

**HEATH'S MODERN  
LANGUAGE  
SERIES: A SHORT  
FRENCH GRAMMAR**

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Heath's Modern Language Series: A Short French Grammar by C. H. Grandgent

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A SHORT  
FRENCH GRAMMAR

BY

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## PREFACE.

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THE world is so full of French grammars that the author who brings out a new one really owes the public some kind of an apology. Hence, in putting this little volume on the market, I feel bound to excuse its existence as best I can, by calling attention to any features that may distinguish it from other books. I will say, then, that my purpose in writing this *Grammar* has been to produce an elementary work that should combine the following advantages: (1) brevity without undue conciseness, (2) treatment of the subject from the standpoint of the American pupil, (3) a strictly systematic arrangement, and (4) a scientific but easily intelligible study of French pronunciation.

**Brevity.** — Although this book is very small, readers will find that the various parts of speech are discussed here with unusual fulness. My aim has been, in fact, to attain brevity, not through compression, but through the exclusion of useless and extraneous matter. Vocabulary and the translation of idioms belong to the dictionary, not to the grammar. The same thing is true of invariable words — prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, and adverbs; although the description of the *use* of some of these forms lies naturally in the province of syntax. As to syntax itself, I do not believe that very much of it can ever be learned from a text-book: the student must, in the main, become acquainted with constructions through his own observation of the spoken and written language. Only when he is tolerably familiar with the subject will he be able to make intelligent use of a complete set of rules, which will then help him to give definiteness and system to the knowledge he has acquired. In my *Grammar*, therefore, no attempt has been made to furnish anything like a thorough-going presentation of French syntax; invariable words have, for the most part, been left out of account; but the agreement of participles, the values of the

moods and tenses, the agreement and position of adjectives, the uses of articles, and some other important matters are treated in such a way as at least to indicate to the pupil the direction in which he should turn his attention.

**Point of view.** — Nearly all French grammars that I know are constructed without regard to the intelligence, habits, and previous training of the American schoolboy; most of them, indeed, are little more than collections of rules taken from French grammars written by Frenchmen for French children. Hence our pupils, on beginning the language, are confronted with a strange style, a foreign conception of grammatical principles, and a new, confusing, and often senseless terminology; for a long while they cannot get their bearings, and the knowledge they have gained through the study of English is of no benefit to them. Experience has convinced me that the use of such expressions as "partitive article," "past definite," and "past indefinite" is a source of endless misunderstanding, and almost invariably causes the absolute waste of a great deal of valuable time. I have tried to make my book, as far as possible, a natural continuation of the ordinary grammar school course. At every step I have taken pains to compare French with English, so that students may readily grasp the characteristics of the new language and understand more thoroughly than ever before the structure of their own. The common nomenclature of English grammar has been used as far as it goes; for the imperfect and preterit I have ventured to coin new names, "descriptive past" and "narrative past," which designate the nature of both and the function of each. The French equivalents of the English "potential mood" have been carefully explained.

**Arrangement.** — As methods of modern language teaching improve, the grammar will doubtless come to be regarded more and more as a guide and reference-book, and less and less as a collection of detached lessons. Moreover, whatever be the use to which the grammar is put, no really intelligent work can be expected of a class unless the French inflections are so displayed and the principles of the language are so exposed as to show clearly their relations to one another. For these reasons I have tried to arrange my *Grammar* according to a strictly logical scheme. I begin with verbs and end with nouns. In attacking

a strange language, a student can do but little until he has been introduced to the highly inflected parts of speech, but he can accomplish a great deal without having made any special study of words that are nearly or quite invariable.

**Pronunciation.**—It seems to me that the time has come for a more scientific description of pronunciation in popular text-books. I have attempted to furnish this without the use of any unfamiliar terms and with almost no mention of the positions of the unseen vocal organs. I have, in fact, in characterizing the individual French sounds, relied almost entirely on English key-words, but these words have been selected with such care that the correspondences are sufficiently accurate. Of course my descriptions are offered as a supplement to oral instruction by the teacher, not as a substitute for it. Throughout the *Grammar* the pronunciation of French words and inflected forms has been clearly and consistently indicated. My phonetic notation is exceedingly simple: an intelligent person who knows French can read the transcription without any explanation; while beginners will, I think, find it a great help in studying French speech. To any phoneticians who may think I ought to have given less importance to the written forms, I would say that I agree entirely with the opinion expressed by H. Morf, *Phonetische Studien*, VI., 1, pp. 112-113, on the comparative value of pronunciation and spelling to the student of a foreign language; for Americans, indeed, isolated as they are, he might have put the case still more strongly.

**Authorities consulted.**—Wishing to make my little book as original as possible, I have used other grammars very sparingly. Nevertheless, I got some help from Da Costa's *Cours supérieur* and Edgren's *Compendious French Grammar*, and I found some welcome suggestions in *Notes on the Teaching of French*, by Professor F. C. de Sumichrast (contained in *Methods of Teaching Modern Languages*, published by D. C. Heath & Co.). I take pleasure in acknowledging my indebtedness to Professor Sheldon, of Harvard, who was kind enough to read and criticise my manuscript; I am under great obligations, also, to Professor Lang, of Yale, Professor Matzke, of Stanford University, and Professor Rambeau, of Johns Hopkins, who assisted me in revising the proofs. For pronunciation I have consulted the well-known



works of Paul Passy, Franz Beyer, and Rousselot, the still unfinished dictionary of Hatzfeld and Darmesteter, and Ph. Wagner's *Französische Quantität*; in the matter of assimilation I have followed G. Rollin, *Phonetische Studien*, VI., 2, p. 220, and Jean Passy, *Maître phonétique*, February, 1893, pp. 28-29. In a few cases where Paul Passy is at variance with other authorities—for instance, as to the quality of the vowel in *mais* and in *ces, les, mes, ses, tes*—I have not chosen his pronunciation. I have, moreover, kept the *l* of *il* and *ils*: in the slow and labored utterance of beginners the clipped forms of rapid conversation are disagreeably incongruous. On the other hand, as students are so likely to drawl or distort the “mute *e*,” I have considered this vowel as really silent in all cases where it is not usually audible in actual speech. My treatment of the *u* in *lui* is open to criticism on theoretical grounds, as it is not consistent with the rest of my scheme; I have found, however, by experiment, that it is the only practical method for our school-children: any suggestion of a resemblance between this *u* and *w* is fatal to success. The wise and long-needed reforms in French orthography recently adopted by the French Academy have not yet met with recognition enough to entitle them to consideration in an elementary text-book; in fact, so far as I know, they have never been fully and officially announced: I have therefore been obliged—much against my will—to leave them out of account.

**Suggestions to Teachers.**—As the *Short French Grammar* calls for methods of instruction that are new to many American teachers, the following practical suggestions may not be found superfluous:—

1. Do not try to use the *Grammar*, in a class of beginners, without the accompanying pamphlet of *Lessons and Exercises*, or some equivalent.—The *First Year's Course for Grammar Schools* is suited to very young children, and calls for no previous knowledge of technical English grammar. The *First Year's Course for High Schools* is intended for beginners who have just entered the high school. The *First Year's Course for Colleges* is adapted both to mature beginners, and to ordinary high school pupils in their second year of French. Some college classes may profitably study the two latter pamphlets in one year. Courses for the second and third years in

grammar schools will soon be provided. Moreover, it is my intention to furnish, in time, alternative sets of exercises for each high school and college course, so that the work may be changed from year to year. All these little books are constructed on the basis of three recitations a week. In schools where four or five hours per week are given to French, teachers may pursue either one of the following methods: (1) They may have a grammar lesson at every recitation, thus finishing the pamphlet before the end of the year, and leaving several weeks free for translation and oral or written composition; or (2) they may confine the grammar to three hours a week, and devote the other hour or hours to reading and to such oral and written work as is furnished in my *French Composition* and in my *Materials for French Composition* (D. C. Heath & Co.).

2. Follow closely the directions given in the prefaces of the *Lessons and Exercises*, and do not deviate (without good reason) from the schemes of lessons indicated in those pamphlets.—Remember that most pupils can never acquire a good pronunciation unless they form it at the very outset. The use of a phonetic notation, wherever it has been tried (and the experiment has now been made in a great many places), has proved to be a wonderful help to the pupil. Teachers should, therefore, be willing to give themselves the little trouble required to make them thoroughly familiar with the extremely easy system employed in these books; unless they have had exceptional opportunities for learning French, they will probably find their own pronunciation considerably strengthened and improved by the use of this method.

3. Do not be alarmed at the somewhat novel character of the exercises in the *First Year's Course for High Schools*.—English-French and French-English exercises of the traditional kind have here been purposely avoided. As for English-French exercises, the best modern authorities agree in condemning the mechanical translation of English sentences into French by very young pupils who have no acquaintance with the French tongue. Not until the school-boy has gained, through reading and speaking, some insight into the structure of the foreign language, should he attempt to write it; and even then his efforts should be confined, for some time, to the close

imitation of connected French prose that he has carefully studied. With regard to old-fashioned French-English exercises, it is hardly necessary to point out that they are inferior, in every respect, to a well-chosen consecutive French text that interests the pupil, furnishes useful vocabulary, and shows the grammatical principles in natural operation.

4. Use a good reading-book, with high school and college classes, from the very beginning of the first year's course.—Only a part (perhaps two-thirds) of each recitation hour should be given to the grammar work laid out in the *Lessons and Exercises* of these grades; the rest should be devoted to reading. During the first few weeks, all or nearly all translating must, of course, be at sight; this exercise should proceed briskly, the teacher lifting the pupil over the hard places and showing him how to find his way through the rest. When scholars have mastered the verbs, they can easily prepare translation lessons; but sight work should never be entirely neglected. Several excellent reading-books are available: among them are Super's *French Reader* and Joynes' *French Fairy Tales* (D. C. Heath & Co.).

5. In using the *Grammar* with classes that do not exactly correspond to any of the grades for which pamphlets are provided, adapt the lessons and exercises to the special needs of the scholars.—For instance, third-year high school pupils who are just beginning French can first take the *First Year's Course for High Schools*, covering two or more lessons at a time, and then make use of a large part of the *First Year's Course for Colleges*. High school children, after their second year of French, and college students, after their first year, do not need any regular exercises in grammar: they should, instead, devote some time every week to exercises based on the French texts they are reading, and, later, to free composition work, using the *Grammar* as a book of reference.

CAMBRIDGE, January, 1894.