

FRENCH TERMS IN ENGLISH

PART 1

This is a list of French terms that made their way into the English language. Using French terms when speaking in English adds refinement to your speech. However, always assess the ability of your audience to understand these terms before using them in a conversation.

adieu	Used like “farewell,” when you don't expect to see the person again in this life.
agent provocateur	A person who attempts to provoke suspected individuals or groups into committing unlawful acts.
aide-de-camp	A military officer who serves as a personal assistant to a higher-ranking officer.
aide-mémoire	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Position paper2. Something that acts as an aid to memory, such as crib notes or a mnemonic device
à la carte	French restaurants usually offer a <i>menu</i> with choices for each of the several courses at a fixed price. If you want something else (a side order), you order from the <i>carte</i> .
à la mode	In English, this means “with ice cream”. Apparently someone decided that having ice cream on pie was the fashionable way to eat it.
amour-propre	Self-respect.
apéritif	From Latin, “to open.”
après-ski	The French term actually refers to snow boots, but the literal translation of the term is what is meant in English, as in “après-ski” social events.
à propos (de)	<p>In French, <i>à propos</i> must be followed by the preposition <i>de</i>. In English, there are four ways to use <i>apropos</i> (we leave out the accent and the space):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adjective - <i>appropriate, to the point</i>: “That's true, but it's not <i>apropos</i>.”2. Adverb - <i>At an appropriate time, opportunely</i>: “Fortunately, he arrived <i>apropos</i>.”3. Adverb/Interjection - <i>by the way, incidentally</i>: “<i>Apropos</i>, what happened yesterday?”

4. Preposition (may or may not be followed by *of*) - *with regard to, speaking of*: “Apropos our meeting, I’ll be late”; “He told a funny story apropos of the new president.”

art déco	Short for <i>art decorative</i> .
attaché	A person assigned to a diplomatic post.
au fait	<i>Au fait</i> is used in British English to mean “familiar” or “conversant”: She’s not really <i>au fait</i> with my ideas.
au gratin	In French, <i>au gratin</i> refers to anything that is grated and put on top of a dish, like breadcrumbs or cheese. In English, <i>au gratin</i> means “with cheese.”
au jus	Served with the meat’s natural juices.
au naturel	In French, <i>au naturel</i> can mean either “in reality” or the literal meaning of “unseasoned” (in cooking). In English, we picked up the latter, less common usage and use it figuratively, to mean natural, untouched, pure, real.
au pair	A person who works for a family (cleaning and/or teaching the children) in exchange for room and board.
avant-garde	Innovative, especially in the arts.
avoir du poids	Weight or heaviness, especially of a person.
bête noire	Similar to a pet peeve: something that is particularly distasteful or difficult to be avoided.
billet-doux	Love letter.
blond blonde	This is the only adjective in English which agrees in gender with the person it modifies: <i>blond</i> is for a man and <i>blonde</i> for a woman. Note that these can also be nouns.
bon appétit	The closest English equivalent is “Enjoy your meal.”
bon vivant	Someone who lives well, who knows how to enjoy life.
bon voyage	English has “Have a good trip,” but <i>Bon voyage</i> is more elegant.
brunette	The French word <i>brun</i> , dark-haired, is what English really means by “brunette.” The <i>-ette</i> suffix indicates that the subject is small and female.
carte blanche	Free hand, ability to do whatever you want or need.
cerise	The French word for the fruit gives us the English word for the color.
c’est la vie	Same meaning and usage in both languages: “That’s life.”

chagrin	A keen feeling annoyance or embarrassment, caused by failure, disappointment, or a disconcerting event. <i>To her chagrin, the party ended just as she arrived.</i>
chaise longue	In English, this is often mistakenly written as <i>chaise lounge</i> —which actually makes perfect sense since <i>chaise longue</i> is a reclining chair with a long seat that supports the outstretched legs.
chargé d'affaires	A substitute or replacement diplomat.
cheval-de-frise	Barbed wire, spikes, or broken glass attached to wood or masonry and used to block access.
cheval glace	A long mirror set into a moveable frame.
chic	Stylish. <i>Chic</i> sounds more elegant than stylish.
cinéma vérité	Unbiased, realistic documentary filmmaking.
coup de grâce	Deathblow, final blow, decisive stroke.
coup d'état	Overthrow of the government.
crème brûlée	Baked custard with caramelized crust.
crème caramel	Synonym of <i>flan</i> —custard lined with caramel.
crème de cacao	Chocolate-flavored liqueur.
crème de la crème	Synonymous with the English expression <i>cream of the crop</i> —refers to the best of the best.
crème de menthe	Mint-flavored liqueur.
crème fraîche	This is a funny term. Despite its meaning, <i>crème fraîche</i> is in fact slightly fermented, thickened cream.
crêpe de Chine	Type of silk.
critique	<i>Critique</i> is an adjective and noun in French, but a noun and verb in English; it refers to a critical review of something or the act of performing such a review.
cuisine	In English, <i>cuisine</i> refers only to a particular type of food/cooking, such as French cuisine, Southern cuisine, etc.
cul-de-sac	Dead-end street.
debutante	In French, <i>débutante</i> is the feminine form of <i>débutant</i> —beginner (noun) or beginning (adj). In both languages, it also refers to a young girl making her formal debut into society. Interestingly, this usage is not original in French; it was adopted back from English.
décolletage décolleté	The first is a noun, the second an adjective, but both refer to low necklines on women's clothing.

dégustation	The French word simply refers to the act of tasting, while in English <i>degustation</i> is used for a tasting event or party, as in wine or cheese tasting.
déjà vu	This is a grammatical structure in French, as in “Je l'ai déjà vu”—I've already seen it. It can also disparage a style or technique that has already been done, as in “son style est déjà vu”—His style is not original. In English, <i>déjà vu</i> refers to the scientific phenomenon of feeling like you have already seen or done something when you're sure that you haven't.
demimonde	1. A marginal or disrespectful group 2. Prostitutes and/or kept women
demitasse	Refers to a small cup of espresso or other strong coffee.
démodé	Same meaning in both languages: outmoded, out of fashion.
de rigueur	Socially or culturally obligatory.
dernier cri	The newest fashion or trend.
de trop	Excessive, superfluous.
double entendre	A word play or pun. For example, you're looking at a field of sheep and you say “How are you (ewe)?”
du jour	“Soup <i>du jour</i> ” is nothing more than an elegant-sounding version of “soup of the day.”