

28. Nouns (1) - gender of nouns

1 Definitions

A **noun** is a word which names a person, thing, place, substance or state. Unlike in English, where only nouns referring to living beings are masculine or feminine, in French all nouns have a gender. For example the French word *bateau* is masculine and the word *table* is feminine, even though there is nothing intrinsically masculine or feminine about boats or tables.

2 Gender by category

2.1 The following types of word are generally masculine:

- Words referring to males:
le père le fils un boucher un Français
the father *the son* *a butcher* *a Frenchman*
- Days, months, seasons, trees, measures:
le mardi mai prochain le printemps un chêne un kilo
on Tuesdays *next May* *spring* *an oak tree* *a kilo*
- Languages:
le français l'espagnol
French *Spanish*
- Countries **not** ending in -e:
le Canada le Japon
Canada *Japan*

2.2 The following types of word are generally feminine:

- Words referring to females:
la mère la fille une coiffeuse une Française
the mother *the daughter* *a hairdresser* *a Frenchwoman*
- Most countries, continents, rivers, vegetables and fruit ending in -e:
la France la Tamise une carotte la pomme
France *the Thames* *a carrot* *an apple*
- Most shops:
une boutique la boulangerie
a shop *the baker's*

Note that the French word for person is **always** feminine: *une personne*

3 Gender by word ending

3.1 Words with the following endings are usually **masculine**:

-au	un tuyau - <i>pipe</i>	
-acle	un spectacle - <i>show, sight</i>	
-age	un voyage - <i>journey</i>	but la plage - <i>beach</i> , une image - <i>picture</i>
-asme	le sarcasme - <i>sarcasm</i>	
-eau	un bateau - <i>boat</i>	but la peau - <i>skin</i> , de l'eau chaude - <i>hot water</i>
-ège	le sacrilège - <i>sacrilege</i>	
-ème	le problème - <i>problem</i>	
-et	un paquet - <i>packet</i>	
-isme	un organisme - <i>body</i>	
-ment	un établissement - <i>establishment</i>	
-oir	le trottoir - <i>pavement</i>	

3.2 Words with the following endings are usually **feminine**:

-ade	la bousculade - <i>jostling; crush</i>	
-aison	la maison - <i>house</i>	
-ance	une instance - <i>authority</i>	
-ée	la journée - <i>day</i>	but un musée - <i>museum</i>
-ence	une expérience - <i>experience</i>	but le silence - <i>silence</i>
-ense	la défense - <i>defence</i>	
-eur	la couleur - <i>colour</i>	but le bonheur - <i>happiness</i>
-ière	la frontière - <i>border</i>	but un cimetière - <i>cemetery</i>
-sion	une expansion - <i>expansion</i>	
-tion	la caution - <i>deposit</i>	
-ude	une attitude - <i>attitude</i>	
-ure	la fermeture - <i>closing</i>	
-xion	une réflexion - <i>reflection</i>	