

63. Expressing quantity

1 Cardinal numbers

Cardinal numbers are numbers used in counting, like *un*, *deux* or *trois*.

1.1 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

1.2 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, and 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*

2 Ordinal numbers (*first, second* etc.)

Ordinal numbers are formed by adding *-ième* to the cardinal form of a number. If the cardinal ends in an -e, this -e is dropped. Exceptions are *premier* and *second* and note also spelling changes in *cinquième* and *neuvième*. Cardinal numbers (*trois*, *quatre*) and not ordinals (*troisième*, *quatrième*) are used to indicate all days of the month except the first: *le premier avril*, but *le deux avril*.

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*.

3 Fractions

All fractions, with the exception of *moitié*, are masculine. When used on their own they take the indefinite article when singular (*un cinquième*) and no article when plural (*sept huitièmes*). When the fraction is followed by a noun, it is generally preceded by the definite article:

Nous avons fait **le tiers** / **la moitié** du travail

We did a third of / half the work

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

He drank two-thirds of a bottle of wine

Demi does not take an agreement when it comes before a noun, but it does when it comes after a noun:

Il a bu une **demi**-bouteille / une bouteille et **demie**

He drank half a bottle / a bottle and a half

4 Numerals

- The number 6,5 (in French) = 6.5 (in English)
- 6.500.000 (in French) = 6,500,000 (in English)
- 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*

5 Distance

French uses a construction involving *à* to express distance:

Manchester est **à** 400 kilomètres de Londres

Manchester is 400 kilometres (away) from London

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?

How far is it from Manchester to London?

6 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

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