

FRENCH PRONUNCIATION

Cheat Sheet for English Speakers

Master the mouth movements behind the French R, U vs OU, nasal vowels and silent final consonants.

1. TONGUE POSITION	2. LIP SHAPE	3. AIR & RESONANCE
Where is the tongue: forward, central, or raised toward the back?	Are the lips relaxed, spread, or rounded?	Is resonance mainly oral, or does the nasal cavity also contribute?

THE FRENCH R	U vs OU	NASAL VOWELS
Main cue: tongue tip relaxed and low; back of tongue works toward the uvular region. Practice: rue - rouge - Paris - regarder Do not force it. It should not hurt.	U /y/: tongue forward + rounded lips OU /u/: tongue farther back + rounded lips Pairs: tu/tout - rue/roue - dessus/dessous Trick: say 'ee', hold the tongue forward, then round the lips.	The vowel carries nasal resonance; do not automatically add a full final N or M. Practice: bon - blanc - vin - sans Note: spelling and following sounds can change nasalization.

Silent Final Consonants: Patterns, Not Absolute Rules

Useful mnemonic	What it suggests	Caution
CaReFuL: C, R, F, L	These letters are pronounced in many common word-final positions.	There are important exceptions. Learn frequent words as complete sound patterns.

5-Minute Daily Practice

1 min	Vowel warm-up	ee - U - OU
2 min	French R	rue - rouge - Paris - regarder
1 min	Nasal vowels	bon - blanc - vin - sans
1 min	Short phrase	Un bon vin blanc.

KEY IDEA: Focus on movement, not spelling. Aim for comfortable, repeatable articulation rather than a 'perfect' accent.

VISUAL REFERENCE

The 3 Physical Pillars of French Pronunciation

FRENCH PRONUNCIATION THE 3 PHYSICAL PILLARS

French sounds become easier when you focus on how your **mouth**, **tongue**, and **breath** work together.



1. TONGUE POSITION

Where your tongue sits or moves to shape the sound.



2. LIP SHAPE

How your lips round, spread, or relax.



3. AIR & RESONANCE

Where the air flows: through the mouth, the nose, or both.

THE FRENCH R /ʁ/

Produced in the back of the mouth (uvular area), not like the English R.



- ✓ Tip of the tongue rests behind the bottom teeth.
- ✓ Back of the tongue lifts slightly toward the soft palate.
- ✓ Air passes through the back of the throat to create friction.

EXAMPLES

rue (street) **rouge** (red) **Paris** (Paris) **regarder** (to look)

KEY TIP: Keep your tongue tip anchored and relax the throat. It should never hurt.

U vs OU

Both use rounded lips, but the tongue position changes.

U /y/

Tongue forward



Tongue is high and **forward** (near the bottom front teeth).

OU /u/

Tongue back



Tongue is higher and **farther back** (toward the soft palate).

MINIMAL PAIRS

tu (you) — **tout** (all)
rue (street) — **roue** (wheel)
dessus (above) — **dessous** (below)

TRAINING TRICK: Say "ee" then round your lips without moving your tongue for U.

NASAL VOWELS

Air flows through the nose and the mouth at the same time.



- ✓ The vowel is nasalized.
- ✓ The final N or M is usually silent (as a consonant).
- ✓ Do not add a separate "n" or "m" at the end.

EXAMPLES

bon (good) **blanc** (white) **vin** (wine) **sans** (without)

TIP: Think "nasal sound in the vowel," not "add an N at the end."

SILENT FINAL CONSONANTS: USEFUL PATTERNS, NOT ABSOLUTE RULES

Many final consonants are silent.
CaReFuL is a helpful memory aid:

C R F L

Usually pronounced

Other consonants

Usually silent

EXAMPLES

grand → pronounced (final D is silent)
petit → silent (final T is silent)
vous → silent (final S is silent)
neuf → pronounced (final F is silent, but many say "nuf")

BUT: There are important exceptions in both directions. Learn words as complete sound patterns, not by mechanical rules.

5 KEYS TO SUCCESS



1

Focus on movement, not spelling.



2

Listen carefully to native speakers.



3

Practice a little every day.



4

Use the sounds in real words and sentences.



5

Be patient and consistent! Your mouth is learning.

5-MINUTE DAILY ROUTINE

1 min	Vowel warm-up: ee - u - ou
2 min	French R: rue - rouge - Paris - regarder
1 min	Nasal vowels: bon - blanc - vin - sans
1 min	Short sentence: un bon vin blanc.
1 min	Repeat everything once more!