

A Student Grammar of  
**French**

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## A Student Grammar of French

*A Student Grammar of French* is a concise introduction to French grammar, designed specifically for English-speaking undergraduates. Keeping technical detail to a minimum, it explains the fundamentals of the grammar in accessible and simple terms, and helps students to put their learning into practice through a range of fun and engaging exercises. All the essential topics are covered, with chapters on verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, determiners, prepositions, adverbs, negation, numerals, sentences and clauses. Every grammatical point is illustrated with a range of authentic examples drawn from magazines and newspapers, covering many areas of contemporary life such as fashion, health issues, relationships and sport. It is clearly organised into a user-friendly, numbered indexing system, allowing the learner to locate any grammatical topic quickly and easily.

Functioning as both an indispensable reference guide and a comprehensive workbook, this grammar will become the perfect accompaniment to any first- or second-year undergraduate course.

Malcolm Offord was formerly Lecturer and Reader in the Department of French, University of Nottingham. He is author of *Varieties of French* (1990), *French Sociolinguistics* (1996), *French Words, Past, Present and Future* (2001), *Francophone Literatures: A Literary and Linguistic Companion* (2001), *Using French: A Guide to Contemporary Usage* (with Ronald Batchelor, Cambridge University Press, 3rd edition 2000) and *Using French Synonyms* (with Ronald Batchelor, Cambridge University Press, 1993).



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372	<b>lors de</b> = <i>during, at the time of</i>	266
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# Introduction

*Grammar* is a word that all too often strikes terror and a sense of panic into the breasts of modern language students. Grammar presents a cold, clinical, unemotional exterior – not exciting, straightforward and vibrant like vocabulary, especially when the latter tends towards the informal and slang. The mortar of language (grammar) is never so interesting as the bricks (vocabulary). Grammar is often seen as an obstacle to free expression – it makes you linger and dither over whether to use one preposition rather than another, whether an agreement is required or not – whereas you would rather press on, get your meaning across, communicate. Anything that impedes or slows down that expression is annoying and needs to be dealt with as soon as possible, or even ignored. But bricks without mortar are ugly and lack style, are in danger of collapsing and not fulfilling the purpose for which they were erected in the first place. What can we do about it?

First of all, there's no avoiding it – we need a grammar book. It's no good sticking your head in the sand – mortar is essential, the right consistency, the right thickness for maximum effect and to perform its job efficiently and discreetly. Secondly, we need a grammar book that is easy to use, that helps us identify our problems, that has a very clear and easily accessible index, that guides us to the right solution for us and explains what we need to know, expressed in language we can understand. Thirdly, when we get to the point where the explanation is, we need illustrations that are drawn from the world we live in – not taken from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not taken from the greatest authors, whose French we cannot ever hope to emulate; not boring examples that have been concocted to illustrate the point but don't connect with our world. We need examples that make us want to read on, that entertain us, that make us smile, that might even inform us on issues that are of interest to us, that make us look seriously at the way in which they are expressed – because they're cool. We don't want fuddy-duddy examples about the price of oranges (at least not too many), about who will bring the suitcases down, about (not) doing your homework, examples that suck. We want real, living examples – examples that are authentic, that express our reality – about relationships, sport, contemporary entertainment, fashion, social behaviour, weight-control and – another word that strikes terror into the breast of students, but not just the breast of students, it must be said – sex, and related matters: in short about daily living in the twenty-first century. Fourthly, we need a means of making sure that we have assimilated the grammatical points being illustrated.

This *Student Grammar of French* is aimed at meeting all those needs. It is conceived in such a way that no section is overwhelmingly long, that excessively technical language is avoided, that the index is straightforward and contains references to all the points contained in the book, and that the illustrative examples are worth a read in their own right and may inspire you to imitate their phraseology as well as take note of the grammatical point being illustrated. Since the vocabulary used in the examples is completely up-to-date, it's worth learning the contemporary words as well as noting how the examples work. It has to be admitted that some of the translations have been held back from being completely free, and thus more typically English, in order to allow the grammatical point under

consideration to be seized more clearly – a more fluent translation might obscure the grammatical point.

A simple but effective way of helping to ensure that the grammatical point is understood and is becoming part of your personal grammatical apparatus is to test yourself with the exercises provided at the end of each chapter; exercises that use similar material to that contained in the examples in the text itself. These exercises are designed to consolidate your grammatical knowledge and perhaps increase your sociological and cultural awareness.

Mortar can be fun and the result of using it effectively and skilfully very satisfying – ask a bricklayer!

This grammar book has been designed according to the following plan. The first four chapters are devoted to verbs – verbs are absolutely essential to self-expression, they are the motors of speech; consequently it seems logical to place examination of them at the beginning of the book. The **first chapter** provides the forms that need to be acquired in order to be able to manipulate the verbs effectively. The **second chapter** shows how the verbs are used, especially the different tenses, and the **third chapter** introduces a large number of tables giving the full conjugations of the major verb groups, followed in the **next chapter** by a list of verbs that do not belong to the first, most common group of verbs (those ending in **-er**), and showing how these verbs relate to verbs illustrated previously. The **fifth chapter** deals with nouns and adjectives and concentrates upon the themes of gender and number (how to form plurals in particular). The **sixth chapter** examines the area of pronouns – personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, possessive pronouns and indefinite and quantifying pronouns. The **next chapter** examines the tricky area of determiners – the definite, indefinite, partitive and zero (what?!) articles, and demonstrative and possessive adjectives. Even more tricky is the topic of prepositions and these are fully treated in chapter 8 – though they are often extremely small words and you often glide over them without thinking about them, prepositions as linking words have a very important role to play in the unrolling of speech; this is a long chapter which attempts to cover all those environments where prepositions occur. The **ninth chapter** is devoted to adverbs and adverbial expressions – these lend more detail and precision to our speech and require skilful handling. Everything has been positive up to this stage – with the **tenth chapter** we enter the realm of negation, how to deny, refuse, cancel – very important in an age where science and technology are creating products which replace and supersede previously current products. The **next chapter**, the shortest, looks at numerals, which the speaker needs to be able to handle accurately – otherwise misunderstandings and more serious problems may ensue. The **last chapter** on sentences and clauses shows how all that has been learnt and hopefully assimilated in earlier chapters builds up into sophisticated language, making communication exciting, rewarding and challenging. The purpose of this chapter – and indeed of the book as a whole – is to allow us to express our thoughts, hopes and ideals in appropriate, well-formed, clear sentences, showing us to be intelligent and valuable members of society.

Just as there are many varieties of English, of which you are no doubt fully aware, so there are many varieties of French. Some are geographically based – the French of Paris differs in some ways from the French of the north-east of the country and from that of the south-west, and more so from the French of Belgium, Canada and francophone Africa. Others are based on age – youth-speak and wrinkly-speak differ considerably – still others on gender – males and females have different speech habits from time to time. However, the most important area of variety is that of formality – we speak formally, very



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