

French B2

— What to Study

Level: **B2 (Vantage)** • Language: **French** • Audience: **Learners**

B2 is where you stop working around French and start working in it. You can follow a lecture or a meeting, argue a point, read an opinion column and write a structured text that a native speaker would take seriously. It is the level many French universities ask of international students, and the one where register — the difference between spoken, standard and formal French — becomes part of what you are learning.

The Common European Framework describes B2 as being able to understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in your field of specialisation; to interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party; and to produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

Grammar to master

The subjunctive in full.

- Doubt, concession and restriction: *douter que, bien que, quoique, à moins que, sans que, jusqu'à ce que*
- After superlatives and uniqueness: *C'est le meilleur film que j'aie vu*
- The past subjunctive: *Je suis content que tu sois venu*
- Recognising the *ne* that appears in formal writing without making a sentence negative: *avant qu'il ne parte*

Hypotheses in the past. The past conditional for regrets and unreal past situations: *J'aurais dû partir plus tôt; Si j'avais su, je serais venu.*

Reported speech in the past. Tense shifts when the reporting verb is in the past: *Il a dit qu'il viendrait, Elle m'a demandé ce que je faisais, Ils ont expliqué qu'ils étaient partis.*

Complex relatives. *Lequel, laquelle* and their combinations with prepositions: *la raison pour laquelle, le projet auquel je travaille, la ville près de laquelle il habite.*

Reading formal and literary French.

- The *passé simple* and its role in written narrative
- Present participles and participle clauses: *Étant donné que..., Ayant terminé son travail, il est parti*
- Nominal style in reports and articles: *la mise en place de la réforme* rather than *on met la réforme en place*

Structuring an argument.

- Emphasis: *C'est ... qui / que, Ce qui me gêne, c'est...*
- Connectors for contrast and consequence: *en revanche, néanmoins, or, par conséquent, d'une part ... d'autre part, étant donné que*
- Concession and nuance: *certes ... mais, il n'en reste pas moins que*

Vocabulary areas

Aim for a broad passive vocabulary and at least 4,000 words you can use actively, with a clear sense of register.

- Society and politics, the economy, current affairs
- Science, technology and the environment
- The world of work in formal terms: contracts, responsibilities, negotiations
- Education and research
- Culture: literature, film, the arts, criticism
- The language of argument: stating a position, conceding, contrasting, concluding
- Formal correspondence and phrases for presentations and meetings

What you should be able to do

- Follow a lecture, presentation or meeting on a topic in your field
- Argue for a position in a discussion, respond to objections and summarise the other side fairly
- Understand newspaper articles and reports, including opinion pieces
- Write a structured argued text or formal letter, with a clear position, advantages and disadvantages
- Write formal emails and letters in the appropriate register
- Give a short presentation and answer questions on it
- Understand most films and TV series in standard French
- Explain a complex process or problem clearly

Common difficulties

Register. French distinguishes sharply between *familier*, *courant* and *soutenu*. *T'inquiète*, *Ne vous inquiétez pas* and *Je vous prie de ne pas vous inquiéter* are all correct in the right place. At B2 you need to choose deliberately.

Formal writing conventions. French formal letters and argued texts follow set formulas and structures. Learn the standard openings, transitions and closings as ready-made phrases.

Subtle false friends. *Éventuellement* means possibly, not eventually. *Achever* means to finish. *Un avertissement* is a warning, not an advertisement.

Speed and accent. Real conversations, films and radio are fast, and you will hear accents from across France, Belgium, Switzerland, Quebec and Africa. Wide listening is the only fix.

How to know you are ready for C1

You are ready when you can take part in a discussion on an unfamiliar abstract topic without falling back on simpler language, when an opinion column no longer needs a dictionary for its structure, and when your formal writing reads as organised French rather than translated thought. C1 moves from arguing clearly to arguing precisely: nuance, implication and style.

Written by GongbuLeng. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2 descriptors. For the official French examination at this level, the DELF B2, see France Éducation internationale's DELF page.