

MASTERING FRENCH PREPOSITIONS

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Introduction

French prepositions are small yet powerful words that connect different elements of a sentence. They indicate movement, location, time, or cause, making sentences more precise. However, translating them directly from English can lead to confusion, so it's essential to learn them in context.

This guide covers both simple prepositions (prépositions simples) and compound prepositions (prépositions composées) with practical examples.

1. Simple Prepositions

Simple prepositions consist of a single word. Here are some of the most commonly used ones:

1. À (to/at/in)

- Je parle **à** Marine. (*I'm talking to Marine.*)
- Il habite **à** Londres. (*He lives in London.*)
- Nous avons rendez-vous **à** 15 heures. (*We have a meeting at 3 PM.*)

✦ À contracts with definite articles:

- à + le → **au** → Il va **au** parc. (*He is going to the park.*)
- à + la → **à la** → Elle est **à la** maison. (*She is at home.*)
- à + l' → **à l'** → Je vais **à l'aéroport**. (*I'm going to the airport.*)
- à + les → **aux** → Nous parlons **aux** étudiants. (*We are talking to the students.*)

2. De (of/from/about)

- Je reviens **de** Madrid. (*I'm coming back from Madrid.*)
- Je prends un verre **de** jus. (*I'm taking a glass of juice.*)
- Il parle **de** son projet. (*He is talking about his project.*)

✦ De also contracts with definite articles:

- de + le → **du** → Elle arrive **du** bureau. (*She is coming from the office.*)
- de + la → **de la** → Il rentre **de la** poste. (*He's returning from the post office.*)
- de + l' → **de l'** → Nous parlons **de l'université**. (*We are talking about the university.*)
- de + les → **des** → Il vient **des** États-Unis. (*He is coming from the United States.*)

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3. En / Dans (in/inside)

- Il travaille **en** Espagne. (He works in Spain.)
- Nous partons **en** mai. (We are leaving in May.)
- Le chat est **dans** la boîte. (The cat is inside the box.)

★ Difference between “en” and “dans”

- Use “en” for countries, languages, materials, and time frames.
- Use “dans” when referring to something physically enclosed or when something will happen in the future.

4. Avec (with)

- Je voyage **avec** mes amis. (I travel with my friends.)
- Il boit son café **avec** du sucre. (He drinks his coffee with sugar.)

5. Pour (for)

- J’ai acheté ce cadeau **pour** toi. (I bought this gift for you.)
- Ce cours est **pour** les débutants. (This course is for beginners.)

6. Sur (on/about)

- Le livre est **sur** la table. (The book is on the table.)
- Nous avons une discussion **sur** l’environnement. (We are having a discussion about the environment.)

7. Sous (under)

- Mon sac est **sous** la chaise. (My bag is under the chair.)

8. Chez (at someone's place)

- Nous allons **chez** Marie ce soir. (We are going to Marie’s place tonight.)

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2. Compound Prepositions

Compound prepositions are formed by combining two or more prepositions.

1. Près de (near to)

- Il y a une école **près de** chez moi. (*There's a school near my house.*)

2. Loin de (far from)

- Mon bureau est **loin de** la gare. (*My office is far from the station.*)

3. À côté de (next to/beside)

- Il y a un café **à côté de** la librairie. (*There is a café next to the bookstore.*)

4. À cause de (because of - negative reason)

- Je suis en retard **à cause de** la circulation. (*I'm late because of the traffic.*)

5. Grâce à (thanks to - positive reason)

- J'ai réussi **grâce à** mon professeur. (*I succeeded thanks to my teacher.*)

6. En dehors de (outside of)

- Nous habitons **en dehors de** la ville. (*We live outside the city.*)

7. Au milieu de (in the middle of)

- Il y a une fontaine **au milieu du** jardin. (*There's a fountain in the middle of the garden.*)

8. Par rapport à (compared to)

- Ce produit est meilleur **par rapport à** l'autre. (*This product is better compared to the other.*)

9. À travers (through/across)

Nous avons voyagé **à travers** la France. (*We traveled across France.*)

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3. Troublesome Prepositions & Tips

À cause de vs. Grâce à

- Il a perdu son travail **à cause de** son retard. (*He lost his job because of his lateness.*)
- Il a trouvé un bon emploi **grâce à** ses compétences. (*He found a good job thanks to his skills.*)

Parce que vs. Car

Both mean “because,” but:

- **Parce que** is used in spoken French.
- **Car** is more formal and written.

Example:

- Je ne peux pas venir **parce que** je suis occupé. (*I can't come because I'm busy.*)
- Il pleut, **car** il y a des nuages. (*It's raining because there are clouds.*)

Ci-dessous vs. Au-dessous

- **Ci-dessous** is for text: *Voir les instructions ci-dessous.* (*See the instructions below.*)
- **Au-dessous** is for location: *Le parking est au-dessous du bâtiment.* (*The parking is below the building.*)

Conclusion

Mastering French prepositions requires practice, but learning them in context makes them easier to remember. Keep using them in real-life conversations, and soon they will feel natural.

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Divya Singla is an accomplished French language trainer and skilled content writer since 2016. She holds a Master's degree in English Language & Literature from Panjab University and boasts a DALF C1 certification from Alliance française d'Ahmedabad.

Currently, Divya is engaged in advancing her studies with a Master's degree in French and a DALF C2 and has already achieved a commendable B2-C1 level (CLB 7= B2+) in the TEF Canada exam conducted in Paris during March 2022. Her teaching expertise spans DELF/DALF, TEF Canada, and TCF.

With a teaching background spanning about 9 years, Divya has accumulated a wealth of experience. Having resided in France for 2 years, she brings an insider's perspective and is attuned to the unique challenges faced by non-native French learners. Notably organized in her approach, her meticulously structured lessons and course materials cater to students of all proficiency levels, making learning accessible and comprehensible.



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