

# DEVELOPING LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN FRENCH AND ITS METHODS

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**Abstract:** In this article, I'll give several tips to improve your French listening skills. Here are the steps that you need to take in order to improve your oral comprehension in French. Each step is detailed in the following sections.

**Key words:** how to learn French, Rules, actually pronounced, consonants, listening skills, listening skills.

Related to this article, you can check my article on how to learn French better or these guides on Master Your French to get more tips on how to learn French faster and better. Learn The Rules Around The Letter E. Spelling words with silent letters is one of the biggest challenges when learning the French language. For instance, do you know that the letter -e is pronounced in the word mercredi (pronounced: /mɛʁkrɛdi/) but it isn't pronounced in the word samedi (pronounced: /samdi/)? It's one of the many rules that you must understand. In some French words, only a few of the letters are actually pronounced! The most common unpronounced letter in French is the letter -e. Here are two of the many rules of the pronunciation of the letter -e: Within a group, the letter -e generally is pronounced if it's preceded by two or more pronounced consonants. Otherwise, the statement would not be articulated properly in a good French pronunciation. For instance you cannot say "mercrdi". Another example: at the end of a group, the letter -e is usually not pronounced in standard French. For example, "une table" is pronounced /yn.tabl/. You need to learn the rules of the pronunciation of the letter -e (here is a video lesson on 1. Learn the rules around the letter e. 2. Master the liaisons in French. 3. Start linking words and sounds in French (les enchaînements). 4. Do a short exercise to improve your French listening. (Choose the right French audio and video). My advice is: First, learn the rules of the pronunciation of the letter -e; Then, practice the

pronunciation of words and sentences; Soon, you'll be able to better understand sentences when someone pronounces (or not) the letter -e.

2. Master Liaisons In French. The second tip to improve your French listening skills is to understand when French speakers link words together. When a word ends with a consonant that is normally not pronounced, a liaison is made by pronouncing the consonant if the word that follows begins with a vowel or silent -h. In making the liaison, the consonant that is pronounced becomes part of the syllable at the beginning of the word that follows. There are specific cases and rules. There are times when a liaison is required, recommended, or when it's forbidden. Let's see some examples: Liaison with the S consonant: when you're linking a subject pronoun that ends in the S consonant with a word that begins with a vowel, you have to pronounce the liaisons. In this case the liaison is pronounced /z/. French speakers do this liaison without thinking about it. For instance: vous avez. It sounds like /vu.zave/. Liaison with the preposition "en": here is another situation where the liaison is made when speaking French. You have to pronounce the liaison between the preposition "en" and the following vowel. For instance: "en avance" is pronounced /ɑ̃.navɑ̃s/. The liaison is pronounced as the French sound /n/.

3. Start Linking Words In French. Linking words together, or enchaînements in French is another way that French speakers are able to articulate so quickly but still be clear. When you study linking and the ways French link words and sounds, it makes it easier to understand listening skills. When a word ends with a consonant or a vowel that is normally pronounced, an enchaînement is made by linking the consonant to form a syllable with the word that follows if it begins with the vowel or silent h. Here is a video about

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Choose the right French audio and video.

Let's see an example: Pour elle: The consonant R in "pour" is always pronounced. The word that follows begins with the vowel -e. In this group, pronounce the letter "r" of "pour" not as part of the word pour, but rather with the "e" in "elle". It sounds like "pou.relle". Tu as écouté: Here is another example that shows linking words in French. In the sentence "tu as écouté", you have an enchaînement between three vowels: u, a, é. This means that "tu as écouté" is pronounced like "tuaé.couté".

You can practice the pronunciation of linking words with my YouTube videos<sup>1</sup>.

Learn the rules around the letter e

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Choose the right French audio and video of enchaînements in French.

4. Exercise To Perfect Your Listening. You learned the rules of the pronunciation of the letter -e, the liaisons, and the enchaînements. Now you're ready to improve your listening with a specific listening exercise. Here are the steps for a French listening practice:

Find a short audio or video clip of a native speaker that has a transcript. You need to keep it short. 10 or 20 seconds of video or audio is perfect.

Listen several times to the audio/video in French. First, you need to listen without the transcript.

Do your best to write down exactly what's being said.

Compare it with the transcript. What are the words and phrases you missed? What liaison or enchaînement did you miss?

Listen again and try to figure out why you missed them. When you figure out why you didn't understand it, it's going to help you get it next time.

Repeat this exercise regularly and you'll start making big progress with your French listening comprehension.

In the previous tip to improve your French listening skills, I asked you to listen to a video or audio as part of an exercise. However, you must be careful when you

choose the audio or video. Here is why: First, any audio or video must match your French listening level. Are you an intermediate or an advanced French listener? Second, you have to choose something you like, something you're passionate about. Do you like watching French movies? Do you like cooking? Do you prefer to listen to French culture? If so you can listen to a recipe in French or a documentary about French culture. If you're interested in the topic you'll be fully motivated. To sum up, this additional French listening tip is about choosing the right audio or video according to: 1. Your French level. 2. Your interests

And being able to listen to French and comprehend it are two completely different skills. You'll notice that when children are learning their native language, they do so orally—meaning their listening comprehension comes many years before their reading comprehension. They must take time to learn how to read and write. The way many adults learn a language, though, is the opposite—being able to read and write before the listening comprehension kicks in. So if you're new to speaking and listening to French, here are five ways to start moving from “Please speak slower” to “You could actually speak faster, if you'd like—I understand!”

**Additional Benefits of Stellar French Listening Comprehension Skills** Besides the obvious benefit of being able to speak and listen to French without any trouble, there are some less obvious benefits that come along with honed listening comprehension skills. Your accent sounds more French The more you listen to native speakers French, the more your brain processes the correct pronunciations and mimics them as you speak yourself. The important takeaway here is to listen to the same accent as often as possible at the beginning (this is when spending a significant time immersing yourself in a city is valuable) to get your ear accustomed to certain sounds and inflections. You'll find yourself mimicking that accent and slowly sounding more French. This video gives you an idea of how many accents exist just in France—so that's not including the many dialects and accents in Francophone countries around the world. Learning new vocabulary happens almost by osmosis. As you listen, you'll pick up new vocabulary all the time. Some of it will stick, and some won't, but you'll be surprised how much you

retain. Many of the words you learn might show up in something you read and you'll know what it means without thinking about it. Or, in other cases, you'll recognize the word and be able to look it up without trouble. What's also great about learning new vocabulary by hearing it is that you learn the pronunciation in tandem with the definition—bringing us back to the very nice perk of having a great accent. You learn how to speak both informally and formally. When you're learning grammar and vocabulary, you don't typically learn. At the end of the day, developing your listening comprehension is a process of putting many different skills together and being persistent about your practice.

Maybe most of all, it's about asking questions and being willing to make mistakes. So go out there and listen!

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