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Essential French Dialogs

Everyday Conversations & Travel Tips

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Introduction

Fact: foreigners traveling to France are going to face linguistic as well as cultural challenges.

To help you prepare for it, I've chosen key situations any tourist is bound to encounter (booking a hotel room, ordering in a restaurant, buying in a shop...) and have recorded a short and realistic dialog to give you the vocabulary and confidence you'll need to speak and interact in French.

These French dialogs are recorded at two speeds:

- a slower speed, so you can learn the sentences by repeating them and work on your French pronunciation
- a faster, more natural speed, so you can train your ear to understand the French when they speak to you

You may notice some differences between the 2 recordings: spoken street French is full of glidings that vary with the speed of speech, and I will record the second, faster recording, focussing on real street French pronunciation.

Whenever the dialog is between two persons only, I will not say the name of the speaker, so it's more dynamic. When there are more people involved, I will say the speaker's name, so you can follow who is speaking.

I have also included practical tips, factual and cultural points which will help you fit in and prevent nasty surprises. These tips are full of additional vocabulary related to the subject of the chapter.

How to use this audiobook

I suggest you start with listening to the tips, and study the vocabulary in them.

Then, if you are a beginner, you may need to read the dialog and the translation to get acquainted with the new vocabulary.

If you are not a beginner, you should already know a lot of the vocabulary, and if you don't know all of it, you may be able to guess some from the context of the conversation. Listen, listen, listen and try to guess. Then refer to the French text, and as a last resort, to the translation. And of course study the new words.

1. To improve your understanding

Depending on your level, you should study with the slow or the normal recording, without reading the dialog, and see how much you are able to understand.

When you don't understand something, play it back a couple of times. You may get it on the 3rd or 4th run, and it's a good exercise to push your ears and brain to understand.

If you cannot "hear" properly what I say, try to figure out the sounds: what do you hear? Write it down.

Then try to guess. These are dialogs, the conversation is somewhat predictable. What do you think they are saying? Write it down as well. How would you say that in French?

The next step is to go see the dialog. First read only the French dialog. Can you understand now? Is it a word you know? Did you guess what it meant? If you knew that word, how come you didn't understand it?

If it's a new word, look in the translation, and then make a flash-card about it. Then work on memorizing it.

Many students want to understand every single word of the conversation, and automatically translate everything in their head. It's not a good habit, since it's unlikely that in a real conversation, you'll understand everything. Partly because it's likely there will be some vocabulary you don't know, and partly because in a real life situation, you won't be able to hear everything very clearly. Therefore, it's very important that you learn to "go with the flow". And retrain your brain to use its "guessing power", as it does in your native language. Very often, the context and the logic of the conversation are as important to understanding as the vocabulary involved.

2. To improve your pronunciation

Depending on your level, practice with the slow or the normal recording. Beginners may not be able to speak as fast as in the normal recording, and that's OK. At this stage, you cannot speak like a native, and it's perfectly fine to speak slower. Actually, the person you talk to is likely to match your speed, so the faster you talk, the faster they'll talk back, which may not be what you want!

Practice repeating each sentence one by one, pausing between them if necessary.

Pay close attention to the spoken French glidings, but also where I breathe in the sentence (this is very important since many students don't know where to breathe), and mimic my voice as if you were an actor.

Note also the "song" of my voice: where it goes up, where it goes down, and compare it to the punctuation of the dialog.

Always learn the vocabulary with the audio playing, so the written form doesn't fool you into a wrong pronunciation.

Training out loud is essential, do not just listen to the recordings, make sure you repeat everything out loud.

Good luck with your French studies, and remember, repetition is the key!

Booking a hotel room

In this chapter, we'll study a typical conversation in a hotel. **La cliente** (the customer, here a woman) talks to **le réceptionniste** (the hotel clerk).

As far as the language is concerned, it's very likely that people working at the hotel will speak at least some basic English, so I wouldn't worry too much about it.

1. Conversation on the phone

Cliente	Allo, bonjour monsieur, je voudrais réserver une chambre.
Réceptionniste	Bien sûr Madame. Pour combien de jours ?
Cliente	Une semaine. Du 10 au 17 juillet.
Réceptionniste	Une chambre double ou une chambre simple ?
Cliente	Une chambre double s'il vous plaît, non-fumeur, avec baignoire si possible.
Réceptionniste	Ah, désolée, nous n'avons pas de chambre avec baignoire. Toutes nos chambres ont une salle de douche privée, et des toilettes.
Cliente	D'accord. Je voudrais une chambre très calme, côté jardin ou cour, pas côté rue, et pas au rez-de-chaussée.

...End sample

2. Conversation on the phone + Translation

Cliente	Allo, bonjour monsieur, je voudrais réserver une chambre. <i>Hello, good morning sir, I'd like to book a room.</i>
Réceptionniste	Bien sûr Madame. Pour combien de jours ? <i>Of course miss. For how many nights?</i>
Cliente	Une semaine. Du 10 au 17 juillet. <i>One week. From the 10th to the 17th of July.</i>
Réceptionniste	Une chambre double ou une chambre simple ? <i>A single or double occupancy room?</i>
Cliente	Une chambre double s'il vous plaît, non-fumeur, avec baignoire si possible. <i>A double room please, non-smoking, with a bathtub if possible.</i>
Réceptionniste	Ah, désolée, nous n'avons pas de chambre avec baignoire. Toutes nos chambres ont une salle de douche privée, et des toilettes. <i>Oh, I'm sorry, we don't have any rooms with a bathtub. All of our rooms come with a private shower and toilet.</i>
Cliente	D'accord. Je voudrais une chambre très calme, côté jardin ou cour, pas côté rue, et pas au rez-de-chaussée. <i>OK. I would like a very quiet room, facing the garden or courtyard, not facing the street, and not on the ground level.</i> <i>... End sample</i>

3. Tips about French hotels

Choosing an accommodation in France can be quite a challenge: there are many hotels, **chambres d'hôtes** (bed and breakfast), **auberge de jeunesse** (youth hostels) ranging from the upmost luxuriant to the... well, let's say ridiculously noisy, dirty and uncomfortable.

The elevator

My first tip will definitely be about **l'ascenseur** (the elevator)... or the lack of it. Although the French accessibility laws are changing drastically, there are still quite a lot of smaller hotels (in Paris in particular) that don't have an elevator. Even if there is an elevator it will often be extremely TINY (and when I say tiny, I mean having to walk in sideways!)

So forget larger suitcases. And if there is no elevator, be ready to carry your **valises** (suitcases) yourself: it's not the clerk's job, and in standard hotels, there are no porters or bellhop.

The floor issue

This brings us to the second point: the French count their floors from **le rez-de-chaussée** (first floor) up. So you have to account for that one floor difference; **le deuxième étage** (literally 2nd floor) is actually the equivalent of a US third floor. Something to remember when there is no elevator.

Noise

Noise is something to consider when choosing your hotel in larger cities: the ground floor will solve the stairs issue, but may be quite noisy... So pack earplugs, especially if you are traveling in the summer and you may need to leave your windows open.

End sample...