



# How to Understand Someone Speaking French

KS4 FRENCH

MFL

Ages 13-16 ⏰ 4 min read

## What Does It Mean to Understand Spoken French?

Understanding someone speaking **French** is different from reading it. When someone speaks, the words come quickly, sounds blend together, and you can't pause to look things up. You need special **listening skills** to catch what they're saying and make sense of it.

The good news? These are skills you can learn and practise, just like learning to ride a bike or play an instrument.

## Skill 1: Recognising French Sounds

**French phonetics** — the way words sound — is your foundation. **French** has sounds that English doesn't have. For example, the **French 'r'** is made at the back of your throat, not like the English 'r'. The **nasal sounds** (like 'on', 'an', 'in') sound different too.

Think of it like learning to spot different bird calls. At first, all birds sound similar, but as you listen more, you learn to pick out each one.

When you hear these sounds over and over, your brain starts to recognise patterns automatically. This is why listening to **French music, podcasts, and films** really helps.

## Skill 2: Understanding Word Stress and Rhythm

Every language has a rhythm and pattern. **French** sounds smooth and flowing because the stress falls differently than in English. In English, we say PREsent, but in **French**, each syllable gets almost equal weight: pre-sen-Tation.

Learning this rhythm helps you separate words from each other when they run together in speech. It's easier to spot where one word ends and another begins.

## Skill 3: Using Context Clues

You won't understand every single word, and that's completely normal. Instead of panicking, use **context** — the words around it — to guess what something means.

Think of it like watching a film in another language. You don't know every word, but from the pictures, faces, and tone of voice, you understand what's happening.

If someone says 'Je suis fatigué' and you know 'Je suis' means 'I am', you can guess that **fatigué** means tired just from the tone and situation.

## **Skill 4: Recognising Common Phrases and Patterns**

Certain phrases come up again and again: '**Ça va?**' (How are you?), '**Je ne comprends pas**' (I don't understand), '**Parlez plus lentement**' (Speak more slowly). When you know these **common expressions**, you can follow conversations much better.

## **Skill 5: Active Listening**

**Active listening** means paying full attention. Don't translate every word in your head — that's too slow. Instead, listen for the main ideas and key words. If you miss something, keep listening; you might catch it in context later.

The more you practise these **five skills**, the easier French becomes. Be patient with yourself!