

Unit 2: First Steps & Basic Sentences (Les Premiers Pas)

You've got the sounds under your belt (mostly!). Now it's time to put those sounds into action and start having your very first basic conversations. This unit is all about introducing yourself, saying hello, saying goodbye, and talking about what you have. These are the bricks and mortar of everyday chats!

Lesson 4: Greetings & Goodbyes (Les Salutations)

Thoughts: This lesson is super practical. You'll learn how to say hi and bye in various situations. The most important concept here is **formal vs. informal address** – a social rule crucial in French, similar in concept to how you address people in Czech, but specifically using "you."

Casual Introduction: Imagine walking into a café in Prague (or Paris!). What's the first thing you say? "Dobrý den!" or "Hello!" In French, it's just as simple, but there are a few important nuances. Are you talking to a friend, a shopkeeper, or your grandmother? The French have different ways to say "you," and it changes how you greet someone. Let's learn to make a great first impression!

Essential Greetings (Les Salutations essentielles)

Here are the most common ways to say hello and goodbye:

- **Bonjour !** (Bohn-ZHOOR) - Hello / Good day.
 - *Thoughts:* This is your universal, go-to greeting during the day. Use it almost anywhere, with anyone, from morning until about 6 PM.
- **Bonsoir !** (Bohn-SWAHR) - Good evening.
 - *Thoughts:* Use this from late afternoon/early evening onwards.
- **Bonne nuit !** (BUN NWEE) - Good night.
 - *Thoughts:* This is only used when you are *going to bed* or saying goodbye to someone who is going to bed. Not a general evening greeting.
- **Salut !** (Sah-LEW) - Hi / Bye.
 - *Thoughts:* This is super informal, like "Hi" or "Hey" in English. Only use it with friends, family, or people your age you know well. Never with a stranger or someone older/in a position of authority!
- **Au revoir !** (Oh ruh-VWAHR) - Goodbye.
 - *Thoughts:* Your universal goodbye, for formal and informal situations.
- **À bientôt !** (Ah byahn-TOH) - See you soon!
 - *Thoughts:* Used when you expect to see the person again relatively soon.
- **À tout à l'heure !** (Ah toot ah LUHR) - See you later (today)!
 - *Thoughts:* More specific than *À bientôt*, implies seeing them later the same day.

Asking How Someone Is

After "Hello," you often ask "How are you?"

- **Ça va ?** (Sah VAH?) - How are you? / How's it going?
 - *Thoughts:* This is the most common, very casual way. Literally "It goes?"

- **Ça va.** (Sah VAH.) - I'm fine. / It's going well.
 - *Thoughts:* The answer is often the same as the question!
- **Ça va bien.** (Sah VAH byahn) - I'm doing well.
- **Et toi ?** (Eh TWAH?) - And you? (Informal)
- **Et vous ?** (Eh VOO?) - And you? (Formal / Plural)

Example Dialogue 1 (Informal):

Anna: Salut, Tomáš ! (Hi, Tomáš!) **Tomáš:** Salut, Anna ! Ça va ? (Hi, Anna! How's it going?) **Anna:** Ça va bien, merci. Et toi ? (I'm doing well, thanks. And you?) **Tomáš:** Ça va. À bientôt ! (I'm fine. See you soon!) **Anna:** À bientôt ! (See you soon!)

Example Dialogue 2 (Formal):

Client: Bonjour, Madame ! (Hello, Madam!) **Vendeur:** Bonjour, Monsieur. Ça va ? (Hello, Sir. How are you?) **Client:** Ça va, merci. Et vous ? (I'm fine, thanks. And you?) **Vendeur:** Ça va bien, merci. Au revoir ! (I'm doing well, thank you. Goodbye!) **Client:** Au revoir ! (Goodbye!)

Vocabulary Box:

French Phrase	English Translation	Notes
Bonjour !	Hello / Good day	Universal daytime greeting
Bonsoir !	Good evening	Used from late afternoon
Bonne nuit !	Good night (when going to bed)	Only for bedtime
Salut !	Hi / Bye	Informal, for friends/family
Au revoir !	Goodbye	Universal goodbye
À bientôt !	See you soon!	When you expect to see them again soon
À tout à l'heure !	See you later (today)!	For same-day encounters
Ça va ?	How are you? / How's it going?	Casual question
Ça va.	I'm fine. / It's going well.	Casual answer
Ça va bien.	I'm doing well.	
Et toi ?	And you?	Informal
Et vous ?	And you?	Formal / Plural
Merci.	Thank you.	Always polite!
Madame	Madam / Mrs.	For married or older women
Monsieur	Sir / Mr.	For men

Grammar Spotlight: Tu vs. Vous – The Two "Yous"

This is one of the most important distinctions in French social etiquette. English just has "you," but French (like Czech, sort of!) has two ways to say it:

- **Tu** (too) - This is the **informal, singular "you."**
 - Use *tu* with:
 - Friends
 - Family members
 - Children
 - Animals
 - People your age or younger, *if* you've agreed to be informal (sometimes indicated by using first names).
 - Think of it like when you use someone's first name in Czech, or informal address within family.
- **Vous** (voo) - This is the **formal, singular "you"** AND the **plural "you"** (for any group of people).
 - Use *vous* with:
 - Strangers
 - People older than you (unless they invite you to use *tu*)
 - People in positions of authority (teachers, police, doctors, shopkeepers, etc.)
 - Any group of two or more people, even if they are your friends.
 - Think of it like the Czech concept of *vykání* when addressing an elder or stranger politely, even if the grammatical mechanics are different. And of course, *vy* for multiple people.

Why is this important? Using *tu* when you should use *vous* can be seen as disrespectful or rude. When in doubt, **always use *vous***. It's better to be too polite than not polite enough. If someone wants you to use *tu*, they'll usually tell you: "*On peut se tutoyer.*" (We can use *tu* with each other.)

Cultural Note: When to Use 'Tu' vs. 'Vous'

In France, the *tu/vous* distinction is deeply ingrained in social interactions. It's more than just grammar; it's a sign of respect, familiarity, and social distance.

- **Initial encounters:** Always start with *vous* when meeting someone new, especially adults.
- **Age and Authority:** Generally, you use *vous* with anyone significantly older than you or in a professional/authoritative role (teachers, doctors, shop assistants, waiters, etc.), unless they explicitly suggest otherwise.
- **Professional settings:** Even among colleagues, *vous* is often the default, at least initially.
- **Younger generation:** Younger people (under 30) tend to switch to *tu* more quickly among themselves, but it's still good practice to start with *vous* with a new acquaintance until familiarity is established.
- **Czech Parallel:** While Czech doesn't have two distinct "you" pronouns, you understand the social nuances of addressing people differently (e.g., *pan/paní* + surname for formality, or different verb endings). The *feeling* of formality/informality is something you're familiar with, even if the French system is pronoun-based.

Exercises/Quiz:

1. Translate these greetings into French:

- a) Good day (universal)
- b) Hi (informal)
- c) Goodbye (universal)
- d) See you soon!

2. You're speaking to:

- i) Your best friend: Should you use *tu* or *vous*?

- ii) A stranger at a shop: Should you use *tu* or *vous*?
- iii) Your French teacher: Should you use *tu* or *vous*?
- iv) A group of your friends: Should you use *tu* or *vous*?

3. Fill in the blanks with the correct "you" pronoun:

- a) Salut, Marie! Ça va? Et _____ ? (talking to your sister)
- b) Bonjour, Monsieur Martin. Ça va bien, merci. Et _____ ? (talking to your boss)
- c) Au revoir les enfants ! À bientôt ! (talking to a group of children)

Solutions:

1. a) Bonjour! b) Salut! c) Au revoir! d) À bientôt!
2. i) tu, ii) vous, iii) vous, iv) vous
3. a) toi, b) vous, c) vous

Lesson 5: Introducing Yourself with être (Se présenter avec être)

Thoughts: This is a crucial step! We're learning the most fundamental verb in French, *être* ("to be"), and the words that stand in for names: **subject pronouns** (I, you, he, she, etc.). You'll be able to say "I am [your name]" and "He is [his name]!"

Casual Introduction: After saying hello, the next natural step in a conversation is usually introducing yourself or someone else. To do that, we need the "to be" verb. In French, this verb is super important, but also a bit... special. It's called *être*. It changes its form depending on who "is" doing the "being." Don't worry, we'll make it clear!

Subject Pronouns (Les pronoms sujets)

These are the words that replace nouns (people, places, things) and tell us who is doing the action. They are the "I, you, he, she, we, they" of French.

French Pronoun	English Translation	Notes
Je	I	J' before a vowel (e.g., j'ai)
Tu	You (informal, singular)	
Il	He / It (masculine)	
Elle	She / It (feminine)	
On	We / One / People (generally)	Very common in informal French for "we"
Nous	We (formal, plural)	More formal than <i>on</i> for "we"
Vous	You (formal, singular / plural)	
Ils	They (masculine / mixed group)	For two or more males, or mixed gender
Elles	They (feminine)	For two or more females only

- **Czech Connection:** You're familiar with these concepts in Czech: *já, ty, on, ona, my, vy, oni, ony*. The French set is similar!

Grammar Spotlight: The Verb ÊTRE (To be)

Être is one of the two most important verbs in French. It's "irregular," meaning it doesn't follow a simple pattern. You'll need to memorize its forms, but don't worry, you'll use it so often, it'll become second nature!

ÊTRE - Present Tense Conjugation

Subject Pronoun	ÊTRE Form	English Equivalent
Je	suis	I am
Tu	es	You are
Il	est	He is
Elle	est	She is
On	est	One is / We are
Nous	sommes	We are
Vous	êtes	You are
Ils	sont	They are
Elles	sont	They are

Pronunciation Notes:

- Notice the silent final 's' on *suis* and *es*.
- *Est* sounds like "eh," and the 't' is silent.
- *Sont* sounds like the nasal 'on' (from Lesson 2) with a 's' at the beginning, the 't' is silent.
- **Liaison Alert!** When *vous* or *nous* are followed by a verb starting with a vowel, the final 's' is pronounced like a 'z' sound. So, *vous êtes* sounds like "voo-ZET." *Nous sommes* has no liaison because *sommes* starts with a consonant.

Introducing Yourself and Others

Now, let's put it together!

To say "I am [your name]":

- **Je suis** [Your Name]. (Juh SWEE [Your Name].)
 - *Example:* Je suis Anna. (I am Anna.)
 - *Example:* Je suis Tomáš. (I am Tomáš.)

To ask "Who is it? / What is it?":

- **Qui est-ce ?** (KEE ES?) - Who is it? (Literally "Who is this?")
- **C'est...** (Seh...) - It is... / This is...
 - *Thoughts:* *C'est* is super useful! It's how you identify people or things.
 - *Example:* C'est Marie. (It is Marie. / This is Marie.)
 - *Example:* C'est mon ami. (It is my friend. / This is my friend.)

Introducing others:

- **Il est** [Name/Description]. (EEL eh) - He is...
 - *Example:* Il est Pierre. (He is Pierre.)
 - *Example:* Il est étudiant. (He is a student - masculine.)
- **Elle est** [Name/Description]. (EL eh) - She is...
 - *Example:* Elle est Sophie. (She is Sophie.)
 - *Example:* Elle est étudiante. (She is a student - feminine.)

Example Dialogue:

Marie: Salut, Pierre ! **Pierre:** Salut, Marie ! Qui est-ce ? (Who is this?) **Marie:** C'est Anna. Elle est de Prague. (This is Anna. She is from Prague.) **Pierre:** Bonjour, Anna. Je suis Pierre. (Hello, Anna. I am Pierre.) **Anna:** Bonjour, Pierre.

Vocabulary Box:

French Phrase	English Translation	Notes
Je suis	I am	
Tu es	You are (informal)	
Il est	He is / It is (masc.)	
Elle est	She is / It is (fem.)	
On est	We are / One is / People are	Informal "we"
Nous sommes	We are	Formal "we"
Vous êtes	You are (formal/plural)	
Ils sont	They are (masc./mixed)	
Elles sont	They are (fem.)	
Qui est-ce ?	Who is it?	
C'est	It is / This is	Very common for identification
de	from / of	
étudiant / étudiante	student (m/f)	
ami / amie	friend (m/f)	

Cultural Note: Politeness in Introductions

In French culture, when introducing yourself or others, a simple "Bonjour" or "Bonsoir" accompanied by a firm handshake (or *bise* - a light kiss on the cheek, which is a whole other cultural note for later!) is standard. Always make eye contact. Being direct is fine, but politeness (using *vous* initially, saying *merci*) is key.

Exercises/Quiz:

1. **Conjugate *être* for the following pronouns:**

- a) Je _____
- b) Nous _____
- c) Ils _____
- d) Tu _____
- e) Vous _____

2. **Translate the following sentences into French:**

- a) I am Martin.
- b) She is from Paris.
- c) We are friends (use *nous*).
- d) Are you (formal) a student? (Hint: just *Vous êtes étudiant?* with rising intonation)
- e) This is Paul.

3. **Correct the mistakes (there's one mistake per sentence):**

- a) Je est Marie.
- b) Il sont Thomas.
- c) Tu sommes Jean.

Solutions:

1. a) suis, b) sommes, c) sont, d) es, e) êtes
2. a) Je suis Martin. b) Elle est de Paris. c) Nous sommes amis. d) Vous êtes étudiant ? e) C'est Paul.
3. a) Je **suis** Marie. b) Il **est** Thomas. c) Tu **es** Jean.

Lesson 6: Talking About What You Have with avoir (Parler de ce qu'on a avec avoir)

Thoughts: Time for our second superstar verb: *avoir* ("to have"). You'll learn how to talk about possessions, but also some surprising things like age and certain feelings – this is where French (and Czech!) differs from English.

Casual Introduction: What do you have? A pen? A cat? A good idea? In French, we use the verb *avoir* to talk about possession. But *avoir* is a multi-talented verb! It's also used for your age (you *have* years, you don't *are* years) and even some basic physical states. Let's explore *avoir*!

Grammar Spotlight: The Verb AVOIR (To have)

Like *être*, *avoir* is super important and irregular. Memorize its forms!

AVOIR - Present Tense Conjugation

Subject Pronoun	AVOIR Form	English Equivalent
Je	ai	I have
Tu	as	You have
Il	a	He has
Elle	a	She has

Subject Pronoun	AVOIR Form	English Equivalent
On	a	One has / We have
Nous	avons	We have
Vous	avez	You have
Ils	ont	They have
Elles	ont	They have

Pronunciation Notes:

- **J'ai** (ZHAY) - The 'e' in 'je' disappears before a vowel. This is called **elision**.
- **Tu as** (too AH) - No silent 's' here! The 's' links to the vowel.
- **Il a** (eel AH) - No liaison here because 'il' ends in 'l', not 's' or 't'.
- **Nous avons** (noo-ZAH-vohn) - The 's' of *nous* links to the 'a' of *avons*, making a 'z' sound (**liaison**).
- **Vous avez** (voo-ZAH-vay) - Same as *nous avons*, liaison with 'z' sound.
- **Ils ont** (eel-ZOHN) / **Elles ont** (el-ZOHN) - Liaison with 'z' sound. Also, *ont* uses the nasal 'on' sound (from Lesson 2!).

Using AVOIR

1. To Express Possession (What you *have*)

- **J'ai** un livre. (Jhay un LEEVR) - I have a book.
- **Tu as** une voiture. (Too ah oon VWAT-yur) - You have a car.
- **Il a** un chien. (Eel ah un SHYEN) - He has a dog.
- **Elle a** une idée. (El ah oon EE-day) - She has an idea.
- **Nous avons** une maison. (Noo-ZAH-vohn oon MAY-zohn) - We have a house.
- **Vous avez** un chat. (Voo-ZAH-vay un SHAH) - You have a cat.
- **Ils ont** des amis. (Eel-ZOHN day-ZAH-mee) - They have friends.

2. To Express Age (How old you *are*)

In French, you *have* years, you don't *are* years! This is similar to Czech, where you use *mít* (to have) for age.

- **J'ai 30 ans.** (Jhay TRAHNT ZAHN) - I am 30 years old. (Literally: I have 30 years.)
- **Tu as 25 ans.** (Too ah VANGT-sank ZAHN) - You are 25 years old.
- **Il a 40 ans.** (Eel ah KAH-rahnt ZAHN) - He is 40 years old.
- **Czech Connection:** This is great news for you! In Czech, you say "*Mám 30 let*" (I have 30 years). So the concept is identical: **French avoir = Czech mít for age**. This will feel very natural!

3. To Express Certain Feelings or States

This is another difference from English, where you might say "I *am* hungry." In French, you *have* hunger!

- **J'ai faim.** (Jhay FANG) - I am hungry. (Literally: I have hunger.)

- **Tu as soif.** (Too ah SWAHF) - You are thirsty. (Literally: You have thirst.)
- **Il a chaud.** (Eel ah SHOH) - He is hot. (Literally: He has hot.)
- **Elle a froid.** (El ah FRWAH) - She is cold. (Literally: She has cold.)
- **Nous avons sommeil.** (Noo-ZAH-vohn SOH-may) - We are sleepy. (Literally: We have sleep.)
- **Vous avez peur.** (Voo-ZAH-vay PUHR) - You are afraid. (Literally: You have fear.)

Example Dialogue:

Jean: Salut Marie ! Ça va ? (Hi Marie! How's it going?) **Marie:** Ça va bien, merci. J'ai faim ! Et toi ? (I'm doing well, thanks. I'm hungry! And you?) **Jean:** Moi, ça va. Tu as quel âge ? (Me, I'm fine. How old are you? - Lit: You have what age?) **Marie:** J'ai vingt-cinq ans. Et toi ? (I'm twenty-five. And you?) **Jean:** J'ai trente ans. (I'm thirty.) **Marie:** Ah, tu as un chien, non ? (Ah, you have a dog, right?) **Jean:** Oui, j'ai un chien ! (Yes, I have a dog!)

Vocabulary Box:

French Phrase	English Translation	Notes
J'ai	I have	
Tu as	You have (informal)	
Il a	He has / It has	
Elle a	She has / It has	
On a	We have / One has	
Nous avons	We have	
Vous avez	You have (form./pl.)	
Ils ont	They have (masc./mixed)	
Elles ont	They have (fem.)	
un livre	a book (masc.)	
une voiture	a car (fem.)	
un chien	a dog (masc.)	
une idée	an idea (fem.)	
une maison	a house (fem.)	
un chat	a cat (masc.)	
des amis	friends (plural)	
ans	years	Used for age
faim	hunger	Used with <i>avoir</i> for "hungry"
soif	thirst	Used with <i>avoir</i> for "thirsty"
chaud	hot (feeling)	Used with <i>avoir</i> for "hot"
froid	cold (feeling)	Used with <i>avoir</i> for "cold"

French Phrase	English Translation	Notes
sommeil	sleep	Used with <i>avoir</i> for "sleepy"
peur	fear	Used with <i>avoir</i> for "afraid"
quel âge ?	what age?	For asking age

Exercises/Quiz:

1. Conjugate *avoir* for the following pronouns:

- a) Je _____
- b) Nous _____
- c) Ils _____
- d) Tu _____
- e) Vous _____

2. Translate the following sentences into French:

- a) I have a car.
- b) She is 20 years old.
- c) We are thirsty (use *nous*).
- d) They (masculine) have a dog.
- e) Are you (formal) cold? (Hint: *Vous avez froid?*)

3. Correct the mistakes:

- a) Elle est 30 ans.
- b) J'ai suis faim.
- c) Tu ont un chat.

Solutions:

1. a) ai, b) avons, c) ont, d) as, e) avez
2. a) J'ai une voiture. b) Elle a 20 ans. c) Nous avons soif. d) Ils ont un chien. e) Vous avez froid ?
3. a) Elle **a** 30 ans. (Not *est*) b) J'**ai** faim. (Not *suis*) c) Tu **as** un chat. (Not *ont*)

Key Takeaways for Unit 2: First Steps & Basic Sentences

- **Greetings:** Use **Bonjour** (day), **Bonsoir** (evening), **Au revoir** (goodbye). **Salut** is informal.
- **Asking how someone is: Ça va?** (casual) and **Ça va.** for the answer. Use **Et toi?** (informal) or **Et vous?** (formal/plural) to ask back.
- **Tu vs. Vous:** This is crucial!
 - **Tu:** Informal, singular (friends, family, kids).
 - **Vous:** Formal, singular (strangers, elders, authority figures) AND *always* plural. When in doubt, use *vous*.
- **Verb ÊTRE (to be):**
 - *Je suis, Tu es, Il/Elle/On est, Nous sommes, Vous êtes, Ils/Elles sont.*
 - Used for identity ("Je suis Anna") and descriptions.
 - Remember **C'est** (It is/This is) for identification.
- **Verb AVOIR (to have):**
 - *J'ai, Tu as, Il/Elle/On a, Nous avons, Vous avez, Ils/Elles ont.*

- Used for **possession** ("J'ai un livre").
- Used for **age** ("J'ai 30 ans" - I have 30 years, just like Czech *mít*).
- Used for certain **feelings/states** ("J'ai faim" - I have hunger / I am hungry).
- **Pronunciation:** Continue practicing the nasal sounds and remember **liaison** (linking sounds) with **nous avons** and **vous avez**. Also, **elision** (dropping a vowel) with **j'ai**.

You've learned to say hello, introduce yourself, and talk about what you possess or how you feel! That's a huge step toward real conversations. Keep practicing these essential verbs and distinctions!