



# Silence of the Vowels

A Crash Course on French  
Pronunciation (in English)



# Disclaimers

- I am **not** a native speaker!
- Pronunciation here is “**Standard French**”
- There will be many, *many* other rules not covered
- For more, take **FREN 351** (en français)

|               |               |             |              |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| cul-de-sac    | entrepreneur  | bon voyage  | baguette     |
| laissez-faire | rendez-vous   | croissant   | renaissance  |
| hors d'œuvre  | mille-feuille | espionnage  | toupée       |
| foie gras     | surveillance  | bourgeoisie | connoisseur  |
| crème brûlée  | coup d'état   | Québécois   | résumé       |
| genre         | chauffeur     | bon appétit | eau de       |
| lingerie      | ennui         | valet       | toilette     |
| bureau        | chandelier    | avant-garde | papier-mâché |

|                | Front |    | Back |    |
|----------------|-------|----|------|----|
| Semi-vowel     | j     | ɥ  |      | w  |
| Closed v.      | i     | y  |      | u  |
| Semi-closed v. | e     | ø  |      | o  |
| Central v.     | ə     |    |      |    |
| Semi-open v.   | ɛ     | œ  |      | ɔ  |
| Open v.        | a     |    | ɑ    |    |
| Nasal v.       | ɛ̃    | œ̃ | ɑ̃   | ɔ̃ |

p, b, t, d, k, g

f, v, s, z, ʃ, ʒ

m, n, ɲ, l, ʁ

# French orthography is surprisingly phonetic!

(It's just *unfamiliar*.)

At least, compared to English:

*dough*

*rough*

*cough*

*through*

*brought*

*plough*

*feared*

*crooked*

*snaked*

*biped*

*ration*

*ratio*

*question*

*equation*

*patio*

*cation*

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# Basic Pronunciation Rules

- p, b, t, d, k, g, f, v, z, m, n, l, y, w as in English
- s = /s/ or /z/, c = /s/ or /k/, g = /ʒ/ or /g/
- ch = /ʃ/, j = /ʒ/, gn = /ɲ/, r = /ʁ/
- a = /a/, i = /i/, o = /o/ or /ɔ/, u = /y/

# POP QUIZ: « oiseaux »





**neetsocks**

no language should be mocked other than french

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**hypallepse**

Birds is “oiseaux” in French.  
No letter is pronounced the way it should.  
And there are *seven* of them.

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**teaboot**

ITS PRONOUNCED “WAZO” AND YES, I WILL  
DIE MAD ABOUT IT

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**judgejudyofficial**

oiseaux hits every vowel in the french alphabet  
and manages to only be pronounced with 2  
goddamn syllables

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*ois***eaux**

Rule of Thumb 1:

« au », « eau » are pronounced /o/

|               |               |             |                 |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|
| cul-de-sac    | entrepreneur  | bon voyage  | baguette        |
| laissez-faire | rendez-vous   | croissant   | renaissance     |
| hors d'œuvre  | mille-feuille | espionnage  | toupée          |
| foie gras     | surveillance  | bourgeoisie | connoisseur     |
| crème brûlée  | coup d'état   | Québécois   | résumé          |
| genre         | chauffeur     | bon appétit | <b>eau de</b>   |
| lingerie      | ennui         | valet       | <b>toilette</b> |
| <b>bureau</b> | chandelier    | avant-garde | papier-mâché    |

*oiseaux*

Rule of Thumb 2:

« oi » is pronounced /wa/

|                  |               |                  |                    |
|------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------|
| cul-de-sac       | entrepreneur  | bon voyage       | baguette           |
| laissez-faire    | rendez-vous   | <b>croissant</b> | renaissance        |
| hors d'œuvre     | mille-feuille | espionnage       | toupée             |
| <b>foie gras</b> | surveillance  | bourgeoisie      | <b>connoisseur</b> |
| crème brûlée     | coup d'état   | <b>Québécois</b> | résumé             |
| genre            | chauffeur     | bon appétit      | eau de             |
| lingerie         | ennui         | valet            | <b>toilette</b>    |
| bureau           | chandelier    | avant-garde      | papier-mâché       |

|                  |               |                  |                      |
|------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------|
| cul-de-sac       | entrepreneur  | bon voyage       | baguette             |
| laissez-faire    | rendez-vous   | <b>croissant</b> | renaissance          |
| hors d'œuvre     | mille-feuille | espionnage       | toupée               |
| <b>foie gras</b> | surveillance  | bourgeoisie      | conn <b>a</b> isseur |
| crème brûlée     | coup d'état   | <b>Québécois</b> | résumé               |
| genre            | chauffeur     | bon appétit      | eau de               |
| lingerie         | ennui         | valet            | <b>toilette</b>      |
| bureau           | chandelier    | avant-garde      | papier-mâché         |

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## history

### history

LaCroix is the best selling domestic sparkling water brand in the USA. A true American favorite for over 30 years, LaCroix has the distinction of being the number one sparkling water brand sold in cans. Today, the brand is recognized by consumers throughout North America and beyond, with its unique blue logo and array of fantastic flavors. Pronounced "la-croy", consumers are reminded of the correct pronunciation when asked to "enjoy LaCroix" with every sip they take.



Originally made in Wisconsin (circa 1981), by a local family owned brewery, GE Heileman, the brand was named for its local roots. "La" was taken from the city of La Crosse, and "Croix" hails from the beautiful St. Croix River which flows between Wisconsin and Minnesota. Originally bottled and

sold locally in glass, LaCroix is now sold primarily in 100% recyclable cans; however the original bottles may still be found today on store shelves in parts of Wisconsin and Illinois. Always 100% natural with nothing artificial, this sparkling water caught the eye of Nick A. Caporella, Founder and CEO of National Beverage Corp., Fort Lauderdale, Florida.



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*oiseaux***x**

Rule of Thumb 3:

Final « s », « t », « x », « d » often silent

|               |                    |             |              |
|---------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|
| cul-de-sac    | entrepreneur       | bon voyage  | baguette     |
| laissez-faire | rendez-vous        | croissant   | renaissance  |
| hors d'œuvre  | mille-feuille      | espionnage  | toupée       |
| foie gras     | surveillance       | bourgeoisie | connoisseur  |
| crème brûlée  | <b>coup</b> d'état | Québécois   | résumé       |
| genre         | chauffeur          | bon appétit | eau de       |
| lingerie      | ennui              | valet       | toilette     |
| bureau        | chandelier         | avant-garde | papier-mâché |

|               |               |             |              |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| cul-de-sac    | entrepreneur  | bon voyage  | baguette     |
| laissez-faire | rendez-vous   | croissant   | renaissance  |
| hors d'œuvre  | mille-feuille | espionnage  | toupée       |
| foie gras     | surveillance  | bourgeoisie | connoisseur  |
| crème brûlée  | coup d'état   | Québécois   | résumé       |
| genre         | chauffeur     | bon appétit | eau de       |
| lingerie      | ennui         | valet       | toilette     |
| bureau        | chandelier    | avant-garde | papier-mâché |

Rule of Thumb 4:

« eu », « œu » are pronounced /ø/ or /œ/

|                     |                      |             |                    |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| cul-de-sac          | <b>entrepreneur</b>  | bon voyage  | baguette           |
| laissez-faire       | rendez-vous          | croissant   | renaissance        |
| <b>hors d'œuvre</b> | <b>mille-feuille</b> | espionnage  | toupée             |
| foie gras           | surveillance         | bourgeoisie | <b>connoisseur</b> |
| crème brûlée        | coup d'état          | Québécois   | résumé             |
| genre               | <b>chauffeur</b>     | bon appétit | eau de             |
| lingerie            | ennui                | valet       | toilette           |
| bureau              | chandelier           | avant-garde | papier-mâché       |



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Rule of Thumb 5:

« é(e) » and final « ez », « er », « et »  
are pronounced /e/

Rule of Thumb 5:

« é(e) » and final « ez », « er », « et »

are pronounced /e/                      (/ɛ/)



|                      |                          |                    |                     |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| cul-de-sac           | entrepreneur             | bon voyage         | baguette            |
| <b>laissez-faire</b> | <b>rendez-vous</b>       | croissant          | renaissance         |
| hors d'œuvre         | mille-feuille            | espionnage         | <b>toupée</b>       |
| foie gras            | surveillance             | bourgeoisie        | connoisseur         |
| <b>crème brûlée</b>  | coup d'état              | <b>Québécois</b>   | <b>résumé</b>       |
| genre                | chauffeur                | <b>bon appétit</b> | eau de              |
| lingerie             | ennui                    | <b>valet</b>       | toilette            |
| bureau               | <b>chandeli<b>er</b></b> | avant-garde        | <b>papier-mâché</b> |

# Summary

| Grapheme            | IPA        | English approximation |
|---------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| au, eau             | /o/        | oh                    |
| oi                  | /wa/       | wah                   |
| -s, -t, -x, -d      | —          | —                     |
| eu, œu              | /ø/ or /œ/ | uh, er                |
| é(e), -ez, -er, -et | /e/ (/ɛ/)  | eyy                   |

# BONUS: « ill »

## /il/

- ville
- village
- mille
- tranquille
- distillerie
- scintiller

and more...

## /ij/

- fille
- pillage
- feuille
- gentille
- surveillance
- briller

...so many more...

# FIN



\*grammatically incorrect;  
should be omelette *au* fromage