

AP French Language & Culture — Complete Exam Guide

AP AP Study Guide

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Complete Study Guide

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Aligned to College Board AP French Language & Culture Course and Exam Description (CED) 2025-2026

Section 1: Exam Overview & Format

The AP French Language and Culture exam tests your ability to communicate in French across three modes: **interpersonal**, **interpretive**, and **presentational**. The exam is approximately 3 hours and 3 minutes long.

MEMORISE THIS

Exam Structure at a Glance:

Section	Task	Questions / Duration	Weight
I-A	Multiple-choice: reading	30 questions, ~40 min	23%
I-B	Multiple-choice: listening	35 questions, ~55 min	27%
II-A	Email reply	1 prompt, 15 min	12.5%
II-B	Persuasive essay	1 prompt + 3 sources, ~55 min	12.5%
II-C	Simulated conversation	5 prompts, ~20 sec each	12.5%
II-D	Cultural comparison	1 prompt, 2 min presentation	12.5%

Scoring

The exam is scored on a scale of **1 to 5**. Most colleges grant credit or advanced placement for a score of **3 or higher**, though selective institutions may require a 4 or 5.

EXAM ALERT

Key change for 2025-2026: College Board has clarified that the persuasive essay (Task 2) must engage with **all three sources** — students who ignore the audio source consistently score lower. Make sure you reference the audio clip in your essay.

The Six Themes

All AP French content is organized around six overarching themes. Every stimulus on the exam connects to at least one:

1. **Les familles et les communautés** — Families and Communities
2. **La science et la technologie** — Science and Technology
3. **L'esthétique** — Beauty and Aesthetics
4. **La vie contemporaine** — Contemporary Life
5. **La quête de soi** — Personal and Public Identities
6. **Les défis mondiaux** — Global Challenges

IB TIP

Strategy tip: When you encounter an unfamiliar passage, first identify which of the six themes it belongs to. This activates your thematic vocabulary and helps you anticipate the content before reading in detail.

Section 2: Multiple-Choice — Reading (Section I-A)

You will read a variety of French texts — articles, letters, advertisements, literary excerpts, charts, and graphs — then answer multiple-choice questions.

Text Types You Will See

- **Journalistic articles** (Le Monde, Le Figaro style)
- **Literary excerpts** (short fiction, memoir)
- **Promotional materials** (ads, brochures, event posters)
- **Emails and correspondence**
- **Charts, infographics, and tables** (paired with a text)

Reading Strategies

1. Skim first, then read closely

Before looking at the questions, spend 30 seconds skimming the passage. Identify:

- The **source** (journalistic? personal letter? ad?)
- The **theme** (which of the six AP themes?)
- The **tone** (formal? persuasive? nostalgic?)

2. Identify the main idea (*idée principale*)

The first question almost always asks about the main idea or purpose of the passage. Lock this in early.

3. Watch for false cognates (faux amis)

MEMORISE THIS

Common faux amis that appear on the AP exam:

French	Looks like...	Actually means
<i>actuellement</i>	"actually"	currently
<i>assister à</i>	"assist"	attend
<i>attendre</i>	"attend"	wait for
<i>blessé</i>	"bless"	injure
<i>coin</i>	"coin"	corner
<i>librairie</i>	"library"	bookstore
<i>monnaie</i>	"money"	change / currency
<i>rester</i>	"rest"	stay / remain
<i>sympathique</i>	"sympathetic"	nice / likable
<i>travail</i>	"travel"	work

4. Paired texts and graphs

When a passage is paired with a visual (chart, graph, table), expect at least one question that requires **synthesizing** both sources. Read the axes labels and title of the graphic in French carefully.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Worked Example — Reading Comprehension

Passage excerpt: “Selon un sondage récent, 67% des jeunes Français préfèrent communiquer par messagerie instantanée plutôt que par téléphone. Cette tendance, qui s’est accélérée depuis la pandémie, inquiète certains sociologues...”

Question: D’après le passage, quelle est l’attitude des sociologues envers cette tendance?

(A) Ils sont enthousiastes. (B) Ils sont préoccupés. (C) Ils sont indifférents. (D) Ils sont surpris.

Answer: (B) — The word *inquiète* (worries) signals concern. Don’t confuse it with *indifférent*.

Section 3: Multiple-Choice — Listening (Section I-B)

You will hear audio clips — conversations, interviews, news reports, announcements, and presentations — and answer multiple-choice questions. Each clip is played **twice**.

Audio Source Types

- **Conversations** between two speakers (formal and informal registers)
- **News reports** (radio/podcast style)
- **Interviews**
- **Public announcements** (airports, schools, public events)
- **Voicemail messages**

Listening Strategies

1. Read the questions and answer choices **BEFORE** the audio plays

You get preview time. Use every second of it. Underline key words in the questions so you know what to listen for.

2. First listen = gist; second listen = details

On the first playback, focus on understanding the overall situation:

- Who is speaking?
- What is the context?
- What is the speaker's attitude?

On the second playback, hunt for specific details that match the answer choices.

3. Register and tone matter

Pay attention to whether the speakers use *tu* or *vous* — this tells you about their relationship. Formal register often signals a professional or public context.

EXAM ALERT

Common trap: Audio clips sometimes include speakers who **disagree** with each other. The question may ask about one speaker's opinion specifically. Don't conflate Speaker A's view with Speaker B's.

4. Numbers, dates, and times

French numbers and times come up frequently. Practice hearing the difference between:

- *soixante-dix* (70), *quatre-vingts* (80), *quatre-vingt-dix* (90)
- *quinze* (15) vs. *cinquante* (50)
- *13h30* = 1:30 PM (24-hour clock is standard in French)

MEMORISE THIS

Listening comprehension — signal words to listen for:

Signal	Function
<i>cependant, néanmoins, pourtant, toutefois</i>	However / nevertheless — introduces a contrast
<i>d'une part... d'autre part</i>	On one hand... on the other — balanced argument
<i>en revanche, par contre</i>	On the other hand — contrasting point
<i>autrement dit, c'est-à-dire</i>	In other words — rephrasing (key idea coming)
<i>en fin de compte, en somme</i>	Ultimately / in short — conclusion
<i>grâce à</i>	Thanks to — positive cause
<i>à cause de</i>	Because of — neutral/negative cause

▶Watch: Listening Practice — Street Interviews & Natural French

VIDEO

Section 4: Interpersonal Writing — Email Reply (Section II-A)

You will read a formal email prompt and write a reply in **15 minutes**. The prompt is always a formal situation (a business, school, or organization writing to you).

Email Reply Requirements

Your reply must include **all** of the following:

1. A **formal greeting** (*Madame/Monsieur*, or *Chère Madame Dupont*.)
2. **Reference to the original message** (show you read and understood it)
3. **Answers to all questions** asked in the prompt
4. **At least one question** you ask in return
5. A **formal closing** (*Je vous prie d'agréer, Madame/Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments distingués.*)
6. **Formal register throughout** — use *vous*, not *tu*

MEMORISE THIS

Email template — memorize this structure:

Madame/Monsieur,

J'ai bien reçu votre courriel concernant [topic] et je vous

[Paragraph addressing the questions in the prompt — answer

[Paragraph with your own question or request for clarification]

Dans l'attente de votre réponse, je vous prie d'agréer,
Madame/Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments distingués

[Your name]

⚠ EXAM ALERT

Scoring killer: If you use *tu* instead of *vous* in the email reply, you automatically lose points on the “register” criterion — even if your French is otherwise excellent. The email is **always** formal.

Useful Formal Phrases

Purpose	French Phrase
Thank for writing	<i>Je vous remercie de votre courriel / de m'avoir contacté(e)</i>
In response to	<i>En réponse à votre demande / à votre question</i>
I am pleased to inform you	<i>J'ai le plaisir de vous informer que...</i>
I regret to inform you	<i>J'ai le regret de vous annoncer que...</i>
Could you clarify	<i>Pourriez-vous me préciser / m'indiquer...</i>
I look forward to	<i>Dans l'attente de votre réponse...</i>
Attached please find	<i>Veillez trouver ci-joint...</i>

Section 5: Presentational Writing — Persuasive Essay (Section II-B)

This is the most complex task on the exam. You must write a **persuasive essay** that integrates information from **three sources**: a printed text, a chart/graph, and an audio clip.

Time Allocation (~55 minutes total)

1. **6 minutes** — Read the printed source
2. **~4 minutes** — Study the chart/graph
3. **~2 plays** — Listen to the audio source (~3-4 min total)
4. **~40 minutes** — Write your essay

Essay Structure

Your essay should have a clear **thesis** (thèse/prise de position) and follow this structure:

📖 MEMORISE THIS

Recommended essay structure:

Introduction (1 paragraph)

- Hook or contextualization
- State your thesis clearly: *À mon avis, ... / Je suis convaincu(e) que...*
- Preview your arguments

Body paragraph 1 — Your strongest argument

- Cite **Source 1** (printed text): *Selon l'article, ... / D'après le texte...*

Body paragraph 2 — Supporting argument

- Cite **Source 2** (chart/graph): *Le graphique montre que... / Les données indiquent...*

Body paragraph 3 — Counterargument + rebuttal

- Cite **Source 3** (audio): *Comme l'a souligné le locuteur, ... / L'interview révèle que...*
- Acknowledge the opposing view, then rebut it

Conclusion (1 paragraph)

- Restate thesis in different words
- End with a broader reflection or call to action

Citing Sources Properly

You **must** reference all three sources. Use citation language like:

- *Selon la source numéro un / le premier document...*
- *D'après le graphique / le tableau...*
- *Le document audio révèle que... / L'auteur du passage affirme que...*

EXAM ALERT

Common mistake: Students summarize the sources instead of using them to **support an argument**. You need a clear opinion. Don't sit on the fence — take a position and defend it.

Transition Words for Argumentation

Function	Transitions
Adding	<i>de plus, en outre, par ailleurs, également</i>
Contrasting	<i>cependant, néanmoins, en revanche, malgré</i>
Cause	<i>car, puisque, étant donné que, grâce à</i>
Consequence	<i>par conséquent, donc, ainsi, c'est pourquoi</i>
Exemplifying	<i>par exemple, notamment, tel que, à titre d'exemple</i>
Concluding	<i>en conclusion, en somme, pour conclure, en fin de compte</i>

Section 6: Interpersonal Speaking — Simulated Conversation (Section II-C)

You will participate in a simulated conversation with a recorded speaker. You hear five prompts and have **20 seconds** to respond to each one.

Conversation Format

The outline tells you the situation (e.g., “You are speaking with a French exchange student about school life”) and gives a brief description of what each of your five responses should address.

Strategies for the Conversation

1. Start speaking immediately

Don't waste the 20 seconds thinking. Begin with a filler if needed:

- *Eh bien, ... / Alors, ... / En fait, ...*

2. Address the prompt completely

Each prompt description tells you exactly what to do. If it says “ask a question,” you must ask one. If it says “express your opinion,” give a clear position.

3. Use varied sentence structures

Show range. Mix:

- Simple sentences: *J'aime beaucoup le sport.*
- Complex sentences: *Bien que j'aime le sport, je n'ai pas toujours le temps d'en faire.*
- Conditional: *Si j'avais plus de temps, je ferais du tennis.*

4. React to what the speaker says

Show that you're listening and responding naturally:

- *C'est une bonne question! / Ah, c'est intéressant! / Je comprends tout à fait.*

IB TIP

Pro tip: Practice with a timer. Record yourself giving 20-second responses to random prompts. The biggest enemy on this task is **silence** — even imperfect French is better than no response.

MEMORISE THIS

Conversation fillers and starters:

Situation	French Phrase
Agreeing	<i>Je suis tout à fait d'accord. / Absolument! / C'est exactement ce que je pense.</i>
Disagreeing politely	<i>Je comprends votre point de vue, mais... / Je ne suis pas tout à fait d'accord parce que...</i>
Asking for clarification	<i>Pourriez-vous répéter? / Que voulez-vous dire par...?</i>
Expressing preference	<i>Je préfère... parce que... / Pour ma part, je trouve que...</i>
Giving advice	<i>À mon avis, vous devriez... / Je vous conseillerais de...</i>
Expressing enthusiasm	<i>C'est formidable! / Quelle bonne idée! / Ça me plairait beaucoup!</i>

▶Watch: Speaking Practice — Listen & Repeat Format

VIDEO

Section 7: Presentational Speaking — Cultural Comparison (Section II-D)

You will be given a prompt asking you to compare a cultural practice, product, or perspective in a French-speaking community with your own community. You get **4 minutes to prepare** and **2 minutes to speak**.

Structure Your Response

MEMORISE THIS

Cultural comparison framework:

Opening (15 seconds)

- State the topic: *La question porte sur [topic]...*
- Briefly preview what you'll compare

French-speaking world (45 seconds)

- Describe the cultural practice/product/perspective in a specific Francophone country or region
- Give a **concrete example** (a specific tradition, law, event, or custom)

Your own community (45 seconds)

- Describe how the same topic manifests in your community
- Give a **concrete example**

Comparison and reflection (15 seconds)

- Explicitly compare: *Alors que dans la culture française... dans ma communauté...*

- End with a reflection on what this difference/similarity reveals

Building Your Francophone Knowledge Bank

You need specific cultural knowledge. Here are essential topics to prepare:

Les familles et les communautés

- Le PACS (civil union in France)
- La fête des voisins (Neighbors' Day)
- Le rôle de la famille élargie in West African Francophone countries

La vie contemporaine

- Le système éducatif français (le baccalauréat, les grandes écoles)
- La Sécurité sociale / le système de santé
- Les congés payés (5 weeks of paid vacation in France)
- La gastronomie: UNESCO heritage status of the French meal

La science et la technologie

- La loi HADOPI (internet piracy law)
- Le TGV and French public transportation
- France's nuclear energy policy

Les défis mondiaux

- La Francophonie (Organisation internationale de la Francophonie)
- Immigration and integration in France
- Environmental policy: les accords de Paris

L'esthétique

- Le Festival de Cannes
- La bande dessinée (Tintin, Astérix) as a respected art form
- La mode française: haute couture vs. prêt-à-porter

La quête de soi

- La laïcité (secularism in French public life)
- Le mouvement #MeToo / #BalanceTonPorc in France
- Creole identity in the French Caribbean (Guadeloupe, Martinique)

EXAM ALERT

Don't be vague. Saying "In France, food is important" earns minimal credit. Saying "In France, the traditional multi-course meal — entrée, plat, fromage, dessert — was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2010, reflecting the cultural significance of the repas gastronomique" shows the specific knowledge that earns top marks.

Section 8: AP French Vocabulary by Theme

Strong vocabulary is the foundation of every section. Here are high-frequency words organized by the six AP themes.

Theme 1: Les familles et les communautés

MEMORISE THIS

French	English
<i>l'aîné(e)</i>	eldest child
<i>le cadet / la cadette</i>	youngest child
<i>le foyer</i>	household / home
<i>les liens familiaux</i>	family ties
<i>l'entraide</i>	mutual aid
<i>le bénévolat</i>	volunteering
<i>la solidarité</i>	solidarity
<i>le voisinage</i>	neighborhood
<i>une association caritative</i>	charitable organization
<i>le mariage civil</i>	civil marriage

Theme 2: La science et la technologie

MEMORISE THIS

French	English
<i>les réseaux sociaux</i>	social media
<i>un appareil</i>	device
<i>le développement durable</i>	sustainable development
<i>une découverte</i>	discovery
<i>la recherche</i>	research
<i>un brevet</i>	patent
<i>l'intelligence artificielle</i>	artificial intelligence
<i>les données personnelles</i>	personal data
<i>le cyberharcèlement</i>	cyberbullying
<i>le numérique</i>	digital technology

Theme 3: L'esthétique

MEMORISE THIS

French	English
<i>une œuvre d'art</i>	work of art
<i>un chef-d'œuvre</i>	masterpiece
<i>la peinture</i>	painting
<i>le patrimoine</i>	heritage
<i>un spectacle</i>	show / performance
<i>la mode</i>	fashion
<i>un courant artistique</i>	artistic movement
<i>le siècle des Lumières</i>	the Enlightenment
<i>une exposition</i>	exhibition
<i>un metteur en scène</i>	director (theater/film)

Theme 4: La vie contemporaine

MEMORISE THIS

French	English
<i>le temps libre</i>	free time
<i>les loisirs</i>	leisure activities
<i>le baccalauréat</i>	French high-school diploma exam
<i>la restauration rapide</i>	fast food
<i>un stage</i>	internship
<i>le taux de chômage</i>	unemployment rate
<i>les transports en commun</i>	public transportation
<i>la rentrée</i>	back-to-school season
<i>un séjour</i>	stay / trip
<i>le pouvoir d'achat</i>	purchasing power

Theme 5: La quête de soi

MEMORISE THIS

French	English
<i>l'identité</i>	identity
<i>l'appartenance</i>	belonging
<i>l'épanouissement</i>	personal fulfillment
<i>les valeurs</i>	values
<i>la diversité</i>	diversity
<i>le préjugé</i>	prejudice
<i>la langue maternelle</i>	mother tongue
<i>la citoyenneté</i>	citizenship
<i>l'intégration</i>	integration
<i>la laïcité</i>	secularism

Theme 6: Les défis mondiaux

MEMORISE THIS

French	English
<i>le réchauffement climatique</i>	global warming
<i>les énergies renouvelables</i>	renewable energy
<i>la pauvreté</i>	poverty
<i>les droits de l'homme</i>	human rights
<i>une ONG</i>	NGO
<i>le commerce équitable</i>	fair trade
<i>l'accès à l'eau potable</i>	access to clean water
<i>les inégalités</i>	inequalities
<i>l'immigration</i>	immigration
<i>la sécurité alimentaire</i>	food security

Section 9: Practice Questions

Reading Comprehension Practice

WORKED EXAMPLE

Practice Passage:

Le gouvernement français a annoncé un nouveau plan pour lutter contre le gaspillage alimentaire. Désormais, les supermarchés de plus de 400 mètres carrés seront obligés de donner leurs invendus alimentaires à des associations caritatives. Les commerçants qui jettent de la nourriture encore consommable risquent une amende pouvant atteindre 3 750 euros.

Question 1: Quel est l'objectif principal de cette mesure? (A) Augmenter les profits des supermarchés (B) Réduire le gaspillage alimentaire (C) Fermer les petits commerces (D) Limiter la taille des supermarchés

Answer: (B) — The first sentence states the goal: *lutter contre le gaspillage alimentaire* (fight food waste).

Question 2: Qui bénéficiera directement de cette loi? (A) Les employés des supermarchés (B) Les associations caritatives (C) Les agriculteurs (D) Les restaurateurs

Answer: (B) — Unsold food must be donated to *associations caritatives* (charitable organizations).

Email Reply Practice

WORKED EXAMPLE

Prompt:

Vous avez reçu un courriel du directeur d'un programme d'échange scolaire en France. Il vous demande pourquoi vous souhaitez participer à ce programme, quelles sont vos compétences en français, et dans quelle ville vous aimeriez être placé(e).

Model response structure:

Monsieur le Directeur,

J'ai bien reçu votre courriel concernant le programme d'échange scolaire et je vous en remercie vivement.

Je souhaite participer à ce programme car je suis passionné(e) par la culture française et j'aimerais améliorer mes compétences linguistiques dans un contexte authentique. En ce qui concerne mon niveau de français, j'étudie cette langue depuis quatre ans dans mon lycée et j'ai obtenu une note de 5 à l'examen AP 1^{ère} année dernière. Je suis capable de tenir une conversation courante et de rédiger des textes argumentatifs.

Quant à la ville, j'aimerais beaucoup être placé(e) à Lyon, car je m'intéresse à la gastronomie française et Lyon est reconnue comme la capitale culinaire de la France. Pourriez-vous me préciser la durée exacte du séjour et les activités culturelles prévues dans le programme?

Dans l'attente de votre réponse, je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur le Directeur, l'expression de mes sentiments distingués.

Cultural Comparison Practice

WORKED EXAMPLE

Prompt: *Comparez les attitudes envers le temps libre dans une communauté francophone et dans votre communauté.*

Key points to include:

Francophone perspective:

- In France, the 35-hour workweek (les 35 heures) and 5 weeks of paid vacation (congés payés) reflect a cultural priority on work-life balance
- La pause déjeuner of 1-2 hours is common in many workplaces
- August is traditionally the month when much of France goes on vacation (*les grandes vacances*)

Your community perspective:

- Contrast with typical American work culture (2 weeks vacation, longer hours)
- Discuss the concept of “hustle culture” and how attitudes are evolving
- Mention specific local practices (weekend activities, summer camps)

Comparison:

- The difference reflects deeper cultural values about the relationship between work and leisure
- Both cultures are evolving — France debating the 35-hour week, the US discussing work-life balance post-pandemic

Section 10: AP French Resources

Official College Board Materials

- **Past Free-Response Questions (FRQs):** AP French Past Exam Questions — includes scored student samples with commentary
- **Course and Exam Description (CED):** The official CED contains audio files for practice — download from your AP Classroom account
- **AP Classroom:** Practice questions, progress checks, and full practice exams aligned to the six themes

YouTube Channels for Listening Practice

- **Easy French** — Street interviews with French and English subtitles. Best for training your ear on real spoken French at various speeds.
- **Français Authentique** — Natural-speed French for intermediate learners. Great for building listening stamina before the exam.

- **Coffee Break French** — Listen-and-repeat format. The “To Go” episodes are ideal for practicing 20-second spoken responses.
- **Français avec Pierre** — Grammar and cultural topics explained in clear French. Excellent for Section II-D cultural comparison prep.

Free Practice Platforms

- **Knowt AP French** — Free flashcards, study guides, and practice questions aligned to AP French
- **Fiveable AP French** — Study guides, practice questions, and exam tips organized by unit
- **Lawless French Listening** — Graded listening exercises from beginner to advanced, with transcripts
- **Kwiziq French** — Listening practice organized by CEFR level with adaptive difficulty

French Media for Daily Practice

- **TV5Monde** — Free streaming of French-language news, documentaries, and shows with graded exercises
 - **France 24** — French news broadcast with transcripts available online
 - **RFI Savoirs** — Radio France Internationale’s learning platform with graded audio and exercises
 - **Le Monde / Le Figaro** — French newspapers for reading practice; Le Monde’s “Les Décodeurs” section is excellent for graph and data analysis practice (Section I-A paired texts)
- Bellevue, WA — Local Exam Info & Resources