

Unit 45 - Expressing quantity (1)

1 Numbers

1.1 *Nombre, numéro and chiffre*

There are three words in French for the English word “number”. *Nombre*, which can refer to the units of mathematical calculation (*le nombre quatorze, un nombre impair*) and to the quantity of something (*un grand nombre de personnes*) ; *numéro*, which serves to characterize something in a group of similar things or to classify them in a series (*le numéro d'une maison, d'un passeport, d'un navire*) ; and *chiffre* which is a number written on a page (*une liste de chiffres*).

1.2 Hyphens

When writing numbers, hyphens are used in compound numbers except before and after *et, cent* and *mille* :

dix-sept : 17	cinquante-cinq : 55	quatre-vingt-onze : 91
but trente et un : 31	cent dix : 110	mille deux cents : 1200

1.3 Numbers taking -s

Numbers are for the most part invariable, that is to say they do not take an -e when modifying a feminine noun, or an s in the plural. Note the following :

- *Quatre* and *mille* **NEVER** take an s.
quatre autres personnes - 4 other people
trois mille - 3000
- *Million* and *milliard* are always followed by *de* when used before a noun, always take an -s when multiplied :
Un million / milliard **de** francs Trois millions / milliards **de** francs
One million / billion francs Three million / billion francs
- *Vingt* and *cent* take an s when they are multiplied, unless they are followed by another number.
deux cents - 200 **but** deux cent cinquante - 250
quatre-vingts - 80 **but** quatre-vingt-dix - 90
- *Un* takes an -e before a feminine noun :
Deux cent vingt et **une** pages - Two hundred and twenty-one pages

Note that *in the 1960s* is written *dans les années 60* and **not** **dans les années 60s* (still less **dans les années 60's* - here the apostrophe is wrong even in English).

1.4 Dates

In dates *mille, mil* and *dix* are acceptable :

En **mil** neuf cent trente-neuf
En **mille** neuf cent trente-neuf
En **dix**-neuf cent trente-neuf
In nineteen thirty-nine

1.5 Use with *le*

When naming numbers they are introduced by *le*. Note that with *onze*, *le* and not *l'* is used :

Il suffit de taper **le** 36 15

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Simply dial 36 15

On a pris rendez-vous pour le onze mai

We arranged a meeting for 11 May

1.6 Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers are formed by adding the suffix *-ième* to the cardinal form of a number. If the cardinal ends in an *-e*, this *-e* is dropped. Exceptions are *premier* and *second*. Note also spelling changes in *cinquième* and *neuvième*.

The word *second* (the *c* being pronounced like a hard *g*) is sometimes used as an alternative to the more common *deuxième*. When referring to the Second World War, one can use either, but note the use of upper and lower case :

la Seconde / Deuxième Guerre mondiale

Note that when using ordinal numbers in phrases such as *his first three books*, French uses the opposite word order, i.e. *ses trois premiers livres*.

2 Fractions

All fractions, with the exception of *moitié*, are masculine.

2.1 Used on their own

When used on their own they take the indefinite article when singular (*un cinquième*) and no article (Ø) when plural (*sept huitièmes*).

2.2 Followed by a noun

When the fraction is followed by a noun, it is generally preceded by a definite article *le* or *les*. In less formal language, however, the rule for fractions used on their own can apply (although plural fractions tend to take *les* if they do not come at the beginning of their clause, as in the second example below) :

Il a fait **le (or un) tiers** du travail

He did a / one third of the work

Il a bu **les deux tiers** d'une bouteille de vin

He drank two-thirds of a bottle of wine

Les (or Ø) trois quarts de la ville sont inondés

Three-quarters of the town is flooded

Les (or Ø) trois quarts de sa fortune

Three-quarters of his / her wealth

Les (or Ø) neuf dixièmes de cette somme

Nine-tenths of this amount

French accommodates structures involving fractions less easily than English, and the tendency in some cases is to change to percentages :

To be a third higher / less (than)

≈ *Être à 30% de plus / de moins (que)*

To be a third of

≈ *Être à 30% de*

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2.3 Expressing *half*

Demi generally precedes the noun it qualifies, and in this case it is invariable (i.e. does not agree) and is followed by a hyphen : “une demi-bouteille”. However, when it stands after the noun it must agree in gender : “une bouteille et demie”. In arithmetic *demi* is used on its own whilst *moitié* is used when there is a defined object :

Quatre plus **un demi** font quatre et **demi**
Four plus a half equals four and a half
Dix plus **la moitié** de trente font vingt-cinq
Ten plus half of thirty equals twenty-five

3 Numerals

- The number 6,5 (in French) = 6.5 (in English)
- 6.500.000 (in French) = 6,500,000 (in English)
but both properly speaking should be written 6 500 000
- 6.000.000 francs (in written French) is **spoken** as *six millions de francs*
but 6.500.000 francs (in written French) is **spoken** as *six millions cinq cent mille francs*
- for $30 + 3 = 33$ say *30 plus 3 font or égalent 33*
for $30 - 3 = 27$ say *30 moins 3 égalent 27*
for $30 \times 3 = 90$ say *3 fois 30 égale 90*
 $30 : 3 = 10$ is the way the French write $30 \div 3 = 10$: say *30 divisé par 3 égale 10*
 5^2 say *cinq au carré*, 5^3 say *cinq puissance trois*, $\sqrt{16}$ say *racine carré de seize*

4 Distance, dimensions

Note that the French construction for expressing distance is different to that in English :

Manchester is 400 kilometres (away) from London
Manchester est à 400 kilomètres de Londres

Questions can be phrased as follows :

Combien y a-t-il de Manchester à Londres ?
Quelle distance y a-t-il de Manchester à Londres ?
A combien (de kilomètres) est Manchester de Londres ?
A quelle distance est Manchester de Londres ?
How far is it between Manchester and London / from Manchester to London ?
What is the distance between Manchester and London / from Manchester to London ?

Note the construction when expressing dimensions :

La planche fait 2 mètres de long / est longue de 2 mètres - *The plank is two metres long*
La table fait 3 mètres de long sur 1 de large - *The table is 3 metres long by 1 metre wide*
Un cercle de 40cm de circonférence - *A circle with a circumference of 40cm*

5 Price

Prices are preceded by *à* when indicating a rate :

Deux timbres à 2,80 francs, s'il vous plaît
≈ Two 26 pence stamps, please

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Note the use of *pour* to indicate a quantity of something in terms of price :

Il a commandé **pour** 2000 francs de vin

He ordered 2000 francs' worth of wine

Note also that prices introduced by the verbs *vendre*, *payer* and *acheter* do not need a preceding preposition, like the preposition *for* in English :

Je l'ai vendu / acheté / payé mille francs

*I bought / sold it **for** a thousand francs / I paid a thousand francs **for** it*

6 Pronunciation

The final consonants of *six*, *huit* and *dix* are sounded when these words are used on their own. Otherwise they are only sounded :

- when there is a liaison (*six ans* : here the *x* is pronounced like a *z*)
- when it has the sense of an ordinal in titles like *Henri VIII*, *Charles X*, but not in dates (*le 6 mai* is generally pronounced "le **si** mai")
- when it is the final word in a phrase (*Je lui ai donné six*)

Note also :

- The *f* of *neuf* is sounded *v* in liaison with *ans* and *heures*.
- The *t* of *vingt* is sounded before *et*, and can be sounded in the numbers 22-29 (e.g. *vingt-quatre*), but is not sounded in 81-99 (e.g. *quatre-vingt-treize*).
- The *t* of *cent* is not sounded before *un* (as in *deux cent un*).
- Except in *dix-huit* and *vingt-huit*, there is no liaison with *huit*, *onze*, *huitième* and *onzième* (so that in *les onze livres* the *-s* on the end of *les* is not pronounced).

7 Dates

Cardinal numbers (*trois*, *quatre* as opposed to *troisième*, *quatrième*) are used to indicate all days of the month except the first : *le premier avril*, but *le deux avril*. Months and days of the week are masculine, and are spelt with a small letter unless they begin a sentence.

8 Verb agreements

8.1 Collective subjects

Where the subject of a verb is a collective noun as in *le gouvernement*, *la société*, *tout le monde* etc., the verb is usually singular :

Le gouvernement **a** pris des mesures pour baisser le chômage

*The government **has** / have taken steps to reduce unemployment*

8.2 Expressions of quantity

Where the subject of a verb is governed by an expression of quantity such as *beaucoup des*, *la plupart des*, *la moitié*, *bien des*, *tant de* and *bon nombre de*, the verb is usually plural when referring to plural entities :

La plupart des électeurs **sont** d'accord avec les mesures

*The majority of voters **agree** with the measures*

Note, however, that *la majorité* is an exception to this :

La majorité des électeurs **est** d'accord avec les mesures

*The majority of voters **agree** with the measures*

9 Measurements

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Whilst the French system of weights and measurements is exclusively metric, Britain uses both metric and non-metric (Imperial) systems. When translating between the two languages it is important to convert from one system to the other. For the most part this conversion can be approximate and not exact, although in some circumstances exactness is required.

For exact calculations of a range of weights and measurements, try using the Unit Converter accessible from the <http://www.realfrench.net> homepage.

9.1 Length

Approximate

10 cm \approx 4 inches	1 km \approx ½ mile
30 cm \approx 1 foot	2 km \approx 1 mile
1 metre \approx 1 yard	100 km \approx 60 miles
100 metres \approx 100 yards	120 km/h \approx 70 mph
Il mesure 1 metre 75 cm / 1 metre 80 cm \approx He's 5 foot 10 / 6 foot	

Exact

1 inch = 2.54 cm	1 cm = 0.39 inches
1 foot = 30.48 cm	1 metre = 3.28 feet
1 yard = 91.44 cm	1 metre = 1.09 yards
1 mile = 1.61 km	1 km = 0.62 miles

9.2 Weight / area / volume

Approximate

Un quart de kilo \approx ½ pound	Un demi-kilo \approx 1 pound
250 grammes \approx ½ pound	500 grammes \approx 1 pound
1 kilo \approx 2 pounds	1 stone \approx 6 kilo
1 hectare \approx 2½ acres	10 ounces \approx 250 grams
1 litre \approx 2 pints	1 gallon \approx 4 litres
Il pèse 60 / 80 kilos \approx He's 10 / 13 stone	

Exact

1 kilogramme = 2.2 pounds	1 pound = 0.45 kg
1 kilogramme = 0.16 stone	1 stone = 6.35 kg
1 litre = 1.75 pints	1 pint = 0.57 litres
1 gallon = 4.5 litres	1 fluid ounce = 28 milligrams

9.3 Temperature

Centigrade	Fahrenheit
0	32
10	50
20	68
30	86

9.4 Clothing sizes

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Men's Suits and Coats

France	46	48	50/52	54	56	58/60	62	64
UK	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50

Women's Dresses and Suits

France	34	36	38	44	42	44	46	48
UK	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22

Men's shirts

France / Europe	35	36/37	38	39/40	41	42/43	44	45
UK	14	14½	15	15½	16	16½	17	17½

Men's shoes

France / Europe	40/41	42	42/43	43/44	45	47	48
UK	7	8	9	10	10½	12	13

Women's shoes

France / Europe	36½ / 37	37/37½	37½/38	38½/39	39/39½	40	40½
UK	4	4½	5	5½ / 6	6 / 6½	6½ / 7	7