

MOST IMPORTANT SPELLINGS TO KNOW AND RECOGNISE IN FRENCH:

These are only the most common spellings and essential ones to know and recognise. There are many exceptions. This is NOT an exhaustive list. For more in-depth information on French spellings, please have a look at Thomas Grubb's excellent book: *Singing in French*.

When in doubt, please check the phonetic transcription of a word in a good dictionary (such as Robert-Collins French-English) if you are unsure. The website www.easypronunciation.com can also be very helpful.

VOWELS SOUNDS:

PHONETIC SYMBOLS	SPELLINGS	WORD EXAMPLES
[i] - This is a very "continental" [i] vowel with your tongue very high, like an Italian [i]. In English the closest is the long [i:] of the word "seat".	i -ie ending y	lit [li] - bed vie [vi] - life lys [lis] - lily
[e] - This is a very "closed" vowel, which is very similar to [i]. The tongue relaxes a little, but it is a tiny change. A good exercise to do: [ieieieieieie] on a monotone.	é (the accent is called an acute accent or <i>accent aigu</i> in French) <u>In various verb endings:</u> -ai Present of the verb "avoir", 1st person singular Future (<i>futur simple</i>), 1st person singular Past historic (<i>passé simple</i>), 1st person singular -ez 2nd person plural -er Infinitive and also in the word:	bébé [bebe] – baby j'ai [ʒe] – I have je chanterai [ʒœfɑ̃tre] – I shall sing je chantai [ʒœfɑ̃te] – I sang vous chantez [vuʃɑ̃te] – you sing chanter [ʃɑ̃te] – to sing et [e] – and
[ɛ] The tongue drops quite a lot for this open vowel. It is a very common vowel which is not too tricky provided you release your tongue and jaw.	è (grave accent or <i>accent grave</i> in French) ê (circumflex accent or <i>accent circonflexe</i>) ë (diaeresis accent or <i>tréma</i> in French) ei <u>In various verb endings:</u> Imperfect and conditional tenses: -ais (1 st and 2 nd person singular) -ait (3 rd person singular) -aient (3 rd person plural) and also in the 3 rd person singular of the present of the verb être (to be)	mère [mɛrə] – mother rêve [rɛvə] – dream Noël [nɔɛl] – Christmas neige [nɛʒə] – snow je chantais [ʒœfɑ̃te] - I was singing (imperfect) tu chanterais [tyʃɑ̃tre] - you would sing (conditional) il chantait [ilʃɑ̃te] - he was singing (imperfect) ils chanteraient [ilʃɑ̃tre] - they would sing (conditional) elle est [ɛlɛ] - she is
[a] The tongue and jaw drop a little more	a à oi, oy as [wa]	chat [ʃa] - cat là [la] - there oiseau [wazo] - bird royal [rwajal] – royal
[ɑ] Drop the jaw a little more. This creates extra space, thus extra resonance. Do not think "darker", just think "drop jaw".	â (circumflex accent or <i>accent circonflexe</i>)	âme [amə] - soul
[ɔ] Monkey nut shape	au when followed by and 'r' NOTE: the word <i>aurora</i> can be pronounced [orɔr] (better!) or [ɔrɔr] which is less beautiful in my opinion...	laurier [lɔrje] - laurel

	o usually when followed by a pronounced consonant or vowel sound in the same word. -um ending in words of foreign origin	frivole [frivɔlə] – frivolous poète [pøtə] - poet album [albɔm] – album minimum [minimɔm] – minimum
[o] Rounded lips, lots of space inside	eau ô au (except when followed by an ‘r’)	beauté [bote] – beauty notre [notr] – our chaud [ʃo] - hot
[u] lips pouting forward in “kiss” position, low tongue	ou où où	cou [ku] – neck où [u] – where goûter [gute] – to taste
[y] lips pouting forward in “kiss” position. High tongue.	u û ü	une [ynə] – a dû [dy] – owing cigüe [sigy] – hemlock
[ø] Rounded lips and high tongue	- eu - eut - eux - euse - œu	feu [fø] – fire peut [pø] – can (3 rd person, sing. present) feux [fø] – fires serveuse [servøzə] – waitress vœu [vø] – wish
[œ] and [ə] Monkey nut shape. Same vowel sounds BUT the [ə] (called <i>schwa</i>) represents the final mute ‘e’ at the end of a word, which we do NOT pronounce when we SPEAK, but which we mostly pronounce when singing.	- eur - œur -e and –es endings in words of more than one syllable. -ent verb ending (3 rd person plural)	fleur [flœr] – flower cœur [kœr] – heart belles filles [bɛlə fijə] – beautiful girls elle m’aime [ɛlə mɛmə] – she loves me ils chantent [il ʃɑ̃tə] – they are singing
[ɑ̃] Monkey nut shape. The best way to think about it is thinking it is an [ɔ̃], an open “o” with very little nasal resonance.	-en and -an -em -am -aën -aen -ean -aon	enfant [ɑ̃fɑ̃] – child temple [tɑ̃plə] – temple champ [ʃɑ̃] – field Saint-Saëns [sɛsɑ̃s] Messiaen [mesjɑ̃] Jean [ʒɑ̃] paon [pɑ̃] - peacock
[ɔ̃] Rounded lips are the most important aspect of this vowel, lots of space inside and a little nasal resonance	-on -om -eon NOTE: <u>Denasalization may occur in liaison</u>	bonbon [bɔ̃bɔ̃] – sweet sombre [sɔ̃brə] – dark pigeon [piʒɔ̃] – pigeon mon amour [mɔ̃namur] – my love bon anniversaire [bɔ̃naniversɛr] – happy birthday
[ɛ̃] Lips remain in neutral position and you add a little nasal resonance to a bright [ɛ]	-in -im -ain -aim -yn -ym -ein -eim -en as in –ien and verb endings -iens, -ient and the name:	fîn [fɛ̃] – end impossible [ɛ̃pɔ̃siblə] – impossible main [mɛ̃] – hand faim [fɛ̃] – hunger Jocelyn [ʒɔ̃slɛ̃] thym [tɛ̃] – thyme ceinture [sɛ̃tyr] – belt Reims [rɛ̃s] lien [ljɛ̃] bond il tient [iltjɛ̃] – he is holding Poulenc [pulɛ̃k]
[œ̃] same as [ɛ̃] with lips gently pouting forward.	-un -um	un [œ̃] - one, a humble [œ̃] – humble

SEMI-CONSONANTS:

PHONETIC SYMBOLS	SPELLINGS	WORD EXAMPLES
[ɥ] a fast [y] into another vowel sound	-ua -ui -uin -ué -ueu	nuage [nɥaʒə] – cloud nuit [nuɪ] – night juin [ʒɥɛ̃] – June habitué [abitɥe] – accustomed luxueux [lyksɥø] - luxurious
[j] a fast [i]	i preceded by a single consonant in the following combinations of vowel-letters: <u>When medial</u> -ia- -iai- -iau- -iè- -io- -ieu- <u>When final:</u> -ié -ieu In final –il when followed by a vowel sound, and in medial –ill (but check as there are some exceptions!)	diab ^l e [djablə] – devil liaison [ljɛzɔ̃] – liaison miauler [mjolɛ] – to mew bière [bjɛrə] – beer passion [pasjɔ̃] – passion pieux [pjø] – pious pitié [pitje] – pity adieu [adjø] – farewell œil [œj] – eye gentilhomme [ʒɑ̃tijɔ̃mɑ̃] – gentleman fille [fijə] – girl, daughter grenouille [grœnujə] – frog cueillir [kœjir] – to gather œillet [œje] – carnation
[w] a fast [u]	<u>As a general rule:</u> oi oy œi <u>also:</u> ou + other vowel sound	oiseau [wazo] – bird royal [rwajal] – royal s'asseoir [saswar] – to sit ouais [wɛ] – yeah Rouen [rwɑ̃] – Rouen (city) oui [wi] - yes