoup de langues*. But *c'est intéressant...*

PB: *... que Mark puisse parler tellement de langues*.

Mark: OK, so there we're talking about a specific circumstance *c'est intéressant que...* and...

PB: A specific person, here, Mark. And that he can speak so many languages.

Mark: It just so happens to be in the subjunctive also. We'll leave the subjunctive for a moment. So, *il est important* with a general statement; *c'est important* with a specific example of the statement. *Très bien*.

PB: Ok, are we happy with this?

Mark: So far so good.

PB: Ok, now. We've got another issue which is the level of language, the register of language. Right, obviously, I need to explain myself here. If you go back to the example I gave you: *Il est vrai que les Français mangent beaucoup*. Now, I could have said: *c'est vrai que les Français mangent beaucoup*. Now, if you just listen to that. I took an impersonal, general statement and I changed *il est* and I changed it back to *c'est*. But that's because I'm speaking. It's a spoken way. When I reach this, I tend to say if you're speaking it I don't mind if you say *c'est vrai que*, but when you write it, it's much better to use *il est vrai que*. It's a higher register of language.

Mark: Ok, so just to be clear here. We're talking about this general situation that we've identified, it's true that French people eat snails or whatever, *Il est vrai que les Français mangent des escargots*, but in a spoken register we can also say, and it's accepted,

you'll hear French people saying, *c'est vrai que les Français mangent des escargots*. Now, if we were talking about a specific scenario, *c'est vrai que tu as mangé des escargots hier soir*.

PB: You can't change it back to *il est vrai que tu as mangé des escargots*. It doesn't sound right, unless I'm really posh, I could go to that, but I would say no.

Mark: So, again we are talking about situations of register here, but the crucial thing here is that we focus on *il est vrai que* + a general situation, and *c'est vrai que* + a specific situation. And again in spoken language you may hear that *c'est vrai que* with that general situation too. Now, there are a couple of other things springing to mind that I'm sure our listeners may be thinking too. First of all, when we're talking about time. And when we're talking about time, it tends to be more a regional thing. For example, if I ask you what the time is I say *quelle heure est-il? il est deux heures, il est trois heures* and so on.

PB: In other areas, you could have *c'est quelle heure?* and then *c'est sept heures*.

Mark: *Oui*. Ok, so that's just a regional thing. The other thing that springs to mind is when we're talking about professions. If I were to say, *ton père, qu'est-ce qu'il fait?*

PB: *Il est professeur*.

Mark: So *il est professeur*. *Il est* + the profession, the

**La muscu (la musculation)**  
weight lifting



word for the profession.

PB: Without the article.

Mark: **Il est professeur.** But, if I wanted to give anymore information about that teacher, for example, saying he's a good teacher or he's a teacher who works in a school in Paris. In that situation, then I can use **c'est. Donc c'est un bon professeur.**

PB: **Très bien. Ou c'est un professeur qui travaille avec des élèves difficiles.**

Mark: **Dans ce cas, on dit: c'est un bon professeur ...**

PB: Yes, you couldn't say **il est un bon professeur.**  
You could say **il est bon professeur.**

Mark: **Il est bon professeur.** But when we're using the **un**, when we're using the indefinite article then we would say **c'est.** It is very difficult, **il est difficile, c'est difficile.**

PB: **Non, c'est difficile.**

Mark: **Pourquoi?**

PB: **Il est difficile de faire la différence entre les deux.**

Mark: **OK. Mais « c'est difficile » parce qu'on a déjà parlé de cette situation.**

PB: **Très, très bien. C'est l'heure de passer à autre chose! Il est l'heure de passer à autre chose.**

Mark: **Il est toujours difficile de parler de ces points de grammaire très pointus.**

PB: **C'est vrai.**

Mark: Ok, let's continue on with our fourth expression.

On arrive bien à cerner ta personnalité mais pas trop, ce qui fait que nous souhaitons te rencontrer pour en savoir plus.

Mark: C'est une très bonne expression, merci!

PB: Oui. Alors you've got arriver, cerner which is actually quite difficult to cerner cerner.

Mark: A tricky word to explain.

PB: And then you've got obviously ce qui fait que.

Mark: Oui. This is when Matthieu refers to Gabrielle's profile she's been designing for the dating site and he explains that one succeeds in cerner sa personnalité. So, we'll come cerner in just a moment. But arriver à faire quelque chose.

PB: Arriver à + infinitive is the idea of succeeding, managing.

Mark: We can manage, we can succeed, we're successful in doing something; on arrive bien à cerner ta personnalité. Cerner?

PB: Cerner, to pinpoint, to re-distinguish something.

Mark: To discern, so to discern, but maybe that's not the best translation here. To pinpoint, you can really identify, you can see your personality come through in the profile.

PB: The idea of see very clearly. That's the idea of cerner as well.

Mark: It's really clear. Your personality really come through in the profile. Mais pas trop. But not

too much. And there's a comma, because that comma is very important.

PB: So, you've got your *ce qui*, the idea of not too much.

Mark: And as a result that, *ce qui fait que*, and that, as a result, allows us to?

PB: To wish, to want to meet you, to be able to know more about you.

Mark: OK so let's just talk through this again: *On arrive bien à cerner ta personnalité*. So, we really get to see your personality shine through in this profile, *mais pas trop*, but not too much, *ce qui fait que nous souhaitons te rencontrer pour en savoir plus*, and that's what makes us want to get to know you more.

PB: *Superbe!*

Mark: PB, you're looking a little puzzled.

PB: As you were talking to our listeners *cerner* came back to me again, in a different context: *nous sommes cernés!*

Mark: So, in a different context there, *nous sommes cernés*.

PB: Yes! When I was a kid I used to play cowboys and indians and all that, and then obviously there would be two groups and we would get caught and be surrounded, *ah nous sommes cernés!* There's no way out!

Mark: We're surrounded.

PB: And then the idea of *être cerné*, there's no way out, you can't get out of the situation. And it kind of narrows it down. That's the link.

Mark: So we've identified her personality. We've got it in our sights.

PB: Yes, we've grasped.

Mark: We've grasped her personality through the text, the profile that she's written.

PB: *Oh! Ces quatre expressions étaient quand même assez...*

Mark: *...pointus!*

PB: *Bien pointus!* It did stretch us as well.

Mark: It might have stressed, stretched our listeners! But it really does stretch us when we have these really complex things to explain. And we spend hours talking about them before we come up with the examples that we are going to give you.

PB: I can't wait, *j'ai hâte d'arriver à la saison 36!*

Mark: *Oh la!* Ok, before we start talking about Season 36, or indeed, Season 5, let's have another listen to our text. Hopefully this time you will understand everything.

Salut Gabrielle, désolé de te faire languir mais j'avais la tête ailleurs la dernière fois que je t'ai écrit. Notre soirée au cinéma s'est très bien passée. A la sortie, comme il était un peu tard, je l'ai raccompagnée en voiture jusqu'à chez

elle. J'étais beaucoup plus rassuré que de savoir qu'elle rentrait toute seule à pied, ça craint un peu dans ce quartier. Dans la voiture nous avons bien discuté et nous en avons conclu que nous aimerions bien apprendre à nous connaître un peu plus. Je dois avouer que le courant passe vraiment bien entre nous. Nous nous voyons un petit moment tous les matins lorsque nous prenons le RER et elle m'a invité à manger chez elle vendredi soir. Elle est vraiment très sympa donc je suis ravi. J'ai du mal à croire que cela m'arrive mais comme quoi, il faut savoir attendre! Je te promets qu'à partir de maintenant je te tiendrai au courant de l'évolution de cette histoire. Toutefois, certains détails sont et resteront secrets !

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Au fait, je viens de jeter un œil sur ton « profil  
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tu as très bien fait. On arrive bien à cerner ta  
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nous souhaitons te rencontrer pour en savoir  
plus. C'est très bien. Vas-y lance-toi si c'est ce  
que tu veux faire. Souviens-toi quand même  
que des fois, on trouve l'amour au moment où  
on ne le cherche plus ! Je ne croyais pas les  
gens qui me disaient ça, mais regarde mon  
histoire: je dois avouer que je suis en train de  
tomber amoureux... Enfin, on se parle bientôt.  
Bonne journée. Bises Matthieu

Mark: [Et voilà! C'est fini!](#)

PB: [Je n'arrive pas à croire que ce soit fini, que  
cette saison s'achève aujourd'hui!](#)

Mark: Et moi j'espère que nos auditeurs seront comblés avec toute cette série de Coffee Break French.

PB: J'en suis sûr.

Mark: We really do hope that you've enjoyed this Season, that you've enjoyed learning about the nuances of the French language and that you've enjoyed the story too obviously. We've just been listening to a certain section in the story and perhaps there might be more in the future with our characters. Who knows? But for the time being that is it for CBF Season 4. However, there is more news for you. One of the things that you, our listeners have been asking us for, is in a sense a more structured look at some of the grammar points and idiomatic expressions we've included in this season. The grammar points and idiomatic expressions have come up naturally in the text and that's the exactly the experience you would have if you were reading a French novel or watching a French film. You would hear these expressions as they appear, rather than focusing on a particular set of expressions. However, sometimes what you need is a little bit of practice on those expressions to really help you consolidate them and to learn them in as much detail as possible. That is exactly what we've been working on. We've taken all the language from Season 4 and put in into an

organised and structured, basically, a grammar course and we'll be making that available very soon. If you head over to [thecoffeebreakfrenchcompanion.com](http://thecoffeebreakfrenchcompanion.com) then you'll find out more information about this new material that we've been working on and there you'll be able to find out exactly when we are publishing it and when it will be available to help you take this French that we've been learning through this Season a little further. But for now, all that remains is for us to say a huge thank you to you, our listeners for sticking with us through all of this Season. We hope that you've enjoyed it. We hope you've found it useful and we hope that you're looking forward to whatever is coming next.

PB: [Eh bien, merci à vous tous et puis surtout merci Mark!](#)

Mark: [Merci Pierre-Benoît et merci à tout le monde! Merci infiniment et à très bientôt!](#)

PB: [À la prochaine, enfin j'espère!](#)