

Learning French: Lost in Translation

5 common mistakes from students



Includes:

- Reminders that fit in a sticky note
- Practice questions with answers

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About the author



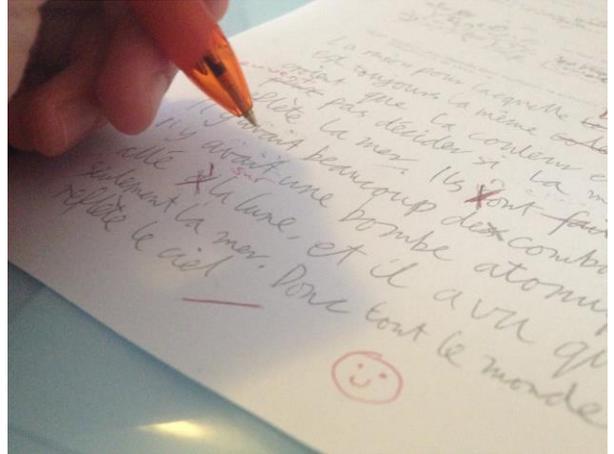
A **qualified French teacher born and raised in the Champagne region in France**, Jessica founded [French Your Way](#) to address the inconsistencies that she noticed while teaching in big language schools.

She developed an **alternative approach for teaching French that is student-focused and relevant.**

Jessica worked with hundreds of students from all countries in France, Ireland, Trinidad and Tobago, and China before settling down in 2010 in Melbourne, Australia. She understands the common difficulties faced by learners of French, and has a unique ability to **break down the language into simple components, making French easier to learn.**

When literal translation doesn't work...

Learning a new language is more than studying new vocab and grammatical notions. It is an eye opener to see the world in a different way.



The five common mistakes presented in this book illustrate that necessity of thinking differently.

They are mistakes that native English speakers often make in French because they are translating concepts from English. As a teacher, I hear them everyday!

This selection is meant to suit all levels of learning. I think that beginners will gain awareness on these common pitfalls, and that intermediate and advanced students alike will recognise themselves...and maybe have a light bulb moment!

Reminders are made to fit in a sticky note to make them easy to remember.



I hope that you will find the following tips useful and memorable.

1. "Room": *chambre* / *pièce*

Don't mix them up!

Many students of French use "chambre" when they actually mean "pièce".

A "chambre" has a bed and is for sleeping.

Une **chambre** = a
BEDroom
Une **pièce** = a room
(any room)

- *La **chambre** de Van Gogh à Arles*
(Van Gogh's Room at Arles)



- Une **pièce** de la maison de Napoléon
(a room in Napoleon's house)



1. "Room": *chambre / pièce*

Practice time!



How many do you see ?

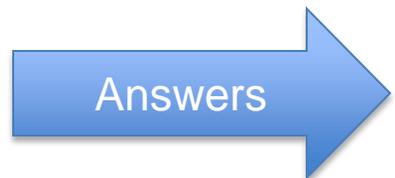
A.

___ pièce(s)
___ chambre(s)



B.

___ chambre(s)
___ pièce(s)



1. "Room": *chambre / pièce*

Answers



A.

7 (sept) pièces
rooms
3 (trois) chambres
bedrooms



B.

1 (une) chambre
bedroom
4 (quatre) pièces
rooms



2. "Time": *temps, heure, fois*

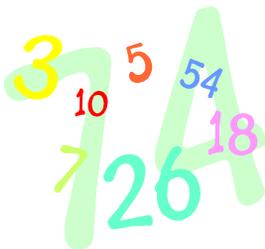
A word can have several meanings and therefore several translations in another language. "Time" is a good example. Here are 3 common translations in French:

1. As a **general notion**, use "**temps**" (masc.)
eg: **Time** flies. → *Le **temps** passe vite.*



2. If you **can point at your watch** or a clock while saying it, translate with "**heure**" (fem.)
Eg: What **time** will the train arrive ?
→ *Le train arrivera à quelle **heure** ?*

3. If you mean to count a **number of times/of occurrences**, use "**fois**" (fem)
Eg: I've told him 3 **times** already.
→ *Je lui ai déjà dit 3 **fois**.*



"**temps**" (m) → general notion, abstract
"**heure**" (f) → refer to clock/watch
"**fois**" (f) → number of times/occurrences

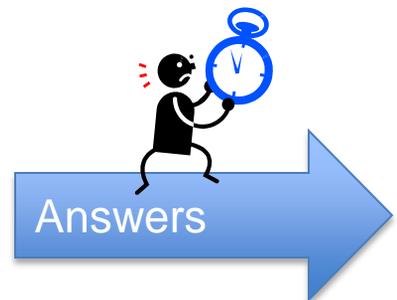
2. "Time": *temps, heure, fois*

Practice time!



Which of "*heure*" , "*temps*" or "*fois*" would you use in the following situations?

- A. What **time** is it ?!
- B. Sorry, we'll have to catch up another **time**, I am really late !!
- C. I don't even have the **time** to finish this coffee!



2. "Time": *temps, heure, fois*

Answers



1. What **time** is it ?!

*Answer: **Heure** (pointing at clock/looking at watch)*

Full translation: Quelle heure est-il ?!

2. Sorry, we'll have to catch up another **time**, I am really late !!

*Answer : **Fois** (another day, on another occurrence)*

Full translation: Désolé(e), nous devons nous revoir une autre fois, je suis vraiment en retard!!

3. I don't even have the **time** to finish this coffee!

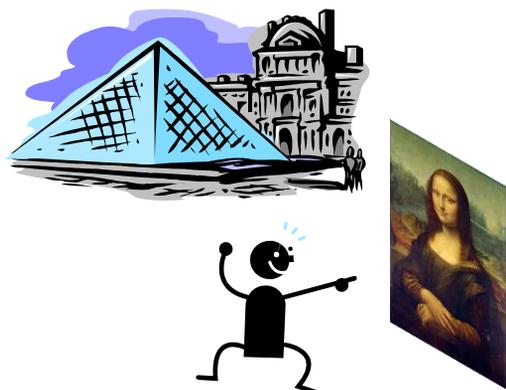
*Answer : **Temps** (general notion, continuous measurement of a duration)*

Full translation: Je n'ai même pas le temps de finir ce café!

3. “To visit”: *visiter* / *rendre visite*

In French, “**visiter**” can only be used for a **place**.

“**Visiter**” has the meaning of **looking around to discover/find out more about the place.**



Eg: He’s visiting the Louvre
→ Il **visite** le Louvre.
(*place*)

You can’t use “visiter” for people.
However, you **pay a visit to someone** : “**rendre visite à...**”



Eg: He’s visiting his friend
→ Il **rend visite à** son ami.
(*person*)

Visiter (+place)
Rendre visite à
(+pers.)

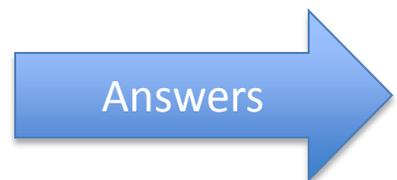
3. “To visit”: *visiter / rendre visite*

Practice time!



Which of “*visiter*” or “*rendre visite*” would you use in the following situations?

1. If I go to France, I will **visit** my penfriend there.
2. And I will also **visit** Versailles, of course!
3. *(to real estate agent)*
When can I **inspect** the studio for rent ?



3. "To visit": *visiter / rendre visite*

Answers



1. If I go to France, I will **visit** my penfriend there.

Answer: rendre visite à
(my penfriend = a person)

Full translation: Si je vais en France, je rendrai visite à mon correspondant.

2. And I will also **visit** Versailles, of course!

Answer : visiter
(Versailles = a place)

Full translation: Et je visiterai Versailles bien sûr!

3. When can I **inspect** the studio for rent ?

Answer : visiter
(the studio = a place they want to see and find out more about.)

Full translation: Quand puis-je visiter le studio à louer ?

4. “What...?”: *quel / qu’est-ce que...?*

There are 2 main translations for the question word “What...?”

The choice will depend on what the question refers to : a noun (use “quel”) or a verb/phrase (use “qu’est-ce que”).

Qu’est-ce que +
verb
(what is it that...?)
Quel(le)(s) + noun
(what, which)

TIP:

Ask yourself :

What is it that we want to know ?

Qu’est-ce que **tu aimes manger** ?

(= *What do you like to eat* ?)

(*verb*) – also: “**What is it that** you like to eat?”

Qu’est-ce que **tu préfères** : thé ou café?

(= *What do you prefer* : tea or coffee ?)

(*verb*)- also: “**What is it that** you prefer?”

Tu préfères *quel* **type de thé** ?

(= *What type of tea* do you prefer ?)

(*noun*) – also: “**Which** type of tea...?”

Quelle est votre **nationalité**?

(= *What is your nationality* ?)

(*noun*) –also: “**Which** nationality...?”

NOTE: “Quel(le)(s)” must agree in gender and number with the noun it refers to (hence its different spellings)

4. “What...?”: *quel / qu’est-ce que...?*

Practice time!



Which of “*quel*” or “*qu’est-ce que*” would you use in the following situations?

1. What floor do they live on ?
2. What did he tell you on the phone?
3. We would like to know: what do we have to learn for tomorrow?
4. We would like to know: what exercises do we have to do for tomorrow ?



4. “What...?”: *quel / qu’est-ce que...?*

Answers



1. What **floor** do they live on ?

(noun)

(also : “which floor?”)

Answer: Quel

Full translation: A quel étage ils habitent ?

2. What **did he tell you** on the phone?

(verb)

(also : “What is it that he told you on the phone?”)

Answer: Qu’est-ce que

Full translation: Qu’est-ce qu’il t’a dit au téléphone ?

3. We would like to know: what do **we have to learn** for tomorrow?

(verb)

(also “What is it that we have to learn?”)

Answer: Qu’est-ce que

Full translation: Nous voudrions savoir: qu’est-ce que nous devons apprendre pour demain?

4. We would like to know: what **exercises** do we have to do for tomorrow ?

(noun)

(also “which exercises?”)

Answer: Quels

Full translation: Nous voudrions savoir : quels exercices devons-nous faire pour demain?

5. Saying your age

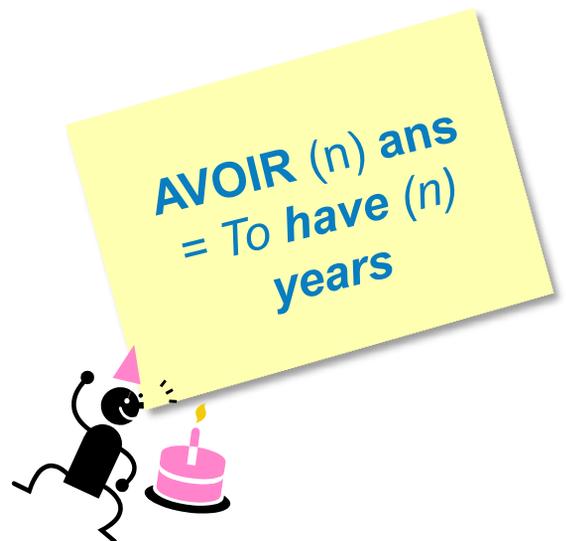
In French, you are not an age. You **HAVE** an age.
You count **the years that you have** (been alive for) .

Example: "I am 50."

✘ Je **suis** 50. (= I am 50.)
Incorrect. Literal translation.

✘ J'**ai** 50. (= I **have** 50.)
Correct use of verb (AVOIR). But you have 50 of what ?

☑ J'ai 50 **ans**. (= I have 50 **years**.)



5. Saying your age

Practice time!



Tool Box

Âge (m) = age

An (m) = year

Tu = you (informal)

Vous = you (formal, polite)

Avoir

J'ai

Tu as

Il/elle a

Nous avons

Vous avez

Ils/elles ont

To have

I have

You have

He/she has

We have

You have

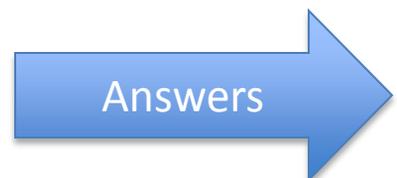
They have

1. Which form is correct ?

- Vous avez quel ans ?
- Vous êtes quel âge ?
- Vous avez quel âge ?

2. How would you ask the same question to a child ? (use the "tu" form)

_____ ?



5. Saying your age

Answers



1. *Answer.* Vous avez quel âge ?

- ✗ Vous avez quel ans ? (= You have what years ?)
- ✗ Vous êtes quel âge ? (= You are what age ?)
- ☑ Vous avez quel âge ? (= You have what age?)

2. *Answer.* Tu as quel âge ?

(“Vous avez” becomes “tu as”)

Reminders

What you've learnt at a glance

Une **chambre** = a
BEDroom
Une **pièce** = a room
(any room)

"**temps**" (m) → general
notion, abstract
"**heure**" (f) → refer to
clock/watch
"**fois**" (f) → number of
times/occurrences

Visiter (+place)
Rendre visite à
(+pers.)

Qu'est-ce que +
verb
(what is it that...?)
Quel(le)(s) + noun
(what, which)

AVOIR (n) ans
= To have (n)
years

Questions ? Feedback ?
We'd love to hear from you!



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