



Pronunciation: the missing sounds

Nasals, the French u and r, silent letters, liaison, rhythm.

01. The sounds English does not have

Sound	How to make it	Hear the difference
u (rue)	Say "ee", keep your tongue there, round your lips hard	rue (street) vs roue (wheel) · tu vs tout
ou (roue)	Like English "oo" in food, lips very round	dessous (underneath, ou) vs dessus (on top, u)
an / en	Nasal "ah", air through the nose, mouth open	sans, vent, dans, blanc
on	Nasal "oh", lips rounder than for an	bon, mon, pont · bon vs banc
in / ain	Nasal "eh", lips spread	vin, pain, matin · vin vs vent vs vont
r (Paris)	A soft gargle at the back of the throat, not the tongue tip	rouge, merci, très
é vs è	é = closed "ay" cut short · è = open "eh"	été (summer) vs être (to be)
ill = "y"	filles, famille, travail: the ill sounds like "y"	exceptions: ville, mille, tranquille keep the L

02. Silent letters: the CaReFuL rule

Final consonants are usually SILENT (petit, trop, vous, grand). Exceptions: final **C, R, F, L** are usually pronounced: parc, hiver, chef, hôtel. A final -e is silent but wakes up the consonant before it: petit (silent t) vs petite (t pronounced). Plural -s: never pronounced. The « -ent » verb ending is silent: ils parlent sounds exactly like il parle.

03. Liaison: when words hold hands

Rule	Example	Sounds like
Article + noun	les amis, un homme	les-z-amis, un-n-homme
Pronoun + verb	vous avez, ils ont	vous-z-avez, ils-z-ont
Adjective + noun	un petit appartement	petit-t-appartement
After est	c'est une bonne idée	c'est-t-une
NEVER after et	un café et un thé	no liaison after « et », ever

04. The rhythm secret

English stresses syllables inside words (PHO-to-graph). French does not: every syllable stays even, with a light push on the LAST syllable of a group. Say « important » as im-por-TANT, flat and even. This one habit makes you sound more French than any single sound.

05. Twenty words to drill (say each 3 times)



Word	The trap	Rough guide
bonjour	nasal on + soft r	bon-JOOR
merci	the French r	mehr-SEE
rue	the u sound	rü
beaucoup	eau = o, silent p	bo-KOO
vin	nasal in	veh(n)
pain	same nasal as vin	peh(n)
temps	nasal an, silent p and s	tah(n)
fille	ill = y	fee-y
ville	the exception: L sounds	veel
famille	ill = y again	fa-mee-y
heure	silent h + French r	euhr
eau	just "o"	o
oiseau	the full combo: wa-zo	wa-ZO
monsieur	irregular, learn it as is	muh-SYUH
femme	the e sounds like a	fam
ancien	two nasals in a row	ah(n)-SYEH(n)
travail	ail sounds like "eye"	tra-VYE
gentil	soft g + silent final l	zhah(n)-TEE
croissant	r + two nasals	krwa-SAH(n)
deuxième	the soft eu sound	duh-ZYEM

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