

3. Accents and pronunciation

1 Accents

- 1.1** The acute accent (´ : *accent aigu*) is used over *é* as in *été* to transform the normal French *e* sound (pronounced either like the vowel sounds in the English words *book* or *get*, depending on its situation in a word) to create a lengthened sound similar to that in the English word *eight*.
- 1.2** The grave accent (` : *accent grave*) is used over *à*, *è* and *ù*. With *è* it tends to indicate a lengthened vowel (a little like the vowel sound in the English word *there*): *Je me lève* (*I get up*). With *à* and *ù* it doesn't tend to affect the pronunciation but rather is used to differentiate between words, for example *à* (*to*) and *a* (*has*), *où* (*where*) and *ou* (*or*).
- 1.3** The circumflex (^ : *accent circonflexe*) is used over any of the vowels. It can indicate a lengthened vowel (a little like the vowel sound in the English word *coat*): *la vôtre* (*yours*). Alternatively, like the grave accent it can be used to differentiate between words: *sûr* (*sure*), *sur* (*on*).
- 1.4** The cedilla (ç : *cédille*) indicates that the *c* is pronounced like an *s*. It is only used before *a*, *o* and *u*: *ça* (*that*), *garçon* (*boy*), *reçu* (*received*). If there isn't a cedilla before these vowels the *c* will be hard like a *k*: *car* (*coach*), *conférence* (*conference*), *culture* (*culture*).
- 1.5** Two dots over a letter (¨ : *tréma*) indicates that the vowel is to be pronounced separately: *Noël* (pronounced "No-well" - *Christmas*), *Israël* (pronounced "Isra-el" - *Israel*).

Note that accents are generally not used with capital letters:

Etre professeur n'est pas facile
It's not easy being a teacher

2 Pronunciation

In French there is often a big difference between the way a word is written and the way it is pronounced. Here is a list of some of the most common difficulties:

- s*, *z* and *x* at the end of a word is generally not pronounced:
les garçons tu donnes très le riz la paix
the boys you give very rice peace
- h* is always silent. Generally it is treated like a vowel (*l'hôtel* - *hotel*) but it is occasionally treated like a consonant (*le hasard* - *chance*).
- ent* at the end of a verb (as in *Ils donnent*) is not pronounced.
- t* and *n* are generally not pronounced at the end of a word:
il finit le chat bon le vin
he finishes the cat good wine
- au*, *eau* is pronounced like *o* in *go*.

- *er* at the end of a verb (as in *donner*) is usually pronounced the same as *é*.
- *oi, ui* are pronounced as if beginning with a *w*:
 je suis un oiseau
 I am a bird
- *ais, ait, aient* are pronounced the same as *è* as in *très*:

3 Liaison

Liaison is the linking of words for ease of pronunciation. It occurs when a usually silent final consonant such as *-s, -t, -z* or *-x* is pronounced in front of a vowel.

Les _enfants ont beaucoup aimé le film
The children really enjoyed the film
 Elle est _allée en ville
She's gone into town
 J'aime bien dîner chez _eux
I like eating at their house
 On a visité le musée des beaux _arts
We went to the art gallery

4 Elision

- 4.1 In written French the final *e* or *a* of certain words is dropped and replaced with an apostrophe in front of vowels, an *h* treated as a vowel or the pronoun *y*:

je - j' <i>étais</i>	le - l' <i>acteur</i> - je l' <i>ai vu</i>
ce - c' <i>est</i>	la - l' <i>actrice</i> - je l' <i>ai vue</i>
me - il m' <i>a dit</i>	de - d' <i>habitude</i>
te - tu t' <i>installés</i>	que - qu' <i>est-ce?</i>
se - elle s' <i>habille</i>	jusque - jusqu' <i>ici</i>