

## French

### The Most Practical Foreign Language

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*The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language [2008 Survey](#) indicates that more students are interested in studying French than any other foreign language in the United States.*

*The [most recent survey](#) by the Modern Languages Association (2009) shows that French enrollments in the United States are on the rise and are now at the highest level in over 20 years.*

While any language will be useful for some jobs or for some regions, French is the only foreign language that can be useful throughout the world as well as in the United States. French as a foreign language is the second most frequently taught language in the world after English. The International Organization of Francophonie has 56 member states and governments. Of these, 28 countries have French as an official language. French is the only language other than English spoken on five continents. French and English are the only two global languages.

When deciding on a foreign language for work or school, consider that French is the language that will give you the most choices later on in your studies or your career.

French, along with English, is the official working language of

- the United Nations
- UNESCO
- NATO
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- the International Labor Bureau
- the International Olympic Committee
- the 31-member Council of Europe
- the European Community
- the Universal Postal Union
- the International Red Cross
- Union of International Associations (UIA)

French is the dominant working language at

- the European Court of Justice
- the European Tribunal of First Instance

- the Press Room at the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium

One example of the importance of French can be seen in a recent listing of international jobs (12/1/09) distributed by the US State Department: 92 required or preferred French, 36 Spanish, 11 a UN language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish), 7 Arabic, 5 Russian, 1 Japanese, 1 Hindi, 1 German, and 1 Chinese.

Of the various types of professional positions for which international organizations recruit, four required French, two Spanish, and one Arabic, according to the fact sheet released by the Bureau of International Organization Affairs of the U.S. Department of State (October 2011).

### **The Economics of French and France**

- French is the foreign language spoken by our largest trading partner (Canada).
  - The province of Quebec alone is the sixth largest trading partner of the United States with approximately \$72 billion in trade in 2006.
  - In 2006, the United States exported and imported more to countries having French as a national language than to countries having any other foreign language. Exports to Canada alone in that year were greater than the combined exports to all countries south of the United States.
- From 2003 to 2008 trade between France and the United States increased by 59% with one billion dollars of transactions taking place every day.
  - The U.S. and France share many trade similarities, particularly their global standing as the world's top 2 exporters in 3 very important sectors: defense products, agricultural goods, and services. Franco-American trade is also remarkable for its symmetry, as 6 of the top 10 exports are the same each way.
  - France has the fifth largest economy in the world after the U.S., Japan, China, Germany (2008). In 2006, the French GDP was \$2.231 trillion and China's was \$2.668 trillion.
  - France is the second largest exporter of agricultural products in the world after the U.S.
  - In recent years, the U.S. has been the largest direct investor in France. France is nearly tied with Japan, Germany and the Netherlands as the second largest foreign investor in the U.S.
  - In 2010, the United States was the leading destination for French investments abroad.
  - The world invests in France: in 2006, France was the third largest destination of foreign investment in the world.
  - 2,800 French companies in the US employ approximately 550,000 Americans. US companies employ nearly 650,000 people in France. Among foreign countries doing business in the US, France employs the third largest number of Americans.
  - among the world's 200 largest companies, 35 are French, 34 are German and 30 are British.
  - France is the third most productive nation in the world per hour work behind Norway and the US.
  - French is one of the languages spoken in the US: 1.8 million Americans speak French

in the home. (2010 US Census)

- Overall, the French export more per capita than the Japanese and more than twice as much as the Americans.
- France is the world's leader in the production of luxury goods.
- More tourists visit France than any other country in the world.
- France gives more foreign aid per capita to developing nations than does the US.

### **Science and Technology**

- France will be the site of the world's first nuclear fusion reactor, the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor
- Seven of France's top ten exports to the U.S. are industrial or high technology products.
- France is the fourth largest producer of automobiles in the world (Renault, Peugeot, Citroën) and the third largest exporter.
- France is fourth in research among countries of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (after Japan, Germany, and the US).
- France is a major world research center in the field of high energy physics.
- The French are a world leader in medical research: the AIDS virus was first isolated by French doctors.
- The French are the world's third manufacturers of electronics equipment.
- European leader in aerospace (Aérospatiale, Arianespace, Airbus...).
- Most commercial satellites are put into space on French Ariane rockets.
- France is a leader in the development of high-speed trains such as the TGV.
- The smart card was used on a large-scale basis in France.
- The ocean liner Queen Mary II was built in France.
- France is one of the world's leading military powers and has the world's second largest defense industry (i.e. exocet missiles, radar technology.)
- The French have nearly 15,000 troops on peace-keeping duties in 15 countries including Afghanistan, the Balkans, and the Ivory Coast.
- France is the world's second largest builder and exporter of civilian and military aircraft and helicopters (Airbus is the world's second largest fleet of commercial airliners, and many of the US Coast Guard helicopters are made by Aérospatiale in Toulouse.)
- France has one of the most advanced systems of telecommunications in the world.

### **Importance of French in school and work**

Historically France and the French language have had an enormous influence over American society. France was the United States' first ally. French thought played a dominant role among the founders of the United States in the 18th century, and it continues to

shape America today through the influence of such intellectual currents as post-structuralism and post-modernism. In the humanities and the social sciences, many of the most important writings have come from France. Students and researchers who know French have access to these works for several years before they are translated into English. Many significant works are never translated and remain accessible only to those who know the language. In addition, most graduate schools require knowledge of at least one foreign language, and French remains the most commonly used language after English.

When employers and universities look at applicants, they do not start looking at the bottom of the list to see who has done only the minimal amount of requirements necessary or taken the easiest route available, they start at the top of the list and look for those students who have risen above the rest. High school students should consider studying at least four years of a foreign language. College students should seek to earn a minor in French or have French as a primary or secondary major. With French they have access to the most widely spoken foreign language in the world after English and they become familiar with a culture that significantly influences our own. The French economy is one of the strongest in the world and is increasingly a leader in technological innovation. In sum, French is the language of the future.

Source: Richard Shryock Merci, Richard!

[Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University](http://www.fl.vt.edu/french/whyfrench.html) (Virginia Tech)

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