

Basic guide to French pronunciation

The French alphabet also has accents. Little accent marks you'll see above letters like "à" or "û." These marks change the pronunciation of the letter.

There are five different French accent marks that can be added to specific letters to change the pronunciation or meaning of a word.

<u>Accent Name</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Pronunciation/Effects</u>
Accent aigu	é	"AY"
Accent circonflexe	â, ê, î, ô, û	No real effect on pronunciation
Accent grave	à, è, ù	No real effect on pronunciation
Accent tréma	ë, ï, ü	Separates two vowel sounds
Cédille	ç	A soft "s" sound

1) The **accent aigu** points diagonally upward, and it can only be placed on the letter E.

- é

It makes the E pronounced at the end of a word instead of being silent. For example, danse is pronounced DAHNS. When an accent aigu is added, dansé is now pronounced DAHNS-AY. When an accent aigu is added to a verb, it often indicates the past tense of the verb.

2) The **accent circonflexe** makes a little rooftop on any vowel. It doesn't change the pronunciation of the word.

- â, ê, î, ô, û

3) The **accent grave** points diagonally downward on the letters A, E, and U.

- à, è, ù

It doesn't have an effect on pronunciation, but it does often change the meaning of a word. For example, ou means "or." Où means "where." This accent makes a big difference in meaning. Forgetting an accent circonflexe can cause confusion to a French reader.

4) The **accent tréma** separates to vowels so they are distinctly pronounced.

- ë, ï, ü

For example, in English, we have the name Joel that is pronounced like JOLE. The verbs meld together as one. In French, they have the holiday, Noël. The verbs are distinctly pronounced as NO-EL, not NOLE. This is because of the accent tréma.

5) The **cédille accent** is only used on the letter C.

- ç

It changes a hard C to a soft C that makes a sound like an S. Garçon is pronounced GAR-SOHN not GAR-CON.

It is important to note that the French have many pronunciation rules when it comes to letters. Here are just a few:

- The Letter “Y” in the French alphabet acts just like the English Y. It’s a consonant if the first letter of a word and a vowel (i or ee sound) if following a consonant.
- Consonants from the English word “CAREFUL” (C, R, F, and L) are usually pronounced at the end of words. All other consonants are usually silent. The word for egg demonstrates this idea. Un oeuf (an egg) is pronounced UHN-UHF. The F is pronounced. The plural des oeufs (some eggs) is pronounced DAY-ZUH. The S is silent.
- If a consonant is followed by the letter E at the end of the word, it becomes a pronounced sound instead of remaining silent. Intelligent is the masculine form of the adjective. The T is silent (IHN-TELL-EE-JAHN). However, to make the word feminine, the letter E is added: intelligente. In this case, the T is pronounced (IHN-TELL-EE-JAHNT). French speakers can tell by this pronunciation if the speaker is referring to a male or a female.
- When the letter S precedes a vowel at the start of another word, it forms a liaison. This means that the S will be pronounced like the English Z. Les ananas means “the pineapples.” It is pronounced LAY-ZAHN-AHN-NAH. The S makes the Z sound before the A.